

**RESTORING MULTIPLE USE TO
REVITALIZE AMERICA'S
PUBLIC LANDS AND RURAL
COMMUNITIES**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Serial No. 119-6

Printed for the use of the Committee on Natural Resources



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>
or

Committee address: <http://naturalresources.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

58-952 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members

From: Subcommittee on Federal Lands: Aniela Butler, Brandon Miller, and Jason Blore (Aniela@mail.house.gov; Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov; and Jason.Blore@mail.house.gov; x6-7736)

Date: February 10, 2025

Subject: Oversight Hearing on “*Restoring Multiple Use to Revitalize America’s Public Lands and Rural Communities*”

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “*Restoring Multiple Use to Revitalize America’s Public Lands and Rural Communities*” on **Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2 p.m. in Room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, February 10, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- The Trump administration has promised a prompt return to multiple use on our federal lands, which will bring immediate relief and concrete benefits to struggling Americans, particularly those in rural, western communities.
- Returning multiple-use principles to federal land management will help lower housing costs, ease the way for much-needed development projects, allow for increased access to public lands, improve forest health, bolster rural economies, and secure American energy dominance for years to come.
- In contrast, the Biden administration pursued a variety of heavy-handed, preservationist policies. Besides harming rural communities, these policies marked an egregious departure from longstanding and widely accepted multiple use principles.
- Through the vague “30x30 Initiative,” the controversial “Public Lands Rule,” unpopular national monument expansions, restrictive resource management plans, and other ill-advised policies, the Biden administration revealed the alarming scope and dogmatic application of its preservationist agenda.

II. WITNESSES

- **The Honorable Eric Clarke**, County Attorney, Washington County, St. George, Utah
- **Mr. Jim D. Neiman**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Neiman Enterprises, Hulett, Wyoming
- **Mr. Tim Canterbury**, President, Public Lands Council, Howard, Colorado
- **Mr. Dan Gibbs**, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Denver, Colorado [Minority Witness]

III. BACKGROUND

The Biden Administration's Harmful Disregard of Multiple-Use Principles

The Significance of Multiple Use

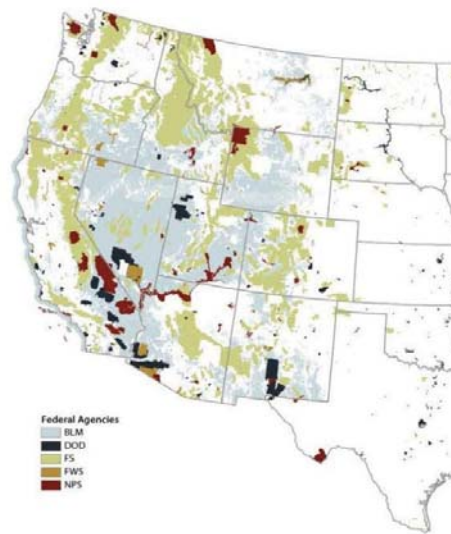
The federal government owns approximately 640 million acres of land in the United States (U.S.), covering about 28 percent of the country's landmass.¹ In America's western states, federal land ownership approaches 50 percent of the landmass. These lands fall primarily under the jurisdictions of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).² The BLM's enabling statute, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), requires the agency to manage its 244 million acres of land and more than 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate in accordance with multiple use and sustained yield (commonly referred to as a 'multiple use mandate').³ Multiple uses include livestock grazing, energy and mineral development, timber production, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat protection.⁴ FLPMA further defines the term "sustained yield" to require "the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity" of multiple uses.⁵ Similarly, USFS must guarantee multiple use and sustained yield on America's national forests.⁶

For nearly 50 years, the multiple use mandate has guided productive and responsible administration of America's public lands. The principle's primacy in law and practice during this lengthy period indicated broad acknowledgment of a simple truth: multiple use is essential to the Western way of life. With so much western land under federal control, thousands of rural economies depend on access to federal land for energy and mineral development, recreational activity, livestock grazing, timber production, and other activities supporting economic livelihoods. In fact, BLM estimated that its lands supported 783,000 jobs in fiscal year (FY) 2021.⁷

Throughout its term, however, the Biden administration jettisoned longstanding multiple use principles to implement a radical environmentalist agenda. Turning a blind eye to the needs of western and rural America, Biden's federal land managers obsessed over climate change, environmental justice, clean energy, and resource preservation. They advanced these goals through policies and programs such as the "30x30 Initiative," the BLM's "Public Lands Rule," national monument creation and expansion, preservationist resource management plans (RMPs), the "Old Growth" Initiative, and related efforts. These extreme measures jeopardized the well-being of countless western and rural communities.⁸ The purpose of this hearing is to examine the harmful consequences of the Biden administration's abandonment of multiple use and demonstrate the numerous benefits that will result from restoring this time-honored principle to the management of America's public lands.

The Radical and Ill-Defined "30x30 Initiative"

The vast scope of the Biden administration's preservationist agenda was quickly revealed when, on January 27, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14008, directing the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and other federal agencies to preserve at least 30 percent of the country's lands and waters by 2030.⁹ Observers soon highlighted significant problems with the E.O., including its extraordinary vagueness and failure to define basic terms.¹⁰ For instance, it was not explained whether conservation efforts on private and state lands and waters would have counted toward meeting the 30 percent goal. Similarly, the Biden administration failed to identify a baseline of current conservation practices to measure progress toward the 30x30 goal. The federal government already owned roughly 28 percent of U.S. land when the Initiative was launched.¹¹ If this amount had been used as a baseline, the federal estate would have still had to grow by an additional 41 million acres of land in less than a decade to meet the 30 percent goal. This translates to an area roughly the size of the State of Washington.¹²



Federal land ownership by agency in the western U.S. Source: Congressional Research Service, using National Atlas, 2005, and ESRI USA Base Map data.

This unscientific and ill-defined goal had so many issues that the Biden administration even attempted to rebrand the effort as the “America the Beautiful Initiative,” an implicit acknowledgment of 30x30’s willful detachment from mathematical realities. Further confusion resulted from the previous administration’s announcement of a “\$1 billion” “America the Beautiful Challenge” fund to further the 30x30 Initiative.¹³ When asked about how the program would meet its \$1 billion funding goal, for example, CEQ representatives vaguely cited authority under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, even though that statute contains no mention of either the 30x30 Initiative or its objective of “conserving 30 percent of the nation’s lands and waters.”¹⁴ At the conclusion of the Biden administration, despite promises of conservation, 30x30 was only ever cited as a justification for locking up lands and resources under restrictive, preservationist designations such as national monuments and mineral withdrawals.¹⁵ Together, these actions demonstrate that the 30x30 Initiative was a deliberately vague policy to which the Biden administration could point when attempting to justify its increasingly restrictive land-use policies and further weakening of multiple use.

The Controversial “Public Lands Rule” and Natural Asset Companies

On May 9, 2024, the BLM published its final, so-called “Conservation and Landscape Health” Rule (commonly referred to as the “Public Lands Rule”).¹⁶ The publication followed more than a year of controversy, limited opportunities for public input, and well-founded concerns upending the longstanding multiple use mandate.¹⁷ Under FLPMA, BLM-administered lands are to be managed in support of multiple uses, which are exclusively defined to *only* include livestock grazing, energy and mineral development, timber production, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat protection.¹⁸ The Public Lands Rule, however, allows BLM to elevate conservation above all other uses, thereby threatening the traditional uses that many Western communities rely upon for their livelihoods.¹⁹ Specifically, the rule enables BLM to lease federal parcels under new and vaguely defined “restoration and mitigation” leases and change certain standards governing land-use decisions.²⁰ Moreover, if BLM determines that uses previously authorized under FLPMA are incompatible with a restoration and mitigation lease, new land-health standards, or an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), those uses would no longer be allowed.²¹

The Public Lands Rule’s new leases are an unaccountable mechanism through which wealthy individuals and entities could lock up huge areas of public land for preservationist purposes. These leases are broadly available to “entities seeking to restore public lands or mitigate” negative environmental impacts.²² While the initial

lease term is capped at 10 years, the lease “can be extended as necessary to serve the purpose for which [it] was first issued.”²³ Also troubling is the fact that the leases are vulnerable to exploitation by a new kind of entity, the natural asset company (NAC). A NAC is a company “whose primary purpose is to actively manage, maintain, restore . . . and grow the value of natural assets and their production of ecosystem services.”²⁴ Developed by the Intrinsic Exchange Group (IEG), NACs “hold the rights to the ecological performance” of prescribed areas, including public lands, for “conservation, restoration, or sustainable management.”²⁵ On September 29, 2023, the New York Stock Exchange requested that the Securities and Exchange Commission allow NACs to be listed on the exchange.²⁶ Although the proposal was withdrawn after facing heavy criticism, IEG maintains that it will continue to pursue “different options” for introducing NACs into financial markets.²⁷ Through misguided policies like the Public Lands Rule, the Biden administration had made it easier for extreme environmental groups or foreign entities, perhaps under the guise of a NAC, to hold unaccountable, managerial authority over federal lands. This was certainly a marked departure from the idea, codified in statute, that BLM lands are supposed to be owned by the public and managed to support multiple uses.

Unilateral and Unpopular National Monument Expansions

Under the Antiquities Act of 1906, Congress authorized the president to designate national monuments on federal lands containing “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, or other objects of historic or scientific interest.”²⁸ This authority was limited, however; among other restrictions, the law specified that national monuments “shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected.”²⁹ Despite the Antiquities Act’s intended narrow focus, presidents of both parties have repeatedly abused the law throughout its history to lock up millions of acres of land under onerous restrictions. The 46th president, however, took this brazen disregard to new heights. In just four years, President Biden created or expanded 12 national monuments and restored the boundaries of three others that Presidents Obama and Clinton had created.³⁰ This included two national monuments that President Biden created in California during the last two weeks of his presidency: the 624,000-acre Chuckwalla National Monument and the 224,000-acre Sattitla Highlands National Monument.³¹ In total, President Biden “used the Antiquities Act more than any first-term president since the Carter administration,” using his expansive interpretation of the statute to lock up nearly 5.7 million acres of land.³²

Apart from blocking access to natural resources, national monuments often defy local sentiment and limit economic opportunities for struggling rural economies.³³ Adding insult to injury, locals often express concern over “whether there was sufficient consultation with, and support from, Congress, local and state governments, residents of the affected areas, and the general public” before a president creates a given monument.³⁴ Further, national monuments are increasingly being placed under the jurisdiction of the BLM and USFS,³⁵ creating tensions with the two agencies’ multiple-use mandates. By unilaterally designating more than 5 million acres as national monuments, President Biden thus expanded upon a lamentable presidential tradition of flagrantly abusing the Antiquities Act and ignoring the concerns of local communities and stakeholders.³⁶

Restrictive RMPs

BLM prepares RMPs to serve as land-use plans for specific units. As the BLM’s “blueprint” for “keeping landscapes healthy *and* productive,” an RMP should offer a balanced management plan that accounts for multiple uses and the perspectives of interested stakeholders.³⁷ Under the Biden administration, however, these plans were routinely transformed into top-down, preservationist schemes that flew in the face of local interests and concerns. The Rock Springs RMP, which covers approximately 3.6 million acres in southwestern Wyoming and was finalized in December 2024, is representative of this approach.³⁸ When the Draft Rock Springs RMP was released in August 2023, many locals were dismayed to see its strict limitations on oil and gas development, grazing, and recreation.³⁹ The opposition was so strong that Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon called on the BLM to withdraw the Draft RMP completely.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the finalized RMP ignored most of these concerns, and BLM Principal Deputy Director Nada Wolff Culver rejected Governor Gordon’s recommendations outright.⁴¹ In response, state and local officials expressed disappointment that “years of collaborative work” with the BLM had proved unavailing.⁴²

Similar dynamics unfolded in Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, Utah, and across the West. The BLM’s RMPs for the Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) and Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO), finalized on October 16, 2024, restricted oil and

gas leasing on nearly 1.1 million acres in Colorado despite facing significant opposition in Colorado and Congress.⁴³ Relatedly, county officials in Utah accused BLM of failing to adequately coordinate with state and local partners during the planning of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GESNM) RMP.⁴⁴ According to these officials, the BLM missed critical deadlines, failed to produce a list of the “objects” that would be protected by the monument’s new acreage, and misled the public about road closures that would occur under the agency’s preferred alternative.⁴⁵ By cutting off multiple use at the planning level, the Biden administration furthered a “death by a thousand cuts” approach to rural and western economies that depend on productive lands for food, fuel, and fiber.

The Misguided “Old Growth” Initiative

In April 2022, President Biden issued E.O. 14072, directing USDA and DOI to define, identify, and inventory “mature and old growth forests” on public lands and develop policies to protect those forests.⁴⁶ The interagency mature and old growth initiative began in July 2022 with a Federal Register Notice and public comment period, resulting in roughly 4,000 comments and more than 100,000 signatures on various form letters from across the country.⁴⁷ In April 2023, USFS published an “initial draft” seeking to define and inventory “old-growth and mature forests” and even convened a “Definition Development Team.”⁴⁸ Yet these efforts failed to create a coherent definition for “old-growth” or “mature” forests. This was a predictable shortcoming, as no standard definition exists for “old-growth forests” and “mature forests,” and they are not terms recognized in the scientific practice of forestry. Despite this lack of clear definitions, the report identified 91 million acres of “old-growth and mature” forested lands on National Forest System (NFS) lands, comprising 63 percent of all land managed by USFS.⁴⁹

The Biden administration ultimately admitted that “these ‘definitions’ are considered dynamic, not static, and thus are subject to refinement as new information is incorporated (working definitions).”⁵⁰ Despite lacking a real definition, the administration released an introductory report in January that identified wildfire, insects, and diseases as the leading threats to mature and old-growth forests and even admitted that “tree cutting” is a minor threat.⁵¹ The report even acknowledges that active management generally “improved or maintained” old growth stands.⁵² Continuing this misguided and incomplete effort, USFS published a Notice of Intent to amend all 128 national forest land management plans to provide direction on managing, conserving, and stewarding old-growth forest conditions.⁵³ On June 21, 2024, USFS released a draft Environmental Impact Statement that included burdensome regulations that would hinder forest management efforts.⁵⁴

There was significant opposition from various stakeholders who argued that the proposed National Old Growth Amendment was legally suspect and scientifically flawed. In response, USFS announced they were withdrawing the proposed amendment on January 7, 2025.⁵⁵ USFS Chief Randy Moore acknowledged this opposition, stating there “was also feedback that there are important place-based differences that we will need to understand” in order to properly steward forest resources on the ground.⁵⁶ While this was a welcome decision, the fact remains that this ill-advised effort from the Biden administration unquestionably diverted time and energy away from addressing the overwhelming wildfire and forest health crisis that is the true threat to forest stands of every age class.

The Benefits of Restoring Multiple Use

The American people need relief after suffering four years of disastrous natural resources policy under President Biden. A simple return to the letter and spirit of time-tested multiple-use mandates, as proposed by the Trump administration, will go a long way toward helping struggling communities surrounded by federal land. Some of the policy areas with the most urgent need for improvement are described below.

Right-sizing Federal Land Ownership to End America’s Housing Shortage

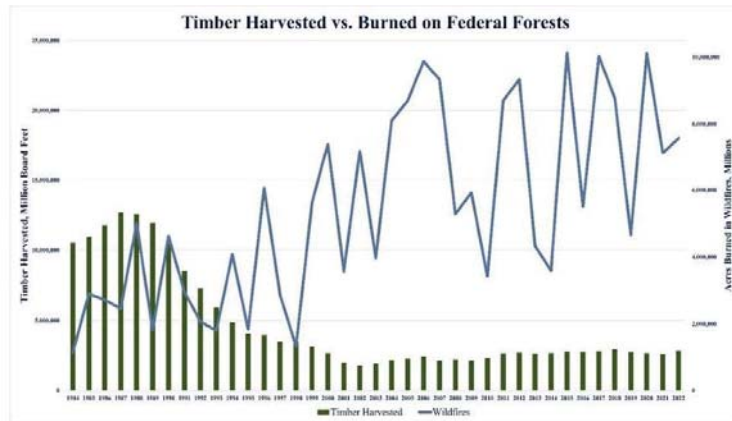
The harmful consequences of excessive federal land ownership are not confined to America’s rural communities. Federal lands encircle many of the nation’s fastest-growing urban centers, driving up housing costs and rental prices.⁵⁷ This problem is especially pronounced in America’s western states, where approximately half of the land is federally owned.⁵⁸ Therefore, it is unsurprising that this region has generally suffered from housing price increases that have outpaced those experienced in other parts of the country.⁵⁹ Additionally, these communities often face significant delays in approving needed transportation projects, water resource plans, and other local initiatives simply because they are surrounded by federal parcels under restrictive land-use designations.⁶⁰

Fortunately, workable solutions to America's housing crisis remain firmly within reach. In a 2022 study, Republicans on the U.S. Congressional Joint Economic Committee (JEC) found that "[t]he federal government can alleviate a large share of the housing shortage in the West by disposing of a minuscule share of its vast landholdings."⁶¹ Freeing up only 0.1 percent of the federal government's landholdings for residential development across the west could lead to the construction of 2.7 million new homes and empower 4.7 million Americans to finally afford averagely priced homes in their states.⁶² In Utah, for example, allowing for more housing to be built on federal lands could address 35 percent of the current housing shortage.⁶³ Utah Governor Spencer Cox recently identified the state's exorbitant housing prices as "the single greatest threat" to achieving future prosperity, which shows the importance of this issue. Even a small reduction in the federal estate could bring enormous benefits to American families.

Restoring Multiple-Use to Improve Forest Health and Strengthen Rural Economies

BLM and USFS are the two primary agencies tasked with forest management.⁶⁴ USFS manages roughly 145 million acres of forests and woodlands across the NFS, while BLM manages 37.6 million acres of mostly public domain forests.⁶⁵ Turning these agencies away from the preservationist approaches they have taken under the Biden administration and requiring them to fulfill their statutory multiple-use mandates would benefit both the economy and the environment by promoting active, responsible stewardship of federal forestland. Timber harvesting and grazing, for example, are traditional uses whose increased presence in federally managed forests is essential to managing the wildfire crisis and supporting rural economies.

Timber harvesting can directly reduce wildfire risk. Vast tracts of federal forests are overloaded with hazardous accumulations of dry fuels that have resulted from a combination of fire suppression and a dangerous lack of thinning, prescribed burns, and mechanical treatments.⁶⁶ Yet USFS missed its timber target in FY 2024 by roughly 260 million board feet.⁶⁷ Doubling down on this failure, USFS lowered its timber target from 3.4 to 3.2 billion board feet for the next two years.⁶⁸



Source: House Natural Resources Committee, 2023.

Reversing this troubling trajectory for timber targets would bolster USFS's wildfire risk reduction capabilities and revitalize threatened sawmill infrastructure. Since 2000, over 1,500 sawmills, approximately one-third of the total number of sawmills then in operation, shut down or severely curtailed their business activities.⁶⁹ Boosting timber targets would help prevent future loss of this critically important infrastructure, which could be leveraged to help ramp up forest management activities and process hazardous fuels. The viability of this solution has been confirmed in practice. Following the devastating Caldor Fire in 2021, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California partnered with a private timber company and USFS to build a sawmill to process the salvage timber left behind by the wildfire.⁷⁰ This partnership promised to improve forest health and provide an important source of revenue and jobs in that region.⁷¹ Moving forward, our land management agencies must reject the false premise that locking up land is sufficient to protect our forests. Instead, to restore health and resiliency to our forests, federal land managers must engage in active forest management, which includes responsible timber harvesting.

