

Opening Statement

The Honorable John Fleming, M.D.

Chairman

House Water, Power and Oceans Subcommittee

Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the Missions and Impacts of the President’s Proposed Fiscal Year 2017 Budgets of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Power Marketing Administrations*”

March 22, 2016

The Subcommittee meets today to examine the proposed budgets and missions for a number of agencies under this Subcommittee’s jurisdiction. Since this will be the last time we hear from these agencies about their proposed funding under this Administration, today’s hearing provides a valuable opportunity to compare and contrast our visions over the past seven years.

When it comes to accessing our oceans, our philosophies couldn’t be further apart. This Administration has been on steroids when it comes to expanding national marine monuments and the fishing limitations and other restrictions that go with them in the West Pacific. To make matters worse, the Administration is contemplating a new monument designation off New England after going through a sham of one public meeting.

There has been a complete lack of emphasis on funding fisheries science and data collection. It’s the worst kept secret in the Gulf of Mexico that the red snapper population is now abundant. You would never know that from this Administration, which has, in fact, done very little to improve fishery data collection, while continuing to reduce recreational fishing days. Instead, NOAA has prioritized its central office by adding over 200 new employees.

Both NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service have made the Endangered Species Act a blunt tool to stop development in the oceans and on land with the Right Whale Critical Habitat Expansion and numerous listings under its sue-and-settlements with the Center for Biological Diversity and WildEarth Guardians. The agencies refuse to be transparent on the data used for these listings and oppose bills requiring the agencies to be transparent. Meanwhile, the Fish and Wildlife Service continues to impose unnecessary fees and duplicative requirements on sea urchin exports to feather its nest.

We’ve witnessed time and again that the Delta smelt has priority over farmers and farmworkers in California. Ironically, when we have more water flowing through the system this year, we have less water for the San Joaquin Valley. At the same time, the Bureau of Reclamation continues its paralysis-by-analysis approach towards studying new dams. This Nation put a man on the moon in eight years and yet continues to study the expansion of existing reservoirs and new off-stream reservoirs for the last thirteen.

This Committee has done its best to fight these extremist agendas and offers a far more refreshing vision. Instead of relying on restricted access and rationing existing resources, we

have pursued policies that increase the size of the pie. We passed Mr. Young's bill, H.R. 1335, to correct inequities in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and to improve science and data. We've passed our colleague Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's bill as part of the sportsmen's legislation ensuring that states have a legitimate say when it comes to federal parks and sanctuaries located in state waters. We've received testimony on another bill that supports our domestic tuna industry. Ironically, this Administration that can't seem to understand that other countries are benefiting from federal policies while the U.S. suffers. We will soon move bills that reduce the tension between conflicting environmental laws when it comes to protecting predators and endangered species. And, this House has moved comprehensive drought legislation aimed at expanding our water resources and putting common sense back into species recovery.

In my limited time, these are just some of the contrasts between our Republican vision and this White House. Unfortunately, the budgets for the agencies before us continue the White House's dismal and negative vision of making our natural resources scarcer while limiting access to those resources. We need to return to the policy of abundance and transparency: where anglers are able to access healthy fisheries, where residents have enough water for green lawns in the West, and where the federal government provides the data to justify its decisions.

We have an obligation to provide a better way of life for our constituents through proactive and positive policies. That's what this hearing is all about.