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TODD YOUNG
CHIEF OF STAFF

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of Chairman Doc Hastings Committee on Natural Resources

On Wednesday, April 30, 2014

1324 Longworth House Office Building

Full Committee Markup on H.R. 4315, H.R. 4316, H.R. 4317, H.R. 4318

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“Today we are meeting to markup four sensible and targeted proposals to improve and modernize the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Making legislative changes to the ESA is not something this Committee has rushed into or taken lightly. In fact, today is the result of nearly three and a half years of Committee oversight. We have held nine Full Committee hearings with testimony from 54 witnesses and have also held numerous Subcommittee hearings that have dealt with the ESA.

We intentionally took a slow, thoughtful approach; heard from all sides; and gathered hundreds of public comments before entering into this legislative phase.

We did it this way because I believe there are key areas where we can come together and actually make updates to this law. There is widespread support for conserving endangered species, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement. This is a 40-year-old law that was last reauthorized in 1988; certainly there are ways to bring this law into the 21st century and make it work better for both species and people.

That is our goal today. It is NOT to move forward with sweeping, comprehensive reforms to the ESA or to overhaul the law. That should be obvious to anyone who has read the bills being considered today.

These are four common sense bills that are very narrowly focused and make targeted improvements to the law in the areas of transparency and species recovery.

The bills have been endorsed by over 25 organizations including, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Family Farm Alliance, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, American Farm Bureau Federation, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Washington Farm Bureau, Oregon Farm Bureau, Public Power Council, and National Association of Conservation Districts. I ask unanimous consent that letters of support from these groups be admitted for the record.

In a moment I will further explain the details of each bill. However, if we were to put politics aside for a moment, I believe they include proposals that both Republicans and Democrats can support.

Increasing transparency; posting data online; enhancing state, local, and tribal participation; and reducing taxpayer-financed attorneys fees to help direct taxpayer dollars towards recovery efforts are small, but important steps in making smart and sensible updates to the ESA.

I hope today we can find some common ground. Even the Obama Administration's Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has acknowledged that there could be "opportunities to make incremental improvements" to the ESA. I obviously agree and look forward to moving that process forward today."

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