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

**Opening Statement of
Chairman Rob Bishop**
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing on
"Payments in Lieu of Taxes"
Friday, October 14, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.

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As prepared for delivery:

Today we will hear testimony on the history and construction of PILT, how PILT payments are configured and the impact federal land management decisions have on surrounding communities.

While PILT was enacted to compensate local governments for lost property tax revenues on non-taxable federally owned land, it never fully accounted for the numerous management prescriptions that accompany that land.

Not all federal/public lands are created equal. PILT does not adjust for variations in land use designations, especially if moving from accessible multiple-use to a more restrictive or non-impairment management status.

PILT has become an essential lifeline for many rural counties. Since more than half of all the land in the West is owned and managed by the federal government, PILT has a significant impact on the rural economies of Western States.

PILT is not an equalizer. While PILT is a necessary source of funds for rural, primarily western counties, it often does not adequately reflect the economic opportunities available through active management and use of federal public lands.

When land management decisions reduce access and utilization of natural resources, local economies bear the brunt. Too often vital economic opportunities and resources, including traditional and renewable energy resources, are lost. Again, PILT cannot and does not fill that void.

PILT alone is not an adequate reimbursement for an absentee federal landlord, especially one that pushes additional reductions in access and multiple-use on our public lands.

Contrary to claims by the administration and others, the designation of monuments and wilderness are not a boon to local economies, but rather a detriment in most scenarios.

I look forward to hearing more about the work Dr. Yonk and his colleagues have done that clearly calls into question the validity of recent testimony before this Subcommittee by the Executive Director of Headwaters Economics.

America is in the midst of a recession with elevated unemployment, yet the Obama Administration continues to push a “wilderness agenda” that competes with our national priorities of job creation and domestic energy independence. This is counter-productive. At a time when budgets are tight around the nation, and particularly in the rural West, the Obama Administration needs to closely evaluate the real impact of advancing a “wilderness agenda.”

To lock-up millions of acres of public lands in the West, without Congressional approval, resulting in restricted access for energy production, recreation, and other job-creating economic activities, would devastate these rural counties that unfairly bear the brunt of these restrictive land management designations.

With the expiration of full funding for PILT looming in fiscal year 2012, the interests and livelihoods of all residents and stakeholders should be considered and protected when making land use decisions.

Land use designations such as national monuments and wilderness should be initiated at the local level, not out of pressure from Washington without adequate understanding of the impact on local communities who are too often left shouldering the heavy burden of these dictates.

The Republican Majority in Congress understands that we are at a critical juncture when it comes to managing our nation’s assets and the current state of our economy mandates that we do more with less.

It is imperative that we begin to manage our federal lands and natural resources for a maximum return on conservation, economic and public benefit.

Improved management of our federal lands and resources will create much-needed jobs, amplify conservation efforts and make America more self-reliant. This approach will help to keep PILT-reliant counties productive and viable.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.