

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2010

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, II
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall,

Due to the great and justified public concern regarding the growing violence on the U.S-Mexico border, we request that the Natural Resources Committee hold a hearing in September on the increasing use of federal lands along the border by criminal cartels, the environmental damage to these lands resulting from illegal activities, and the extent to which federal land management policies interfere with effective border security operations.

Drug smuggling, murders, human trafficking and other illegal activities have become prevalent on America's public lands, including National Parks, National Forests, Wildlife Refuges, and other protected areas near our Southern border. In June, the Washington Post reported that since 2006 over 23,000 people have been killed due to drug violence in Mexico—violence that is spilling into, and through, our federal lands.

In April, Arizona rancher Robert Krenz was shot and killed by a criminal who illegally crossed the border on federal land. The following month, Pinal County Sheriff Deputy Louie Puroll was shot while tracking drug smugglers through federal land. In June, the Houston Chronicle reported that Mexican and U.S. authorities were "secretly scrambling" to thwart a plot by the Zeta cartel to blow up Falcon Dam on the Rio Grande. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been forced to close portions of Buenos Ares National Wildlife Refuge due to drug cartel activity, effectively ceding part of U.S. territory to drug runners. Most recently, on August 31, the Washington Times reported that the Bureau of Land Management posted signs 100 miles north of the Arizona-Mexico border on Interstate 8, warning the public that they were entering an "active drug and human smuggling area" and may encounter "armed criminals and smuggling vehicles traveling at high rates of speed."

As border security efforts focus on populated urban areas and major cross-border roadways, federal lands have become a prime location for violent criminal activities, endangering the public who should have the right to enjoy their public lands without their very lives being threatened. These potentially deadly situations have been exacerbated due to access restrictions placed on U.S. Border Patrol by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. It is simply unacceptable that the actions of these Departments are making border security more difficult on federal lands.

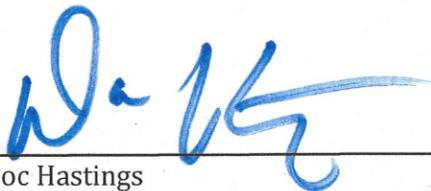
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As the Committee of jurisdiction over the majority of our federal lands and considering the gravity of the current situation, we believe it is this Committee's duty to act to ensure that both public safety and environmental protection are achieved on public lands by taking the steps necessary to fully secure the border against cartels and criminals. The American people deserve straight answers from the agencies responsible for protecting our borders and public lands. There is simply no excuse for allowing government policies to continue that hamper the Border Patrol and create paths of access to violent criminal activity. This situation is what led Republicans to introduce a legislative solution (H.R. 5016) that very simply ensures the Border Patrol has the authority to achieve operational control of the border on public lands.

In addition to calling both Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano before the Committee, we request that a hearing include witnesses from the relevant agencies, including the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. State and local law enforcement should also be included.

It is critical that this Committee act to address the situation without further delay.

Sincerely,



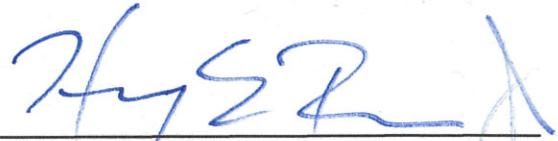
Doc Hastings
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources



Rob Bishop
Ranking Member
Sub on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands



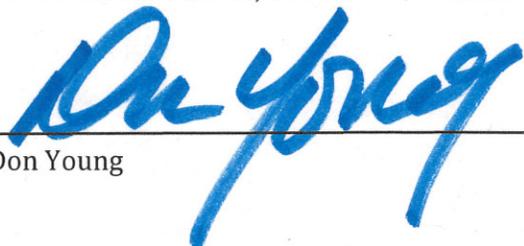
Doug Lamborn
Ranking Member
Sub on Energy and Mineral Resources



Henry E. Brown, Jr.
Ranking Member
Sub on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife



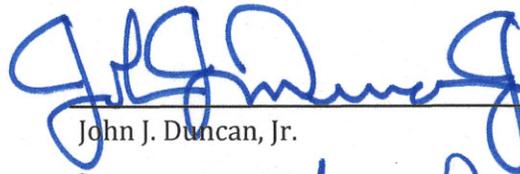
Tom McClintock
Ranking Member
Sub on Water and Power



Don Young



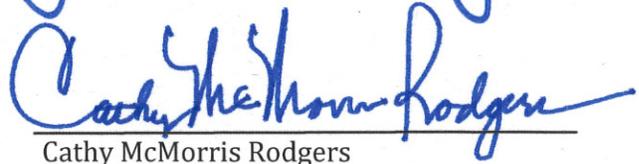
Elton Gallegly



John J. Duncan, Jr.



Jeff Flake



Cathy McMorris Rodgers



Louie Gohmert



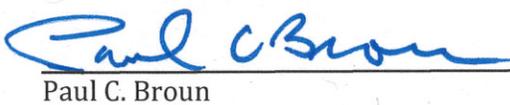
Bill Shuster



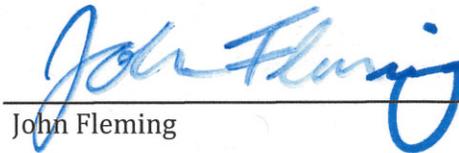
Adrian Smith



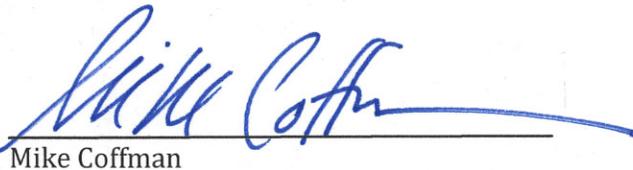
Robert J. Wittman



Paul C. Broun



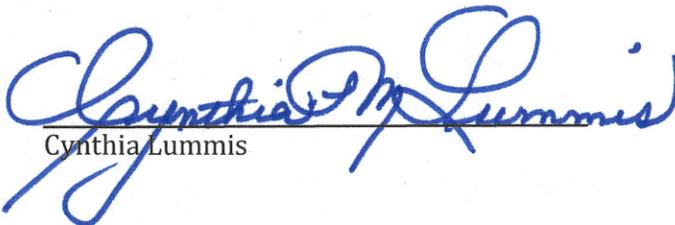
John Fleming



Mike Coffman



Jason Chaffetz



Cynthia Lummis



Bill Cassidy