

Statement of Randy Newberg.
Sportsman and Host of *Fresh Tracks* and *On Your Own Adventures*,
Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
April 15, 2015

Mr. Chairman, I am Randy Newberg, a lifelong sportsman and conservationist from Bozeman, Montana, and I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee today as you consider issues related to the conservation of federal lands, including the critically needed recreation access, community-based priorities, and vital economic progress and growth secured by federal projects funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and other federal programs.

My perspective on these places and issues has been shaped by the deep connection I have been lucky enough to experience with them both professionally and personally. My work as host of *Fresh Tracks* on the Sportsman Channel and of other media projects has given me the chance to share some of the best of America's outdoors with sportsmen and women in your districts. My experience as a hunter has blessed me with a profound appreciation, which I know is shared by many millions of our fellow outdoorsmen and women, for the vital role the natural world can and should play in all our lives. My involvement in conservation policies and projects, including my service as a board member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, has shown me just how important individual federal land conservation projects can be to maintaining and enhancing the larger context of public recreation for us all. And my experience of 24 years as a practicing CPA in Montana has shown that local businesses -- the core of our year-round tourism and recreation economy, --benefit significantly from the accessible federal lands that millions of tourists come to enjoy. Additionally, employers in Montana share a competitive advantage in attracting extremely qualified employees seeking the amenities these public lands provide.

As those various roles take me around the country, and particularly as I travel across Montana and the interior West, I have witnessed again and again the irreplaceable value that these public land conservation projects provide to the resources we all care about, the local communities and economies that depend on them, and the countless Americans whose outdoor recreation needs are uniquely met by the network of national forests, recreation areas, and other federal lands that enhance our connection to the outdoors. As Americans, we are very fortunate to have a public federal lands system that provides some of the best intact fish and wildlife habitat and quality opportunities for sportsmen in all the world. Nearly half of those who hunt and fish spend all or a portion of their time outdoors on public lands.

In my travels around this great country, I have also seen the risks we face when we miss the opportunity to protect the key missing pieces in these essential public resource areas. Filling these gaps achieves a broad spectrum of public benefits, not the least of which is providing the access Americans need -- and often

do not have – to outdoor resources. According to a recent survey by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, hunters rely on public lands more than private lands in every state west of the 100th Meridian. The same survey showed that a lack of access to those lands was cited most frequently as the reason people cut back on hunting, stop hunting, or choose not to maintain generations-long family hunting traditions. And for other outdoor recreation, inadequate and restricted access poses similar challenges.

Federal land conservation is an essential tool to remedy this situation. In Montana, for example, LWCF funding has been absolutely critical to opening up access for hunters and fishermen to what might be our nation’s most productive wildlife areas, including numerous acres in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Montana Legacy Project, at Bozeman Pass, in the Swan Valley, and many, many others. But Montana still has public land areas that are blocked to public access due to private ownership, and so we sportsmen, in Montana, and across America, continue to need LWCF’s federal land acquisition funding to help us continue to address this challenge. Federal lands are mostly open to hunting and fishing; it’s often private lands that block our ability to hunt and fish in some of our nation’s best spots.

In addition to recreation access to existing public lands, federal land acquisitions address a host of other critical priorities for sportsmen and other outdoor recreationists, for communities, and for the economy.

- Federal acquisitions protect iconic resources. Inholdings in federally managed areas can pose serious threats to the scenic, recreation, habitat, and other public values of our most treasured public lands. Willing-seller acquisition of these private parcels with compelling public assets secures the future of the federal lands we all care about and rely on. Acquisitions within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, for instance, have safeguarded some of the West’s most productive and important elk calving grounds, secured migration corridors for mule deer, and protected spectacular scenery that draws millions of visitors each year. And from Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota and Grand Teton in Wyoming to the Florida Everglades to the forests of New England to the California Sierra, similar federal conservation successes have secured vitally important wildlife habitat and fisheries, recreation areas, and scenery that otherwise would have been lost.
- Federal acquisitions support the economy, locally and nationally. Outdoor recreation is a mainstay of the American economy, accounting (according to research by the Outdoor Industry Association) for \$646 billion in annual economic activity and supporting one in every 15 jobs in America. America’s public lands are the natural infrastructure on which the outdoor economy depends. Federal acquisitions represent an extremely small investment in that infrastructure, an investment that yields outsized returns as it facilitates public access to current federal lands, secures new resource lands that

