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Opening Statement by
The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
At the Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5744, H.R. 5960 and H.R. 6089
Friday, July 20, 2012 at 9:00 a.m.

Today we are hearing three bills that aim to bring much-needed solutions to a slow-moving train wreck that has overtaken our public lands.

Decades of failed policies and hands-off management of our forests have left the majority of these lands in an unnatural, and unhealthy state. What was once a valuable asset that provided raw material for a growing and prosperous nation, clean water, recreation and numerous other benefits has deteriorated into an extreme liability to western communities and the environment.

It is time for a paradigm shift in restoring our landscape so that national forests can once again meet the purposes for which they were established. For decades we've witnessed the problem and have known the solution. While some try to convolute and distract from the debate for their radical agendas, the solution is simple – we need to remove the volume of fuels that these forests are adding to themselves at a rate of 30% each year. The Native Americans used fire, modern man used forest management; the federal government removed both and now nature is in the process of replacing them with its own scorched earth policy.

This is the fourth hearing this subcommittee has held on this issue within the last year, and the response has been the same – we need to get back to the business of managing our lands.

Some like to argue that the problem is funding. Obviously the hardworking and dedicated land managers on the ground are not going to implement forest management for free. Yet funding does nothing to undo the Gordian knot of regulation, conflicting mandates, and obstruction that former Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth self-diagnosed as “analysis paralysis.”

Again, this is not a new issue, and not a new solution. We need to thin the trees. We do not need more “experiments” or more “pilots” to tell us what the problem is. We simply need to provide land managers the direction, flexibility, and encouragement to work with affected communities and stakeholders and get back into the forest.

I'm encouraged that two of our colleagues from areas that have been tragic victims of these conditions have worked on legislation to do just that, and restore management to the landscape. I thank Mr. Tipton and Mr. Gosar for their hard work, as well as Ranking Member Markey for his recognition of the need for a more active approach to our forest resources than has occurred under current mismanagement of the federal estate. I thank our witnesses for joining us and look forward to their testimony.