



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**FY 2016 Budget Hearing
Bureau of Land Management
March 19, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared**

The Subcommittee will come to order.

Good morning. Today we have our hearing on the President's budget request for FY 2016 for the Bureau of Land Management. I would like to welcome Neil Kornze, Director of the Bureau of Land Management, to the Subcommittee. Thank you for being here.

The budget request proposes \$1.2 billion for BLM for FY 2016. This is an increase of \$107 million above the FY 2015 enacted level. Unfortunately, there are many, many increases in this budget request. It also includes some very questionable decreases.

Director Kornze, your colleagues at the Department of the Interior and mine on this Subcommittee have heard me say numerous times that we are operating in a very constrained funding environment. As you know, the President and Congress agreed upon statutory spending caps in 2011. At this time, we are bound by that law. The many increases proposed for BLM ignore the reality of that agreement and our present fiscal situation. Of course, we are going to do our best to address the highest priority needs in this Subcommittee's jurisdiction. But, please be aware that any increases most likely will have to be offset by decreases in other accounts and programs.

Let me first mention the largest increase in the budget request, which is the \$45 million increase for the sage-grouse. As you mention in your written testimony, Congress has provided \$15 million in each of the previous three fiscal years for BLM to collaboratively work with other Federal agencies, States and private groups to develop and begin to implement plans to conserve the sage-grouse and the many other plant and animal species that reside in the sage-brush ecosystem.

Generally, the \$45 million increase is intended to put the conservation practices identified in the plans "on the ground", so to speak, and then assess and monitor their effectiveness. At last year's hearing, I asked whether the \$15 million requested was enough. I also said that I did not want to find out after the sage-grouse had been listed that there was more BLM could have done. Now we have our answer.

I don't know if an additional \$45 million is the right amount to ensure that result, but it certainly does demonstrate BLM's commitment to conserving the species and its ecosystem. However,

we need much more information about the request before we begin to make our funding recommendations for the next fiscal year. I'm sure we will talk about it today.

Another large increase is an additional \$11 million, as well as the transfer of another \$5 million from various other programs, for national conservation lands. As you know, there is some debate about the structure of this program in Congress. There is an \$8 million increase for enterprise geographic information system; a \$6 million increase to finalize master leasing plans; \$5 million for youth programs; and nearly \$3 million for the Wild Horse and Burro program. We need to hear from you on which of these is your top priority. Not everything can be funded as we may want or wish for.

The budget request also includes proposals to raise and impose new fees. This is frustrating as Congress has rejected these proposals in the past. I expect that we will again reject a fee that would generate \$48 million but impose additional costs on the oil and gas industry. I believe Congress has responded to the need for more inspections by providing additional appropriations, which came from offsetting cuts elsewhere in our bill.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the proposal to raise \$16.5 million by increasing the fee for grazing livestock on BLM land. Congress just has not supported this proposal as part of the appropriations process in the past. The Subcommittee continues to believe this issue should be addressed by the authorizing committees.

Earlier this week at our hearing on the Fish and Wildlife Service's budget request, I talked about the need to address the backlogs we have in the endangered and threatened species program. However, the issue of backlogs isn't confined to only endangered species; it is reality for many programs across the Federal Government, including the wild horse and burro program.

We know the program is unsustainable in its current form, and that we cannot afford to perpetuate the situation for much longer, especially since \$54 million – 67 percent – of the program is used to care for horses and burros in holding facilities. The Subcommittee is well aware that we need a bipartisan long-term strategy of sustainable, non-lethal population management as well as short-term solutions to the overabundance of horses and burros on the range.

In the time of lean budgets and growing needs, particularly in our defense and security programs, perhaps we should have a serious discussion about getting back to basics. We really need to find solutions to these long-simmering issues.

Let me now yield to our distinguished ranking member, Ms. McCollum, for any opening remarks she may have.

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