

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Oversight Hearing – Public Lands Extremism
Opening Statement
October 22, 2019**

- **Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands hearing on combating anti-public lands extremism.**
- **We're here today, in part, to review the results of a recent Government Accountability Office report detailing the impacts of anti-government extremism on public land managers and federal facilities.**
- **As we'll hear, that report found some shocking details about the threats these federal employees face just for doing their jobs.**
- **Federal land managers and law enforcement personnel have been followed around in stores, had their homes staked out, and have even faced attempted murder at the hands of those who promote anti-government ideologies.**
- **I hope that we can all agree that this is unacceptable. These people are hard-working public servants employed by the federal government.**

- **No one should face fear and harassment in their place of work or in their communities.**
- **I also think it is important that we keep the larger context of these incidents in mind, because these extremist ideologies do not develop in a vacuum.**
- **Anti-government rhetoric more frequently being adopted by officials in positions of power is being used as a weapon against our public lands and the public servants who manage them.**
- **Attempts to push this ideology into the political mainstream has a very real impact on people's lives.**
- **As GAO found, quote, "Some field unit employees said that in certain circumstances, they consider receiving threats a normal part of their job. . . Officials described being threatened while off-duty, such as by being harassed in local stores or being monitored at their home, which officials said in some cases they did not report because it was a common occurrence."**
- **If we could turn to the screen, we'll see a handful of statements public officials have made in recent years *(read each one aloud, especially for the recording)*:**

- **“What Sen. [Harry] Reid may call domestic terrorists, I call patriots.” – Former Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), on the 2014 armed Bundy militia standoff in Bunkerville, Nev.**
- **“The BLM has become a bureaucratic agency of – basically – terrorism. So at what point do we band together as elected officials, and say, ‘Enough is enough of the BLM?’” – State Rep. Michele Fiore (R-Nev.)**
- **“The federal government, the BLM, the Forest Service, the FBI, the DEA, any of those guys, they’re not elected. Those other entities, they answer to me.” – Beaver County (Utah) Sheriff Cameron Noel**
- **“You, the people of Nevada, not Washington bureaucrats, should be in charge of your own land ... I will fight day and night to return full control of Nevada’s lands to its rightful owners. Its citizens.” – Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas)**
- **This rhetoric often turns into violence. In 2012, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert signed the Utah Transfer of Public Lands Act, which “required” federal agencies to cede ownership of most federal land to state control after 2014.**

- **A researcher at the University of California, San Diego, found that in the year after Utah and other Western state legislatures made their land-transfer demands, those states saw a nearly 11 percent increase in violence directed at federal public lands employees.**
- **In that context, it is particularly disappointing to see my Republican colleagues invite a witness today with little experience on the issues we're here to discuss and who has written favorably about giving away federal land to state and private control.**
- **Former BLM director Bob Abbey said in 2014, quote, "the political rhetoric today does lead to animosity and increased tension, and there is a belief because of that rhetoric that it's OK to do certain things outside the law and some people believe that they're going to get away with it."**
- **Today, I hope we can examine this rhetoric and the danger it creates, so that we can consider how to protect public employees, promote collaboration, and end the culture of threats and violence.**
- **With that, I'd like to recognize Ranking Member Curtis for his opening remarks.**