



Opening Statement of Chairman Bruce Westerman

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6441, H.R. 7666, H.R. 8182, H.R. 8517, H.R. 9062, H.R. 9165, H.R. 9528, H.R. 10082, and H.R. 10084

November 19, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany. I'd like to take a moment to commend you for your leadership this Congress as the Chairman of this very important Subcommittee.

It is remarkable to think about all that we have accomplished this year to improve federal lands management, promote conservation, increase access, support innovation, and make agencies transparent and accountable to the American people.

In total, this Subcommittee has had process this Congress on more than 110 pieces of legislation from Republican and Democrat Members across the country. The Subcommittee has held more than 30 legislative and oversight hearings and supported numerous full Committee hearings. This includes two of the Committee's first ever outdoor field hearings in the Yosemite Valley and southern Utah.

True to its fashion, this Subcommittee has operated in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion. Today's hearing, like most of the others held this Congress, feature a ratio of Republican to Democrat bills that exceeds the standard 3-to-1 ratio.

The Subcommittee has also advanced two overwhelmingly bipartisan bills that I have had the privilege of championing, the “Fix Our Forests Act” and the “EXPLORE Act.”

The “Fix Our Forests Act” is comprehensive, bipartisan forestry legislation I led with Congressman Scott Peters to improve the health of our nation’s forests and bolster their resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, insects, disease, and drought. This bill gives land managers the tools they need to immediately start work on the ground by codifying emergency authorities, streamlining environmental reviews, and ending frivolous litigation.

The “EXPLORE Act,” which is led by myself and full Committee Ranking Member Grijalva, supports the \$1.1 trillion outdoor recreation economy by improving access to our public lands and waters. Supported by more than 300 organizations, this bill passed the House unanimously earlier this year.

As we close out the remainder of this Congress, I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in the Senate to advance these pieces of legislation, along with many others, across the finish line. I believe we have a real opportunity to deliver enormous wins for Americans across the country by sending as many of the bills this Committee has worked on this Congress to the President’s desk.

Moving to the bills on today’s agenda, I am encouraged to see another full slate of legislation being considered by the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. I appreciate the bill sponsors leading these thoughtful bills before us today.

The bills before us improve public lands grazing, create economic opportunities through domestic renewable energy production, support local search and rescue activities on federal lands, establish the first National Park in Georgia, honor the Civil Rights Movement, and protect local residents in Malheur County, Oregon, through a series of public lands management provisions.

There is perhaps no greater steward of our federal lands than public lands ranchers. America's ranchers take great pride in protecting the lands they graze on. The ranching community has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to leaving the land in a better condition for future generations. Ranchers are truly the embodiment of 'conservation versus preservation.'

Grazing on public lands is of course extremely important for rural economies and for providing food for the nation. Grazing is also an invaluable land management tool that provides immense conservation and ecosystem benefits.

I am pleased to see four bills before us today that offer innovative reforms and protections that will improve grazing policies and provide important flexibility for ranchers and the communities that rely on them.

I would like to highlight H.R. 7666, which is being led by Representative LaMalfa. This legislation would direct the Forest Service to expand the use of proactive, targeted grazing

in fuels management programs to help combat the threat of wildfire.

As we have examined ways to combat our historically severe wildfire crisis, the importance of using all of the tools available in the toolbox has continued to be emphasized by the experts and stakeholders on the frontlines of this fight. Targeted grazing is one of those tools that has enormous potential to help mitigate catastrophic wildfire risk.

Through targeted grazing, livestock can eat grasses and shrubs that would otherwise serve as fuel for wildfire. This can create fuel breaks that can be strategically placed to help mitigate wildfire risk. I applaud Congressman LaMalfa's leadership on this effort and was proud to also support this language as an amendment on the floor to the "Fix Our Forests Act."

Additionally, I want to commend Congressman Clyburn for his leadership on H.R. 10084, the "Renewing the African American Civil Rights Network Act." Signed into law in 2018, the African American Civil Rights Network recognizes the importance of the African American Civil Rights movement and the sacrifices made by the people who fought against discrimination. The Network includes more than 80 sites across the country that tell the story of communities and civic leaders who were vital in the struggle for justice and equality.

My home state of Arkansas is home to one of those sites. The Little Rock Central High School was among the first institutions to integrate following the *Brown v. Board of*

Education ruling from the Supreme Court, which held that segregation of America's public schools was unconstitutional. In 1957, the Little Rock Nine bravely stepped into the battle for civil rights as they became the first African Americans to desegregate Little Rock Central High school.

I'd also like to recognize Congressman Scott for his leadership on legislation that would create Georgia's first national park, Congressman Curtis for his continued support of Utah's ranchers, Congresswoman Maloy for her legislation supporting local law enforcement, Chairman Bentz for his leadership on resolving contentious land designation issues in his home district, and Chairman Gosar for offering legislation that will create new jobs and economic growth in Arizona.

I thank the bill sponsors for the bills being considered today. I also want to thank all the witnesses for being here to provide their expert testimony on these important topics. I look forward to hearing from each of you as we examine these proposals here before us.

In closing, the Natural Resources Committee has dedicated considerable time this Congress looking for ways to improve the management and stewardship of our federal lands. I'm pleased to report that we won't be slowing down any time soon and look forward to working with the Trump administration in the 119th Congress on many of our nation's most pressing natural resources issues.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time. Thank you.