Opening Statement of

Rep. Jamie Herrera Beutler
Field Hearing on
"Failed Federal Forest Policies: Endangering Northwest Jobs, Forests and Species"
Subcommittee on Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Longview, Washington
May 21, 2012

As prepared for delivery

I want to welcome everyone to my home, Southwest Washington.

I'd like to start by recognizing those elected officials who took the time to join us today.

Today we consider the policies and practices that affect our forests, wildlife, economy, and entire communities in this region. Those things make up our identity. And folks across the spectrum are recognizing that those things that we value are in jeopardy.

Almost twenty years ago, the Northwest Forest Plan was written into law. The stated goals of the plan were laudable: balance a healthy forest economy with the protection of wildlife.

But before a new plan is adopted that doubles-down on the current practices, we need an honest, science-based assessment of how they have worked over the last 2 decades.

What we'll hear today will be based on science, expert analysis, and the testimony of community members who have been left to deal with consequences of these policies. I believe what we'll hear is that reality has been far different from what even the plan's architects intended.

Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas was a primary author of the Northwest Forest Plan. Ten years after, he stated that the plan is not working and has failed to fulfill its promise to the people, as well as the environment. He stated: "I've got real terrible concern whether we are taking care of the land."

Here's what we've seen: federal forests like the Gifford Pinchot have been locked away from economic activity, and species like the Spotted Owl have plummeted in number. Setting aside 80% of our forests in some places have still failed to protect the Spotted Owl.

Plans to undertake environmentally sound forest harvest projects, even very small projects, have been successfully arrested by lawsuits and a thicket of federal laws and hoops to jump through, and a failure of the U.S. Forest Service to defend these projects.

Those who I hear from, regardless of political party, want a new plan for managing our forests and sustaining our communities. They're not asking for anything unreasonable; just a plan based on science that manages for all of the wildlife species. Unfortunately, mismanagement by the US Fish and Wildlife Service has led to the decline in species like deer, elk, and multiple species of birds that are dependent on diversity of forest habitat.

In the northwest for generations, use of our forests for economic activity has been part of who we are. That has necessarily adapted and changed to become more sustainable and responsible. But I have worked with Members of Congress from both parties to protect common sense in our forest economy. For instance, my friend Kurt Schrader from Oregon and I are working hard to keep 35 years of forest and water protection in place, instead of allowing the onerous "Forest Roads Rule" from further locking up our forest economy. I've worked with business, labor, Republicans and Democrats on this issue because, make no mistake about it, jobs will be lost. Communities will be harmed.

I look forward to from hearing from our witnesses about the need for better science and more balance in our forest management practices. For two decades, mismanagement of our beautiful forests have put them at grave risk of destruction from disease, insect devastation, and catastrophic wildfire.

Just last December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service admitted during a congressional briefing that managing for one species has harmed other wildlife. It hasn't protected the Spotted Owl, and it most certainly hasn't protected the jobs that our community so badly needs.

I believe we can do better. Our wildlife and our economy can be protected. Treating those two goals as mutually exclusive simply hasn't worked.

Our forests and our communities are sounding the alarm. It is time for us to listen and respond.