



To: Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Committee Staff; Aniela Butler (Aniela.Butler@mail.house.gov) (801-971-2937), Brandon Miller (Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov) (202-603-4782), and Terry Camp (Terry.Camp@mail.house.gov) (435-512-1326)
Date: Monday, March 22, 2021
Subject: Oversight Hearing titled “Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America’s Public Lands”

The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America’s Public Lands” on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 10:00 am EST online via Cisco WebEx.

Member offices are requested to notify Brandon Miller no later than Monday, March 22, 2021, at 4:30pm EST, if their Member intends to participate. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee’s electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Please contact David DeMarco (David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov) or Everett Winnick (Everett.Winnick@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Preservationist policies that lock up millions of acres of land and destroy multiple-use management drastically harm rural economies, restrict access and recreational opportunities, and prohibit desperately needed management of our overgrown, diseased, and dying public lands.
- Restrictive, overlapping, and burdensome regulations and land use designations such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national monuments, and critical habitat designations do little to actually protect the environment while killing jobs and harming rural America.
- In contrast, true conservation and innovation can promote land management policies that will restore healthy and resilient forests and public lands, mitigate the threat of catastrophic wildfire, improve access for sportsmen and women and outdoor recreationists, and enhance the many other economic uses and activities that Americans rely upon from our public lands.

II. WITNESSES

- **The Honorable Brad Little**, Governor, State of Idaho [Republican Witness]

Governor Little is a fourth-generation cattle and sheep rancher who is extremely well versed in the stewardship of our public lands. He will focus on the importance of preserving the multiple uses of our public lands while working collaboratively to address issues like forest management and access to public lands.

- **Sharon Buccino**, Adjunct Professor, University of Wyoming College of Law
- **Molly Cross, Ph.D.**, Director of Climate Change Adaptation, North & South America, Science Director, WCS Climate Adaptation Fund
- **Mary Ellen Sprenkel**, President & CEO, The Corps Network

III. BACKGROUND

Overview

During his presidential campaign, Joe Biden released his “Build Back Better” plan which, among other issues, focused on clean energy mandates, regulations impeding fossil fuel production, and environmental justice. The plan endorsed the Green New Deal as a “crucial framework for meeting the climate challenges we face.”¹ The plan also argued for conserving 30% of America’s lands and waters by 2030 (commonly referred to as the 30x30 Initiative) as a means to protect biodiversity and slow extinction rates.² The proposal made no references to the legal multiple use and sustained yield mandates of several land management agencies or the need to actively manage public lands, particularly in the West, to avoid catastrophic wildfires and promote rural jobs.

A core tenet of the plan called for creating a “Civilian Climate Corps” tasked with “conserving our public lands” and “addressing the changing climate.”³ While this costly, progressive proposal is sure to be divisive, the plan offers a few encouraging tasks this new Corps would undertake, including using “science-based techniques to thin and sustainably manage our forests, making them more resilient to wildfire and enhancing their carbon intake and habitat integrity.”⁴ The plan also suggested the Corps could improve recreational trails and address invasive species.

Following the “Build Back Better” theme, as well as the early administrative and legislative actions on national monuments and wilderness designations, the Democrats would like to use this hearing to highlight their preservationist public lands priorities. In particular, they will focus on climate change, the 30x30 Initiative, restrictive land use designations, and the Civilian Climate Corps. In contrast, Republicans will argue against the unscientific conflation between preservation and conservation and promote the need to actively manage our federal lands to reduce catastrophic wildfires, improve rural economies and create jobs, open up access for sportsmen and women and outdoor recreationists, and provide other numerous benefits to the American people.

Preservationist Proposals from the Biden Administration and House Democrats

¹ Biden-Harris, “The Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice,” <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>.

² Id.

³ Biden-Harris, “The Biden Plan to Build a Modern, Sustainable Infrastructure and Equitable Clean Energy Future,” <https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/>.

⁴ Id.

In the first two months of the Biden administration, Democrats have already begun an effort to lock up millions of acres of new land and shut down multiple use across the West in an effort to promote the “Build Back Better” plan and the 30x30 Initiative.

