

Statement of Chairman Rob Bishop
Committee on Natural Resources
Full Committee Markup
June 22, 2017

Today, the Committee will mark-up several important pieces of legislation. Though all are good bills, I want to mention a few that stand out.

The first, H.R 2936, authored by Mr. Westerman, would jump-start the Forest Service's and BLM's largely motionless management of our nation's forests. With as much as **one-third** of our federal forests at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and growing, we simply cannot afford to wait. Building upon existing workable and practical ideas—ideas that could be implemented the day after they're signed into law—this bill will ensure the Forest Service and BLM have the tools necessary to treat federal forestlands before they are leveled by devastating fires, insects or other natural disasters.

The bill also allows the quick removal of dead trees and the rapid reforestation of areas devastated by wildfires or other catastrophes so future generations of Americans will enjoy green national forests instead of dead, burnt-over wastelands. Numerous wildlife, hunting and water groups support this bill because it would improve wildlife habitat *and* watershed health. The Tribal title of the bill would allow tribes to work with the agencies to manage adjacent federal forests to protect tribal property and ancestral lands important to tribes. Finally, the bill also solves the fire borrowing problem. This bill would not only help our federal forests and land management agencies, but would also help people—especially those living forested rural communities.

Another bill we will consider, HR 289, authored by Rep. LaMalfa is the Guides and Outfitters—or “GO” Act. This is another bi-partisan bill that would actually help people—specifically guides, outfitters and folks who recreate on federal lands. This bill streamlines costly and duplicative environmental studies that cost millions of dollars and have no actual positive impact on the environment. Each year the Forest Service and BLM issues thousands of recreational permits. Due to bureaucratic red tape and litigation, processing these permits takes longer and costs more each year. Many outfitters and guides can either not afford the cost of the paperwork required or the agencies can’t complete the paperwork before the operating season begins. The result is fewer jobs and less recreation on our federal lands. I look forward to passing this bill out of Committee today and working towards its enactment into law.

The third bill is H.R. 2939, the Water Rights Protection Act, authored by Rep. Tipton. This important bill upholds longstanding federal deference to state water law by prohibiting agencies within the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture from conditioning or withholding the issuance of any permit, lease or other land use arrangement on the requirement to transfer privately held water rights to the United States.

Many in the West have witnessed this abuse of power. In 2014, the Forest Service proposed the so-called Groundwater Directive and began holding grazing permit renewals hostage if ranchers didn’t agree to hand over some of their water rights. Thankfully, Congress was able to squash this effort. Mr. Tipton’s bill is important to ensure this never happens again.

Finally, I want to mention H.R. 2937, sponsored by Mr. LaHood, which addresses a long-standing problem with the cleanup of abandoned coal mines. Specifically, this bill ensures states and third party non-governmental entities, or as the bill identifies them, "Community Reclaimers," will be allowed to use their own resources to remediate abandoned sites impacting communities across this country. Currently, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement estimates a remaining \$10.4 billion worth of outstanding liability for states. Right now, the only way states can address this liability is through payments from the Abandoned Mine Land Fund. By providing the requisite liability protections for Community Reclaimers and expressly allowing for the cleanup of acid mine drainage sites, this legislation authorizes another path for dealing with abandoned mine sites.

We will consider many other bipartisan or non-controversial bills at this markup. I congratulate Members for their work on these bipartisan measures and look forward to moving them forward.