people want to go to, and maintains the scenic integrity that keeps people – including we sportsmen – coming back to our national forests, wildlife refuges, and parks.

In Montana, we have many examples where LWCF-funded acquisitions greatly benefit the local economies. The Madison River is a world-class trout fishery that lures thousands of visiting anglers every week. Some hire guides to float them through these Blue-Ribbon waters, while others wade the riffles themselves. All spend money, significant money, critical to the local economy that is dependent upon access to this amazing fishing. Access to fishing in Montana is an LWCF investment that drives our economy. Two-thirds of the Fishing Access Sites in Montana were acquired with LWCF funding. And on the Madison River specifically, two great LWCF examples, Three Dollar Bridge and the Olliffe Ranch, are critical pieces that enhance fishing access to benefit the economies in West Yellowstone, Ennis, Bozeman, and surrounding communities. Many of these positive impacts are felt most immediately by gateway communities where visitors spend their money; other impacts are felt more broadly outdoor recreation manufacturing and other sectors.

- Federal acquisitions help us to manage the federal lands we already have. There has been a great deal of attention to the maintenance backlogs facing federal land management agencies. It is important to note that much of this backlog is tied to road maintenance, and I understand many members of Congress are looking to Transportation funding as the appropriate mechanism to address those needs. It also is important to note that the balance of the federal maintenance backlog involves buildings and other facilities – NOT the undeveloped, high-quality resource land that makes up the annual list of inholding acquisition priorities. In fact, inholding purchases provide for improved, consolidated public management, better coordinated watershed management and fire treatment, and reduced management costs. At Mt. Rainier National Park, an LWCF-funded acquisition along an entrance road allowed the National Park Service to move a campground, trailhead, picnic area, and other visitor services that washed out frequently due to their location along the Carbon River. A land acquisition supported by LWCF funds is now saving the Park Service from expending hundreds of thousands of dollars every time the road washed out.
- Federal acquisitions provide essential drinking water protection and fire risk reduction. Those of us who live near federal lands understand the positive impacts that strategic acquisitions can have far beyond our use and enjoyment of the lands themselves. Like my hometown of Bozeman MT, where our community water sources of Hyalite Reservoir and Mystic Lake have been protected by LWCF projects, many other western communities, from Leavenworth WA to Portland OR to Salt Lake City UT depend on public

protection of water sources in nearby national forests, and each of these communities has benefited from LWCF acquisitions to secure water quality and quantity. Across the West and elsewhere, we also recognize the skyrocketing costs of wildfire management and the consequences of inholding development on firefighting needs and costs. Put simply, houses built on these lands, within or adjacent to undeveloped public forests have claimed more and more of each year's firefighting budget. Forest Service managers routinely report that the vast majority of their fire budgets are expended to protect developed private lands. In Montana, for example, the 2013 Lolo Complex fire covered more than 10,000 acres and threatened the town of Lolo. LWCF funding subsequently made it possible for the Forest Service to acquire several private inholdings in order to consolidate the checkerboard parcels. This was part of a risk reduction strategy that allows the Forest Service to more rationally manage the forest in this area. It eliminates the potential intermittent presence of homes that would be at high risk.

As this Subcommittee considers the community and environmental effects of federal land acquisition, I hope you will keep in mind these and other ways those acquisitions contribute to the needs of the recreating public, to the irreplaceable assets that our federal lands represent, and to the balance sheets of local communities and the national economy. Thank you for considering these perspectives.