Grazing is another traditional use whose increased application would significantly reduce wildfire risk and improve landscape health. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that grazing is compatible with rangeland management and even vital to rangeland health. In 2024, for example, USDA released a study showing livestock grazing can limit both wildfire risk and invasive annual grasses.⁷² Responsible grazing can modify the range to make it more fire resilient, while the presence of livestock on federal land decreases fire probability and severity.⁷³ Such benefits are among the reasons why USFS listed grazing as a key aspect of the agency's Wildfire Crisis Strategy.⁷⁴ Grazing on public lands also delivers considerable cost savings to federal land management agencies while adding economic value to rural economies. Ranchers grazing livestock on public lands assist federal agencies by frequently clearing public trails, monitoring recreation trends, observing wildlife movements, and responding first to wildfires and other natural disasters.⁷⁵

As demonstrated through the examples of timber harvesting and grazing, a severe consequence of federal land managers locking up land is that states and localities lose out on revenue-generating activities. Economic research has found that a "[w]ilderness designation is significantly associated with lower per capita income, lower total payroll, and lower total tax receipts in counties."⁷⁶ The study continued by noting that "[t]he benefits and costs from [w]ilderness are unevenly distributed between local and non-local communities, with local communities incurring a larger burden of the costs."⁷⁷ This logic would readily apply to other restrictive land-use designations that contradict true multiple-use. Therefore, opening more federal land to traditional uses could serve as a promising way forward for many of the nation's most economically disadvantaged rural areas.

Republican Solutions to Restore Local Control and Productive Uses of Public Lands

House Republicans are determined to use the 119th Congress to advance common-sense and practicable solutions to increase Americans' access to their public lands and empower local stakeholders to have a greater role in land-use decisions. In completing this work, Republicans will return to many of the legislative solutions that were already developed in the 118th Congress to advance these policies to President Trump's desk. A selection of bills planned for consideration or already considered this Congress in the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Natural Resources include the following:

- **H.R. 471 (Rep. Westerman), "Fix Our Forests Act"**: Comprehensive, bipartisan legislation to restore forest health, improve resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, and protect communities by expediting environmental analyses and deterring frivolous lawsuits.⁷⁸
- **H.R. 3397 (Rep. Curtis) (118th), "Western Economic Security Today (WEST) Act of 2024"**: Withdraws the proposed Public Lands Rule and prohibits the BLM from finalizing, implementing, or enforcing any substantially similar rule.⁷⁹
- **H.R. 5499 (Rep. Miller-Meeks) (118th), "Congressional Oversight of the Antiquities Act"**: Amends the Antiquities Act by requiring congressional approval for the designation of national monuments. If Congress does not approve the designation within six months, the monument cannot be redesignated by the President for 25 years.⁸⁰
- **H.R. 6085 (Rep. Hageman) (118th), To prohibit the implementation of the Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Rock Springs RMP Revision, Wyoming**: Restricts the Secretary of the Interior from finalizing, implementing, administering, or enforcing the RMP and Environmental Impact Statement for the Rock Springs RMP Revision, Wyoming.⁸¹
- **H.R. 6547 (Rep. Boebert) (118th), "Colorado Energy Prosperity Act"**: Restricts the Secretary of the Interior from finalizing, implementing, administering, or enforcing the Draft RMP or Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the CRVFO and GJFO RMPs.⁸²
- **H.R. 7006 (Rep. Curtis) (118th), To prohibit natural asset companies from entering into any agreement with respect to land in the State of Utah or natural assets on or in such land**: Restricts a NAC from entering into any agreement regarding land or natural assets in Utah.⁸³

¹ Carol Hardy Vincent & Laura A. Hanson, “Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data,” Congressional Research Service, February 21, 2020, <https://www.crs.gov/reports/pdf/R42346/R42346.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*

³ 43 U.S.C. §§ 1701-1787. Vincent & Hanson, *supra* note 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ 43 U.S.C. § 1702(h).

⁶ 16 U.S.C. §§ 528, 1604(g).

⁷ “The BLM: A Sound Investment for America 2022,” Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2022-12/2022-SoundInvestment.pdf>.

⁸ See, e.g., Marc Heller, “Biden admin nixes old-growth forest plan,” E&E News, January 8, 2025, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/biden-admin-nixes-old-growth-forest-plan/> (quoting a critic of the plan as observing that “[m]ost old-growth areas in national forests are already off-limits to logging”).

⁹ Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, January 27, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

¹⁰ Letter to Secretary of the Interior Debra Haaland, Chairman Bruce Westerman, et al., April 14, 2021,

[https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2021-04-](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2021-04-14_westerman_et_al_to_haaland_doi_re_30_x_30_engagement_session.pdf)

[14_westerman_et_al_to_haaland_doi_re_30_x_30_engagement_session.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2021-04-14_westerman_et_al_to_haaland_doi_re_30_x_30_engagement_session.pdf).

¹¹ Vincent & Hanson, *supra* note 1.

¹² Lauren Wenzel, et al., “Marine Protected Areas 2020: Building Effective Conservation Networks,” National Marine Protected Areas Center, 2020, <https://nms.marineprotectedareas.blob.core.windows.net/marineprotectedareas-prod/media/docs/2020-mpa-building-effective-conservation-networks.pdf>.

¹³ Biden-Harris Administration Launches \$1 Billion America the Beautiful Challenge to Support and Accelerate Locally Led Conservation and Restoration Projects, April 11, 2022, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/eo/news-updates/2022/04/11/biden-harris-administration-launches-1-billion-america-the-beautiful-challenge-to-support-and-accelerate-locally-led-conservation-and-restoration-projects/>.

¹⁴ Briefing from Council on Environmental Quality Leg. Affairs to H. Comm. on Natural Resources Staff (Apr. 11, 2022, 15:00 EDT).

¹⁵ For a non-exhaustive list of examples, please see the designation of the [San Gabriel Mountains National Monument](#), the [Thompson Divide mineral withdrawal](#), the [Berrvessa Snow Mountain National Monument](#), and the [Twin Metals mineral withdrawal](#).

¹⁶ Federal Register, Conservation and Landscape Health, Final Rule, RIN 1004-AE92, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, May 9, 2024, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-05-09/pdf/2024-08821.pdf>.

¹⁷ There were only three in-person information sessions to discuss the proposed rule, all of which were in major urban centers. “Bureau of Land Management releases meeting dates for proposed Public Lands Rule,” Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, May 3, 2023,

<https://www.blm.gov/press-release/bureau-land-management-releases-meeting-dates-proposed-public-lands-rule>. See, e.g., “BLM Rule Threatens Multiple Use Management of Public Lands,” National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, April 18, 2024, <https://www.ncba.org/ncba-news/news-releases/news/details/37658/blm-rule-threatens-multiple-use-management-of-public-lands>.

¹⁸ 43 U.S.C. § 1702(c).

¹⁹ Letter to Secretary of the Interior Debra Haaland, Office of Advocacy, U.S. Small Business Administration, June 13, 2023, <https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/BLM-Conservation-Letter-FINAL.pdf>.

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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON RESTORING MULTIPLE USE TO REVITALIZE AMERICA'S PUBLIC LANDS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

**Tuesday, February 11, 2025
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C.**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:07 p.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Tiffany, McClintock, Fulcher, Stauber, Amodei, Maloy, Kennedy, Westerman; Neguse, Stansbury, Dexter, Randall, and Huffman.

Also present: Representative Hageman.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on restoring multiple use to revitalize America's public lands and rural communities.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to participate in today's hearing from the dais: the gentlelady from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman; and the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Crank.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

Mr. TIFFANY. I want to welcome everybody to the first official Subcommittee on Federal Lands hearing of the 119th Congress.

Last Congress the Subcommittee continued its bipartisan tradition by sending more than 15 separate pieces of legislation to the President's desk. In fact, if Federal Lands were counted as a full Committee, it would have tied for the fourth most productive Committee in the House last Congress. This is also based on a conservative estimate, since we are not counting the numerous other bills signed into law through comprehensive packages like the EXPLORE Act.

As we begin our important work in this new Congress, this Subcommittee will work with the Trump administration and the new Republican Senate majority to restore multiple use to our public lands, empower local communities, and revitalize rural economies.

And there is much work to be done. President Biden left America's public lands and natural resources in a sorry state. For four long years President Biden and his Federal land managers abandoned the long-standing and previously uncontroversial principle of multiple use. Instead they adopted top-down preservationist schemes designed to placate extreme environmentalists. Along the way, Biden's officials never seemed to notice or care that their reckless policies were inflicting enormous damage on America's rural economy, housing affordability, energy dominance, and national security.

While virtually no American was spared by President Biden's irresponsible natural resource policies, the harm was felt most acutely out West. Growing urban centers like Salt Lake City and Las Vegas suffer from exorbitant housing and rental prices largely because they are encircled by Federal land. Rural communities are facing economic devastation as generations-old grazing and logging businesses have had to shut down due to ruinous regulations. And on top of all that, the Democrats' profligate spending brought us the highest inflation in 40 years, which disproportionately hurt rural residents.

The startling scope and arrogance of these policies were laid bare by the Biden administration's 30x30 agenda. Under this initiative Federal land managers sought to lock up at least 30 percent of the Nation's land and waters by 2030. Seldom remarked was the fact that the Federal Government already owns 640 million acres, or roughly 28 percent of the Nation's land mass, including nearly 50 percent of the land out West. The 30x30 initiative, then, was simply a misleading attempt to justify further land grabs. Thirty by thirty was consistently cited when the Biden administration designated new national monuments or announced ill-advised mineral withdrawals.

Under glaring abuses of the Antiquities Act the former President sealed off nearly six million acres in California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. Adding insult to injury, the Federal land managers who planned and implemented these national monuments often displayed a sneering disregard for local opinion. Again and again, local officials and residents reported that their questions and concerns had been deflected or ignored.

This was also true of the BLM's Public Lands Rule, which overturned the long-standing statutory precedent of multiple use and sustained yield. The rule empowers environmental groups and foreign entities to purchase so-called conservation leases, and thereby lock up millions of acres of public lands intended for multiple use. Despite repeated requests to hold more in-person listening sessions from across this dais in Western States, the Biden administration refused to do so and pushed this rule forward over the objections of governors, local officials, ranchers, recreationalists, and countless others.

Similar issues plagued the resource management plans issued by Biden's bureaucrats in Colorado, Utah, Montana, North Dakota,

and Wyoming. The BLM used resource management plans to prohibit energy production, limit economic activity, and block traditional access. And yet again, Federal land managers simply dismissed local outrage.

These examples lead to an inescapable conclusion: When bureaucrats in Washington turn their backs on multiple use, they also turn their backs on the American people. Thankfully, a unified Republican government means that relief is now at hand. Instead of ignoring local voices, we are putting Western communities back in the driver's seat to shape the land and resource policies that affect their lives.

Further, Committee Republicans will ensure that Federal land managers understand that, under our watch, coordination will always require attentive, good faith, and meaningful engagement with local communities. The days of ignoring and downplaying stakeholders' concerns are over.

I could go on forever about these issues, but fortunately we have some high-caliber witnesses in front of us who are eager to share their expertise. So in closing I would like to thank all of them for traveling here today. Please know that your insights are highly valued by each member of this Subcommittee.

With that I yield and recognize the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mr. Huffman.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Pinch hitting for our Subcommittee Ranker for now. I appreciate it.

This Subcommittee will host some very important conversations in the coming months, conversations and debates over policy that will have profound impacts on the future of our public lands. And it is clear from the onslaught of attacks emanating from the White House that the heart and soul of America's public lands is at stake here.

Between Project 2025 and its extreme targeting of public lands, and now the aggressive rollout of the Project 2025 agenda through executive orders, a hiring freeze, funding freeze, there is no question that Federal land management agencies, along with many other Federal agencies, are under siege. This reckless and illegal action is delaying the delivery of critical funds to State, local, and tribal partners right now. It is paralyzing the implementation of wildfire mitigation projects, projects that keep communities safe. It is pausing or outright canceling the hiring process for critical personnel with vital functions like public safety, resource protection, and others.

Shockingly, constituents in my district who are hard at work implementing post-fire disaster recovery and wildfire mitigation projects have been forced to pause these efforts without any idea how long this pause will even remain in effect. They could lose an entire season because of the administration's actions. There is nothing "woke" about reducing wildfire risk and helping communities rebuild. These efforts are essential for public safety, regardless of politics. So this is beyond perplexing.

On top of that, countless Federal employees have no idea if they still even have a job because these tech bros, along with Elon Musk, these unelected, unaccountable private-sector actors, are rifling through all of their computer systems and private information, in some cases suggesting mass layoffs. And doing that with non-partisan civil servants is incredibly shortsighted. This ego-driven vendetta is going to have grave consequences. And those who support it or those who simply stand by while it happens will own those consequences.

The tech bros at DOGE have no idea how much Americans love their public lands. Visitation is skyrocketing, outdoor recreation is booming. And thanks to the hard work and dedication of the Biden administration, conservation is on the rise. Democrats are proud of the progress we achieved in the last 4 years. But unfortunately, the country is about to experience a massive sense of whiplash. Newly confirmed Interior Secretary Burgum has wasted no time in rolling out the Project 2025 playbook. His secretarial orders set the stage for rolling back practically every beneficial public lands policy from the past 4 years, exactly as called for in Project 2025.

Rolling back initiatives like the Public Lands Rule, stripping protections for places like the Boundary Waters, peeling back national monuments to hand over our public lands to polluting billionaire barons is a betrayal of the American people and the lands we all love. This plan, again, is right out of Project 2025, and Donald Trump swore up and down that it was not his plan. Many of you here denied it, as well. But here we are with an administration that is following it to the letter.

My Republican colleagues insist that they support policies that reflect their commitment and the input of rural communities. Well, let me tell you, there are going to be a lot of incensed rural stakeholders when the President carries through with his plans to roll back all of these protections.

We have an obligation and a responsibility to manage our public lands in a balanced way that keeps future generations in mind and puts conservation on equal footing with other demands and uses. To put it in context of this hearing today, balance is a key component of multiple use.

My district is full of rural communities, and I can assure you that the local input that Republicans repeatedly cite isn't just a blanket request for more development and extraction and pollution. Local input includes requests from Tribes seeking to protect sacred sites and cultural resources from destruction by foreign mining conglomerates, or local communities hoping to preserve the unspoiled landscapes around them. That is why Democrats work with their communities to develop legislative solutions for public lands in their districts.

Democrats also represent rural communities surrounded by public land, just like many of you. All you have to do is to look at the members of this Subcommittee and the districts they represent. Unfortunately, our efforts are often blocked in Congress by our colleagues across the aisle.

But first and foremost, we need to put an end to the uncertainty and the chaos that is going on right now because of President Trump's Federal funding freeze. I really hope my colleagues across

the aisle will start engaging on that, paying attention to the damage that is rolling out to all of our districts. If we really want to help rural communities, that is a good place to start.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you for the opening statement, Mr. Huffman, and we are going to move on to witness testimony here.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony press the “on” button.

On the microphone, we use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

First, I would like to introduce the Honorable Eric Clarke, the County Attorney of Washington County, Utah.

Mr. Clarke, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. ERIC CLARKE, COUNTY ATTORNEY,
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH, ST. GEORGE, UTAH**

Mr. CLARKE. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

My ancestors settled the area of Bryce Canyon National Park and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. I was in high school in 1996 when the 1.7 million-acre monument was created and my town became surrounded by public lands that were no longer managed for multiple use.

Professionally, I have worked in the Washington County Attorney’s Office in southwest Utah for 14 years, and have served as the elected county attorney since 2020. I regularly work on public land issues involving federally protected land, plants, and animals, land exchanges with the BLM, highway and water development projects, resource and travel management plans, and visitor crowding in Zion National Park. For better or worse, I am an expert when it comes to the often dysfunctional public land bureaucracy.

My family has lived in southern Utah for six generations. My Grandpa Clarke worked in the Escalante sawmill, which relied on timber harvested from Forest Service land. He also ran cattle on BLM-managed lands that are now part of the Grand Staircase National Monument. His livelihood relied on positive and functional partnerships with Federal land management agencies, and he lived a long, happy life. Unfortunately, the sawmill is now closed because the Forest Service could not provide consistent timber permits. Running cattle becomes more and more difficult due to constantly changing Federal land management and restrictions. I have six siblings, but only one lives in our home county. There are simply not enough high-paying jobs to keep people in the area.

I live in nearby Washington County, which, in contrast to my home county, is thriving economically. Our population center is 90 miles from Las Vegas on Interstate 15, and we are the gateway to Zion National Park, which had over 5 million visitors last year. We have experienced rapid population growth for decades, growing from 10,000 residents 65 years ago to more than 200,000 today.

Like other population centers in the Southwest, conserving water and improving our water infrastructure are of paramount importance to us. An egregious example of a broken bureaucratic system is the BLM administrative land exchange process. We must improve our water reuse capacity, and the first step in our comprehensive water reuse plan was to complete a non-controversial land exchange where the county would acquire a reuse reservoir site and BLM would receive designated critical habitat that would increase the size of the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area. The BLM estimated it could complete the simple exchange in 18 months, but it has been 8 years and the exchange is still in process. We cannot meet our water needs if every step in the Federal process takes a decade to complete.

We also have to build new arterial roads to meet our growth demands. Congress approved a Northern Corridor for our community in the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act. In that same bill, and with our county's support, Congress designated 250,000 acres of wilderness, 110,000 acres of National Conservation Area lands and 165 miles of Wild and Scenic River. In 2021 the BLM approved a four-and-a-half-mile Northern Corridor. Simultaneously, we protected thousands of acres of Mojave Desert tortoise habitat. But 2 months ago the BLM revoked that right-of-way, removed the protections on the habitat, and flaunted the clear direction from Congress to delineate a buildable road corridor by 2012.

I have worked on this project for 10 years, and it is beyond frustrating to have our good-faith growth and conservation efforts disregarded. Communities surrounded by Federal lands need reliable and responsive Federal partners. For communities to thrive we need consistent multiple-use management. Congressional action on permitting reform, including judicial review, will be helpful.

Maximizing public uses on Federal lands also depends on congressional oversight of how Federal land management agencies' handbooks and internal policies are utilized to thwart or delay multiple uses on those lands. We need consistency in land management decisions. We need those decisions to be completed in a timely, cost-effective manner. And we need the BLM to follow its multiple-use mandate, work with us to preserve our cherished public lands, encourage responsible access, and provide for economic growth.

My great-great-great-grandparents helped settle southern Utah. I hope that my generation is not the last in my family to have the opportunity to live in our amazing area.

Thank you for holding this important hearing today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Clarke follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC CLARKE, COUNTY ATTORNEY
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to discuss the impacts of federal land management when the management ignores the desires of and impacts to communities adjacent to federally managed lands.

My ancestors settled the area near Bryce Canyon National Park and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. I was in high school in 1996 when President Clinton proclaimed that the federally managed land adjacent to my community was part of the original 1.7-million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National

Monument designation. Professionally, I have worked in the Washington County Attorney's office in southwest Utah for 14 years and have served as the elected County Attorney since 2020. Our county contains most of Zion National Park, 15 congressionally designated wilderness areas, and two congressionally-designated national conservation areas. I regularly work on public land issues involving (1) the 14 federally protected plants and animals in our county; (2) land exchanges with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); (3) highway and water development projects; (4) resource and travel management plans; and (5) visitor crowding in Zion National Park. For better or for worse, I am an expert when it comes to the often-dysfunctional public land bureaucracy.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 is a congressional act that mandates BLM to manage public land resources for a variety of uses including livestock grazing, recreation, timber harvesting, energy development while balancing the protection of sensitive lands and species and cultural resources. "Multiple use" is not an esoteric concept. It is an actionable and proven approach to land management. Multiple use encourages actors to co-exist rather than exclude one another. The movement away from multiple-use management of public lands and toward benefiting only one use directly harms local communities. Figure 1, a map of the state of Utah, shows how few BLM lands (in yellow) are eligible for multiple use whereas most BLM lands in Utah are encumbered with special designations.

