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Opening Statement by
The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
At the Oversight Hearing on:

"Forest Service Regulatory Roadblocks to Productive Land Use and Recreation: Proposed Planning Rule, Special-Use Permits, and Travel Management"
November 15, 2011

As prepared for delivery:

Federal regulations, particularly with regard to land-use, is a topic of much debate before this subcommittee. Given the federal government's ownership of over 600 million acres of abundant and accessible natural resources and natural wonders, we must ensure that policies are put in place so we can wisely and prudently balance the many competing and worthy uses of these lands and resources.

We continue that discussion today with the Forest Service and actions the agency is taking with regard to the 155 national forests and 20 grasslands the public has entrusted to its care. Those who have come to join us on the panel and in the audience today are on pins and needles in anticipation of a new planning rule that will dramatically affect the way those 175 units manage their resources.

Going back almost two years in the development of the proposed planning rule, many user groups and stakeholders have called on the Forest Service to correct the many problems with Forest Service planning that led former Chief Dale Bosworth to attribute the much used, yet appropriate, phrase "analysis paralysis" to the management of our federal lands. However, as our witnesses will tell us today, we fear that much of this input has fallen on deaf ears as the rule that was proposed on Valentine's Day of this year will continue, if not exacerbate, the downward spiral of management on our national forests.

Whether it is various insect and disease infestations, unnaturally-overgrown forest stands, catastrophic wildfire, or any combination of such, no one can deny that our National Forests are in dire straits. National forests are an important and necessary source of economic activity and recreation for local communities and the public. This resource needs to be managed for the benefit of all users and this cannot be done under a planning process that leaves land managers spinning their wheels on solutions in search of problems and still winding up in court at the end of the day.

While I understand the agency has every intention of finalizing a rule as we speak, I hope that the testimony presented today will be taken into account to ensure that the final planning rule works for the stakeholders it is intended to serve.

I also look forward to hearing testimony on the ongoing implementation of the Travel Management Rule as well as the recent concerns with special-use permits and water rights. My colleague, Mr. Tipton, recently wrote Secretary Vilsack a letter highlighting issues that need to be addressed. Water rights are a sacred issue in the West and any attempt to upset the balance of state water law and primacy is something to be taken very seriously.

With that, I thank our witnesses for being here and I now recognize Ranking Member Grijalva for any opening statement he might have.