

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN DOC HASTINGS

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Witnesses Call for Increased Public Participation, Transparency in Federal Land Management Decision-Making Process

ELKO, NV – Today, the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held an [oversight field hearing](#) in Elko, Nevada entitled, “*Explosion of Federal Regulations Threatening Jobs and Economic Survival in the West.*” At the hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01) and Representative Mark Amodei (NV-02) heard testimony from the U.S. Forest Service, local officials and impacted citizens about county interaction with federal land management agencies over land-use regulations and state water rights.

“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 vital resource needs to be managed for the benefit of all users and I strongly believe that there is plenty of it to go around,” [said Chairman Bishop \(UT-01\)](#). “Today, we heard from witnesses who described a variety of situations in which their popular and longstanding use of public land and water has been impacted by not only increasing regulations and policy, but also the Forest Service’s implementation of such. 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.”

“Over the last few decades we have experienced a fundamental shift in resource development and forest management that has resulted in decreased access to our public lands and threats to our water rights. The federal government’s cooperation with local, state, and tribal governments concerning these important issues has quickly deteriorated. In the West, as exemplified in my home state of Nevada, access to our public lands is critical to job creation and our economic viability. I hope our concerns regarding Nevada water law and federal collaboration in travel management don’t fall on deaf ears so that we can once again manage the lands for the benefit of all,” [said Rep. Amodei \(NV-02\)](#).

Under the 2005 Travel Management Rule, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is required to develop travel management plans for designating a system of roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use within our National Forests and Grasslands. In implementing the rule, the USFS is required to collaborate with federal, state, county and other local government entities as well as tribal governments in the route and area designation process. However, according to [Mr. Howard Hutchinson, Executive Director of the Coalition of Arizona/New Mexico Counties](#), “repeated attempts to secure local government participation and meaningful input into the NFMA, NEPA, ESA and other planning processes

have been met with extreme resistance by federal agencies.” Mr. Hutchinson cited several examples where the federal government ignored local opinion in favor of restricting access on public lands.

Implementation of the proposed travel management plans will severely hurt economies throughout the West. According to [Elko County Commissioner Charlie Myers](#)’ testimony, *“Seventy-five percent of the lands used for outdoor recreation in Elko County are managed by the Federal Government (7.5 million ac.). The total economic impact of outdoor recreation to Elko County is almost \$165 million.”* Mr. Myers discussed the lack of scientific evidence supporting the need for limiting access to Forest Service lands. *“NEPA requires that an action such as prohibition of motorized vehicle use must be based on the best available commercial scientific data. Elko County has asked the Forest Service on four different occasions for the scientific data used for the ROD determination and the last request for this data was through the Freedom of Information Act. We have yet to receive any data.”*

[Gerald Temoke, Chairman of the Elko Band Council for the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone](#), spoke of the importance of public lands access to the tribes of Nevada. *“We have been walking, then riding and now driving around these mountains for hundreds, more likely thousands of years, many county residence have been here for generations. Most of us spend our lifetimes here. This is our home.”* Mr. Temoke expressed deep concern and disappointment over the lack of consultation by USFS on the proposed travel management plans that would strip tribes of access to roads they regularly use for game retrieval, wood cutting, gathering of food, getting close to certain medicinal plants & roots. *“Existing roads that are not on the Forest Service map are considered not to exist. If these roads are not allowed to be used after a short period of time they will for all intents and purposes disappear. ... The Forest Service never consulted or attempted to consult with us until after it was announced that there would be a Congressional Hearing.”*

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