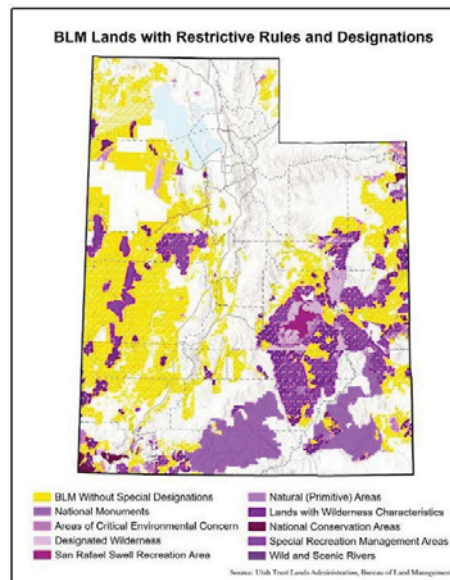


Figure 1. Land Rules and Designations in Utah

I share with this committee direct examples of how multiple use can advance the needs of all stakeholders. Yet, the way federal agencies have chosen to *implement* federal land and environmental policies enacted by Congress is riddled with red-tape, layers of review, and processes that have become an impediment that delays and diminishes the use of federal lands for the public benefit. This is why facilitating multiple uses also enhances the conservation values integral to land management.

I. Federal Mismanagement Harmed my Hometown

After World War II, my grandpa married my grandma, and they bought a small farm in a small community in rural southern Utah where they had both been raised. They raised their six children in that same small community. My grandpa worked full time in the timber industry, sharpening saws in a sawmill in the small town of Escalante. The sawmill where he worked relied on timber harvested from U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed land. He also ran cattle on BLM-managed lands that are now part of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. My

grandparents' livelihood relied on positive and functional partnerships with federal land management agencies, and they lived long, happy lives.

Unfortunately, after my grandpa retired, the sawmill where he'd spent his career closed. While its owners tried several times to get it up and running again, each time it failed because of legal challenges to timber harvesting permits or bureaucratic red tape. A sawmill cannot operate without a steady supply of timber, and all the timber was in a federally managed forest where it was tied up by bureaucratic red tape.

Grazing has fared better than logging, but it is still negatively impacted by federal decisions and management plan updates that place further restrictions on monument uses. Much, if not most, of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was actively grazed at the time of its creation. While the number of cattle allowed was not immediately reduced when the National Monument was created, road closures and other restrictions have made it difficult for owners who rely on historic federal grazing permits to maintain cattle. On top of this, only a small portion of land in the area is private property, so any cattle in the area must graze on federal land. I spoke with a concerned county commissioner two weeks ago who says that grazing is being choked out of existence due to federal mismanagement and restrictions.

No one who visits this area will find evidence of destructive logging or overgrazing. The hard-working people who worked in those industries saw BLM and USFS employees as their partners, partners whom they worked alongside to keep the land healthy because healthy lands were necessary for the local communities' economic survival. The industries suffered not because the local communities were abusing the land, but due to broken bureaucratic processes and never-ending legal challenges from non-governmental entities.

My paternal grandparents had six children, and I am the oldest of my father's seven children. Yet I have only one sister and no paternal cousins living in the community where I grew up. The high school in Escalante is now only a fraction of the size it was at the time of my graduation in 1999. As the local saying goes—the area's largest export is its children. While the state of Utah was the fastest growing state in the nation for the fifteen-year period of 2008–2023, averaging a 21% growth rate, counties in rural Utah made up of mostly federally managed land cannot grow. The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is in Garfield and Kane Counties. The population of Garfield County was 5,172 in 2010 and is now 5,314, representing only a 1.6% increase over 10 years.¹ Kane County has experienced similar trends with an average growth trend of 1% between 2010–2023.² As demonstrated by my experience, people move away because it is no longer economically feasible for them to remain. For most people born in these communities, the only employment options include working for a governmental agency or working in the tourism industry (neither option is known to lead to economic prosperity because the hospitality jobs are often seasonal and low paying).

Federal lands should be managed in a way that allows the lands and species to thrive and that promotes long-term economic prosperity for the people invested in the survival of the lands. Instead, land management is choking local economies out of existence.

II. Washington County is Vested in Protecting the Local Environment

After finishing law school and a federal judicial clerkship, I moved to Washington County, Utah. I am currently the elected County Attorney. Washington County is a public lands county, with the federal government managing over 75% of the land in our county. Of our 1.5 million acres, the BLM manages 41% of those, the USFS manages 25%, and the National Parks Service manages 9%. Our county's uniquely beautiful landscape is a result of the junction of the Colorado Plateau, the Mojave Desert, and the Great Basin landforms. Our awe-inspiring vistas, warm climate, and welcoming community make Washington County an ideal place to live and visit.

Washington County continues to experience rapid population growth. In 1960, we had a population of 10,000. Today it is over 207,000.³ To put that into perspective, our population has at least doubled every 20 years since 1960. With tourism playing such an essential role in our economy, it is unsurprising that estimates place the number of visitors our County receives at between eight and ten million annually.

¹Population Data Garfield County: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/garfieldcountyyutah/PST045224>

²Population Data Kane County: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/kanecountyutah/AFN120222>

³Population Data Washington County, Utah: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/utah/washington-county>

Last year, Zion National Park was the fourth-most-visited national park in the United States, attracting five million visitors.⁴

In addition to being an attractive place for people to live and visit, our unique landscape is also home to 15 federally protected plant and animal species. For decades, Washington County has successfully implemented the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan, proving that vibrant communities can participate in successful conservation efforts resulting in thriving lands and species when community members have a seat at the table and when they are allowed to work in partnership with Federal agencies. Our community leaders work diligently to ensure our population growth and tourism industry, along with their associated outdoor recreation, occur in ways that preserve our local environment. Our open space and beautiful views are an essential part of the Washington County experience, and our community leaders are invested in preserving them.

III. Broken Bureaucratic Processes are Impeding Our Water Infrastructure Planning

Washington County exists in an extremely dry desert climate. We have a single, small drainage basin that provides all the water to our area. The region relies on water storage from above-average precipitation years to meet our needs in below-average years. We have proactively planned and developed water systems and storage throughout the time our community has existed. However, the burdensome bureaucracy that has harmed my hometown is also harming my current community. For example, a very small reservoir currently under construction in Washington County required 20 years of a costly bureaucratic tug-of-war to win a permit and begin construction.

An egregious example of a broken bureaucratic system is our county water district's efforts to navigate the BLM's administrative land exchange processes. For background, our county developed a comprehensive water reuse plan that will allow us to meet our population growth by reusing water—a system that would solve many of the problems currently faced by many drought-ridden areas in the Western United States. This water reuse system is a common-sense solution that nearby desert communities like Las Vegas, Nevada have used to great effect. Washington County's regional reuse system will include new treatment facilities, conveyance infrastructure, and water storage facilities that will optimize reuse water. Most of the system intersects with federal lands. Due to local leaders' familiarity with the bureaucratic challenges presented by the federal environmental review processes, they hoped to speed up the process by using a comprehensive environmental impact statement (EIS) for the entire reuse project rather than one project component at a time.

The linchpin of this reuse plan requires the development of a large reuse storage reservoir. In accordance with our preservation-minded attitude, we worked to put this site on lands of minimal biological and historical value. Thus, the Washington County Water Conservancy District proposed purchasing valuable and tortoise-occupied Mohave desert tortoise habitat from a private person. Those private lands reside inside the boundary of the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area. This purchase would allow those lands to be immediately incorporated into that NCA when it goes under BLM management. In exchange, the District worked within the BLM Resource Management Plan to identify other lands the District could utilize that are less biologically and economically valuable to enhance water storage capability. Notably, the privately held tortoise land inside the NCA had long been flagged as a priority for BLM acquisition and the reservoir site is listed as a planned reservoir site in the current BLM resource management plan for the area.

This exchange checks every box. It fits the existing BLM planning documents, helps the environment in multiple ways, and directly benefits the local community. When we began working on it, the BLM estimated that it could be completed in 18 months. But eight years have now passed, and the exchange is still not complete. The County has not run into any unforeseen issues like discovery of a new species or a previously unknown antiquity site. The BLM process is simply broken and cannot be completed in a timely manner.

The years-long delay has cost our water district millions of dollars because construction costs have increased dramatically. These costs necessarily come out of the pockets of our citizens and taxpayers. If the administrative land exchange had been completed in two years, the comprehensive environmental impact statement for the regional reuse project would be finished by now. A significant amount of our water

⁴Zion National Park Visitation: <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/management/park-visitation-statistics.htm>

reuse system would be under construction. Frustratingly, everything has been delayed because a timely completion of the land exchange has failed.

IV. 2008 Washington County Growth and Conservation Act

We have worked diligently to preserve open space in our area. Twenty years ago, Utah's then-Governor Ölene Walker encouraged local leaders to work with Congress, conservation groups, and others to protect significant swaths of open space in our county while ensuring those protections would not impede future water development, utility access, or road construction. Those efforts resulted in the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act, which was passed as part of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act (Public Law 111-11).

On the "conservation" side of the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act, the Act designated 16 wilderness areas, totaling nearly 250,000 acres. It designated 165 miles of the Virgin River and its tributaries in our county as a Wild and Scenic River. The Act also established two national conservation areas protecting, to a lesser degree than wilderness, an additional 110,000 acres. This NCA acreage was expected to grow significantly when the BLM fulfilled its commitment to acquire the lands privately held and the school trust lands inside the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (Red Cliffs NCA) boundary. The Act even designated uses for the funds that would come as the BLM sold lands that had been listed for disposal year earlier; these funds were to go toward acquiring the NCA inholdings. Thus, the "conservation" side of the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act was significant.

On the "growth" side of the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act, local and state land-use planners were assured that the creation of the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area would not unduly hinder running utilities or accessing water within the NCA as necessary for future population growth. This assurance was important because the NCA's southern and eastern boundary was adjacent to existing or planned developments, and its western boundary abuts the Shivwits Band of Paiutes Reservation. All parties understood that, to some degree, the NCA land would always have to be utilized for the movement of water, utilities, and traffic.

Bringing together both the "conservation" and "growth" sides of the Act, the Act also gave the BLM three years to develop a comprehensive travel management plan that would ensure appropriate access to all of the BLM-managed land in the county, placing an emphasis on continuing recreational use of the remaining multiple use areas. The contents of the final plan for BLM-managed lands was to include one or more options for the construction of what is known locally as the "Northern Corridor." As you can see in the map prepared for this testimony, the Red Cliffs NCA boundary dips south near the historic downtown of St. George City (See Exhibit A). Traffic planners have identified the need for a northern bypass road since the mid-1980s, which is why it was clearly and unequivocally included in the Act. Forty years later, we are still waiting, and the bypass road is needed now more than ever.

V. BLM's Failure to Follow the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act

Inexplicably, the BLM has fully implemented all the conservation measures of the Act while largely ignoring the *growth* measures. Here are a few examples:

- **A. Utility and Water Access.** This House Committee held a field hearing in St. George City in 2016 to address utility and water access in the Red Cliffs NCA. The draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Red Cliffs NCA inappropriately restricted utility and water access, not adhering to the agreement reached in the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act. Pressure from the committee, combined with excellent work of then-Deputy Washington County Attorney Celeste Maloy, resulted in most of these concerns being resolved before the finalization of the RMP.
- **B. Travel Management.** Around 2014, the local BLM field office began working with Washington County on the congressionally required travel management plan as passed in PL 111-11. For six months, County and BLM planners identified dispersed campsites, overlooks, and other destinations throughout the county. The draft plan was well written, and the County was largely supportive of the BLM's preferred alternative. However, the plan was never released for public comment, nor was it adopted. It has continued to gather dust on a shelf in the local BLM office for 10 years.
- **C. Northern Corridor.** The BLM's most egregious action has been its open opposition to the Northern Corridor, a road project expressly enabled by the Congress in the Washington County Growth and Management Act (PL 111-

11). This open opposition was demonstrated in the BLM's denial of an initial application for the roadway—a decision that was overturned by the Department of Interior Board of Land Appeals. This open opposition was also demonstrated by the BLM's refusal to include a transportation corridor that would meet our area's clear traffic needs in the 2016 Red Cliffs NCA Resource Management Plan.

VI. Granting a Right-of-Way

Washington County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state of Utah and it is projected to continue growing, doubling its population by 2050.⁵ As much as we focus on smart and innovate ways to provide water, housing, and energy for our residents and our millions of visitors each year, our community is equally concerned with transportation and traffic congestion and the consequences to these issues for our local neighborhoods and our air quality.

In 2017, our County gathered numerous federal, state, and local stakeholders to directly address the Northern Corridor issue, given the BLM's lack of action on the travel management plan and our need to address regional transportation issues. Washington County teamed up with the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the State of Utah, Utah's school trust lands administrators (SITLA), local transportation planners, and cities.

While our position remains that no additional biological mitigation should be necessary because the roadway was part of the bargain struck in the 2009 Act, we also acknowledge legitimate concerns about the road's impacts on the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. The Reserve is the key component of the county's habitat conservation plan and its Mojave desert tortoise incidental take permit. In the process of addressing the Northern Corridor issue, the County and other stakeholders saw an opportunity to protect as open space the heavily recreated area shown as Zone 6 in the attached map—an opportunity that we embraced, further illustrating local leaders' commitment to preserving the beautiful and biologically important local environment (See Exhibit A).

From 2017 to 2021, the BLM and the USFWS jointly completed an environmental impact statement (EIS) that analyzed the following:

- (1) an application from Utah for the Northern Corridor Right-of-Way;
- (2) a 25-year renewal of the County's desert tortoise incidental take permit.

The incidental take permit renewal process included amending Washington County's Mohave Desert Tortoise Habitat Conservation Plan so that the plan addressed commitments from the County, the BLM, Utah's school trust lands administration (SITLA), and other parties impacted if the Northern Corridor were approved. The most important biological aspect of those commitments was the County's offer to expand The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve to include Zone 6 in return for the BLM's grant of a right-of-way to the state of Utah for the Northern Corridor. In 2020 and 2021, the USFWS approved the amended habitat conservation plan and renewed the county's incidental take permit. The BLM granted Utah a right-of-way for the Northern Corridor, which then triggered the part of the amended plan that established Zone 6.

Zone 6 contained 6,813 acres, half of which was already BLM-managed land. One-third of Zone 6 was part of the Red Bluff Area of Critical Environmental Concern, an area already managed for conservation of the protected dwarf bear-poppy plant but not yet managed for conservation of the Mojave desert tortoise. Nearly half of Zone 6 is privately owned by Utah School Trust Lands Administration (formerly SITLA). The remaining acres were owned by private property owners or local governments. The area has a large and healthy desert tortoise population. It is also heavily recreated.

Popular trails include Bearclaw Poppy and Zen, using for mountain biking and hiking. Rock climbing areas include the Green Valley Gap and Moe's Valley. To put in perspective how popular the area is, trail counters show that over 100,000 mountain bike rides occur annually on the Bearclaw Poppy Trail alone.

To ensure that all impacts to the desert tortoise from the construction of the Northern Corridor would be fully offset, the County and its partners proposed the following:

- (1) set aside all 6,813 acres in Zone 6 to be managed for the benefit of the tortoise,

⁵ Kim C Gardner Total Population Projections by County: https://tableau.dashboard.utah.edu/t/Business/views/20220111_Detailed_Proj_Vis/ProjectionsWorkbook?%3Adisplay_count=n&%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3AshowVizHome=n

- (2) do away with the prior development authorization of 3,341 acres of non-federally managed lands, and
- (3) strategically place tortoise culverts under Cottonwood Road in the portion of the Red Cliffs NCA near the Northern Corridor.

This would result in the County protecting 12 acres of tortoise habitat for every one acre of habitat disturbed for road development. In terms of the tortoise population, eight tortoises would be protected due to the preservation of lands for every one tortoise disturbed due to road development (although new information indicates that the ratio would be closer to 10:1). (See 2020 Amended and Reinstated Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan Appendix G).⁶ No reasonable refutation can be made that the proposed benefits to the described tortoise recovery efforts far outweigh the harms caused by the construction and ongoing use of the four and half mile-long Northern Corridor.

We were understandably shocked in 2022 when the BLM and non-governmental organizations agreed in an out-of-court settlement to do two things: (1) immediately revoke the Biological Opinion from USFWS supporting the 2020 Northern Corridor Record of Decision and (2) complete a supplemental environmental impact statement allowing for the revocation of the right-of-way. The BLM completed that final revocation in December 2024; the USFWS simultaneously eliminated Zone 6.

These actions made the 3,300 acres of occupied tortoise habitat, which are still privately-owned as school trust lands, immediately developable. Before this decision, I would never have imagined the USFWS would choose to allow for the destruction of high quality and occupied habitat, an action that will translate into the destruction of 12 acres of habitat for every one acre that gained protection. Washington County filed a lawsuit last summer challenging the illegal revocation of the Northern Corridor Biological Opinion. We are currently working with the State of Utah as we explore our options for most effectively challenging the revocation of the state's BLM-issued right-of-way.

VII. Breaching Trust

In addition to the inexplicable path taken by the Biden Department of Interior, the agency also burned bridges built by decades of the federal agencies and community partners working together in good faith. After the Northern Corridor Right-of-Way was issued in January 2021, our county was obligated to fulfill many commitments triggered by the road's approval.

We have spent over \$6 million! We have closed areas to OHV use by constructing fencing and signage and by imposing a regular law enforcement presence. We have already purchased enough acres of land to offset the loss of tortoise habitat acres from the road at a 3:1 ratio. We have purchased grazing permits to be retired. We have built a public outreach center where we educate the public about our area's sensitive animals and plants daily. We have implemented tortoise-conscious development restrictions for utilities crossing Zone 6. We have significantly cleaned up and reduced the amount of trash dumping that had been occurring in the area for decades. We have fulfilled our part of the bargain.

Neither the BLM nor the Fish and Wildlife Service ever indicated that we should hold off on these activities or that our obligations were being put on hold while they engaged in secret backroom negotiations with outside groups for years. They held us to our commitments while possessing a full knowledge that they were going to renege on theirs.

How can we partner with these agencies now? We spent years working to find a solution that satisfied every possible requirement of the Endangered Species Act and the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. The County and the state spent millions of taxpayer dollars on studies, plans, and an environmental impact statement. We then spent millions more fulfilling our time-sensitive obligations under the new agreement. The federal agencies knowingly extorted money from us and then took away the right-of-way that we had negotiated, and that Congress had approved in 2009. The Biden Department of the Interior actions have left us with no viable option for meeting our area's transportation needs. We hope that, with a change in Administration, the agencies may renew their commitments to us in a way that will allow us to keep the full benefit of our work and resources. However, the broken bureaucratic process has proven nearly impossible to complete during a single Administration.

⁶Appendix G, Determining Fully Offset for the Northern Corridor of the 2020 Amended and Restated Washington County Habitat Conservation plan. https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/1502103/200341977/20029421/250035622/Amended%20Washington%20County%20HCP%20-%20Final.pdf

Conclusion

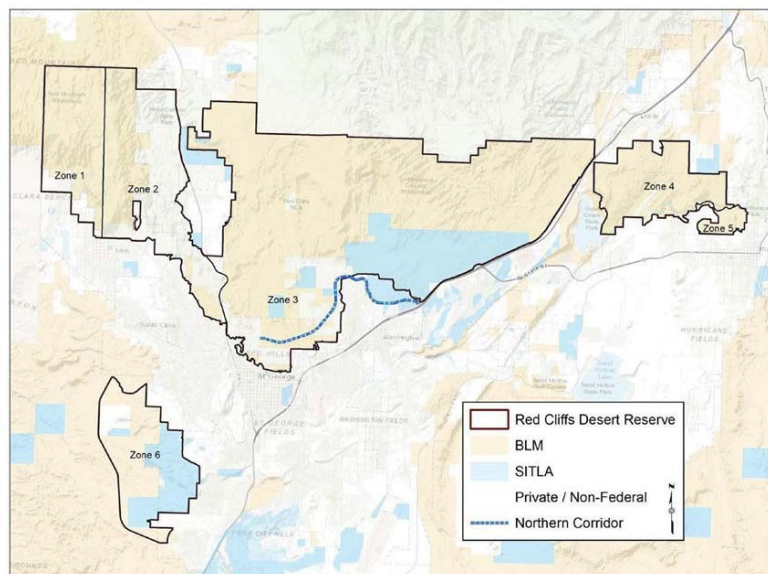
For Communities to thrive, we need consistent, multiple use management. I worry that the negative impact of these federal decisions will grow with my children as they grow to adulthood. Employment opportunities in the towns near southern Utah's national monuments are severely limited. Housing prices will increase dramatically if failure to build roads and water infrastructure prevents Washington County from keeping up with housing demand. I had no viable option for staying in my hometown and so I moved from a town of 500 to a community that has grown to 200,000. I worry that the dysfunctionality of federal land management will force not only my children, but children coming of age across Southern Utah, to move away from the area.

