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July 29, 2014

**Chris Wood, President and CEO, Trout Unlimited**

**Testimony on H.R. 596, the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act**

***Legislative Hearing on H.R. 596, H.R. 1363, and H.R. 2004***

**House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Holt, and members of the subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Rep. Gosar's bill, H.R. 596, the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act. My name is Chris Wood. I am the President and CEO for Trout Unlimited. My testimony will share with you the perspective of the hunting and angling community on public land wind and solar development, and how H.R. 596 can help set us on a path to responsible energy development that takes care of the interests of hunters and anglers, and the fish and wildlife habitat we depend on.

Wind and solar energy projects are a relatively new, but growing presence on western public lands. Since the beginning of 2009, 29 solar projects totaling more than 8,000 megawatts, and 11 wind projects totaling more than 4,000 megawatts, have been approved on public lands in the U.S.

TU supports responsible energy development on public lands. We take pride in our efforts to work with traditional energy developers and federal land managers to ensure that development is balanced with fishing and hunting opportunities.

It is important to understand the context for energy development on public lands. Numerous stressors on the western landscape affect fish and wildlife habitat and hunting and angling opportunity. These include: traditional energy development, insect and disease outbreaks, intense and more frequent wildfire, invasive plants, private land development, and drought conditions in already over-subscribed basins. If we're going to add large-scale wind and solar development to this picture it must be done in a thoughtful way.

Processes such as the Solar Programmatic EIS, which identified zones suitable for development, are helping to guide sound siting decisions that avoid and minimize impacts to fish and wildlife habitat. Even with the best siting decisions, however, large-scale wind and solar projects will take up big chunks of land for long periods of time, and some impacts will be unavoidable. The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act provides an answer to this challenge.

The bill offers a way to offset unavoidable impacts on fish, wildlife, and water resources by creating a conservation fund derived from royalties and other revenues from public land wind and solar energy development. This conservation fund is essential to our ability to balance wind and solar energy development with the kind of unparalleled hunting and fishing opportunities that make our western public lands a prime destination for sportsmen and women from around the country.

The conservation fund would be used in regions where renewable energy development takes place so that work can be done to improve our lands and waters. For example, invasive plant treatment could be done to enhance big game habitat on surrounding lands to improve the health of the herd. Projects to increase irrigation efficiency could be used to stretch the water supply and provide flows for fish, even as new water demands for energy development are met. Where an area previously used by hunters becomes a wind or solar project, voluntary access easements could be used to gain better access to surrounding public lands. If we have the resources to do these types of activities we'll be able to balance wind and solar development with fishing and hunting opportunities on a landscape scale.

Finding a balance between wind and solar development and the conservation of fish and wildlife on public lands will be essential to the future of renewable energy on public lands. Wind and solar offer the prospect of much-needed jobs and increased energy security for our nation. We need for these benefits to coexist with the outstanding cultural and economic benefits of hunting and fishing. A survey by the Fish & Wildlife Service found that 91.1 million U.S. residents fished, hunted, or wildlife watched in 2011, and they spent \$145 billion on their activities. This is a large, and growing, contributor to our economy: 11 percent more people fished in 2011 than in 2006, and 9 percent more people hunted. We need high quality, accessible habitat to sustain this economic activity. The conservation fund created by the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act would support the work needed to maintain our public land natural resource values.

The sportsmen's community is one that is naturally inclined to work collaboratively to solve problems. Trout Unlimited's 155,000 members annually dedicate more than 600,000 volunteer hours to conservation. Hunters and anglers are strong conservationists, and our members take great pride and joy in planting trees along streams, removing invasive plants, or working with agencies to reconnect streams. The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act, by providing the resources needed to do habitat improvement work in the field, will help position the sportsmen's community as partners as wind and solar projects are built on public lands.

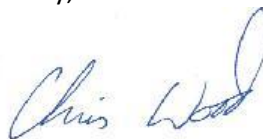
I'm an angler, as are almost all Trout Unlimited members. Conservation is the most affirmative, hopeful, and optimistic idea that America ever gave the rest of the world. And fishing is inherently an act of optimism. Each time you cast a fly, it is with the hope that you're about to hook a fish—even if your last 100 casts have come up empty. That spirit of optimism permeates Trout Unlimited's work. In Rep. Thompson's district we clean up abandoned mines

and get fish back into streams where they had been wiped out for decades. In Montana we work with ranchers to conserve water and restore trout to streams that had previously run dry. In Wyoming we partner with landowners to improve old water diversion structures and enable fish to reach upstream habitat. These projects start with the idea that we can make things better than they are today, and they succeed through hard work and cooperation.

Rep. Gosar's bill embodies this spirit of optimism. It is a demonstration of how people of good will can come together to apply common sense to common problems for the common good. With it we can develop energy resources, bolster local economies, diversify county revenue streams, and make the fishing and hunting better than we found it. That is why it has attracted the support of 59 cosponsors in the House—including half of the members of this subcommittee—from both sides of the aisle and every point on the political spectrum. I am proud to testify alongside partners from state and county government, and the environmental community, who have come together in support of this legislation.

Again I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate the leadership of Representative Gosar on this issue. Thank you to the Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this hearing, and thank you to the 14 members of the subcommittee who have signed on as cosponsors. We look forward to working with all of you to advance the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Wood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "C".