

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Russ Fulcher
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 8108, H.R. 8109, and H.R. 8719
September 14, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. First, welcome to all of the witnesses joining us today. I am looking forward to hearing your testimony.

During the past six weeks, I have had the great privilege of being back home in Idaho, traveling throughout my district, and listening to concerns raised by my constituents. A common theme I heard from them was the difficulty of living in a state with such a large federal footprint. Idaho, like much of the West, is choked with smoke due to catastrophic wildfires as a result of poor federal forest management. And local communities have few new economic opportunities, particularly when so much

of the Federal Land within Idaho's borders are locked away from wise management and multiple use. Unfortunately, federal regulations, so-called "environmental" lawsuits, and an over-burdened National Forest Service has transformed what was once a fabulous, renewable, natural resource and economic juggernaut - into firewood... wildfire wood. But that's what happens when land isn't properly cared for.

Tribal governments can be great partners in land management and their knowledge and expertise can help address many of the challenges I just mentioned. For example, Historic Tribes have utilized prescribed burns in North America and around the world for millennia to clear areas for crops, manage lands for certain plants and animals, and to hunt. In a year where more than 6.6 million

acres have burned, we should be learning from the active forest management strategies that Historic Tribes have used for centuries, which is why I've introduced bills like the "Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act," which would allow them to retain project revenues like States do - under Good Neighbor Authority. Hopefully, the Majority will consider moving it this year.

With that, I am deeply concerned about the unintended consequences of the bills before us today. For example, H.R. 8109 would create a brand new Tribal Cultural Areas System that mirrors some of our most restrictive land designations, such as wilderness areas as national monuments. History is clear: "locking it up", eventually means "burning it up"... unintended consequences.

Take for example the designation of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, which led to increased tourism, but also associated destruction of the very tribal sites that the monument was originally supposed to preserve. Earlier this year, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition shared photos of vandalism to sacred cultural sites and said these “destructive incidents have been on the rise” and have “been a regular occurrence in Bears Ears.” Drawing large circles on a map has not protected this area, and there’s been no increase in resources or law enforcement presence.

This bill would also allow the agencies to lock up millions of acres of land without receiving Congressional approval, similar to the Antiquities Act. Locking up large swaths of federal land contradicts the multiple use mandate of federal land

management agencies who are charged with balancing various uses such as energy development, timber harvesting, outdoor recreation, and grazing. These multiple uses are important to enhancing tribal economic opportunities, as we heard from witnesses representing the Inter-Tribal Timber Council and the Southern Ute Tribe earlier this year during an oversight hearing on tribal co-management.

Another bill on today's hearing, H.R. 8719, would designate thousands of acres as new National Conservation and Wilderness Areas in Arizona. This bill would make it much more difficult to eradicate invasive species like buffelgrass, which Chair Grijalva himself recently said was "a fuel for wildfire, a threat to biodiversity, a threat to species

and a threat to the landscape that we all love and cherish.”

We cannot lose sight of the fact that when we designate new lands as wilderness from Washington, D.C., thousands of miles from where those lands are actually located, it has real life consequences. Just a few months ago, this subcommittee held a hearing on Representative DeFazio’s “Wild Rogue Conservation and Recreation Enhancement Act,” which seeks to create nearly 60,000 acres of new wilderness.

That same area is now burning as we speak in the Rum Creek Fire, which Oregon Governor Kate Brown declared as an emergency.

People across the West deserve to have their agencies increase the management of their lands, not impede management through restrictive

designations. What may look good on paper, thousands of miles away, looks a lot different through smoke infested flames on sight.

I hope today's discussion will be about how to properly balance land management objectives, promote self-determination for Indian tribes and responsibly manage our natural resources, rather placing more restrictions on millions of acres of public land and adding more burden to a broken system.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.