On January 20, 2021, President Biden issued an executive order (EO) on “Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis” that implemented a 60-day drilling moratorium, initiated a review process to restore previous national monument boundaries and management, revoked the permit for the Keystone XL Pipeline, and revoked Trump-era executive actions on the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and other regulatory actions.⁵ A week later, the President issued an additional EO related to climate that included policies to enact a broader oil and gas moratorium, promote environmental justice, and evaluate steps to preserve at least 30% of the nation’s lands and waters by 2030.⁶

The actions within the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee’s jurisdiction, including national monument boundary reviews and the 30x30 order, have been met with several questions about basic definitions and transparency. In particular, the January 20th EO directed the Secretary of the Interior to review “restoring national monument boundaries” for three modified national monuments including Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument off of the Atlantic Coast. Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, recently confirmed that the administration will push back the timeline of the original 60-day review as she was confirmed less than one week before it was originally set to expire.⁷ Despite pushing back this deadline, the administration has provided no details of the review process, no criteria under which the monuments will be reviewed, no indication on whether they will open this review for public comment, and has not responded to Committee briefing requests on this issue.⁸

Regarding the 30x30 Initiative, the January 27th EO directed the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with other cabinet officials and the Council on Environmental Quality, to submit a report within 90 days that recommends “steps that the United States should take, working with State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments, agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, and other key stakeholders, to achieve the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.”⁹ The report is due on April 27, 2021.

The concept of conserving 30% of our nation’s lands and waters began in earnest last year. The genesis of the movement started from a 2019 article called “A Global Deal for Nature,” which argued for protecting 30% of the Earth by 2030 and putting an additional 20% in “climate

⁵ President Biden, “Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,” January 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis/>.

⁶ President Biden, “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” January 27, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

⁷ Bethany Rodgers, “Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to visit Utah ahead of decision on Bears Ears, Grand Staircase monuments,” March 17, 2021, The Salt Lake Tribune, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2021/03/17/interior-secretary-deb/>.

⁸ Natural Resources Republicans, “Westerman Requests Transparency on National Monument Boundary Reviews,” March 8, 2021, <https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/newsroom/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=409502>.

⁹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

stabilization areas.”¹⁰ Importantly, this paper argued for 30% of the *entire Earth* to be protected, not 30% of the *United States*. As an extension of this, some groups are arguing for protecting half of the planet by 2030 or 2050 (50x50). Last year, then-Representative Haaland introduced a resolution stating that it should be the goal of the United States to conserve 30% of lands and waters by 2030.¹¹

The baseline of what is considered “protected” or “conserved” is not clearly established and will be a key point of clarification needed from the administration. For example, some environmental groups and Rep. Haaland’s resolution stated only 12% of lands are protected (which roughly correlates to the most restrictive land designations – i.e. National Parks and wilderness areas). However, the federal government already owns 28% of the land in the United States (primarily in Western states). Following Democrats’ logic, this means that the 30x30 Initiative would need to turn every acre of federal land into wilderness and would still fall 2% short of its goal.

In addition to the Biden Administration’s actions, Committee Democrats are also moving forward with legislation outside of regular order to lock up new areas of land. Just last month, House Democrats put H.R. 803 on the House floor, the “Protecting America’s Wilderness and Public Lands Act.” This lopsided wilderness package contained 1.5 million acres of new wilderness and 1.2 million acres of permanent mineral withdrawals, an area equivalent to the size of President Biden’s home state of Delaware.¹² Despite the fact that the 30x30 policy is currently undefined, the administration released a Statement of Administration Policy on the bill explicitly stating that it was consistent with the 30x30 goal.¹³

Conservation Proposals from House Republicans

In contrast to the preservationist approaches of the administration and House Democrats, House Republicans are promoting access through conservation and innovation. Rural Americans depend on working public lands for recreation and enjoyment, economic development and job creation, and multiple other uses. Unfortunately, our public lands are in dire need of active management and are susceptible to insects, disease, invasive species, and increasingly devastating fire seasons year after year. Many federal forests are overloaded with dangerously dry fuels that have been allowed to accumulate, leaving them unhealthy, overgrown, and fire-prone.¹⁴ The driving cause of these uncontrollable infernos that have continuously wreaked havoc on our western landscapes and communities is unquestionably the poor management of our national forests and public lands, not climate change.¹⁵

Ironically, by delaying or cancelling important active forest management activities, extreme environmental groups are actually contributing to climate change and creating a less healthy environment. Forests have historically been carbon sinks, that capture significant amounts of

¹⁰ Dinerstein, et al. “A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding Principles, milestones, and targets.” *Science Advances* Vol. 5, No. 4, April 19, 2019, <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/4/eaaw2869>.

