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**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**Opening Statement of**  
**Chairman Tom McClintock**  
**Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

**On Wednesday, April 15, 2015**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**

**Oversight Hearing on: *"Federal Land Acquisition and its Impacts on Communities and the Environment."***

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The Federal Lands sub-committee meets today to review federal land acquisition policies and their impact on communities and the environment.

Last month, this sub-committee received testimony from the government's land management agencies regarding their 2016 budget requests. All expressed a burning desire to vastly increase their holdings, while admitting to large and growing backlogs of deferred maintenance. Congressman Gohmert summed up the situation nicely when he compared our land managers with the wealthy old miser whose dilapidated house had become the neighborhood eyesore while he spent all his time and money plotting to buy more and more property from his neighbors. Lincoln summed up this proclivity by comparing it to the farmer who said, "I ain't greedy for land – all I want is what's next to mine."

That's the issue before us today. Most federal land acquisition is authorized under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. Funds for this act come from federal OCS royalties, but are generally appropriated by Congress and thus must be evaluated each year in competition with other pressing priorities. This 50-year old act expires in September, offering the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress an opportunity to thoroughly examine its mission and impacts and to make adjustments accordingly.

About a quarter of LWCF funding goes to the state-side grant program, which seems to have been most successful. This is the program most members cite when extolling benefits from the LWCF. We will hear today from Domenic Bravo, Administrator, Wyoming Division of State Parks, Historic Sites & Trails, about his state's experience with this portion of the program. It seems to me that because it requires a match from the states and is administered through state agencies, there has been far greater accountability in developing state parks and recreational areas with the highest public demand. The major controversy seems to arise from sweeping federal land acquisitions and plans outlined by the agencies for as much as a 373 percent increase in spending for this purpose, as the BLM proposes.

I have often noted that the Federal government owns just 25 percent of the land area of Washington, D.C., but owns 67 percent of the state of Alaska, 40 percent of the state of California and in the case of one county in my district, 92 percent of Alpine County, California. When the Plantagenet kings seized just 30 percent of the land for government use, it was so damaging and so resented that no fewer than five clauses of the Magna Carta were devoted to redressing the public's grievances.

At a prior hearing, I repeated the concerns expressed to me by the ----- fire district in the Lake Tahoe basin that excessive federal land acquisitions were steadily sapping the property tax base it relies upon for revenue.

Proponents of federal land acquisition point out that cleaning up checkerboard land ownership patterns can improve efficiency of administering these lands. The question, though, is whether this objective is better reached by constantly expanding the federal footprint, or rather by acquiring land-locked parcels by divesting other parcels that are at the periphery of the federal holdings.

We will soon hear from County Supervisor Robert Lovingood of San Bernardino County. His district has lost roughly 900,000 acres of land to the federal government. The result is a shrinking tax base for his county that undermines its ability to pay for basic public services such law enforcement, roads and public education while suppressing commerce and depressing the economy. This is a common complaint of county supervisors throughout my district, which spans five national forests and two national parks.

As we will hear from Shawn Regan of the Property and Environment Research Center, calls for accelerated federal land acquisitions come at a time when the federal government's ability to manage our current holdings is conspicuously apparent. These agencies have already confessed to a maintenance backlog approaching \$20 billion. We have already lost millions of acres of precious natural forests to fire, pestilence and disease due to a forest management policy that can only be described as benign neglect.

Annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund comes from the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill—it is discretionary funding, not mandatory. It is therefore incumbent upon Congress to set priorities for the management of our public lands and whether we should be acquiring vast new holdings in light of desperate need for fire prevention, fire suppression, wildlife management and facilities maintenance and improvement. This sub-committee will not shrink from that responsibility. With that, I'm pleased to introduce the Ranking Member.