

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, May 14, 2012  
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CONTACT: [Crystal Feldman](#), [Spencer Pederson](#) or [Jill Strait](#)  
202-226-9019

## Field Hearing Stresses Need for Active Forest Management to Suppress Bark Beetle Epidemic, Protect Water and Power Supplies

**Montrose, CO** – Today, the House Subcommittees on Water and Power and National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held a [joint oversight field hearing](#) in Montrose, Colorado entitled, “*Logs in the Road: Eliminating Federal Red Tape and Excessive Litigation to Create Healthy Forests, Jobs and Abundant Water and Power Supplies.*” At the hearing, Subcommittee Chairmen Rob Bishop (UT-01) and Tom McClintock (CA-04) and Colorado Congressman Scott Tipton (CO-03) heard from witnesses about how the bark beetle epidemic and inadequate forest management have devastated federal lands throughout the West, leaving them susceptible to catastrophic wildfire, endangering neighboring communities and putting water and power supplies at risk.

*“The Mountain Pine Beetle has turned most of Colorado, not to mention pine forests throughout the West, into a sea of dead and dying trees. Sadly, decades of the federal government’s failed forest policies have in part allowed this native insect to reach epidemic proportions that have impacted over three million acres in Colorado alone. Bark beetles have so far claimed over 40 million acres nationwide – equal to nearly 20% of the National Forest System,” said Chairman Bishop. “Fortunately, we are in the position to change course on this issue. Active, scientific forest management – when not impeded by inflexible regulations and frivolous appeals and lawsuits – can begin the process of restoring our forests. This epidemic was decades in the making and will not be curbed overnight, but it is important to ensure that our federal land managers have the flexibility to implement forest management projects and utilize our partners to maintain infrastructure that is necessary to ensure the long term health and productivity of the land and natural resources that have been entrusted to their care.”*

Throughout the West, there has been a severe decline in federal forest health caused by the absence of active forest management. The lack of long-term timber harvesting has left forests overcrowded and blanketed with dead and diseased trees. Unnatural forest density coupled with drought and wildfires cause further damage to the landscape and water supplies. High intensity wildfires strip vegetation and alter soil composition, which increases the probability of severe erosion, floods and surface water pollution to rivers, lakes and reservoirs. As a headwaters area, the State of Colorado supplies water to eighteen western states.

*“Today’s hearing was yet another vivid indictment of the long-term mismanagement of our public lands. These policies have systematically transformed once-thriving communities into*

*victims of economic devastation, unemployment, overgrown and diseased forests, overdrawn watersheds, jeopardized transmission lines and increasingly intense and frequent forest fires. The testimony we gathered from local experts will facilitate unraveling of the paralyzing tangle of litigation, over-regulation, and endless deliberation that have misguided our federal agencies so far from their public trust,” said Chairman McClintock.*

Another factor contributing to the decline of forest health is the bark beetle epidemic. Since 1996, bark beetles have ravaged Western forests, infesting over 41.7 million acres of state, private and federal land nationwide. Even though the bark beetle is native to the western United States, poor forest health conditions caused by the lack of proper forest management, warm winters and drought have exacerbated the spread of the epidemic. As a result, stands of dead trees left in their wake are susceptible to catastrophic wildfires leaving neighboring communities, water supplies and power lines at risk.

*“You don’t have to look far from this spot to see the devastating impact that decades of federal obstruction to effective management have had on Colorado’s once healthy forests. Dead timber, lost jobs, contaminated water, and landscapes eviscerated by catastrophic wildfire are hallmarks of a bureaucratic process that places politics and inaction ahead of common sense and conservation,” said Rep. Tipton. “The witnesses today clearly made the case that much of this has been preventable. By removing federal obstacles and allowing access for responsible forest management, we can reverse the trend, restore and protect precious habitats and water supplies, preserve our scenic natural beauty, reinvigorate local economies, create needed jobs, and reduce the threat of wildfire.”*

Lawsuits and fear of litigation have directly impacted how the U.S. Forest Service handles forest management operations. Environmental activist groups have exploited the administrative process provided by NEPA and other laws to object to projects on both procedural and substantive grounds, using lawsuits and legal actions to prevent timber harvesting and other multiple-uses. Despite historically serving as one of the few revenue-producing agencies in the federal government, the Forest Service now spends \$2 for every \$1 in receipts it collects from timber harvest or other multiple-use activities.

Witnesses at the hearing agreed that the best long term solution to resolving the bark beetle situation is to improve forest management. Restoring active forest management will not only aid in restoring forest health, but it will also improve water supplies and wildlife habitat, protect the electricity rights-of-way on federal lands so as to prevent widespread power outages and fire danger, as well as create much-needed jobs in the surrounding communities.

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