

As Chair Haaland noted in her opening remarks, the Subcommittee meets today to consider 7 pieces of legislation. These bills before us address over 2 million acres of land, and over 800 miles of rivers. While I do not believe that all of the bills before us reflect the balance, compromise and local support to become law at this time, I hope this hearing can serve as a space to work towards solutions to improve these bills.

I fear that this Committee is bringing forward some bills that do not have the consensus that is necessary to move forward, including giving all impacted parties a seat at the table. I fear this could accidentally set back some of these bills years, if not decades, by preventing the dialogue necessary to find consensus among a broad group of stakeholders.

However, there is some consensus legislation today, including H.R. 252, the Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act, offered by Mr. Amodei. This bill is the culmination of years of stakeholder outreach and reflects the type of bipartisan agreement that is possible when we stop playing politics and start listening to local voices. This bill has the support of the entire Nevada delegation, impacted communities, and affected stakeholder groups.

I also appreciate the majority holding a hearing on H.R. 1475, offered by Mr. Stauber from Minnesota. This bill addresses specific concerns raised by the local recreation community in Mr. Stauber's district, including the reinstatement of a lottery system for the issuance of boat permits in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness of the Superior National Forest.

The remaining 5 bills collectively create over 1.5 million acres of new Wilderness, our country's most restrictive federal land designation. These designations must be carefully applied due to their limitations, and make sure to take into account existing uses of the land that could be limited, including wildfire risks, public access challenges, and economic concerns raised by local stakeholders.

I do not have enough time to address each of the individual concerns in the bills before us, but I will briefly highlight some of the more worrisome flaws that I believe need to be addressed before this committee considers additional action.

H.R. 2546, offered by Congresswoman DeGette from Colorado, would create 741,000 acres of new wilderness, located in 33 areas throughout the state. Much to my concern, all of the new wilderness designated by this bill is located outside of Ms. Degette's district, without the support of the Member of Congress who represents the vast majority of the impacted land. This bill is being openly opposed by many of the rural counties that would be impacted, and lacks the bipartisan consensus necessary to get signed into law. Today, we will hear testimony from Montezuma County Commissioner Keenan Ertel, outlining his County's specific grievances with this legislation.

In addition, the impacted land management agencies have noted that this bill presents many challenges and is inconsistent with previous designations and existing land uses.

Additionally, the National Guard Bureau has raised concerns about this bill's impact on the High-Altitude Aviation Training Site (or HAATS) located in Eagle, Colorado. They are concerned that this bill will jeopardize the specialty helicopter training that takes place in eastern Garfield county. It seems that this bill has many issues to be resolved before it is ready to be heard by this Committee.

Another bill I would like to bring attention to is H.R. 2250, offered by Congressman Huffman of California. This legislation would create over 262,000 acres of new wilderness, and 379 miles of new Wild and Scenic rivers. We will hear testimony today from Keith Groves, who is a member of the Trinity County Board of Supervisors. Mr. Grove's County contains 95 percent of the lands that would be designated as Wilderness under Mr. Huffman's proposal, including much of the land that would be moved into the proposed "restoration area."

Trinity County has expressed confusion and concern with many of this bill's provisions. I would encourage Mr. Huffman to continue to engage with Trinity County, and other impacted communities, to clarify points of confusion and concern before any further action on this legislation. This consensus is vital when impacting such large areas of public land.

As I have articulated in this committee many times, and as much of my own public lands legislative work has demonstrated, I am not opposed to Wilderness designations where appropriate. I have championed over 600,000 acres of wilderness that was signed into law just this year.

However, I believe that advancing unbalanced bills, like some of those before us, is an unproductive endeavor that may garner points with certain special interest groups, but ultimately works only to further prevent real progress through compromise. Land management policies affect numerous interests. Compromise in this space is often difficult to achieve, but I encourage all my friends to pursue it. In the long-run, it will prove to be a worthy endeavor.