

Ranking Member Cliff Bentz Opening Statement  
“Wildlife Trafficking and the Growing Online Marketplace”  
April 27, 2021

Today’s hearing will focus on illegal wildlife trafficking, particularly online. No country is untouched by these crimes and the only beneficiaries are criminals.

There is no simple solution to this problem.

As we will no doubt hear from the witnesses, combating illegal wildlife trafficking requires the cooperation of multiple federal departments, such as Interior, State, Justice and Treasury, as well as international partners. Add access to internet and the problem becomes infinitely more complicated.

While I am eager to learn how we can help curb illegal wildlife trafficking online, I am concerned that we are heading into territory outside of our jurisdiction. There’s nothing wrong with education on this issue, but at the end of the day we need to respect other committee jurisdictions. To that effect, I hope any proposed legislation relevant to this Subcommittee goes through regular order so we can have meaningful dialogue and debate about the merits of the proposals.

What is clearly within our jurisdiction is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their work enforcing the Lacey Act. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Guertin on how the Service intends to use the millions Congress provided to address wildlife trafficking under the American Rescue Plan Act.

I also look forward to hearing from our witness, Ms. Catherine Semcer from the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, Montana. She, too, agrees that online wildlife trafficking is a problem but her work in reducing poaching of these species will be helpful to the Committee as well.

As we begin today’s proceeding, I would be remiss if I didn’t take this opportunity to highlight another very real issue. In the United States, our western states are facing continually worsening drought conditions and this committee should begin a serious focus on this matter. My California Republican colleagues think similarly with the letter we received today.

Mr. Chairman, in my district, this is dire. The Klamath Irrigation Project is facing the most serious water shortage since 2001. In fact, all 17 western states are experiencing some level of drought, with 13 of them experiencing extreme or exceptional drought conditions. Last week, 75 million people living in western states were affected by drought.

By ignoring the issue, we are putting the West at risk of this severe drought leading to a catastrophic wildfire. We currently have 5 active large fires; it will only get worse. I sincerely

hope that we can hold a hearing and act in a bipartisan fashion on these pressing drought issues soon.

I for one believe every Reclamation authority needs to be on the table. This includes reauthorization of the WIIN Act, drought declarations and state flexibilities on groundwater user, conservation and operational and regulatory improvements. While we cannot make it rain, we need to do everything we can to help our constituents. Time is wasting. I yield back my time.