



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, May 07, 2013
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House Subcommittee Examines Federal Impediments to Job Creation, Economic Growth, & Recreation on Public Lands

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held an [oversight hearing](#) on “*Impediments to Public Recreation on Public Lands*.” This hearing examined obstacles put in place by the federal government that put more costs and burdens on small businesses and limit public access to public lands.

“Increased fees, bureaucracy, restrictions, regulation, and processing time are driving up the costs of running private business on public lands making profitable operation difficult, putting many out of business, and threatening the continuation of the services that make visitor access possible and affordable for families,” said [Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop \(UT-01\)](#). *“Unless there is a change in direction, a generation of Americans could lose the opportunity to participate in outdoor adventure and thousands of local jobs could be lost.”*

[Congressman Joe Heck \(NV-03\)](#) told the Subcommittee that streamlining the regulatory process for use of public lands is especially important in search and rescue operations. *“Having thought about these issues as a former member of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department’s Search and Rescue Team, I have decided to develop legislation that would require the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies to streamline and expedite the permitting process as well as waive any liability insurance requirements for non-profit, accredited search and rescue organizations for the purpose of carrying out privately requested missions on federal lands.”*

During this hearing, the Subcommittee heard testimony from stakeholders who experience firsthand how the federal government’s restrictive policies are not only standing in the way of recreation, but hurting job creation and economic growth. In many Western states, the federal government owns a majority of the land, and the ability to protect public access is crucial to their economic livelihoods. [Brian Merrill, CEO of Western River Expeditions](#), said *“63% of the land in Utah is under federal ownership. Only Nevada has a higher percentage of federal land ownership. What happens on that land is of critical importance to the economy of the state.”*

[Michael Friedman, Managing Partner at Adventure Partners LLC](#), noted that increased regulations put undue burdens on local businesses including recreation companies that are

an important component of the economy in rural communities. *“Recreation can no longer be an after-thought. Land managers are simply overwhelmed by the workload associated with mandated regulations, and lack the efficiency, agency leadership and culture of innovation required to succeed.”*

[Grant Simonds, Idaho Outfitters & Guides Association’s Executive Director](#), stressed to the Subcommittee that Idaho outfitters provide service to more than 200,000 persons each year that would not have the opportunity to enjoy a guided vacation without the assistance of an outfitter. He said, *“Outfitting is an important contributor to the Idaho rural economy. Reduction of the trail maintenance backlog and elimination of cost recovery for NEPA compliance would assist in maintaining viable small businesses and options for the public that chooses an outfitted vacation to enjoy our public lands.”*

Federal regulations on small businesses that drive these local economies come in all shapes and sizes. For example, insurance requirements by the federal government on small businesses have increased insurance rates. **[Teresa Kauffman](#)**, who runs a small horse farm and riding stable near Reno, NV, told the Subcommittee, *“I do not see anything good coming from the higher insurance rates. Small local outfitters will not be able to finance the increases and go out of business.”* **[Scott McFarland, owner of High Point Adventures](#)**, agreed saying *“Another way public lands will suffer an intended resource loss is by choosing to increase the liability insurance policies that are required for all commercial outfitters and guides.”*

The Subcommittee heard from other witnesses whose testimony echoed a common theme that the federal government’s regulatory overreach is greatly limiting public use of federal lands. **[John Duncan, managing partner at Telluride Fly Fishing Co. Inc](#)**, said, *“Outfitters can easily be pushed out of business by federal policies and other factors that affect trip margins and the operating playing field.”*

[Rick Lindsey, President, Chairman and CEO of Prime Insurance Company](#), agreed that the federal government’s regulatory overreach is burdensome on stakeholders. *“I have been personally informed by many Concessioners and Federal Permit Holders around the country that their small businesses have been directly targeted and significantly harmed by these federal agencies. It is clear to me that these agencies are trying to put small operators out of business.”*

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