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

Opening Statement of
Chairman Rob Bishop
Committee on Natural Resources

On Wednesday, June 10, 2015

1324 Longworth House Office Building

Full Committee Markup on H.R. 387, H.R. 521, H.R. 1289, H.R. 1992, H.R. 2295, H.R. 2358 & H.R. 2647

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Today, the Committee will mark-up several important pieces of legislation. Though all are good bills, I want to mention three in particular that will improve management of our nation's federal land and energy resources and safer transmission of electricity.

The first one, H.R. 2647, authored by Mr. Westerman, would jump-start the Forest Service's largely motionless management of our nation's forests. Due in large part to a web of regulatory processes and lengthy legal challenges, the Service has become fundamentally incapable of fulfilling its primary mission to sustainably manage the resources entrusted in its care. Today, as much as one-third of the National Forest System is at high risk of catastrophic wildfire. . This year the Service plans on thinning on less than two percent of the identified high risk acreage. This is unacceptable. We simply cannot afford to wait.

Building upon existing workable ideas, this bill will ensure the Forest Service has the tools necessary to treat federal forestlands before they are leveled by devastating fires and disease while still ensuring thorough environmental review.

The bill also allows the quick removal of dead trees and the rapid reforestation of areas devastated by wildfires or other catastrophic events. At a recent hearing on a draft of the bill, the Chief of the Forest Service expressed his encouragement and willingness to work on ideas in the bill, which is better than the dozens of veto threats put forward in recent weeks by the Administration on other things. Surely, Congress must responsibly fund current emergency response needs, but we must also address the underlying barriers to healthier and less fire-prone forest lands. That's precisely what this legislation does.

The second bill, H.R. 2295, introduced by Mr. MacArthur, recognizes the importance of future planning for our nation's expanding natural gas production by identifying "National Energy Security Corridors" on federal lands. These corridors would be used for future pipeline rights of way routes to deliver natural gas to underserved areas of the nation, particularly in the East, which face higher than average energy costs. The bill also makes clear that an Act of Congress shouldn't be required for the Park Service simply to negotiate rights-of-way for routes needing to cross Park Service lands as they have had to do five times already in recent years.

The bill ensures state input and a transparent and predictable planning process consistent with NEPA, and encourages less dependence on foreign sources of energy throughout the nation.

Finally, H.R. 2358, the "Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act," introduced by Mr. Zinke, helps ensure the reliability of nearly 100,000 miles of electricity transmission and distribution power lines on federal forested areas... This bill creates federal agency consistency and accountability to minimize fire hazards created by trees contacting these lines.

These bipartisan bills are supported by outside groups and they promote good policies. While protecting the environment, they seek to enhance and better utilize our nation's forests, meet increased transmission needs and promote energy security using American-made natural gas, and ensure reliability of electricity that serves tens of millions of customers, particularly those in rural areas.

I look forward to moving these bipartisan bills forward, and I thank the great work of my colleagues in putting them together.