As much as this depends on Congressional action in implementing changes that will lead to permitting reform, it also depends on Congressional oversight of how the BLM and other federal agency handbooks and internal policies are utilized and implemented, as they are now utilized and implemented to thwart multiple uses of federal lands. Unfortunately, my personal and professional life have been significantly and negatively impacted by poor federal land management policies and implementation of policies that have failed to respond to the needs of my community.

Communities surrounded by federal lands need responsive federal partners. We need consistency in land management decisions. We need those decisions to be completed in a timely, cost-effective manner. And we need those decisions to seriously consider our local economies and cultures. My great-great-great grandparents helped settle Southern Utah. I hope that my generation is not the last in my family to have the opportunity to live in our amazing area.

Thank you for holding this important hearing today.

Exhibit A. Map of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve showing Northern Corridor and Zone 6.



Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, thank you, Mr. Clarke. I will now recognize Mr. Tim Canterbury, President of the Public Lands Council.
Mr. Canterbury, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF TIM CANTERBURY, PRESIDENT, PUBLIC
LANDS COUNCIL, HOWARD, COLORADO**

Mr. CANTERBURY. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Tim Canterbury, and I serve as President of the Public Lands Council. Since 1968 PLC has been the only organization in Washington, D.C. dedicated to representing the unique perspectives of cattle and sheep producers who hold the 22,000 Federal grazing permits across the West. Between the Forest Service and the BLM, approximately 250 million acres have grazing as an authorized use in any given year.

For five generations, my family has raised cattle in Colorado. Aside from my private land, I have held BLM and Forest Service grazing permits since the 1980s, and manage the lands, waters, wildlife, and multiple uses they sustain. Like other grazing permittees, I am responsible for maintaining fences, water troughs, pipelines, culverts, and other infrastructure on my allotment that benefits my livestock and other users of these lands.

These other users are plentiful. Colorado is home to some of the country's most popular hiking and climbing areas. Two of the most used trails to access these fourteeners run through my allotments. In the height of summer we have measured more than 1,000 people per day who go through my grazing allotment on these trails. I have adjusted my grazing rotations and embraced emerging technologies to reduce the potential for conflict between recreationalists and my livestock like gates left open, damage to water tanks, and soil disturbance from heavy foot traffic. This is all part of normal multiple use management for ranchers like me.

Western economies depend on successful multiple use, and grazing is a tool that makes true multiple use possible. Grazing reduces wildfire risk by more than 40 percent. Without grazing, hikers, bikers, hunters, and climbers would all lose out to damage from catastrophic wildfire or other land loss.

Public lands are crucial to the domestic agriculture supply chain, too. Approximately 63 percent of the Western cattle herd, and more than 50 percent of the national sheep herd spend time grazing on public lands. These livestock operations directly support trucking companies, feed mills, fencing companies, water management systems, veterinarians, and more. Loss of these lands would cripple regional and national livestock production.

Research from the University of Wyoming shows that if grazing were removed from just 3 States, Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming, you would see a 60 percent decrease in cattle sales in those States, and over 40,000 jobs eliminated in a 10-year period. Apply that formula to all Western States, and the impact of grazing management is clear the challenges in our operations are plentiful. Besides economic drivers and an unpredictable Mother Nature, there are activist groups who work to exploit rules and lawsuits to eliminate public lands grazing. We survive because the facts about our good management and the law are on our side.

But sometimes the law places huge regulatory burdens on me and my family. We bear the burdens of implementing the ESA, NEPA, Antiquities Act, and more. The biggest challenge is when our Federal regulations work against us rather than with us. Over

the last several years we saw an administration that doubled down on harmful rules, including the BLM Public Lands Rule. More land designations and a reduced focus on active management are not the solution.

I offer the following suggestions for Congress to help ensure decisions are made on the ground, rather than in an office in Washington.

No. 1, direct agencies to increase the use of targeted grazing to reduce wildfire risk. We thank Representative LaMalfa and this Committee for leadership on this issue.

Two, direct specific resources to ensure agencies can do NEPA and permitting in a timely way. This will decrease the risk of litigation and improve efficiency.

Three, reform statutes like the ESA and the Antiquities Act that have repeatedly been abused to the detriment of the landscape. More land designations are not the solution.

And finally, set expectations that all kinds of energy development avoid or minimize impacts to livestock grazing. Everyone should have to play by the same rules so that no one use is more important than another.

Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the role grazing plays in making multiple use possible. We are happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Canterbury follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TIM CANTERBURY, PUBLIC LANDS COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of multiple use of our nation's public lands. My name is Tim Canterbury and I serve as President of the Public Lands Council (PLC). Since 1968, PLC has been the only organization in Washington, D.C. dedicated solely to representing the unique perspectives of cattle and sheep producers who hold the 22,000 federal grazing permits.

My family has raised cattle in Howard, Colorado for five generations. My grandchildren are the seventh generation to live and work in this way of life. During the course of the year, my cattle spend time on my private land as well as on federal land grazing allotments. I have held grazing permits since the 1980s and have managed them as an integral part of my operation. I manage these lands and waters, and the wildlife and multiple uses they sustain, as if they were my own. For me, there is no difference in my level of investment between the lands I own and the federal lands grazing allotments for which I hold the permits.

Like me, there are thousands of grazing permittees in the West whose careful stewardship of these landscapes has protected hundreds of millions of acres across the 14 western states where grazing happens on federal lands. Between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), approximately 250 million acres¹ have grazing as an authorized use in any given year. In addition to the annual grazing fee I pay the agency, I am responsible for maintenance of fences, water troughs, pipelines, culverts, and other infrastructure that benefits not only my livestock, but all other users of those acres. Because of these additional investments, the cost for me to graze public lands is the same as the cost for me to graze my own lands or lease a private pasture. My family and I have also made additional investments in technology, like virtual fence, to add an extra layer of

¹ USFS classifies approximately 93 million acres as eligible to be used for grazing; BLM has the potential to authorize grazing on 155 million acres. This figure represents the total number of acres that may be grazed in a given year, however the number of acres grazed is often much lower as a result of allotments that are vacant or closed, often due to litigation and inadequate resources to complete NEPA analyses. USFS: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/es/speeches/meeting-challenges-together> BLM: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/natural-resources/rangelands-and-grazing/livestock-grazing#:~:text=The%20BLM%20manages%20livestock%20grazing,issue%20to%20public%20land%20ranchers.>

management precision on my allotments. When you factor in this additional outlay, it is actually much more expensive for me to graze on federal lands.

Value of Grazing

Colorado is home to some of the country's most popular hiking and climbing areas. Two of the most-used trails to access these "fourteeners" run through my allotment. In the height of summer, we have measured more than 1,000 people per day who go through my grazing allotment on these trails. I have adjusted my grazing rotations to reduce the potential for conflict between recreationalists and my livestock and have made other changes to reduce the impact of gates left open, damage to my water tanks, and soil disturbance from tires, tracks, and heavy foot-traffic. When you're a federal lands grazing permittee, these challenges are a normal part of your daily management.

Despite the inherent complexities, public lands ranchers embrace multiple use as a core part of their operations. While grazing is undoubtedly a use of federal lands as an important part of the national beef, lamb, and wool industries, grazing also provides host of co-benefits as a land management tool. Grazing protects wildlife habitat, reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and supports local economies. Cattle grazing on federal lands provides \$8.575 billion² in ecosystem services each year, ranging from wildlife-based recreation, forage production, and other economic measures of biodiversity and land use.

The economic benefits of federal lands grazing cannot be overstated. Approximately 63 percent of the Western cattle herd and more than 50 percent of the national sheep herd spend some time on public lands. These livestock operations directly support trucking companies, feed mills, fencing companies, water management systems, veterinarians, and other important rural infrastructure. If access to federal grazing were lost or significantly abridged, the impacts could be catastrophic. Research from the University of Wyoming³ suggests that if grazing were removed from just three states—Idaho, Oregon, and Wyoming—the direct and secondary impacts would be catastrophic for the surrounding areas. For these three states, loss of access to federal lands grazing would:

- Decrease cattle sales by 60 percent (in those three states).
- Eliminate more than 40,000 jobs over a 10-year period. This increases to 163,507 over a 40-year period.
- Cause a 65 percent reduction in ranch labor related to cattle production.

This work also suggests that while the immediate impact from loss of grazing would be devastating, the secondary economic impacts to the surrounding unities would be three times greater by dollar value.

Permittees manage their livestock to find the highest degree of efficiency for both the productivity of their livestock and the health of the landscape. Many permittees, like my family, have been managing these same lands for decades and provide the kind of continuity of management that protects landscapes from the worst kind of damage. This committee has seen the horrors wrought on the land and on livestock from the increase in catastrophic wildfires over the last decade. While there are many factors that contribute to wildfire risk, grazing is a proven, effective tool to reduce harm. Grazing reduces the risk of wildfire ignition between 45 and 50 percent.⁴ When fires do ignite, grazing is a key tool to reduce fire severity by removing the fine fuels that make fires hotter, faster, taller, and more dangerous for firefighters.

Grazing is also key for reducing invasive species; much of the discussion around fire risk and challenges to western biodiversity have centered around invasive annual grasses, like cheatgrass.

It is well known that "even small amounts of cheatgrass in an ecosystem can increase fire risk".⁵ For years, critics of federal lands grazing have inaccurately

²Maher, Anna T, et al. "An Economic Valuation of Federal and Private Grazing Land Ecosystem Services Supported by Beef Cattle Ranching in the United States." *Translational Animal Science*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 4 May 2021, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8290490/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8290490/)

³University of Wyoming Extension. "Economic Impacts of Removing Federal Grazing Used by Cattle Ranches in a Three-State Area (Idaho, Oregon, and Wyoming)". August 2022.

⁴Starrs, G., Siegel, K., Larson, S., & Butsic, V. (2024). Quantifying large-scale impacts of cattle grazing on annual burn probability in Napa and Sonoma Counties, California. *Ecology and Society*, 29(3). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es15080-290310>

⁵Bradley, B. A., Curtis, C. A., Fusco, E. J., Abatzoglou, J. T., Balch, J. K., Dadashi, S., & Tuanmu, M. (2017b). Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) distribution in the intermountain Western United States and its relationship to fire frequency, seasonality, and ignitions. *Biological Invasions*, 20(6), 1493–1506. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10530-017-1641-8>

blamed the spread of cheatgrass on grazing when in fact, targeted grazing both removes the grass from the landscape and prevents seeds from spreading. Once the seeds pass through the cow's digestive tract, the seeds are unable to germinate.⁶ In short: grazing reduces cheatgrass, and therefore reduces wildfire risk.

Regulatory Challenges to Multiple Use

Over the last four years, there have been a number of policy changes that have eroded the careful balance of multiple use management, and have threatened grazing's place on the landscape. In the BLM, policy changes like the ill-conceived "Public Lands rule" upended the agency's longstanding expectation of balancing multiple uses in a productive way and put an unfair—and illegal—thumb on the scale so that some uses would have greater legal and practical priority than others. As implemented, the rule creates new layers of bureaucracy, making it harder for ranchers to renew permits, expand, and maintain economic viability. The rule also places an outsized focus on the use of restrictive Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations that give the BLM the ability to expedite more restrictive land management, promotes increased conflict on the landscape, and increases the BLM's difficulty in delivering on the agency mission. The repercussions of implementing this rule would adversely impact the national economy.

Other challenges cut across many policy areas; the Biden Administration's changes to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and approach to land use planning picked winners and losers among multiple uses. Using the updated NEPA authorities, federal agencies elevated internal goals, like solar and wind energy, allotting staff time and funding to projects they deemed "priority" while other uses were deprioritized, delayed, and devalued. Delays ranged from simple requests, like approval of range improvement construction and maintenance, to larger projects like timely post-fire remediation that, when stalled, exacerbate the impact of the fire. Across the board, implementation of the grazing program suffered as the agency focused on "higher priority" issues.

USFS also faces challenges. Updates to the USFS grazing handbook and directives have been languishing before agency leadership for nearly 10 years, and many forests are so severely understaffed that implementation of the grazing program and range management are far removed from the district level. This committee needs to look no further than a comparison of the agency's budget across the programs; for example, the agency has repeatedly failed to request the full allotment of Range Betterment Fund dollars that are crucial to cooperative monitoring and range improvement projects with permittees, but continues to tell this Committee and stakeholders that they are unable to carry out programmatic work because they lack funds and staff.

Over time, land management has become more restrictive, not less. There are fewer cattle and sheep on the landscape now than 30 years ago, and millions more acres are in restrictive land designations. National monument designations, wilderness areas, and ACECs have restricted grazing in historically managed areas leading to overgrown vegetation and increased wildfire risk. Federal overreach in land designations bypasses local stakeholders, ignoring the needs of rural communities. Each time the pendulum of power shifts in our democracy our nation's public lands ranchers are left bracing for potential designations that could hurt their economic viability and render the land without the proper management necessary.

Generally, regulatory burdens are the cause of the greatest uncertainty for ranchers. Ranchers must navigate extensive federal permitting processes to graze on public lands, facing delays and inconsistencies. Delayed permit renewals and uncertain staffing allocations discourage investment in land improvements like water infrastructure and rotational grazing systems, and overlapping regulations from agencies like the BLM, USFS, and Fish & Wildlife Service create inefficiencies and added costs.

Opportunities for Congressional Action

Congress has a great deal of opportunity to improve multiple use management for grazing and all other multiple-use management. While the list is not exhaustive, I offer the following suggestions for immediate action:

- *Direct agencies to increase the use of targeted grazing to reduce wildfire risk.* We appreciate the committee's recent action on Fix Our Forests Act, and urge widespread congressional support. This committee must make clear to USFS and BLM that targeted grazing to reduce fuels must not occur only within

⁶Holton, G., Franco, A.M., Richardson, W., Stringham, T., Fonseca, M. (2024). Evaluating the effects of ruminal incubation and abomasal enzymatic digestion on the germination potential of *Bromus tectorum*. *Rangelands*, 46(4), 132-136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rala.2024.05.001>

the bounds of grazing allotments; grazing is already reducing fuels in those allotments. The real need is outside allotments, where fuels are untreated and pose a risk to all uses around them.

- *Direct targeted resources to environmental analysis and permitting for range-land monitoring and grazing allotments.* Both USFS and BLM have long lists of outstanding NEPA analyses that should be updated to facilitate the improved management. Congress should direct the agencies to stand up targeted teams to work through these lists expeditiously.
- *Reform statutes that has repeatedly been abused to the detriment of the landscape.* PLC has a long history of supporting modernizations of the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act implementation, National Environmental Policy Act, and the Equal Access to Justice Act. Congress must provide clear direction to the agencies about future use to prevent further misuse.
- *Conform expectations for traditional and alternative sources to avoid or minimize impacts to livestock grazing.* Livestock producers have become increasingly concerned that alternative energy sources, like solar, will have irreversible impacts to livestock grazing since installations on federal land require conversion of multiple-use land to a single use. This committee should establish a clear expectation that any new installation should avoid existing grazing allotments.

Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide a review of the last several years and offer suggestions about how to build a stronger future for our public lands. The long-held multiple-use doctrine ensures that federal lands remain productive and accessible to all. Ranching provides ecological and economic benefits that ensure those lands are not just accessible, but healthy, resilient, and attractive to all other uses.

My family has managed the lands we utilize since 1879. Our commitment to these lands is baked into our way of life. The knowledge that is handed down from generation to generation offers deep historical and ecological knowledge of the working landscape. Congress and federal agencies must recognize public lands ranching as an essential part of the multiple-use framework and ensure these lands are able to be both important parts of our country's history, and of our future. Together, I'm hopeful we'll ensure grazing is still an instrumental part of the west in another 150 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. TIM CANTERBURY, PRESIDENT,
PUBLIC LANDS COUNCIL

Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman

Question 1. During his questioning, Ranking Member Neguse suggested that you might believe that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) requires additional funding and employees to support adequate grazing and other traditional uses on our public lands.

1a) Is that, in fact, your position?

1b) Or were you instead suggesting that the BLM's allocation of existing resources could be improved, as you seemed to clarify when questioned later by Chairman Tiffany? If so, please elaborate.

Answer. I was not suggesting Congress provide additional funding. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a broad responsibility to work with grazing permittees, users from a wide variety of multiple use groups, and other interests in their mission to manage public lands. In my experience, I believe that BLM should target existing resources—to include funding, personnel, partnerships, and other attentions—to the greatest effect. BLM has the tools they need to undertake environmental reviews, process grazing permits, and do necessary monitoring activities, but sometimes these resources are focused in other areas. I suggest that BLM increase their internal attention to some of these core function because their attention can be leveraged by grazing permittees and all of us who are on the land on a daily basis.

Question 2. In response to Chairman Tiffany's question about whether additional BLM funding was necessary, you stated the following: "[W]hen I used to walk into the agency office there would be three people in the office that managed the entirety of the resources and the lands that are being managed today with three to four hundred people."

2a) Do you think this increase in administrative headcount is an effective way to protect multiple uses of BLM lands? Why or why not?

Answer. More people increases the administrative headcount, but not necessarily their capacity or efficiency. There are key positions in the BLM that work closest with the permittee to get work done: rangeland conservationists, local line officers, and state staff are all integral in the day-to-day communications and approval of key projects on the ground. I believe the agency should prioritize ensuring these positions are filled; we need the right people in the right places, not more people across the board. We have seen what happens when BLM focuses on having more people across the agency—these individuals' tasks become duplicative and rather than becoming more efficient, the agency gets less efficient over time.

2b) Does conservation generally result from BLM administrators or from the grazing permittees, ranchers, and livestock owners, who work on, and care for, America's public lands?

Answer. Grazing permittees are the ones doing the conservation work on the ground, but on federal lands, our work has to be approved and monitored by the federal agency that issues our permit. We are on the front line of watching for invasive species, fire risk, which pedestrian trails are unsafe, where fences are down, and all of the many considerations that go into successful multiple use. It's a system that has to work so that grazing permittees can do the important work on the ground.

Question 3. Would you please distinguish between targeted grazing as an allotment management practice and targeted grazing for fuels reduction?

3a) Have federal land managers demonstrated a proper understanding of how both types of targeted grazing should be applied? Please explain.

Answer. Over the last several years, public lands grazers have been frustrated by the relative lack of application of targeted grazing. Both BLM and the U.S. Forest Service have tried to apply targeted grazing, but they have historically limited application to areas within the boundaries of current grazing allotments. When talking about grazing for wildfire risk reduction, this defeats the purpose: active grazing allotments already are at a reduced risk for wildfire ignition and lower severity because of existing grazing, and we need to apply targeted grazing outside of allotments, in high risk zones, in vacant/closed allotments, and other areas that need additional fire mitigation tools.

We are starting to see some application of targeted grazing in these other areas, but there's a lot of room for improvement. Over the last several years, we've seen BLM back away from several authorizations to use targeted grazing to create fuel breaks, so this is one thing I'd like to see improved.

