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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

***“The Northern Long Eared Bat: The Federal Endangered Species Act
and the Impacts of a Listing on Pennsylvania and 37 Other States”***
Monday, September 08, 2014

“Today is the final in a series of field hearings the House Natural Resources Committee has held over the past four years on the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The goal of this effort has been to find common ground on the need to improve and update the forty year old federal law so that we can help protect species and people in the 21st century. There are ways to do both, beginning with data transparency and utilizing the expertise of state, local and private efforts while fulfilling the worthwhile goal of species recovery.

These hearings have taken us from Fresno, California; Longview, Washington; Billings, Montana; Casper, Wyoming; Batesville, Arkansas to the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As we have witnessed, the ESA is no longer just a western issue – it is now affecting the eastern United States and that’s what this hearing is about.

I am pleased to join several House colleagues here today in the State Capitol to examine one of the most sweeping ESA listing proposals arising out of the Obama Administration’s 2011 mega-settlements with the Center for Biological Diversity: the proposed endangered listing of the Northern Long-Eared Bat. These federal regulations could impact a wide swath of the country.

This map illustrates just how broad of an area is affected. Unfortunately, though 38 states are affected, the Fish and Wildlife Service has not held even a single public hearing on its proposal or its nexus to other regulations that would directly impact millions of acres of private, local, state, and federal lands and restrict or shut down a host of activities on them. I might add, it has been over 20 years since the federal government listed the Northern Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest, and the resulting ESA policies of that decision have shut down more than 80 percent of the timber industry there, placed more than 9 million acres of forests off limits, and decimated hundreds of thousands of acres of forests and owl habitat from catastrophic wildfires due to poor management every year.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the group seeking to list the bat under ESA, acknowledges that “little is known about population trends” for the bat, and that the small amount of population-level data “makes any conclusion provisional at best.” Yet, they

blame farming, forest management and other man-made activities as the cause of bat decline.

Ironically, however, the likely primary cause for any documented decline of the bats is not caused by any human-related activity, but rather from a disease transmitted mostly from bats to other bats called "White Nose Syndrome." It seems to me that efforts should focus on that issue, rather than creating a federal endangered species solution in search of a problem

Yet, that is what may happen with the federal Fish and Wildlife Service's arbitrary settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity, which has paved the way for a federal designation as soon as early next year. This is despite State Natural Resource Department Directors who raised strong concerns that they were shut out of the federal planning process, and that these federal bat guidelines are overly restrictive, based on insufficient data, and would have a "crippling effect" on hundreds of thousands of landowners and the forest industry.

I will conclude by saying that everyone wants to protect bats because they are good for the environment and good for people because of how many insects they can devour. But, the question is over the best way to help the bat population. Federal edicts that ignore state efforts and data and impose one-size-fits-all solutions is not the most cooperative way to achieve this objective. We have expert witnesses here today to help find solutions that will protect bats and Pennsylvania's economy. I look forward to their testimony and thank my colleagues Congressman Thompson and Congressman Perry for hosting this hearing."

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