

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Absolutely no one in this room, on either side of the aisle, condones violence or threats against federal employees – unfortunately, I feel the need to make that perfectly clear. Our boots-on-the-ground are often in difficult positions. They may have to enforce unpopular laws and regulations that have a great impact on local communities and people’s livelihoods. Their safety should be, and is, of the utmost importance.

While I am supportive of the practical recommendations made in the GAO’s report we are looking at today, I am concerned that the title and narrow focus of this hearing may be misleading.

I take issue with the assertion made that there is a widespread problem of anti-government threats and abuse occurring in the West. Being from the West and representing a

state with a high percentage of public land, I would like to set the record straight.

The vast majority of my constituents impacted by the federal government's public lands management decisions are hard-working taxpayers raising families and contributing to their communities. They love the beautiful public lands that surround them and want to be good stewards of them and part of the decision-making process. They are not dangerous or threatening to federal land managers in the field.

Landowners and users who disagree with specific management decisions should not be made to feel that somehow, they will be placed on a government "watch list" of potential threats. Villainizing westerners, and those who disagree with management decisions, does nothing to build the bridges of trust and cooperation that is vital to proper stewardship of the land. As is the case with most of politics,

finger pointing, and divisiveness is counter-productive in the long-run.

We will hear from the GAO witness today regarding the report that the full Committee Chairman asked them to compile, which looks at the progress that the BLM, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service have all made in recent years to bring their human-occupied facilities into compliance with post 9/11 federal security standards.

This report, while important to consider, only took into account four years' worth of data of recorded "threats" among the four land management agencies which each had different, and often inconsistent, methods of recording. There also does not appear to be a way to differentiate between the most serious threats of violence and incidents as minor as a parking ticket.

I believe Republicans on this committee largely support the recommendations made in

the GAO report for the agencies to continue to make progress in taking common-sense efforts to secure federal facilities. However, nothing in the report makes any mention of the existence of a “*culture of anti-government attack and abuse*,” which is the title of this hearing.

My hope is that through the testimony of the witnesses here today, we can all learn the powerful lesson that the vast majority of citizens are not like those in the rare, high-profile, headline-grabbing incidents that will be showcased today. My constituents do not wish to have conflict, and naturally seek compromise and cooperation from their government.

I hope to hear examples today of how federal land managers and local citizens have worked to listen to each other, seek mutual understanding, and come up with collaborative on-the-ground solutions which netted the most positive outcome for all concerned.

As a Committee, we should be promoting and fostering more of these cooperative and collaborative efforts, which will do far more to facilitate safety than spending even tens of millions of dollars to create hardened, secure fortresses.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to their testimony.