



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

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Witnesses Tell Federal Government to STOP Trampling on Private Property Rights

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held an [oversight hearing](#) entitled “*Threats, Intimidation and Bullying by Federal Land Managing Agencies.*” The hearing examined the ongoing and abusive conduct by federal land management agencies taken against private property rights.

“Pioneers viewed the West as the land of opportunity. They saw a chance for greater independence, self-sufficiency, and a better way of life for their families. Today, however, some of these same families, industries, and communities are struggling to stay afloat thanks to some overbearing federal agents who think they are above the law. The witnesses today shared their personal stories of federal intrusion, harassment, and bullying. These incidents involving certain federal land managers and private citizens are not isolated to the recent shutdown, but have become all too routine in communities throughout the West. Private property rights have regularly been trampled by well-funded activist operations and their political allies, but to have federal agents using similar tactics is absolutely unacceptable. My hope is that through this hearing we can shed light on this growing problem and advance solutions that limit the federal government’s abusive behavior in the future,” said **Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01).**

Witnesses who testified before the Subcommittee shared their personal experiences of abusive conduct by federal land management agencies and offered solutions on how to stop this behavior.

[Lorenzo Valdez](#), who is a cattle rancher from Rio Arriba County in New Mexico, told the Subcommittee that he and other ranchers were denied grazing permits because they spoke out publically against the U.S. Forest Service’s actions to “*destabilize and degrade*” private property rights. Valdez said, “*The Forest Service has made it nearly impossible for these ranchers to sustain their grazing permits which results not only in a loss of their private property but in the slow destruction of their cultural fabric.*”

In 1984, [Tim Lowry](#) bought a cattle ranch in Oregon’s North Fork Wilderness Study Area (WSA) only to find out that just months after his purchase, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was planning to drastically cut the grazing allotment on Lowry’s land. Lowry

proactively reached out to the BLM because he was *“confident that working together we could solve any issues relating to grazing in the WSA. I was wrong.”* Lowry added, *“If family ranches are to remain intact, a functioning un-fragmented landscape maintained, the economy Owyhee County protected, and access for recreationists preserved, then this broken, dysfunctional land management must be fixed.”*

[Brenda Richards](#), Idaho rancher and Owyhee County Treasurer, shared one specific example of misconduct by federal land management agencies when it came to the Gateway West Power Transmission Line. *“Early on in this process these lines were to come across the public land, leaving as much private ground as possible”* because private land is scarce in this area. This decision was made with input from all stakeholders involved – the power company, recreational groups, county groups, county elected officials, and surrounding residents. Unfortunately, one person in the BLM’s Washington office negated all the input, time, and money spent on arriving at a decision that was satisfactory to everyone involved. *“The player in this game that we have found out to be playing by their own set of rules – and truly that is a form of bullying when you are aware you can get away with it – is the Bureau of Land Management,”* said Richards.

[Frank Robbins](#), a Wyoming Rancher who exercised his right to decline demands from the BLM for an uncompensated right-of-way across his private land, shared his experiences when the BLM began *“engaging in a pattern of intentionally abusive conduct to coerce me to grant my property rights to BLM and punish me for not immediately capitulating to the BLM’s demands.”* Robbins called for a solution to stop this behavior by federal land management agency employees. *“Win or lose, should private individuals and businesses have the chance to prove that that have been harassed, punished, and bullied by federal bureaucrats, there needs to be more accountability of federal employees and opening the courthouse door is one way to provide for that accountability.”*

Nevada Rancher **[Wayne Hage, Jr.](#)** noted that since 1978 he has experienced a *“disregard for my family’s property rights”* by federal land management agencies and that these agencies *“have punished us for making an honest use and assertion of these rights.”* For the past 23 years, Hage and his family have been in court protecting these property rights from the federal government. From his experiences in dealing with *“threats, intimidation, and bullying”* by the federal government, Hage called for *“harsh penalties to be placed upon employees who break the law and violate a person’s rights”* and an *“easier way to hold them accountable.”*

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