

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Russ Fulcher**  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1638, H.R. 4178, H.R. 5093,  
H.R. 5493, and H.R. 6366  
March 1, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. I would like to begin my statement by sincerely thanking you for cancelling the legislative hearing on the “Northern Rockies Ecosystem ‘Protection’ Act” that had been planned for last month. This poison pill piece of legislation, which would have haphazardly locked up over 23 million acres of land in the West, including 9 million acres in my home State of Idaho, was unserious and has universally opposed by the Members who represent those areas.

The cancellation of this hearing sets a positive tone for the future work of this Subcommittee, as it shows we are ready to focus on what unites us, rather than moving towards the extremes of partisanship. As I talked about during our last hearing, our constituents are facing a multitude of crises from higher gas and energy prices due to the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine to skyrocketing inflation and daunting supply chain challenges. These crises demand nothing less than a swift and strongly bipartisan response.

With that misguided hearing in our rear-view mirror, I believe we can now truly focus on bipartisan bills with real chances of becoming law, like several of the bills on

today's hearing and bills like your BOLT Act, which we considered last month. I'm very pleased with the two Republican bills on today's hearing in particular, as they are both examples of how reducing land under federal ownership can create win-win situations for both the federal government and state and local governments.

The first bill is Representative Herrera Beutler's "Wind River Administrative Site Conveyance Act." Skamania (*skuh may knee uh*) County in Representative Herrera-Beutler's district is almost 77 percent federally owned. Because of the overwhelming presence of federal land, less than two percent of the County's land base can be taxed at full market value, limiting their economic

opportunities. Representative Herrera Beutler's bill would unlock new economic opportunities for nearby rural communities by transferring ownership of approximately 23 acres comprised of the Wind River Nursery site from the Forest Service to the County. The County plans to use this land to create new lodges, which will help drive more tourists to the surrounding Gifford Pinchot (*pin cho*) National Forest.

Another important bill on this hearing is Representative Dusty Johnson's "Gilt Edge Mine Conveyance Act." The Gilt Edge Mine is a former mining site in South Dakota that is now in need of environmental remediation. South Dakota is interested in purchasing

approximately 266 acres of this site in order to facilitate further environmental restoration of the area after the EPA completes its portion of the cleanup work. Funds from the sale will then be put into a special fund that can be used to improve the health of the Black Hills National Forest. Due to federal mismanagement, a local sawmill had to shut down its operations last year and several other small mills are at risk of closure. I hope the Forest Service will use these funds to support the surrounding communities and infrastructure, which are vital to ensuring the long-term health of the Black Hills National Forest.

I'm thankful to Representatives Herrera Beutler and Johnson for introducing these bills and working with their constituents to build consensus and support. Both of these bills are prime examples of the environmental and economic good that occurs when we transfer federal lands to States and Counties for beneficial uses, and I hope this Subcommittee will consider more like them in the coming months.

Finally, while I do have concerns about other bills we are considering today, I will simply end by thanking Chairman Neguse once again for his strong leadership of this subcommittee and for the cancellation of the hearing on the "Northern Rockies Ecosystem 'Protection' Act."

With that, I wish to thank the witnesses for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony, and I yield back the balance of my time.