3b) If not, how might Congress help provide direction to the agencies?

Answer. Congress should provide clear direction to both agencies that targeted grazing for wildfire risk reduction should include all federal land in need of fuels reduction, not just existing grazing allotments. If the agencies are serious about reducing fine fuels at scale and at low risk, then targeted grazing should become a visible, widely used tool. It shouldn't be relegated to a "pilot program" status, nor should it be a tool of last resort when all other tools aren't suitable.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Canterbury. I now recognize Mr. Dan Gibbs, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.

Mr. Gibbs, welcome. You have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAN GIBBS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, DENVER, COLORADO

Mr. GIBBS. Thank you, Mr. Tiffany. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee. I am really excited to be here today.

As the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, I am proud to share the incredible work we do to meet our mission to develop, preserve, and enhance Colorado's natural resources. I have led the Colorado DNR since 2019, but my love for natural resources began while living in Gunnison County, Colorado with the Gunnison River right in my backyard and public lands right there, as well.

My parents were both public school educators, and their experience as teachers influenced me to pursue a career in public service. Over my career I have worked for Congressman Mark Udall, was a State representative, State senator, and a county commissioner. I have also fought fires throughout the West as a certified wildland firefighter. I live in Summit County, which is a community comprised of over 80 percent Federal lands.

We cherish our public lands in Colorado. They provide a vital public good that improves the mental health and physical well-being of our residents and visitors, while also generating tremendous economic opportunities. Colorado is an all-above energy State where we work hard to balance the energy transition with the need for reliable energy. For instance, we are the fourth-largest oil and gas-producing State with vast natural gas reserves, coal, hardrock minerals, geothermal sources, and seemingly endless sunshine and consistent winds that assist our efforts to increase renewable energy generation.

In addition to enabling resource extraction, our public lands support our growing outdoor recreation economy. We are privileged to live in a State that contains 22 million acres of public lands. Colorado's expansive prairies, mountain river valleys, desert canyons are essential to our lifestyle, heritage, and identity.

Colorado's outdoor recreation industry contributes \$36.5 billion in GDP and represents 12 percent of our State's entire labor force. To manage this we have developed a robust partnership between local, State, Federal, and tribal entities through our Colorado Outdoor Strategy and Regional Partnership initiatives. Through this proactive approach our dedicated staff work closely with our Federal partners to responsibly manage and enhance outdoor recreation.

In Colorado we proudly work hand in hand with our Federal partners, as evidenced in our successful co-management of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area since 1989. The BLM and the U.S. Forest Service own much of the area along 152 miles of the Arkansas River, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife collects a user fee to help manage the boat launch, campgrounds, and river rescue, among other activities. The co-management effort has been so successful that we are now exploring replicating this in other areas around the State, in particular the Pikes Peak region in Colorado Springs.

As a wildland firefighter and resident of a fire-prone community, I have seen firsthand the risk that megafires pose. Because wildfires don't know the difference between Federal, State, and private and tribal lands, we need a management strategy that reflects an all-hands approach. We are very proud of our shared stewardship agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, and we hope to soon finalize a similar agreement with the BLM. The shared stewardship agreement that was initiated under the first Trump administration provided the structure to combine funding towards doing the right work at the right place and the right scale based on collaborative input.

Colorado and much of the arid West is one lightning strike, one unattended campfire away from the next devastating megafire. By prioritizing planning and working together, we can take advantage of shared Federal/State resources to create the economies of scale needed to treat the acres to protect lives, property, and critical infrastructure. Shared stewardship should not be limited solely based on forest management, but instead should apply this important tool broadly to collaboratively manage trails, water, wildlife, and much more.

As a former county commissioner, I know our rural communities and understand the challenges they face. We must manage and fund our lands in a way that allows for these communities to reap the benefits. In Colorado our extensive network of stakeholder networking collaborative groups works hard to get projects off the ground. The funding that Colorado receives from the Federal Government is imperative to accomplish projects that cover everything from flood mitigation to dam and mine safety, typically in rural communities. Recent efforts to freeze Federal funds are creating significant uncertainty and concern among our constituents, and are already negatively impacting these types of projects.

Federal funding is the bedrock of these programs. I encourage you to continue to partner with States. Together we can leverage our natural resource funding to obtain extraordinary, efficient, and cost-effective lifesaving outcomes.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gibbs follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAN GIBBS, DIRECTOR OF THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee. I'm excited to be here today.

Overview

As the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, I'm proud to share the incredible work we do to meet our mission to develop, preserve, and enhance Colorado's natural resources. I've led Colorado's DNR since 2019, but my love for natural resources began while living in Gunnison County Colorado with the Gunnison River and public lands in my backyard. My parents were both public school educators and their experience as teachers influenced me to pursue a career in public service. Over my career, I have worked for Congressman Mark Udall, was a Colorado state representative and senator, and a county commissioner. I have also fought fires throughout the west as a certified wildland firefighter. I live in Summit County, which is a community comprised of over 80% federal lands.

We cherish public lands in Colorado. They provide a vital public good that improves the mental health and physical well-being of our residents and visitors while also generating tremendous economic opportunities. Colorado is an all of the above energy state, and we work hard to balance the energy transition with the need for reliable energy. For instance, Colorado is the fourth-largest oil-producing state; with vast natural gas reserves, coal, hard rock minerals, geothermal sources, and seemingly limitless sunshine and consistent winds that assist our efforts to increase renewable energy generation.

Outdoor Recreation Economy

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In Colorado, we proudly work hand in hand with our federal partners, as evidenced by our successful co-management of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area since 1989. The BLM and US Forest Service own much of the area along 152 miles of the Arkansas River, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife collects user fees to help pay for the management of boat launches, campgrounds, and river rescue. This co-management effort has been so successful that we are exploring replicating that model in the Pikes Peak Region in Colorado Springs.

Shared Stewardship

As a wildland firefighter and resident of a fire-prone community, I have seen firsthand the risk that megafires pose. Because wildfires don't distinguish between federal, state, private and tribal lands, we need a management strategy that reflects an all-lands approach.

We are very proud of our Shared Stewardship agreement with the USFS, and we hope to soon finalize a similar agreement with the BLM. The Shared Stewardship agreements that were initiated under the first Trump Administration provide the structure to combine funding toward doing the right work, in the right place, at the right scale based on collaborative input to manage our forests.

Colorado and much of the arid west is just one lighting strike or one unattended campfire away from the next devastating megafire. By prioritizing, planning, and working together, we can take advantage of shared federal-state resources to create the economies of scale needed to treat the right acres to protect lives, property, and critical infrastructure.

Shared Stewardship should not be limited solely to forest management. Instead, we should apply this important tool broadly to collaboratively manage trails, water resources, wildlife, and much more.

Rural Communities, Public Lands, and the Role of the Federal Government As a former Summit County Commissioner, I know our rural communities and understand the challenges they face. We must manage and fund public lands in a way that allows for these communities to also reap the benefits. In Colorado, our extensive network of stakeholder working groups collaborate to get boots on the ground to complete critical conservation projects in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

The funding that Colorado receives from the Federal Government is imperative to accomplish projects that cover everything from flood mitigation to dam and mine safety typically in rural communities. Recent efforts to freeze federal funds are creating significant uncertainty, and concern among our constituents and are already negatively impacting these types of projects. Federal funding is the bedrock of these programs, and I encourage you to continue to partner with states. Together, we can leverage our natural resource funds to obtain extraordinarily efficient, cost effective, and lifesaving outcomes.

Conclusion

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about Colorado's collaborative approach to managing our natural resources. In the West, we are truly blessed with a diverse array of natural resources and so we must be faithful stewards of the land so that all future generations have the same access and opportunities. The only way we can accomplish these goals is by working together to find the balance between resource extraction and conservation.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Gibbs. I now recognize Mr. Jim Neiman, President and CEO of Neiman Enterprises.

Welcome, Mr. Neiman, and you have 5 minutes for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF JIM NEIMAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, NEIMAN ENTERPRISES, HULETT, WYOMING

Mr. NEIMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Congresswoman Hageman apparently had to leave, but I also want to thank the rest of the Committee.

My name is Jim Neiman, President of Neiman Enterprises, a multi-generational sawmill business operating in South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity and feel very blessed to be here today to testify.

For 89 years our family business has been built on perseverance, adaptability, and a deep commitment to forestry and our communities. My grandfather founded our first mill in 1936 in the Black Hills. Our work is about more than timber. It is about sustaining forests and communities. A critical partnership exists between the Forest Service and the forest products companies: the Forest Service relies on industry to manage 193 million acres of Federal lands, while we rely on the agency for a stable supply of raw material. When this partnership functions well, it creates stability for business and enables the Forest Service to implement much-needed treatments on the landscape. However, for this partnership to succeed, all parties must be fully committed.

In the Black Hills, where my company has deep roots, the Forest Service has a long history of sustainable timber management, dating back to the very first Federal timber sale in 1899. Proper forest management has proven to control insect infestation, reduce wild-fire risk, and ensure a sustainable supply of timber. However, we are now experiencing a 75 percent reduction, I repeat, 75 percent reduction, in the timber sale program in the Black Hills.

This year the Forest Service has proposed a timber sale program that meets only a fraction of what one of our mills in Spearfish needs to stay operating, let alone the needs of the broader forest industry in the area. Unfortunately, we are seeing a decline in forest management not only in the Black Hills, but across multiple forests through the Forest Service regions.

The consequences are real and permanent. In 1921, despite record-high lumber prices, we were forced to close the mill in South Dakota due to inadequate Forest Service timber sales. Today our two remaining sawmills in the Black Hills are running at 50 percent capacity and incurring tremendous financial losses, while other companies are being forced to truck material across three States to fill their needs and fill the gap.

The need to do more in our forests is not new, and is supported by both parties. Yet in the last 4 years timber output has dropped 17 percent nationwide, and multiple sawmills which have heavily relied on Federal lands have now shut down. The loss of sawmills means more than economic hardship; it devastates communities. Two of our four operations, Wyoming and Oregon, reside in very small communities where our family business is the economic

backbone. Without it, both could become another ghost town losing its schools, health care, and local businesses.

Our industry is highly capital intensive. Building a modern sawmill today costs well over \$200 million. No business would make that kind of an investment to manage Federal lands when existing mills are struggling to access supplies of raw materials.

We know what works, but we need to act immediately. Many Federal legislative policies fail to support the Federal management levels needed to reduce wildfire and insects risk. The Forest Service needs clear priorities, and we must fully utilize the capacity we already have before exploring new markets or industries. The Organic Act of 1897 established our national forests with a clear mission: to manage them to ensure a permanent wood supply and clean water and prevent destruction of insects and fire. Today we are failing to meet those objectives. Reduced management is harming forests, watersheds, wildlife, and communities. These problems are fixable, but we must act fast to save the forest communities and the industry that we depend on.

We have a very serious situation here, and I just want to thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman, and God bless America.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Neiman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JIM NEIMAN, PRESIDENT, NEIMAN ENTERPRISES

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Jim Neiman, President of Neiman Enterprises, a multi-generational company operating four sawmills in South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic. In addition to my role at Neiman Enterprises, I am also a member of the Intermountain Forest Association which represents forest products companies operating in the Rocky Mountain Region of the USFS and a member of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, which represents similar businesses across the country, although I am not representing either organization today.

For 89 years, our family's sawmill business has been built on perseverance, adaptability, and a deep-rooted commitment to forestry and community. My grandfather founded our first mill in 1936 in Upton, Wyoming, later relocating to Hulett in 1940 after a fire.

In Hulett, a community of about 400 people, if you want to grow your company—you must figure out how to grow the community with it. We went from 20+ employees in 1974 to 125 employees in 1995. A shortage of housing has plagued the community for years. We developed our first housing subdivision in 1980 with 33 lots and helped fund the Hulett Community Housing Authority, with units for senior and affordable housing. We also developed a golf community with an airport to retain and attract quality employees.

Our commitment extends beyond our family; it's about the communities where we operate and the forests that sustain them. We believe that healthy forests create healthy communities, and our work in sustainable forestry ensures both can thrive for generations to come.

Across the US, and even more so in the Western states, there is a tremendous partnership in place to manage federal lands. This partnership is born out of necessity. The US Forest Service (USFS) depends on forest products companies as the primary tool for managing forests on their 193 million acres of land while reducing risk from wildfires and insect infestations. In turn, forest products companies rely on the USFS to provide raw material for manufacturing forest products and supporting community economies.

When this partnership is functioning well, it creates opportunities for a healthy industry to make investments in our facilities, and allows the Forest Service to implement treatments on the landscape. During the first Trump Administration, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue visited the Black Hills and saw first-hand how the partnership between the USFS and forest products companies can win wars against pine beetle epidemics and save communities from wildfires. And while he had hoped to use the Black Hills as a model for other parts of the country, we have seen how important leadership is to sustaining that type of success.

Importantly, for this partnership to work, all parties must be making the same commitments to accomplish the necessary treatments on the land.

On the Black Hills National Forest, where my company originated and has a tremendous amount at stake, the USFS originally proposed a timber sale level of 45,000 Cubic Feet (CCF) this fiscal year. They have recently stated they hope to get closer to 60,000 ccf this year, including all forest products—biomass such as chipping, firewood, small diameter post-and-pole material, and sawtimber. Unfortunately, that increase is not enough to change the end result.

To help understand what the program levels mean for our partnership in the Black Hills, our family's sawmill located in Spearfish, SD needs approximately 90,000 ccf from USFS lands on an annual basis to stay operational—this represents about 75–80 percent of the material needs at that facility due to the percentage of forested land the federal government owns in the Black Hills. This is only one of the facilities in the Black Hills and the combined need is much greater.

In the Black Hills, the industry is heavily integrated with companies using all types of products from the Black Hills National Forest. Sawmills use larger trees (9" in diameter or greater), post-and-pole operators use smaller material predominantly 6" to 9" inch material, and biomass companies such as wood pellet producers and a particle board manufacturer have traditionally utilized residues from other facilities rather than using raw material from the forest.

The current Black Hills Forest Plan allows for 202,000 ccf allowable sale quantity and the forest products companies that haven't yet closed aren't asking for the maximum.

We are seeing downturns in forest management on some other national forests in Region 2, and within other Regions of the USFS, and the resulting impacts on our industry and communities are permanent.

We are here today, in the first month of a new administration where forest management should take a front seat. The reality is that forest management isn't a partisan issue and the opinion that we need to be doing more in our forests isn't new. However, we have never faced a more critical fork in the road for our national forests and the communities that call them home and depend on them for economic sustainability—the need to greatly increase the scale of timber harvest and other forest management is unprecedented.

Recent administrations of both parties have acknowledged the importance of increasing the work we do to manage our national forests.

Under the Obama administration, the USFS developed a strategy titled: Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on Our National Forests.¹ That strategy found that between 65–82 million acres of NFS lands were in need of forest management actions to restore the forests to more sustainable conditions. Restoration activities principally involve reducing tree densities and timber outputs during that administration actually climbed from about 2.5 Billion Board Feet in 2009 to 2.9 Billion Feet in 2016.

During the first Trump Administration, timber outputs increased from around 2.9 Billion Board Feet to 3.2 Billion Board Feet, largely through the use of new authorities adopted by Congress since 2004 and the Trump Administration's "Shared Stewardship" approach which worked to improve cooperation and co-management between the Forest Service and the States.

Early into the Biden administration, the US Department of Agriculture reported on the first 90 days of their Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Strategy.² Within the report, the USDA concluded that "Forest Service and other research scientists have determined the current level of treatment is not enough to keep pace with the scale and scope of the wildfire problem." and that the "... USDA must increase the scale of its actions by two to four times more than is currently treated."

After the historic wildfire seasons of 2020 and 2021, the USFS responded by developing a strategy to Confront the Wildfire Crisis,³ which correctly stated that, "The risk has reached crisis proportions in the West, calling for decisive action to protect people and communities and improve forest health and resilience." As a starting point, the strategy called for implementing forest management actions on an ADDITIONAL 20 million acres of National Forest System lands by 2030.

¹ US Forest Service, Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on Our National Forests: https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/legacy_files/media/types/publication/field_pdf/increasing-pace-restoration-job-creation-2012.pdf

² US Department of Agriculture, Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Strategy 90-Day Progress Report: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/climate-smart-ag-forestry-strategy-90-day-progress-report.pdf>

³ US Forest Service, Wildfire Crisis Strategy: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Confronting-Wildfire-Crisis.pdf>

Unfortunately, despite this commitment to increased timber management, commercial timber outputs fell during the Biden Administration by more than 17 percent nationally, leaving many Western sawmills scrambling to secure adequate raw materials.

As an industry, we appreciated the attention to this issue during the first Trump administration and the recognition that we already have the capacity to tremendously improve the health of our National Forests by working with the existing forest products industry. Moving forward, promising opportunities exist to work with Congress and this second Trump administration to develop policy and guidance that finally addresses the incredible scale and need for increased treatment on our national forests.

Although the forest management program is currently suffering in the Black Hills National Forest, it has a more than 125 year history of timber sales and has, at times, served as a shining example of how to sustainably manage national forests across the country; beginning with the first ever timber sale on federal land in 1899. In the Black Hills National Forest, more than four times as much timber has been removed as what was present at the time of the first timber sale—and there is still approximately three times⁴ as much timber standing today.

Most recently, timber management on the Black Hills showed that the war against insect epidemics can actually be won through timber sales conducted at the landscape scale. Forest Service scientists⁵ researched the effects of commercial harvest operations on mountain pine beetle mortality and found that treated forest stands only experienced four percent mortality to insects compared to more than 38 percent loss in untreated stands. They also found that treatments rapidly reduced mortality from pine beetles and concluded that, “Stand density reductions through silviculture across a large geographical area can abate MPB-caused tree mortality.”

Further, the Black Hills has directly shown how forest management through timber harvest can safeguard communities and the forest alike from wildfires. In 2022, the Wabash Springs fire ignited just outside the city limits of Custer, SD but within exurban community development. The conditions at the time of ignition were dry with moderate drought, and winds gusting to 60 mph. A powerline arced and the fire began to spread quickly. This is a scene we know all too well in the West. Fortunately, the area where the fire began had been previously treated with a commercial timber sale to fight mountain pine beetle populations and had also received additional follow-up work to further reduce the fire danger. The fire was contained to 110 acres and was extinguished as quickly as it started. Surveying the area in the months after showed no trees were lost and no structures were damaged or destroyed.

After the fire, local Forest Service officials said they were able to suppress the fire and prevent the loss of homes because of the work done in recent years by both the Forest Service and private landowners in the area. Noting that no structures or even large trees were burned, the USFS said “The fuels treatment and the thinning that’s been done in and around that area for the last 8–10 years certainly made a difference.” Custer County Emergency Management Director Steve Esser echoed that sentiment.⁶

That hasn’t been the only local example of similar treatments saving structures, communities, and certainly the forest from damage.

And it isn’t just the Black Hills where the empirical evidence has shown the difference treatments can make locally and across broader landscapes.

Although the previous Administration efforts to prioritize older, less productive forests was flawed in terms of goals and process, it did illustrate the real risks to our National Forests and efforts to provide components of older forests on the landscape in the long-term. Through extensive discussion highlighting the outsized impacts to older forests from insects and wildfires, the *threat assessment*⁷ showed that mature and old growth forests decreased on “reserved” lands (Wilderness Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, National Monuments, and others) but that old growth forests actually increased by nearly 8 percent on non-reserved lands. In other words,

⁴US Forest Service, Revised Black Hills National Forest Timber Assessment, p. 38: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1153857.pdf

⁵José F. Negrón, Kurt K. Allen, Angie Ambourn, Blaine Cook, Kenneth Marchand, Large-Scale Thinnings, Ponderosa Pine, and Mountain Pine Beetle in the Black Hills, USA, Forest Science, Volume 63, Issue 5, October 2017, Pages 529–536, <https://doi.org/10.5849/FS-2016-061>

⁶Wabash Springs Fire Threatened Homes: <https://www.custercountychronicle.com/content/wabash-springs-fire-threatened-homes>

⁷USDA and DOI, Mature and Old-Growth Forests Analysis of Threats on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management: https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/MOG-threat-analysis.pdf AND <https://evergreenmagazine.com/content/files/2024/06/MOG-threat-analysis.pdf>

where timber harvest is allowed, old growth forests increased in acreage. Conversely, older forests decreased on lands set-aside from management.

