

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Russ Fulcher

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Oversight Hearing on
“Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America’s Public Lands” (3-22-21)**

**Thank you. Before we begin, I first want to send my deepest
condolences to Chairman Neguse and his constituents in Boulder. We
are all grieving with you today. My prayers are with each of you as
you face this tragic loss.**

**Today we meet to examine the future of America’s public lands. It is
my hope that the broad focus of today’s hearing will give us an
opportunity to consider the many challenges facing our national
public lands and discuss wise innovative solutions to those challenges.**

**In Idaho and across the West, people depend on our federal lands for
recreation and enjoyment, as well as for their livelihoods. No one
understands this better than Idaho Governor Brad Little, who is
joining us as a witness today. As a fourth-generation cattle and sheep
rancher, he understands that those who make their living off the land
are also some of the most actively involved in conservation; for they
have a direct vested interest in sustainable management practices.**

Idaho's forest products industry is one of the many rich examples that illustrates the dual benefits of managing our lands to improve both the environment and our economy. Wise, active land management helps improve the health and resiliency of Idaho's national forests. Idaho's timber industry sustains over 31,000 jobs and provided \$52 million in revenue for Idaho's schools last year alone.

Idaho is also a leader in using good neighbor authority (GNA) to help manage our forests. Since 2016, planned and completed timber sales have treated over 17,000 acres of forestland, generated millions of dollars in economic activity, improved habitat for wildlife, and reduced the threat of wildfire.

Regrettably, this Committee has already advanced policies that will take us further away from these common-sense, smart solutions to our land management issues. This hearing is coming nearly a full month after a significant package of bills that all fall under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction was sent to the House floor.

That package of bills, which the administration claimed would promote the ambiguous and amorphous concept of 30 by 30, locked up 1.5 million acres of wilderness across the West and withdrew 1.2 million acres from mineral production.

If that is indicative of future policy on public lands, the future is bleak. Policies like that ties the hands of our federal land managers, make it more difficult for rural communities to sustain their economies, and hurts the environment by making it more difficult to treat lands to make them resilient to threats like insect, disease, and catastrophic wildfire.

I would encourage my friends on the other side of the dais to commit to regular order going forward and truly listen to the Members of Congress that represent large regions of federal lands, and allow us the opportunity to have input on these policies through the formal Committee process.

Unless we start really listening local stakeholders, we are doomed to keep repeating the management mistakes of the past. Our public lands hold vast potential to benefit the American people – from abundant recreational opportunities to millions of jobs supported by the energy, mineral, timber, and grazing sectors. The question is – are we going to enact policies that fully recognize and enhance those multiple uses and the full potential of our lands?

With that, I'm looking forward to hearing the testimony from our witnesses today and yield back to the Chairman. Thank you.

Introduction of Idaho Governor Brad Little

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Thank you. As I mentioned earlier in my opening statement, today we are joined by the Governor of my home state of Idaho, Brad Little.

Governor Little is not only a fourth-generation rancher, his family founded one of the largest off-road vehicle parks in America, Little-Gem Cycle Park. His testimony before this Committee during the 115th Congress was extremely beneficial in understanding the importance of livestock grazing and the challenges facing rural America, and I have no doubt that his testimony today will be equally beneficial to the Committee. With that, I am proud to introduce my good friend and fellow Idahoan, Governor Little, and yield back the balance of my time.