

Opening Statement

The Honorable Bruce Westerman

Before the House Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee on

Oversight Hearing on the Budget and Missions of the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Geological Survey

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Thank you for holding this hearing.

From the Pond Creek National Wildlife Refuge in my district and the nearby red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, to Alaska's longline fishing industry to California's Central Valley Project, and to the Chesapeake Bay, the four agencies before us today have an impact on the daily lives of all Americans.

The agencies play a vital role in our recreational pursuits, including hunting and fishing; they deliver water to farms so Americans have access to fruits, nuts, vegetables and other foods; and they provide jobs to our communities. But what they give, they can also take away. Government fiat can quickly replace abundance replaced with scarcity.

This is why it's so important that Congress have oversight on these agencies.

We could discuss hundreds of matters today, but I want to focus on just a few.

- O Testimonies by the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA (*Noah*) talk about the 30 by 30 initiative, which has now been rebranded by what the Administration now calls quote "the America the Beautiful initiative" unquote. Other than a catchy bumper-sticker slogan, this effort still remains largely un-defined. We believe that conservation, not preservation, of our natural resources is the best policy and that the American people deserve transparency and clarity on this issue.

- O NOAA's testimony barely touches on fisheries management, particularly red snapper. The Center for Sportfishing Policy, which is composed of recreational anglers and related industries, recently gave the agency a red flag due to the agency's failure to incorporate state data on how it counts fish. The five Gulf states have vastly improved access to our red snapper fishery and have led the way on fish counting innovation, but NOAA seems to be a boat lost at sea when it comes to working with the states.

- O More than 95 percent of the West is under a severe drought advisory. While we can't make it rain or snow at this point, we *can* take proactive steps to avoid the next drought. The Administration should provide a long-term strategy for doing this, not just pave the way to the next disaster. I and my Republican colleagues are for an all-of-the-above approach when it comes to water, starting with water storage advanced by the last Administration.

- O Lastly, the Biden Administration is threatening rural America with potential future listings of the Greater Sage Grouse and the Lesser Prairie Chicken. These decisions will reverse millions of dollars of successful conservation efforts and will shut the door on future investment. Additionally, this Administration is ignoring science on northern spotted owl critical habitat, seeking again to lock up more land across the West. The end result of this will be more destruction, as this locked-up land will eventually be engulfed in catastrophic forest fires.

I have concerns with how this Administration's approach thus far seems to be just over-turning many of the past Administration's efforts. That's not a plan. This ping-pong approach continually fails to provide certainty to people, species and our environment. I'm hoping today that we will have a dialogue on how we can work collaboratively toward a better future.