To be clear, and I can speak for the industry as a whole, we want to see older forests on the landscape in the long-term but there must be recognition that forests are not static and is a foolish endeavor to believe we can preserve disturbance prone forests just as we find them today, in perpetuity. Age and structure are states of existence, not places, and what is old today may be young again and vice-versa.

Previous examples in this testimony have shown what has and can work well. We also know what isn't working for our national forests and dependent communities.

In the Black Hills, our family was forced to close a sawmill during record high lumber markets in 2021, because of inadequate USFS timber sales. Today, our two remaining sawmills are running at 50 percent capacity and incurring tremendous financial losses in the process. Those reductions have also negatively impacted the particle board manufacturer which relies on the residues produced from the sawmills. They are now trucking wood chips across three states to meet a portion of their supply and have resorted to chipping operations in the forest for other portions of their material needs—at a significantly increased cost compared to sawmill residues.

Again, decreasing USFS outputs have been the primary factor in the reductions in our industry and the resulting job losses. Our industry is accustomed to volatility in our end use markets. Companies in the Black Hills are no exception: we have been in business for decades, generations in some instances, and have weathered numerous economic and market downturns—but we must have raw materials in order to continue our operations. If we have to close up shop, the entire “value chain”—loggers, truckers, equipment dealers, and, most vitally, our skilled workers simply have to move on to find gainful employment and viable markets. Once lost, it is nearly impossible to rebuild this value chain.

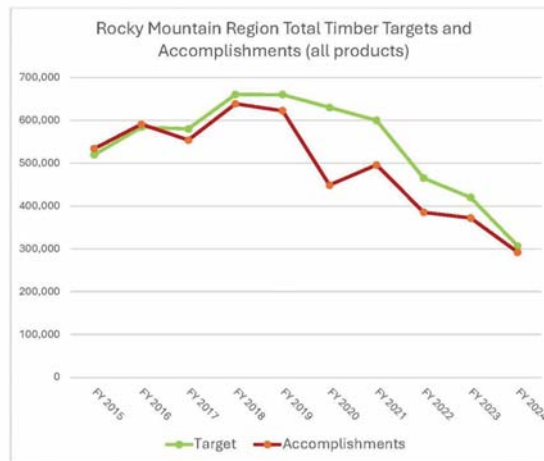
Nationally, we know that competition among producers is fierce, and overall the sector doesn't grow much faster than the overall economy. We know that mills close for a wide variety of reasons, including competition, distance from good markets, lack of adequate investment, or mismanagement. We also know that lumber producers who must rely on Federal timber resources face the additional challenges presented by an inadequate and unpredictable log supply. These challenges have been exacerbated by reduced timber outputs over the last four years, leading to disproportionate closures of sawmills in areas dominated by National Forests.

While overall timber outputs fell in almost every Forest Service regions, the impacts have been particularly damaging in those regions where National Forests make up the majority of the productive timberland.

In the Northern Region (Montana and North Idaho), timber outputs fell by 39 percent over the last five years, leading to or contributing to mill closures in Seeley Lake, MT, St. Regis, MT, and Missoula, MT.

In the Pacific Northwest Region (Oregon and Washington), timber outputs fluctuated widely, but overall they declined by more than 11 percent. This led to mill closures in Springfield, John Day, Glendale, Banks, Riddle, Toledo, and Philomath, OR. New leadership in this Region is showing a promising desire to get national forests and forest management programs back on track.

In the Rocky Mountain Region, looking beyond the impacts in the Black Hills, there are multiple facilities running at decreased production and facing extreme difficulty acquiring logs to keep operating. In this region, the closures go beyond just sawmills. A renewable energy, biomass fueled power plant was recently forced to close when the USFS canceled remaining task orders and did not renew a long-term stewardship contract that would have kept the facility running and providing renewable energy to the electrical grid in Colorado.



Previous 10 years of timber sale accomplishments in the USFS Rocky Mountain Region

The losses of these facilities do more than make the task of managing the National Forests more difficult. They tear at the very fabric of these small communities and eliminate meaningful economic opportunities, particularly for workers with less than a college education. Sawmills and other wood using facilities provide family wage jobs that sustain communities year round, and managed forests provide healthy and safe areas that sustain active recreation industries as well. The managed forests on the Black Hills have historically produced hundreds of millions of board feet of timber, yet our tourist industry is thriving. We don't need an either/or approach when it comes to timber vs. recreation.

Speaking bluntly about my own home town, Hulett is a small, close-knit community of about 400 people. Our family business is the economic heart of the community. Without it, there is a strong possibility that Hulett will become the newest ghost town in the West. While ghost towns are somewhat romantic to visit long after the fact, the process of becoming a ghost town means the loss of a functioning community with access to schools, healthcare, and grocers.

These closures and curtailments are happening at the same time we see millions of national forest acres burning in wildfires or infested by insects each year. As a product, there are currently needs⁸ to restore forest cover on 7 million acres of USFS land and more than 12 million acres total of federal lands.

Our industry is highly capital intensive, with a modern, State of the Art sawmill costing upwards of \$200 Million to build from the ground up. Nobody is coming to make investments in the hundreds of millions toward the partnership of managing federal lands when the current forest products infrastructure is struggling to get supplies of raw materials.

As we discuss forest management today, it is important for the Committee to keep in mind that 98 million acres of the National Forests—more than half the total acreage—is in restrictive land use designations including Wilderness or Roadless areas. By law, no timber harvest takes place in Wilderness Areas, and there are extremely limited and rarely used exceptions allowing some hazardous fuels reduction work in Roadless areas. Management is also restricted in National Monuments, Wild & Scenic River Corridors, and other areas identified in forest plans.

We know what works but, frankly, we need to get out of our own way. Many federal and legislative policies do not provide for the levels of forest management we need to have the desired effect of substantively reducing wildfire hazards and insect infestation risks at meaningful scales. We also need clear direction of what the priorities of the USFS should be and that we should fully utilize the capacity we already have in place before getting creative on developing new industries or markets.

⁸ Reforestation Hub: <https://www.reforestationhub.org/>

I am reminded of the stated objective within the original Organic Act of 1897⁹ which provided for the creation of our national forests (then known as forest reserves):

- Public forest reservations are established to protect and improve the forests for the purpose of securing a permanent supply of timber for the people and insuring conditions favorable to continuous water flow; and
- The Secretary of the Interior shall make provisions for the protection against destruction by fire and depredations upon the public forests and forest reservations which may have been set aside or which may be hereafter set aside under said Act

Although some could say times have changed, it is clear the current reduced level of management on national forests is not having a beneficial effect of protecting the forests, habitat, watersheds, communities, or our climate from damages inflicted by wildfires and insect epidemics.

The problems in our forest are fixable, but we must act urgently to save the forests, and the companies and communities that depend on them.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mr. Neiman. Now we will take members questions.

Members, you will have 5 minutes for your questioning, and we will start out with the gentleman from California, Mr. McClintock.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, listening to the Ranking Member and the Democratic witness talk about the need for more money, I am struck by the fact that throughout the 20th century we not only maintained healthy and fire-resilient forests, we made money doing it. Federal timber auctions, Federal grazing contracts actually generated an enormous flow of capital. Twenty-five percent of that funding went to local governments that were impacted by the Federal lands to compensate them for land that is off their tax rolls, and the other 75 percent went into our land management agencies right back into good land management.

Mr. Neiman, what happened?

Mr. NEIMAN. I can reflect back into the 1970s and 1980s and watch what we went through. But when I look at what happened in the 1990s and the Forest Service cutting the volume considerably back, we lost a lot of sawmills through that time period.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Yes, we saw that in the Sierra Nevada. We saw a 75 percent reduction in timber harvested off the Federal lands, and we saw a concomitant increase in acreage destroyed by catastrophic fire in the same period. We saw the number of sawmills operating in California go from about, I think it was, 180 down to about 30. And we have now entered an era of catastrophic fire.

Now, there is nothing new in that. Before the 20th century paleontologists tell us we lost about 4.5 million acres a year to catastrophic fire in California. But land management brought that down to about 250,000 acres a year, a fraction of what we had lost to nature because of good land management. But we passed laws then that made that management all but impossible, and we have watched the acreage destroyed by catastrophic fire return to their pre-modern levels. In 2020 we lost about 4.3, I think, million acres to catastrophic fire in California.

Now, is that nature or is that policy?

⁹Organic Act of 1897: <https://www.publiclandsforthepeople.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ORGANIC-ACT-OF-1897.pdf>

Mr. NEIMAN. Well, I would refer to policy first, but when you recognize that most of those forests are growing from one to two to three to 4 percent a year, and you are compounding that growth every year for now three decades, you have increased your inventory of carbon in that forest horrendously from what it was naturally back 100 years ago. So the policy has caused a huge problem in building back to where we now have catastrophic fires due to the fuel load on all those forests.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Mr. Canterbury, we not only auctioned off excess timber to provide revenues for land management, but we also did a great deal more ranching. You know, you mentioned that, sheep and cattle ranching that suppress brush growth. Why aren't we doing that these days at the same levels that we used to?

Mr. CANTERBURY. Thank you, Congressman. And so I think, if we look back in history, the significant reduction to the AUMs that is allowed today versus what there was 30, 40, 50 years ago is very significant. So I would say nothing replaces good conservation and land management on the ground.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Right.

Mr. CANTERBURY. It can't be made back here. I am sorry. We need to be able to dictate our own futures on the ground, working with our partners every day, whatever agency that may be.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Yes. One of the other sad things, I toured the devastation of the Southern California fires a few weeks ago and just noted that is how nature gardens. She removes excess growth by disease, pestilence, drought, and ultimately catastrophic fire.

And I recall the City of Altadena being absolutely destroyed by the fires. The Trump administration, in its first term, started the years-long process to get a permit to cut fire breaks to protect the town of Altadena from the surrounding national forest. Biden came in, reversed that, and then declared wilderness protection over those forests that make land management all but impossible, and the result was nature returned to do the gardening, and Altadena was destroyed in the process. It is sad.

Thanks for being here today.

Mr. NEIMAN. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman from California yields, and I will recognize the gentleman, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Neguse, for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEGUSE. I thank the Chairman, and thank you to each of our witnesses for being here for traveling to Washington, D.C. in some cases. We appreciate your testimony.

In particular, I want to thank my good friend and someone whom I think has been an exceptional public servant in the State of Colorado for many, many years, and that is Commissioner, State Representative, State Senator, and now, of course, Executive Director Gibbs. And I couldn't agree more and concur with his assessments regarding what needs to be done with respect to a number of the issues that he described. And of course, I am biased because he is my constituent back in Summit County, Colorado. But we are grateful for him being here.

I want to just follow up. Mr. Canterbury. Canterbury? Sorry, I hope I pronounced that right.

Mr. CANTERBURY. Yes, sir.

Mr. NEGUSE. Yes, sir. OK, great. I want to follow up on one particular provision of your written testimony. So I believe this is the second-to-last page. You write, "As one of," it says, "While the list is not exhaustive, I offer the following suggestions for immediate action." And one of those suggestions, you have underlined it, "direct targeted resources to environmental analysis and permitting for rangeland monitoring and grazing allotments." What do you mean by targeted resources?

Mr. CANTERBURY. So thank you, Ranking Member Neguse. It is a pleasure to be here today.

So what we are talking about there on those targeted funds, if you will, we need to very specifically target some funding. Every agency, as you know, is out of funds. We need some funding directly for the monitoring protocols that we all live by so the agencies can get this monitoring done.

Mr. NEGUSE. That is right. So here is why I ask. No, you answered the question. Thank you, Mr. Canterbury, because you have resolved that in my mind. I just wanted to make sure I understood that. When you said "targeted resources," what you mean is targeted funding. That is the word you used. I concur with that assessment.

Were you invited here by the majority or by the minority of this Committee as a witness today?

Mr. CANTERBURY. That is a really good question. I am assuming I was invited by—

[Laughter.]

Mr. NEGUSE. Why don't I answer that question for you? You were invited by the majority, and we are delighted to have you. In particular, as a Coloradan, I am certainly delighted to have you here.

But the reason why I say this is my colleague from California, you know, took great umbrage with the idea that the Democratic witness and Democratic Members of Congress are demanding more funding. And yet right here, one of your principal recommendations, and it is a common-sense recommendation, by the way, is for more funding for the nature of the work that you have described.

And it is not all that complicated, right? I mean, many of you have testified about multiple use and, you know, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you know, agree with your assessments regarding timber sales or energy leases. Who manages those? Who would you go about calling if you were going to try to procure a timber sale? How does that happen, Mr. Canterbury?

Mr. CANTERBURY. So Ranking Member, thank you for that question.

Mr. NEGUSE. Sure.

Mr. CANTERBURY. I don't deal in the timber industry, but I certainly deal in the livestock industry.

Mr. NEGUSE. Sure.

Mr. CANTERBURY. And my cows eat the understory—

Mr. NEGUSE. Yes, sir.

Mr. CANTERBURY [continuing]. And keep those veggies, those succulent vegetative plants—

Mr. NEGUSE. But where would you go about procuring a grazing lease? Who do you go to?

Mr. CANTERBURY. So I—

Mr. NEGUSE. You go to the Federal agencies, right? You go to the BLM.

Mr. CANTERBURY. I deal with my local agency, folks.

Mr. NEGUSE. Correct.

Mr. CANTERBURY. Yes, sir, I do.

Mr. NEGUSE. Exactly, right? They are Federal employees. These are individuals who work for the Federal Government, particularly the BLM. Right? The same can be said for any number of the multiple uses that this Committee is apparently endeavoring to discuss today.

My broader point is that, as we are discussing multiple use and the benefits of multiple use and the need for the Federal Government to be more responsive, a mile away President Trump is endeavoring to gut every Federal agency piece by piece. Mass rescission offers, buyouts, so-called buyout offers to the Federal Government, including some of the same BLM employees that you work with, sir, that every witness here works with, and it feels a little bit like we are in the Twilight Zone here. You know, that we are supposed to have a sort of normal Federal Lands Subcommittee hearing to discuss the propriety or the benefits of multiple use and ignore the storm that is developing around us.

I mean, I am sure you all are aware of this. Agencies are being shut down here in Washington, the CFPB, effectively, just a few days ago. I don't know if the BLM will be next. I suppose we are going to find out.

So I would just encourage the Chairman of this Subcommittee, and I want to give him my sense, we certainly are not going to treat these hearings as business as usual until our colleagues on the other side of the aisle step up, tell the administration to pull back, and we can get back to regular order, because there is a lot that these witnesses have proposed that is reasonable and common sense and bipartisan. But let me assure all of you, none of it, none of it will come to fruition if the current administration has its way.

And I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber, for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you know well, in northern Minnesota we have the three T's: timber, taconite, and tourism. I would argue there are few communities across this great Nation that understand and benefit from the multi-use mandate more than the communities across northern Minnesota that I am proud to represent.

My district is home to two working industrial forests, including the Chippewa National Forest and the Superior National Forest, where we responsibly harvest timber and mine the taconite that is used in production of 80-plus percent of this Nation's domestically-produced steel. And located on the Superior is the Duluth Complex, which is the largest untapped copper nickel find in the entire world. But we will only be able to responsibly mine these minerals needed to power our 21st century economy forward if we uphold and promote the multiple use mandate on our Federal lands.

Mr. Neiman, thank you for being here today. I want to share that I know your industry quite well, given the makeup of my district. It is home to dozens and dozens of timber harvesters, mills,

and other wood product manufacturers. Unfortunately, we have seen several mills shut down in recent years, leading to the loss of hundreds of jobs. And in most cases this has been due to regulatory burdens put in place by the EPA and other federal regulatory agencies, as well as the Forest Service's failure to uphold their end of the bargain of the multiple use mandate and enable us to reach our timber harvesting goals. Can you talk about the economic impact of mill closures in rural communities where your companies operate?

Mr. NEIMAN. I sure could. Thank you very much, and please say hi to Howard Hedstrom for me.

Mr. STAUBER. I know Howard very well.

Mr. NEIMAN. A great friend.

I am going to talk first. I have lived through six recessions in my lifetime at my age, going clear back to the 1970s. And our family has been able to weather those storms and get through them. This is the first recession in the timber business that we have been in that we have had to deal with no timber supply and running out of wood. You can figure out how to get through recessions sometimes and weather storms like we have in the past, but you can't operate a sawmill without wood.

Along with what you recognized, the high cost of added costs that has happened in inflation over the last three or 4 years, and all the regulation that comes on with that, that regulation has cost the government a whole lot more to put up that wood and made it less valuable to us at the same time, with the added cost we have to go through.

So I hope that answers your question.

Mr. STAUBER. It does. And there was a timber harvester that was reluctant to even go out and harvest the timber. He couldn't afford the fuel, wasn't going to make it on just harvesting the timber.

So Mr. Neiman, one last question. Is it fair to say that if the Forest Service was doing a better job of meeting its timber harvesting goals, many of the jobs in the timber harvesting and forest products industries wouldn't be at risk allowing for the maximum allowable sale to be harvested?

Mr. NEIMAN. I don't know of any forest in the country that is meeting their ASQ.

Mr. STAUBER. Right.

Mr. NEIMAN. I know of none.

Mr. STAUBER. That is the point of the question. Thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Gibbs, is a forest fire subject to a NEPA analysis?

Mr. GIBBS. [No response.]

Mr. STAUBER. That is not hard.

Mr. GIBBS. No.

Mr. STAUBER. Is a forest fire subject to PM NAAQS regulations?

Mr. GIBBS. No.

Mr. STAUBER. What does a better job of sequestering carbon from our atmosphere, a manufactured wood product, an insect-infested tree, or a burnt forest?

Mr. GIBBS. You know, our—

Mr. STAUBER. That is not hard, either. It is a manufactured wood product.

[Laughter.]

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Gibbs, thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Huffman, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I always learn something in these hearings. Mr. Stauber just, you know, suggested maybe if we require NEPA for forest fires we could solve this problem. I wish it was that simple.

I also wish it was as simple as my colleague from California portrayed in his very nostalgic, gauzy view of the 1970s. I wish that all of the problems of rural economies and fire risk could be solved by just rewinding back to the 1970s and doing everything the way we used to back then.

But the truth is not everything was perfectly done in the 1970s. In fact, some of the timber harvest that took place in the 1970s and 1980s was not sustainable. Some of these clearcuts created long-term damage. I mean, we still have watersheds that are bombed out, fisheries that are devastated by erosion and other problems from some clearcutting that just shouldn't have happened, at least not in the way that it did, not only driving some species to the brink of extinction but devastating salmon in the Western United States. And we have had to spend so much public dollars trying to restore a lot of the damage that was done then.

And I look around my district and some of the most unhealthy forests that we have were forests that were clearcut during that golden age and then replanted with, you know, even-age plantation forests that are totally unhealthy and very vulnerable to catastrophic fires. So we shouldn't be too nostalgic and gauzy about the 1970s. We are all trying to solve problems here, but I think we have got to do it with clear eyes.

And so, Director Gibbs, I wanted to ask you just about what is happening right now with this Federal funding freeze because in my district I just recently talked to the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District about how the freeze in Federal funding and all of this chaos and uncertainty is causing their entire community wildfire defense program to just be frozen and suspended. And, of course, they work with other partners, with Tribes and local governments and private landowners. Often the Federal funding leverages all of those other resources, it gets people working together in ways that they wouldn't otherwise collaborate. And we are now weeks into a freeze. We could be months in before it is over. We could lose the entire season.

