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

Opening Statement of
The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources
Before the Full Natural Resources Committee
Oversight Hearing on:

"American Energy Initiative: Identifying Roadblocks to Wind and Solar Energy on Public Lands and Waters, Part II"

Tuesday, June 1, 2011 at 11:30 AM

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America has been blessed with many different kinds of natural resources and there is no doubt that we need to utilize all of them to significantly reduce our reliance on unfriendly foreign energy. House Republicans' American Energy Initiative is an all-of-the-above approach to addressing our energy needs, working to ensure affordable prices and creating good paying American energy jobs. Renewable and alternative energy sources, such as wind, solar, geothermal, and hydropower are an integral part of any long-term energy strategy and there is tremendous potential to use our public lands and waters to help foster and expand their development.

Today's hearing is the second in a series to identify roadblocks to wind and solar energy on public lands. On May 13th, the Full Committee heard from Obama Administration representatives when we received testimony from BLM Director Bob Abbey and BOEM Director Michael Bromwich. Today we will hear testimony from representatives of the renewable energy industry who are struggling to fight through the red-tape that is hindering clean energy projects and slowing job creation.

While the Obama Administration deserves credit for some advances on facilitation of their renewable energy projects on federal lands, significant obstacles exist to renewable energy development. Ironically, bureaucratic delays, unnecessary lawsuits and burdensome environmental regulations impede our ability to harness wind and solar energy on public lands.

As we learned at the last hearing, only one percent of BLM's "solar energy zones," created from over 120 million acres of BLM land, is currently being offered for streamlined solar energy production.

Often, BLM's regulatory structure is so complicated and slow that companies don't bother applying, opting instead for private land. Our public land has specifically been designated as multi-use. It simply makes no sense that the ability to access it, including for energy development, is so cumbersome and uninviting.

Even more stunning is that the perpetrators of many of the lawsuits that are blocking solar and wind production on federal lands are often the exact same groups who are supposedly the leading proponents for renewable energy development.

Time after time renewable energy projects that the Obama Administration has highlighted its support for have been canceled, held up or defunded due to their own policies or their inability to follow through with licensing or permitting.

The Cape Wind project off of the Massachusetts coastline is an excellent example of an offshore wind project that has suffered from years of setbacks. While the Cape Wind project received construction approval in April – it was a ten year process that was subject to numerous bureaucratic delays and red tape.

BOEM recently announced a Request for Interest from the public and received 11 submissions from 10 companies expressing commercial leasing interest. However, after receiving the submission, BOEMRE announced it was reducing the leasing area by more than half. There is tremendous wind energy potential off the coast of Massachusetts but this Administration decision appears to not have been based upon any scientific studies regarding the potential for wind development in this area.

There are clearly abundant opportunities on our public lands and waters for homegrown American energy, but until the restrictive government inefficiencies and politically-driven lawsuits are addressed, they may never reach their true energy production potential. These policies cost American jobs, block clean energy production and increase our dependence on foreign sources of energy.

I'm looking forward to hearing from the witnesses today to learn more about the challenges they are facing and what Congress may be able to do to better facilitate the renewable energy production on our public lands.