



**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman**  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Oversight Hearing on  
*“Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America’s Public Lands”*  
March 23, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and please allow me to echo Congressman Fulcher’s sentiments offering our sincere sympathies to Chairman Neguse after yesterday’s tragic events. He and his constituents are in my prayers.

The focus of today’s hearing, “Examining the Future of America’s Public Lands,” is an appropriate one because ultimately, our job is to make sure we are leaving a better, healthier environment for future generations.

As the new Ranking Member of this Committee, I believe that the best way we achieve that is by increasing access through innovation and conservation. When I say access, I don’t just mean access to our lands for enjoyment or outdoor recreation. Access also needs to include access

to our minerals to counter China's influence, access to timber supplies for rural jobs, and access to grazing allotments to support our ranchers.

Unfortunately, instead of trying to increase access to our lands, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are already trying to lock up millions of acres of land into new wilderness areas. Packages like the one that passed last month on the House floor not only decrease access to our lands, they kill jobs and actually hurt the environment.

Arbitrary land lock-ups and onerous regulations that shut down rural economic activity, restrict access, and make it even more difficult to manage our severely fire-prone landscapes are most certainly not ingredients for "Building Back Better."

That theme, which was President Biden's campaign slogan and is now a series of hearings for the Majority, has also included radical policies like the Green New Deal, which President Biden said was a "crucial framework for meeting the climate challenges we face." The "Building Back Better" plan also embraces the 30 by 30 initiative, an ill-

defined plan to protect 30 percent of America's lands and waters by 2030.

30 for 30 is a good name for a sports show on ESPN, but I'm not sure what it has to do with conservation. We're talking about millions of acres of land and hundreds of thousands of jobs for people who rely on multiple use and working lands. We owe them a lot better than a catchy tagline with no actual substance behind it.

That's why Republicans on our Committee are going to be focused on conservation, not preservation. We must pursue science-based, pro-growth solutions that will benefit our environment, our economy, and our country. It is critical as we move forward that we dispel the false narrative that in order for us to care for our climate and environment, we must embrace extreme socialist and preservationist policies.

I'm looking forward to hearing that debate today, and I'm especially looking forward to hearing from Idaho Governor Brad Little. Governor Little is a fourth-generation cattle and sheep rancher who understands better than anybody that those who live off the lands are the

best conservationists of the land. I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today and yield back the balance of my time. Thank you.