Tell me what is happening in Colorado, and what are your thoughts about the effects of these actions on the ground?

Mr. GIBBS. Thank you, Congressman, for that question. To say the least, it has created major uncertainty, for the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. We have more than 350 Federal grants that support approximately \$300 million worth of programs, with a staff capacity of 490 people that are funded through Federal funding.

We do extensive work at the Department of Natural Resources. Picture us almost like a miniature Department of the Interior. We handle land, water, wildlife, minerals, and oil and gas. And let me

just give you a quick snapshot of some of these potential impacts. And we are really monitoring this closely, because it is day by day. Initially, when the executive orders came out I had meetings first thing in the morning and then later on in the afternoon because there was such uncertainty for me and my staff to understand what are we going to be reimbursed for, who is going to be our partner.

Just a couple of days ago, my staff asked us if I should fund a \$4 million critical dam project that our parks and wildlife team manage. And this is considered a dam where, if there was a breach, there could be huge consequences for a local community if not funded, and we decided to fund that program moving forward without really knowing if we are going to be reimbursed.

But everything from wildlife operations to outdoor recreation, aquatic nuisance species as you know, out West that is a huge challenge. With the Water Conservation Board, we have a water-ready watersheds program that works with local communities to do a threat analysis to understand, if there was a major catastrophic wildfire, what that would mean to the local community, where those sediment issues would be, where the community would be most at risk. We also have a floodplain mapping unit that is funded through the Federal Government.

And then our Energy and Carbon Management Commission, we have our orphan well program. And then, to this date, within our Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety, our program for our abandoned mine program which is funded through IIJA funds, are frozen right now.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Yes.

Mr. GIBBS. And this is looking at, critically the life and safety of people in Colorado, where if our team can't get in there and do remediation work, it could have seismic challenges for our communities.

And so it has created uncertainty and huge challenges and confusions, to say the least. But we are monitoring it very closely.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Amodei from the great State of Nevada for 5 minutes.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate it.

You know, it is interesting to me to hear questions regarding public lands, obviously, that is this Subcommittee, and how things are going, and uncertainty that is caused by things from members that have left, as a State that the Federal Government owns between 80 and 85 percent of.

And if you don't think that is impact, and sir, you got my attention when you said, hey, 80 percent of my county, but I was busy feeling sorry for you because my colleague to my right said, "That guy used to be my boss." I am going, geez, I wonder how he is holding up.

[Laughter.]

Mr. AMODEI. But anyhow, nonetheless, I want to just start with before all this uncertainty of 23 or 24 days ago, and let's start with you, Mr. Gibbs.

Can you tell me if the Forest Service before 24 days ago was fully staffed for all their positions in your State? Timber people, watershed people, archeological people? Were they fully staffed federally in the State of Colorado?

And when you tell me that, if you know, tell me about BLM. Were they 100 percent on range cons, 100 percent on realty executives, 100 percent on all that?

And let me tell you why I am asking you so I am not trying to trick you. But the reason I am asking you is because if you want to talk about staffing and resources, it is like even though there was a lot of money poured into the Department of the Interior under the last administration, they weren't filling those jobs. They weren't paying those people a wage that they could live in your communities. And we will go through Utah, and if you are answering for Colorado, we will go through anybody else who wants to talk about it.

But my point here is, when was the last time that resources were fully funded in terms of personnel to manage those assets and those programs that you talked about, to your knowledge, in Colorado?

Mr. GIBBS. Yes, yes. Thank you, Congressman. I don't know all those answers because, of course, I don't work for the BLM or U.S. Forest Service.

But I will tell you, Congressman, that we do have a shared stewardship agreement with U.S. Forest Service. It is very robust.

Mr. AMODEI. Let me stop you there because my time is limited.

Mr. GIBBS. OK.

Mr. AMODEI. So I will take that as an "I don't know."

Well, I do, because I do oversight for those agencies. And if they are fully staffed in your State, then God bless you. Because you know what? The staffing levels in my State, where the land management mission is no more important than anywhere else, they control the whole State, 80-plus percent. And you know what? They can't get people to apply, even.

And you know what? As a guy who works on the appropriations side, it is like, please pay your people a living wage so they can go work in Gunnison, or they can go work in Heber or wherever, and it is like, yes, we are working on that, we are working on that.

And I will just say this. And I think I am going to get the same thing, and so I am not going to press this, but I will just tell you this. You want to talk about resources for agencies that manage public resources? It goes back a long way before 23 days ago, and it is shameful. I have got this saying. It is like last time we had a resource administration, here is a bipartisan statement, ladies and gentleman, was probably Teddy Roosevelt. And you know who knows that more than anybody else? I would submit Westerners know that. Your Western State, my Western State struggle to manage vast tracts of Federal resources. And we can argue about what the right management is, but how can you sit there and gripe about it when we are not funding basic resource decisions even some of which I may disagree with?

So I would just say, it is interesting that we do this in the context of, if you are really about the resources, you really ought to give your Federal land managers and those agencies the ability to

engage fully. And you may have an agreement with them. I mean, my State does, too. But it is like, when you talk about millions of acres, it is like, eh, we will do the best we can.

But I will tell you what. It is time to talk about who is responsible for vast tracts of land in all Western States, and giving them the tools to do it, whether it is range cons, forest techs, everything from soup to nuts.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield the remainder of my time, if I could, to my colleague from Utah.

Ms. MALOY. OK. Well, in the 30 seconds I have, I am just going to do one thing that I think would be cool, but I don't want to spend my 5 minutes on it.

Eric, the last time we had a witness here from Utah he had his dad and his wife with him, and I said, "Bringing your family is pretty Utah". But could we just have your family stand up for a second?

Because everybody in here is related to Eric Clarke.

[Laughter.]

Ms. MALOY. Come on, hurry. I have only got 13 seconds.

So that might be the most Utah thing I have seen, that you have that many family members here to watch you testify.

And with that I will yield back the remainder of Mr. Amodei's time.

Mr. AMODEI. Happy to help people from Utah.

[Laughter.]

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields, and we will allow no more outbursts like that from the Chair here in the Committee.

[Laughter.]

Mr. TIFFANY. Now we would like to recognize Ms. Dexter from Oregon.

And by the way, welcome to the Subcommittee.

Ms. DEXTER. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and I really appreciate this opportunity to serve.

I did want to just briefly say that job security being eroded is probably not helping recruitment as we move forward, but that is a little bit of a side note.

As a representative for the State of Oregon, where over 50 percent of our land is federally managed, I know firsthand the beauty, biodiversity, and critical resources the public lands have to offer. So thank you all for your testimony today and for coming on behalf of these public lands. They are treasures.

In my own district I have the privilege of representing one of Oregon's natural treasures and a critical resource, as well, the Mount Hood National Forest. And the Mount Hood Wilderness is home to diversity and a vibrant ecosystem, and certainly provides drinking water to more than one million people in the Portland area. And it generates millions annually for the local economy, as well, by facilitating various recreational activities, which I know are also very popular in Colorado and Utah.

A recent poll found that 85 percent of voters in the western U.S. support efforts to protect more of our natural landscapes. So there is a balance to be struck between development and conservation, clearly. But what I am hearing from my Republican colleagues seems to potentially ignore our community's desire to ensure our

children have access to a clean and livable environment for years to come. And I say that knowing the concerns that we have for our investments in our agencies.

So I am going to pivot to tribal co-management now. We have heard from witnesses today that an important component of public lands management involves the input of local communities. And if we want to ensure public lands are managed for the greater good, we have to acknowledge that the ecological expertise of local Indigenous communities are a key component of achieving this goal. So it is for this reason I am interested in advancing efforts led by my predecessor, Mr. Blumenauer, to ensure the Warm Springs Tribe in Oregon is made a true partner in the U.S. Forest Service's efforts to steward the public lands within and around Mount Hood.

So Mr. Gibbs, you noted in your testimony the importance of importance of shared stewardship. What are the benefits of incorporating tribal voices into that stewardship of Federal lands?

And how might these co-management plans improve our conservation efforts?

Mr. GIBBS. Well, thank you, Representative, for that question.

In Colorado we have a very strong working relationship with our two federally recognized Tribes. They are the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute. And we do not have currently co-management agreements, but we do have very strong State-to-tribal relationships that we can explore, you know, that in the future.

We are currently working very closely on fire mitigation work, where we can, you know, partner on reservation land, exploring, you know, State funding that could be there. Our team is working monthly to work together to really find a sweet spot to make sure that their voices are heard. I brought in an Assistant Director on Tribal Affairs for the Department of Natural Resources so we can look at all of our eight divisions and really look for potential partnerships and collaborations moving forward.

Ms. DEXTER. Great, thank you. And it is clear that these Indigenous communities have cared for these lands for time immemorial. So we must therefore do better to seek their partnership, so thank you for your leadership in that regard.

In 2020 the Mount Hood Wilderness was ravaged by two wildfires, and crews are still working on reopening recreational areas. Mr. Gibbs, you are certified wildland firefighter by training. In your experience as a firefighter and your capacity now as the head of Colorado Natural Resources, do you think that tribal costewardship has helped in efforts to curb wildfire with the efforts you have made?

Mr. GIBBS. Yes, they have definitely helped, for sure. And it was a great honor to serve on the National Wildfire Commission, where we came up with 148 consensus-based recommendations. So whether you are a Republican or Democrat on this Committee, I really urge you to take a hard look at those recommendations. And tribal voices were a strong voice on those recommendations. So most definitely we look for partnerships.

Ms. DEXTER. Very good. So I am going to conclude in my 28 seconds.

It is vital that we work together to promote policies that strengthen our local economies without sacrificing our children's ability to grow up and have access to these clean, livable environments. And I look forward to working with the majority on these policies, and I believe our tribal communities will look forward to that, as well. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panel for coming and sharing with us today. This is always educational for us. And forgive some of us who have competing committees. We bounce in and bounce out, so if I do hit a repeat, that is why. But thank you again for being here.

And Mr. Chairman, thanks for having this hearing. The multiple use issue is hugely important. As pointed out, the Federal Government has got about 640 million acres of land across the U.S., and about 33 million of those are in my home State of Idaho. And in Idaho the Bureau of Land Management manages around 11 million acres for multiple use purposes, and the Forest Service has about 20.4 million acres, including significant portions of three national forests.

But here is the rub: the deferred maintenance backlog just for the U.S. Forest Service, this is across the country, but a lot of that is in Idaho, is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$8.7 billion, with a B. For Interior, that number is somewhere around \$32 billion. That is the deferred maintenance backlog. So whether you agree with the Federal management and the process and all that or not, the bottom line is they are overwhelmed. There is just simply not the resources to do it.

And the ramifications of the BLM public lands rule in Idaho have been hugely substantial. Stretches of BLM-managed rangeland critical for livestock grazing have been heavily affected, and our ranchers are now required to renew grazing permits in restricting conditions that places additional burdens on their operations and threatening the economic viability of our communities.

Additionally to that, for some time our sawmills have been facing closures because the project permits have not been available. The timber is there, we have got more than enough of that, but we can't get the logging project permits from Federal land, and it fails to meet our industry needs.

Mr. Neiman, I did catch most of your opening statement, but you describe some of this, maybe not in the same words, but how do you think that we best hold our Federal agencies accountable? From your vantage point, how do we ensure that we can improve some of those access to some of the resources we have got?

Mr. NEIMAN. One of the things I would look really hard at, and thanks for a very important question, one of the solutions I would use would be Good Neighbor Authority.

I know in Idaho, because I know a bunch of the industry in Idaho, in Wyoming, in Colorado that have strong ties to, through their State agencies, particularly State forests, to help out. So Good Neighbor can step in and know what is best on the ground in those States themselves. So I would love to see in this transition that we are going through right now that more authority is given to States

to step in and treat those lands, because they know what is best. They are the ones that have to deal with the fires and the insects.

We are in the middle of a catastrophe right now nationwide in all the Western States of overstocked lands, of fuel loads on the forest. And it, almost needs to be acted as an emergency, and that means we need more timber sales. And we can't do that without the existing forest products industry. If they go away, you have fewer tools in the toolbox for the Forest Service to treat it. So we have got to have new thinking going on here.

Mr. FULCHER. So to your point, we had about a million acres go up, just under a million acres of wildfire this last year, just in Idaho in the last year. So that is to your point.

And I will just also say, because I am going to run out of time for questions, I will submit those in writing.

But I want to give you a follow-up on the Good Neighbor Authority. We do use that heavily in Idaho. Last Congress I launched that again to include counties and Tribes to be authorized for that, and that got through the House but not the Senate. So we are going to try that again, and I think we will get that done. So we are going to get that expanded.

I have got just a little bit left here, so I am going to jump to Mr. Canterbury.

What steps do you believe that Congress should be taking to protect grazing rights? What is the best thing we can do for you?

Mr. CANTERBURY. Thank you, Congressman and, as stated in my testimony, I think you all have an obligation for oversight on our agency folks. Make certain that they are following through with the guidance that you have given them, and they are not leaving the reservation and going on their own.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you for that, a point well taken. And I would add that there are some lawsuit issues we also have to deal with, but that is for another time and testimony, because I am out of time.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman from Idaho yields. I now recognize the gentlelady from New Mexico, Ms. Stansbury.

Ms. STANSBURY. Great, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Madam Ranking Member.

Thank you, all of you for traveling out here today. I have enjoyed listening to you today. I am Melanie Stansbury, and I am deeply proud to represent New Mexico's 1st congressional district, which is right in the heart of central New Mexico and includes 10 rural counties. And so I know very well all of the issues that you all are here to talk about today, and I really thank all four of our witnesses here today.

And I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Clarke. We have a broken bureaucracy, and there are certainly no easy solutions.

And Mr. Neiman, we absolutely need to be supporting our local timber sawmills. They are a critical part of the West, and especially also of forest stewardship. And I think especially family-run businesses are particularly important.

And I also agree, Mr. Canterbury, that grazing is an important part of the West, and our food system and also, increasingly for forest management, having our livestock not only grazing to make

food but also helping with forest stewardship is also becoming an increasingly important tool.

And Dr. Gibbs, I appreciate your testimony today and I am going to ask a question here in a moment.

And, you know, I want to just say I am excited to serve on this Committee. My background is as a water resources professional. I rarely get to say that these days, but I worked for 20-plus years in the field of water resources planning and drought management and, obviously, the intersection with land stewardship, and so I really appreciate the opportunity to serve on this Committee.

But I am concerned about what we have seen over the last 3 weeks in terms of what the administration has been putting forward in terms of policies. We saw a whole slew of executive orders on the first day of this administration, essentially undoing much of what the previous administration had done to protect private and sensitive lands, especially lands that are important for conservation reasons, for climate resilience, for wildlife habitat, for endangered species.

There were areas that were removed from drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf because they were considered unsuitable for various reasons, areas in Alaska that have been removed for decades that, executive orders rolled back the protections for. And just in the last couple of weeks we have seen a slew of executive orders at the Department of the Interior that are targeting DEI programs, that are targeting energy and mining, the Outer Continental Shelf in Alaska, and we are also hearing that the Department of the Interior is reviewing the protection for national monuments.

And I think all of these actions by the administration need to be discussed. Because when you take them in the entirety of what they add up to, it is not just the rollback of the work that the last administration did, it is really the opening of massive amounts of public lands, waters, and mineral resources across the West to multi-national corporations. And for what purpose?

You know, in the case of New Mexico they are talking about taking away protections for Chaco Canyon. This is one of the most sacred places on the face of the planet for our Pueblo and Dine people. And they want to actually open up the greater Chaco Canyon area for oil and gas drilling so that some oil and gas companies can make a few million dollars off of it and ruin it for all of eternity?

They are talking about opening, you know, a vast mining operation at Oak Flat in Arizona, which is the sacred site of the Apache people for thousands of years. There are reasons why we protected these places. It is not an ideological affinity for some technical term around multiple use. It is because they are sacred, because they have cultural importance.

And the funding freezes are going to have real impacts for our communities. All of you talked about land and water impacts.

And Dr. Gibbs, I know you have already answered this, but, taking away and freezing all of this funding, millions of dollars to States, Tribes, and local governments that could help with land stewardship, what kind of impact is that going to have on our communities?

Mr. GIBBS. Yes, thank you for that question. It could have devastating impacts on wildfire issues, devastating impacts on protecting life, property, and critical infrastructure.

You know from your experience being a water leader, impacts just on wildfires alone, if we don't have the resources and staff capacity to get out there to do fire mitigation work, to put together firebreaks, to work with our local communities to make sure we are doing work at the right pace, right location, right scale, could have dramatic, dramatic impacts not only on people in my community, but I know you know Colorado River issues well, too, of course. But it could have devastating impacts on 40 million people that depend on Colorado River water, for example.

And so the relationship we have with our Federal partners, you know, whether it is dealing with remediation of orphan wells or old abandoned mines, water quality and quantity, these are life-and-death issues for people. It is not just something that should be wrapped up into politics at all.

This is something that, being the head of the Department of Natural Resources, I think of often. You know, I stay up at night thinking about not if, but when we have our next megafire, and thinking about all the different partners that are involved with fighting that fire and so forth. And whether it is the BLM or the U.S. Forest Service, they are my brothers and sisters as we work to problem-solve this.

And so it is scary to think about what potential impacts we could have. And we are just really monitoring it closely because we are just not sure right now what is in versus out, what is considered Green New Deal or what is not, you know? And for us it is common sense partnership at the end of the day that we need.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I hope that these funding freezes, and obviously, the courts are weighing in right now, but I think, you know, as was noted, this is life or death, especially in our fire-prone communities.

And I noted, Dr. Gibbs, you are also a firefighter. Thank you for your service.

Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. Does the gentlelady yield?

OK, the gentlelady yields. I now recognize Representative Maloy for 5 minutes.

Ms. MALOY. Well, I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here. I know this is a big sacrifice, and it really is helpful for us. I have follow-up questions for Mr. Canterbury, Mr. Gibbs, and Mr. Neiman, but you can probably relax because I have my old boss up here and I only have 5 minutes to ask him questions. So I probably won't get to any of you. I may have to ask follow-up questions.

So for my colleagues, you know Eric Clarke is a smart guy because he hired me right out of law school before he knew if I had passed the bar.

[Laughter.]

Ms. MALOY. But also, when I first interviewed he hired somebody else, not me. He hired me the second time. So this is a really long revenge plan I am working on here.

[Laughter.]

Ms. MALOY. Now I have got him where I can ask him questions.

Mr. Clarke, you talked about consistency in your testimony, and some of these are projects you and I worked on together where we are working with an agency and they make one decision, but it takes them years to make a decision, then they roll back that decision and it takes them years to roll back the decision, then they change it again and it takes them years and you have to keep studying it.

And I have sat here and listened to a lot of talk about funding being frozen, and how that is going to impact agencies. I just wonder if you can give us a guess. How much money do you think it could have saved taxpayers in Washington County if the agencies, like our friend, Mr. Canterbury, suggested, targeted resources on getting projects done, instead of dragging their feet for years while taxpayers are paying for man hours and also analysis?

Mr. CLARKE. Thanks, Congresswoman. I just have to warn everybody, you never know what someone you are going to hire is going to do to you after the fact.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CLARKE. Easily, our county taxpayers are easily losing \$2 to \$5 million a year as we are trying to work through these broken processes on projects that we know need to happen, that everybody agrees will eventually happen, but we just can't get them there.

Ms. MALOY. Yes. And is it fair to say that on some of the projects we have worked on together, there may be one personality in an agency that, for ideological reasons, just disagrees with what the county is trying to do? And one person in an agency can drag their feet and slow a project down for years.

Mr. CLARKE. Yes.

