

Opening Statement by Ranking Republican Tom McClintock
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2795 and H.R. 3742.
October 17, 2019

The sub-committee meets today to hear two bills that feed the left's insatiable demand for more land and more taxpayer earnings. They raise two critical questions.

First, the federal government currently controls 640 million acres, or 28 percent of the entire land in the United States, mostly concentrated in the west. It controls just 3/10th of one percent of Connecticut, but 79.6 percent of Nevada. It has proven itself to be a neglectful landlord: our federal lands currently suffer from a \$20 billion backlog of deferred maintenance, while our forests have become morbidly overgrown through decades of willful neglect. It is often possible to see the border between federal and private lands by the condition of the forests themselves. In short, we have failed miserably to take care of the land we already control. A few years ago, the subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing in North Las Vegas that is surrounded by vacant land as far as the eye can see. The crisis facing the community: a critical land shortage.

Second, the federal government is now running a \$1.1 trillion deficit, and it is not a revenue problem: our revenues grew four percent last year. The deficit is driven by spending, which is now growing at twice the rate of our revenues. This is a level at which many economists warn that we are courting a debt crisis. Interest alone on that debt is the fastest growing component of the federal budget and currently consumes roughly \$400 billion – just to rent the money we have already spent.

Against this backdrop, we consider two bills. HR 2795 would create a new mechanism for the acquisition of vast sections of land under the guise of expanding “wildlife corridors.” Despite the fact that the Constitution gives Congress sole authority over the public lands, this bill surrenders authority to designate and acquire this land to executive agencies. HR 3742 would expand the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, which is currently funded by fishing and hunting licenses by adding a \$2 billion-a-year authorization for direct taxpayer funding. Think of that as another \$16 from an average American taxpaying family.

H.R. 2795 is predicated on the assumption that human and wildlife use of the land is incompatible, despite thousands of years of experience to the contrary. In pursuit of this faulty assumption, it would vastly expand federal land holdings and impose severe restrictions on productive use of the land. I say a faulty assumption, because our own experience informs us that pipelines and other critical infrastructure are perfectly compatible with flourishing wildlife populations. The pictures you see on the monitors show bears using a pipeline in Alaska to navigate treacherous terrain and herds grazing in the shadows of similar pipelines in other regions.

Wildlife corridors do not require the heavy hand of federal bureaucrats to administer. In November of 2018, then-Secretary Zinke signed Secretarial Order 3362 which explicitly aims to protect migration corridors through greater coordination with states and private land owners.¹

For example, the Elbow Fish and Game Club in northern Pennsylvania and the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation have nurtured a partnership between wildlife and natural gas transportation. According to an analysis of the Whitetail Institute of North America, trail cameras along the pipeline have shown that “deer are using the right-of-way as a food source and travel corridor.” The analysis has stated that the tree clearing to establish the right-of-way has allowed sunlight to stimulate undergrowth that has lent itself as habitat to rabbits and songbirds.²

H.R. 3742, introduced by our Committee colleague Debbie Dingell. This legislation creates yet another taxpayer funded wildlife conservation program. However, unlike the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, which this legislation amends, the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act does not adhere to the successful beneficiary pays principle. Rather, this legislation simply raids the U.S. Treasury by mandating annual transfers of nearly \$2 billion annually, in perpetuity.

The bill’s proponents obviously recognize how fiscally irresponsible this is, because instead of even a pretense of identifying offsetting cost-savings, they have simply exempted themselves from pay-go requirements.

¹ https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/so_3362_migration.pdf

² <https://whitetailinstitute.blogspot.com/2015/10/pipeline-benefits-wildlife-habitat.html>

As of Sunday morning, nearly eight thousand acres in my home state of California have burned to the ground in yet another deadly wildfire season.³ 100,000 people have been asked to evacuate their homes. We have seen power cut to 34 counties. I would ask my Democratic colleagues to stop wasting this committee's time appeasing their environmental supporters and start working on real reforms that will actually protect habitat and save lives.

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-california-wildfire/deadly-los-angeles-wildfire-burns-with-subdued-fury-after-change-in-weather-idUSKBN1WS0LE>