¹¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/835>

¹² <https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/newsroom/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=409472>

¹³ https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SAP_HR-803.pdf

¹⁴ Ingram, Robert G. “Robert G. Ingram: Forest Fuel Management - the Ugly Truth.” *TheUnion.com*, October, 9, 2020, www.theunion.com/opinion/columns/robert-g-ingram-forest-fuel-management-the-ugly-truth/.

¹⁵ “Is Global Warming Fueling Increased Wildfire Risks?” Union of Concerned Scientists. July 24, 2018. Accessed January 31, 2019. <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/impacts/global-warming-and-wildfire.html#.XFNV7apKiUI>.

carbon as they grow. In recent years however, there has been a concerning shift, with many forests in the western United States now emitting more carbon than they capture.¹⁶ As trees mature, the rate that they capture carbon slows down, and as the trees die and decompose, they release the carbon back into the atmosphere.¹⁷ The amount of carbon emitted by these unhealthy forests is further increased by the catastrophic wildfires that quicken the release of carbon.¹⁸ The wildfires in California alone last year emitted roughly 112 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to the emissions of driving 24.2 million passenger cars for an entire year.¹⁹ These impacts are not limited to carbon alone, as catastrophic wildfires also destroy wildlife habitat, worsen air quality, and negatively effect watersheds and water quality. In contrast, active forest management provides significant benefits to the environment, to nearby communities, and to the economy.

Actively utilizing our public lands and resources not only improves the health of these lands, it contributes to rural economies and job creation as well. This is especially true in the western States, where roughly half the land is federally owned. For example, grazing activities provide important conservation and ecosystem benefits and sustain families for generations. Public lands ranchers have historically been good stewards of their grazing allotments, frequently paying out-of-pocket for water source management, wildfire fuels reduction, and species habitat restoration.²⁰ This stewardship provides significant cost savings for federal land management agencies who are responsible for managing millions of acres of public land. Additionally, ranchers often clear public trails, monitor recreation trends, and frequently serve as first responders to wildfires and other natural disasters.²¹ Republicans will continue to promote the benefits of multiple use, including grazing, for economic and environmental benefits.

Finally, Republicans will focus on the importance of recreating on and enjoying our public lands, particularly for the next generation of sportsmen and women. Reliable access not only sustains our nation's rich outdoor sporting tradition heritage, it significantly benefits the men and women that make up the industries that support it. Now more than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans should have ample, reliable access to public lands to hunt, fish, and recreate. Unfortunately, federal agencies often prevent or impede access for these activities, discouraging steady and continuous participation of sportsmen and women in traditional outdoor sporting activities and undermining the ability of everyday Americans to enjoy our public lands. Instead of

¹⁶ Murphy, Zoëann, and Chris Mooney. "Montana's Forests Have Swung from Pulling Carbon Dioxide out of the Air to Putting It Back Again." The Washington Post. January 29, 2019. Accessed January 31, 2019.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/gone-in-a-generation/forest-climate-change.html?utm_term=.8d7a6e691000.

¹⁷ O'Neil, Dr. Elaine. "Cut Trees to Save the Environment? – Who Knew." Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities. Accessed January 31, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/healthyforestshealthycommunities/videos/290559738314129/?_tn_=.d.P-R&eid=ARBUZgWqI7gqN3mlpbi0iJ7itV-11oVHdrHMcgqY8YUBoDhE5FgAqpMuusNI0QBz9cNCCpEk-ssB7Zu.

¹⁸ Malmsheimer, Robert W., Patrick Heffernan, Steve Brink, Douglas Crandall, Fred Deneke, Christopher Galik, Edmund Gee, John A. Helms, Nathan McClure, Michael Mortimer, Steve Ruddell, Matthew Smith, and John Stewart. "Forest Management Solutions for Mitigating Climate Change in the United States." Journal of Forestry, April/May 2008, 119. Accessed January 31, 2019. https://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/uploads/399/Forest_Management_Solutions_for_Mitigating_Climate_Change.pdf.

¹⁹ "California's 2020 Wildfire Emissions Akin to 24 Million Cars." *Bloomberg Law*, news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/californias-2020-wildfire-emissions-akin-to-24-million-cars.

²⁰ Barry, S. (2015). *The Benefits of Livestock Grazing - Livestock Grazing: A Conservation Tool on California's Annual Grasslands*. University of California.

²¹ Madsen, S. L. (2018, March 25). Rangeland Firefighting Provides Model for Ranchers and Government Workers to Collaborate. The Spokesman-Review.

further locking up lands through restrictive designations, these lands should be available to all Americans to fully utilize and enjoy.