Ms. MALOY. Is that fair? OK. So I have been in a lot of hearings. I have been doing policy for a long time, and I always hear from agencies we are expected to do more with less. They want us to do more with less. We can't fill our positions, we don't have enough people. I would like to see agencies do less with less.

And thank you, Mr. Neiman, for reminding us that the Forest Service has a mission, and it is a very targeted mission. And what I see is them doing a lot of things that are not that mission, but they can't fill the positions that are focused on watersheds and production.

And so, Eric, would you unpack for us a little bit, either with the Northern Corridor or with the habitat conservation plan, how many people at those agencies you have to work with to do something that everyone agrees is a good idea and is eventually going to happen?

Mr. CLARKE. Yes, thank you for that question.

Ms. MALOY. You are welcome.

Mr. CLARKE. So those of us that are boots on the ground in these situations, we work every day with our Federal partners. And they want to be our Federal partners, right? These are people that are living in our communities, that are doing work that they love, that are trying to help stuff get better.

And so when we put together a land use application, we go into them and we say, hey, we need a new road. How are we going to make this a win-win? Or we need a new water project, how do we

do that? We are interacting with the whole team, and we are doing it regularly, consistently, and we are having some back-and-forth and working through our disagreements, and that could be a great process. It should be a great process. That is how land management should be, where the local people are coming in and talking to the Federal people, and we are working through those.

But then what happens is we will get a local person to write something up on their desk, and then it goes to a desk in Salt Lake, and then it goes to a desk in Denver, and then it goes to a desk in Washington, D.C. And before it trickles back to Denver, to Salt Lake, to our desk, we have lost a year and a half, and it all changes in that time.

And so then the boots on the ground, great Federal employees that are just wanting to get stuff done, are pulling their hair out because they are tired of us calling them and saying, "Why isn't anything happening," and then it gets back to them and it is different than the good thing that they put together and proposed be done.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you. That is the important thing I wanted to get out of this hearing.

And I am almost out of time, so I just want to put a fine point on this because we have had a lot of talk on both sides about Federal funding and do we need more or do we need less. And I agree with our friend next to you that it needs to be targeted. It needs to be focused on the agency's mission.

And we are Congress. We control the purse strings. So right now we have got an administration that is trying to show where money is being spent well, where it is not being spent well. And I would just remind everyone to ignore the hysteria and focus on the balance of power. We have an oversight obligation, and we are doing it here. Thank you all for being part of it.

And with that I am out of time and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Ms. Randall for 5 minutes.

Welcome.

Ms. RANDALL. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. It is a delight to be here in this Subcommittee to have a, you know, good discussion about Federal lands management.

I have the great honor of representing Washington State's 6th district, which is most of the Olympic Peninsula and a little bit of the City of Tacoma. And in the peninsula we are lucky to have the Olympic National Park, a park that spans 922,651 acres and includes 95 percent designated wilderness. And surrounding the park we also have the Olympic National Forest, Federal forest land.

You know, we are really lucky in Washington to have this unique ecosystem in our backyards and, you know, many people who have lived there for generations and generations, including the usual and accustomed land of 12 federally recognized Tribes who have stewarded it since time immemorial and many folks who choose to move to the beautiful Pacific Northwest because of this unique place.

I will never forget one of my first canvassing experiences as a State senate hopeful when I knocked on the door of a Republican woman who said, "Oh, don't waste your time with me, you know,

I am not going to vote for you.” And then I asked her what she cared about, and she said protecting the waters that are home to the orca whale in Washington State. And that really exemplifies to me how bipartisan the protection of our unique ecosystem is in Washington’s 6th.

You know, one of the things that is special about this place is how many ways folks have to access the lands. Folks hike and camp, you know, they hunt and fish. And science happens in the forests and in the waters, you know, of the Hoh River, and Lake Quinault, and in the national park, and along the Pacific Coast. It is also an incredible boon to our economy to attract folks out to visit this special place.

Mr. Gibbs, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for \$639.5 billion in 2023 nationwide. We know that parks and public lands are centerpieces of this business, and that means jobs and opportunities for communities, especially communities like mine. Could you talk about the role you have seen public lands play in the outdoor recreation economy in Colorado, and how selling off public lands to corporations or shutting down our access to recreation in order to create more resource extraction might impact it?

Mr. GIBBS. Yes, yes. Thank you, Representative. And I was just thinking what a beautiful location that you represent. I would love to visit that area sometime.

In Colorado we are also really blessed with just amazing, beautiful outdoor spaces and vistas and rivers. We are also blessed with amazing outdoor recreation opportunities. I would argue that we have some of the best—or the best—places to go skiing, and to hunt and fish, to go rafting with your friends and family and so forth. And outdoor recreation is \$36.5 billion to our State’s GDP, so it is significant. And, you know, I am here in Washington, D.C., and I would argue anyone to the back of me, I would ask them, you know, what do you think of when you think of Colorado? Many people think of the world-class recreational opportunities.

And I think it is really important to note that in Colorado we work hard to find define a balance. We can be the fourth-largest oil and gas producing State, while at the same time having the best skiing opportunities, while we also have some of the best mountain biking opportunities, and working hard to find a balance.

We also have what is called our outdoor regional partnerships. Mr. Canterbury and I really agree on there is one particular location in his community called Envision Chaffee County, where we work hard to bring the ranching community together along with the mountain bikers, along with the firefighters and all different user groups to try to find that sweet spot because it is not them or oil and gas or recreation. It is recreation and it is preservation and it is conservation and it is supporting our wildlife. So it is an all-the-above approach that we work really hard in Colorado to strive for. Thanks.

Mr. STAUBER. Don’t forget the timber.

Mr. GIBBS. And the timber industry plays an important role, too. [Laughter.]

Ms. RANDALL. Thank you, Mr. Gibbs.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize the Vice Chair of the Subcommittee, Mr. Kennedy, for 5 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, and I am honored to work with you as the Vice Chair. Thanks for that opportunity. And thanks to the witnesses, particularly the Honorable Clarke.

Mr. Clarke, thanks for being with us and tolerating your former employee's prosecutorial questions that she has. I am I am looking forward to actually working with all of you to make sure that we revitalize and restore multiple use of Federal lands together. I think we can do that.

The Biden administration has ignored Utah's needs and neglected their duties to keep Federal lands open to the public. By limiting Utah's resources, the Biden administration artificially limits the State's economic growth and has limited the opportunity for housing and jobs for young Utah families. The youngest State in the union is Utah, and we are supportive of using these lands that these young families can have an opportunity to grow.

In addition, I refuse to allow the Federal Government to neglect Utah lands any longer, and I am looking forward to working with the Trump administration to find solutions to bring much-needed relief to struggling Utahns, particularly in our rural communities. And so Mr. Clarke, I had a question for you in that regard because you know very well the Northern Corridor.

And thanks for your written testimony. It details a lot of what has happened in the Northern Corridor in Washington County. It has been negotiated in good faith under Trump and mandated by Congress, and this happened despite the county's extreme efforts to secure additional protections from the Mojave Desert tortoise. And I am committed to working with the Utah delegation and the Trump administration to construct the highway and boost Washington County's economy.

How did the Biden administration's decision to refuse the Northern Corridor affect the locals, tourists, and the Mojave Desert tortoise is my first question.

Mr. CLARKE. Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair, and I apologize if I slip and refer to you as senator, though, because the last time we time we did this, you were in the State Senate.

It harms all three. When we can't build infrastructure in rapid-growing area that harms quality of life, it harms the ability for tourism to continue to flourish, and the regular residents.

But the fact that we went so far above and beyond where, where Congress had already said, "You are going to get a road there," but we still mitigated for it under the Endangered Species Act in order to prevent a lawsuit. We went so far above and beyond and protected thousands of acres of desert tortoise habitat. Then to have that taken away just felt like a slap in the face to us.

Mr. KENNEDY. In your testimony, your written testimony, even as to the tortoise you mentioned that 8 to 1 or even 10 to 1 tortoises would suffer as a result of the Biden administration's decision. Can you expand a little bit on that?

Mr. CLARKE. Yes. So tortoises are a unique endangered species in that they don't move fast. And so we can put a road through tortoise habitat, we can clear the tortoises, we can put in tortoise culverts. They are burrowing animals. And so we can put a road

through habitat with some impact, but really a pretty minimal impact. And that is what we proposed to do, was put a road through an area, and then we offset that with 7,000 acres of protected area, half of which was developable.

Now, that developable 3,500 acres, if that gets bulldozed and houses go there, that is not the same thing as having culverts under a road. That is permanently taking away the habitat.

Mr. KENNEDY. Yes. Thank you for that explanation.

I will yield the rest of my time to my extremely outstanding colleague, Congresswoman Maloy, who has some additional questions.

Ms. MALOY. I am abusing my authority like I always do in your Subcommittee, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate your patience with me.

Mr. Clarke, one more question is probably all I have time for, but one of the things I wanted to point out at the end the end of my time and ran out of time for is that, in the case of the Northern Corridor or the Habitat Conservation Plan, who pays for your time?

Mr. CLARKE. Our county taxpayers.

Ms. MALOY. And who pays for the time of the people who work at the Habitat Conservation Plan?

Mr. CLARKE. Also county taxpayers. We have a big team, including biologists, that are all county employees.

Ms. MALOY. And who pays for the time of the county commissioners who have been negotiating this?

Mr. CLARKE. Also county taxpayers.

Ms. MALOY. And who is paying for the time of all the Federal people who are dragging their feet and making it take longer?

Mr. CLARKE. And that is all of us as a country.

Ms. MALOY. So we are talking about a road. We know how to design it. We know how to make it tortoise-friendly. But we have got people who are applying for a permit, people who are slowing down the permit, and the taxpayers are paying all of them. So when we talk about how we could do less with less, this is what I am talking about. We could design a road, make it environmentally friendly, and mitigate for any impact to tortoises in a small fraction of the time that it has taken, and with a small fraction of the taxpayer dollars spent that it is taken.

And so it is sort of a charade we are playing to pretend that all of these processes we are going through are doing anything good for tortoises or for the taxpayers. You have got 8 seconds if you want to respond to that.

Mr. CLARKE. I couldn't agree more that so many resources are wasted and so many good things are prevented from being put into place because we can't get projects done.

And I could make any ask, anything that Congress can do to help cut through that tape, and not just impose time limits or reduce things, but actually reduce the bureaucracy so that we can get stuff done, is going to help those of us that have to get things done on the ground able to accomplish things.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

Mr. CLARKE. Thank you.

Ms. MALOY. And thank you for yielding me your time, I appreciate it.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Utah delegation yields.

[Laughter.]

Mr. TIFFANY. I now recognize the gentlelady from Wyoming.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. Lest we forget, the 2001 Clinton roadless rule denied access, management, and use to 58.5 million acres of Forest Service lands. It was the largest rulemaking in U.S. history at the time. And since then we have watched as our forests have been decimated because of a lack of active management.

Global warming and climate change are nothing but a scapegoat to cover up the true impact of the Democrats' and radical enviros failed land management policies. In fact, Colorado is ground zero for the beetle outbreak, which occurred because of the 1997 blow-down in the Routt National Forest that took down 13,000 acres of trees in one night. That beetle outbreak then spread throughout the entire interior West not because of global warming, not because of climate change, but because the Forest Service refused to allow treatment or harvesting in those 13,000 acres. And our national forests have been destroyed since that time.

The Biden administration's restrictive Federal land policies have significantly impacted the timber industry, particularly in Wyoming where Neiman Enterprises is one of the largest sawmill operators. Forest management has led to worsening wildfire risks, as well as insect infestations which threaten both timber supply and forest health.

The U.S. Forest Service failed to meet its timber harvest targets by 260 million board feet in Fiscal Year 2024, and reduced targets for future years. Mr. Neiman, how has this affected sawmill infrastructure in timber-dependent communities in Wyoming?

Mr. NEIMAN. I will start and go back to that we originally had three sawmills in the Black Hills. We shut one down in Hill City, South Dakota, laid off 125 employees. Two years ago we laid off one shift at Hulett, it went from two shifts to one shift, laid off about 40 or 50 employees. Spearfish a year ago this spring laid off 60, 70 employees at Spearfish, South Dakota. Along with that we have laid off about 15 logging crews that spread throughout the hills from a lot of different communities throughout the area. So we have reduced our employment tremendously.

When you go from two shifts cutting Ponderosa to one shift, your costs go up. And then you compound that with all of the inflation costs that have happened, and fuel costs, it puts you in a real precarious position. So we are hanging on by a thread with less than 1 year under contract right now, figuring out what is our next move.

I hope we see some really significant changes that puts us back on track. So we hope that we can see the light of day here fairly soon so we can see some hope. I am a third generation, and I hope to pass it on to the fourth and maybe the fifth generation. If we don't see that light, then I will be making more restrictions and shut down. And the impact that has on communities is tough.

Ms. HAGEMAN. These policies have horrific impacts upon forest health, upon our environment, upon our watersheds, but they also have horrific impacts on our communities, taking away our jobs.

Since the year 2000 over 1,500 sawmills have shut down due to declining timber sales. What policies should Congress pursue to

restore multiple use timber harvesting and prevent further economic losses in Wyoming's forestry sector?

Mr. NEIMAN. Well, I would start, we had Congressman Westerman in here a few minutes ago, I would start by passing the bill that he has proposed, the——

Ms. HAGEMAN. Healthy forests?

Mr. NEIMAN. Yes, yes. I think that would be a good start.

But we are going to need other actions along with his bill. And I know Senator Thune, Senator Barrasso are working on some amendments that should be helpful. But it is going to take a clear change of direction to get this shape back up.

Ms. HAGEMAN. You know, one of the things that bothers me so much about Washington, D.C., and Representative Maloy has touched on it a couple of times here, we are \$36 trillion in debt in this country. What that means is we have spent massive amounts of money with deficit spending. Deficit spending in and of itself is bad, but it also covers up a lot of really bad policies.

It is wonderful to have flowery language about protecting recreation and the Belknap and the little flower here, and I want to see a tortoise there. It is so fine and dandy to say all of that. But when you destroy your communities and destroy your tax base, you become incapable of actually protecting the very environment you profess to love.

There has to be a balance in the way that we manage these resources. These catastrophic forest fires are spewing more carbon into the atmosphere than every single car in the entire country in a matter of months. What we saw in California is an absolute tragedy beyond anyone in this room's imagination, and it is because of failed land use policy and a refusal of people to recognize global warming and climate change, and screaming that at the top of your lungs isn't going to do a damn thing to fix any of this.

It is imperative that we manage these resources for the best interests of the American citizens. I appreciate you being here and being willing to talk about common-sense solutions and why we must change course if we are going to protect and preserve these resources into the long-distant future.

Thank you, and with that I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady's time has expired. I am going to take my 5 minutes for questioning now.

By the way, I think that is the Fix Our Forests Act that you might have been referring to, Mr. Neiman.

Mr. Clarke, you talked about—it was either a community or your family's mill that closed. Tell us a little bit about that mill closing and why it closed.

Mr. CLARKE. So it was a community mill in Escalante, and it closed around the 1990s, when you were talking about how there was a lot of things that happened. And in my personal experience, I spent a summer working for the Forest Service on a trail crew and I remember having a conversation with the forester, who was kind of over timber permits at that time. And I remember I definitely treated her like I assumed that she was, I am definitely on the right side of the spectrum, I treated her like she was not on my side of the spectrum.

And she stopped me 1 day and she said, "Look, I am a forester. Like, I want to have healthy forests. You have got to understand that that is what I am going for." And so she and I had a conversation about the forest. And what would happen is a Utah-based environmental group would file a lawsuit every time they issued a timber permit, and it made it impossible for a sawmill in a pretty remote area to have what they needed.

Mr. TIFFANY. So as a result of those lawsuits? That was a big part of why that mill had to close?

Mr. CLARKE. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. Are there more mills in Utah today than there were 20 years ago?

Mr. CLARKE. Definitely not.

Mr. TIFFANY. Significantly less?

Mr. CLARKE. Significantly less.

Mr. TIFFANY. You said something about you would want to change something in regards to judicial review. What is that specific item? I think you said it in your testimony. What is that item that you would like to see changed?

Mr. CLARKE. So we were the victims of an out-of-court settlement where, had the Biden administration just stepped away and let us defend an action, we would have been fine. But the environmental groups filed a lawsuit challenging something that the Trump administration had approved, and then there was an out-of-court settlement that wasn't based on anything important.

And so what we need is more certainty that sue-and-settle thing harms us.

Mr. TIFFANY. So it was a sue-and-settle.

Mr. CLARKE. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. And it has been used time after time, hasn't it, to stop projects, to stop proper management in the Western States in particular, is that right?

Mr. CLARKE. And in particular, projects that have gone through the whole process and have been greenlighted finally, and then they get this sue-and-settle that isn't based in the facts, it is just based on the politics.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, thank you.

Mr. Canterbury, earlier you had a number of questions from Representative Neguse and he tried to get this Committee to believe that the first thing you believe in is that there needs to be an increase in funding, they call it "resources" here in Washington, D.C., there needs to be more resources. That is called greenbacks by most people. Is it necessary to increase the budget by the Bureau of Land Management to get more money to you, or could there be money that could simply be redirected and get it to the ground in order to be able to get the permits that you need?

Mr. CANTERBURY. So if I may, and I will try not to take too much time, if we just back up in history, when I used to walk into the agency office there would be three people in the office that manage the entirety of the resources and the lands that are being managed today with 300 to 400 people. Those three people could talk to us and sit down and figure out what was the best.

We cannot regulate conservation. Conservation comes from those of us that are on the land.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. So in other words, if the dollars are spent appropriately, the permitting process can be completed for grazers like yourself. Is that correct?

Mr. CANTERBURY. It can be completed. You can help simplify that permitting process.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Neiman, would you rather have us change regulations and permitting, those type of things, or would you like the Federal Government to give you more money?

Mr. NEIMAN. The first, for sure. Less regulation. I don't want more money. Businesses should stand on their own if it is given a fair chance. So regulation is helping destroy us.

Mr. TIFFANY. How many families lost jobs as a result of the reduction in some of your mills and the mill closures? How many families have lost jobs?

Mr. NEIMAN. Directly related to us, along with the independent contractors, someplace between 150 and 200 families lost their jobs. If I go back to what happened in the 1990s, I think it was like 26,000 or 30,000 jobs were lost. It was a huge amount.

Mr. TIFFANY. Twenty-six to thirty thousand jobs where?

Mr. NEIMAN. That was throughout the West.

Mr. TIFFANY. Throughout the West. And are Americans more likely to buy a 2x4, or you name whatever wood product, are they more likely to buy that from an American company these days, than they were 40 years ago?

Mr. NEIMAN. I am seeing a strong trend to lean back to support buying American, buy from the U.S. I am feeling that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Compared to 40 years ago, when you look at today with the mill closures that we have had across the United States, are you more likely to buy a 2x4 that has been made in the United States today than you were 40 years ago, when we had a lot more mills?

Mr. NEIMAN. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. We were more likely to have it 40 years ago that it might have been made in America. Is that correct?

Mr. NEIMAN. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, and it would really be nice to get back to that time, wouldn't it?

Mr. NEIMAN. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. I have a whole bunch more questions, but, you know, I listen to this from the Ranking Member when he talked about Humboldt County out in California and that, boy, things are just going to fall apart as a result of that.

Are you completely dependent on the Federal Government? Is that what is being said here when you hear a statement like that? I don't think anyone should want to be put in that position. And this conjecture that we may not be able to complete projects, let's see if those projects actually do not happen because, I can tell you, the Trump administration is going to make sure that money gets to those frontline communities, rather than funding that 400 people that it now takes to get a grazing permit out. Let's do it in an effective, efficient manner that reflects the wants and needs of the American people.

So with that I conclude my questioning, and I want to thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony.

Members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for you, and we will ask that the witnesses respond to those questions in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, February 14, 2025. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:53 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

