

**Testimony in Front of U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks,  
Forests, and Public lands**

**By Governor Brad Little**

**March 23, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and committee members.

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to share my perspective on the future of public lands in Idaho and across the west.

I am Brad Little, Governor of the State of Idaho. I am also a lifelong rancher and have utilized Idaho's vast, public lands all my life.

I also have a long history of working with both western ranchers and conservation groups to craft win-win scenarios for western communities and conservation-minded Americans.

Idaho is a massive western state with about two-thirds of our land owned and managed by the federal government.

With a relatively small population of 1.8 million people, Idaho truly still feels like the "Wild West" in many ways.

Only two other states have more designated wilderness acres where the most stringent environmental protections prevent any human activity other than on-foot or on-horse recreation.

The enormous amount of designated wilderness in Idaho underscores the importance of keeping our remaining federally owned public lands as "working lands."

Idaho is a mostly rural state. The majority of our communities rely on access to public lands for multiple uses – such as grazing, timber harvest, mining, and outdoor recreation and tourism.

But Idaho is also the nation's fastest growing state, and as more and more people migrate here, the continued access to public lands for multiple uses will become even more important.

In Idaho, public lands are integral to our livelihoods and we recognize we need to do all we can to keep these lands healthy for future generations.

In most cases, conservation – not preservation – will achieve healthy public lands that continue to provide benefits and promote a high quality of life for our people for years to come.

The no-action approach generally does little more than incubate dangerous conditions, prevent active management, and harm rural economies.

Conservation, on the other hand, embraces the role that communities can play in managing the land, so they stay healthy for future generations.

We have seen great success here in Idaho when diverse interests come together in finding common ground in conservation and public land management.

We led the country in establishing rangeland fire protection associations – where ranchers are trained and equipped to assist the BLM in initial attack on wildfires.

We led the nation in launching the Good Neighbor Authority and Shared Stewardship – two initiatives that are improving the health of our forests, minimizing fire risk to communities, and creating jobs through active land management.

Diverse interests came together in Idaho to agree on a plan to conserve sage grouse and their habitat, demonstrating the grassroots approach is always more effective in achieving shared objectives than top-down federal directives.

Conservation groups, the timber industry, and many others came together to create our own Idaho Roadless Rule to responsibly manage more than nine million acres of our national forests – and we are one of only two states to take the initiative.

It is very important to note that in all of these instances, we were also successful because the federal agencies actually treated Idaho as a true partner during the decision-making process. Too often, federal agencies treat states merely as an interested party or a box to check as part of their legal obligations to coordinate and seek comment.

Only when the federal agencies are empowered to work side by side with western communities, do we truly see success. This is federalism at its finest and as you look to the future of public lands management, I ask that you view the states and those closest to the resource as interdependent.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today, and I look forward to questions from the subcommittee.