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CONTACT: [Jill Strait](#) or [Spencer Pederson](#) or [Crystal Feldman](#)
202-226-9019

Republicans Introduce Bill to Secure Border on Federal Lands, Protect Environment

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, House National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT), House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-WA), Homeland Security Committee Chairman Peter T. King (R-NY), Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX), and House Republican Conference Secretary John Carter (R-TX) introduced H.R. 1505, the *National Security and Federal Lands Protection Act*, to prohibit the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) from using environmental regulations to hinder U.S. Border Patrol from [securing our border on federal lands](#). The legislation would ensure Border Patrol, not federal land managers, have operational control of our borders.

Unfortunately, federal land managers are using environmental regulations to prevent Border Patrol from accessing portions of the 20.7 million acres along the U.S. southern border and over 1,000 miles of the U.S.-Canada border. Border Patrol agents are consistently unable to use motorized vehicles to patrol these areas or place electronic surveillance structures in strategic areas. As a result, our federal lands have become a highway open to criminals, drug smugglers, human traffickers and potentially terrorists. This has led to escalated violence and also caused destruction of the environment.

On Friday, April 15th the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands and the Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations Subcommittee will hold a [joint oversight hearing](#) titled *“The Border: Are Environmental Laws and Regulation Impeding Security and Harming the Environment?”* to examine this issue.

“This legislation takes the necessary and responsible steps to address the unacceptable restrictions that prevent Border Security experts from doing their jobs. Allowing public land managers and restrictive environmental policies, not Border Security experts, to dictate how we secure our nation’s borders and keep our country safe is counterintuitive, and as a result, has jeopardized the safety and security of all Americans. The federal lands along our border are a haven of criminal activity and the same environmental policies that are supposed to be protecting the lands are actually allowing them to be destroyed. In fact, what benefit these regulations are actually providing remains a mystery. I have seen firsthand the damage that has been done to our federal lands from trash, foot traffic and man-made fires. Providing Border Patrol with the necessary access to deter and apprehend those who cross through our federal lands illegally would deliver the greatest benefit to both national security and the long-term health of our federal lands,” – **Subcommittee Chairman Bishop.**

“We cannot allow the Obama Administration’s Interior Department to use environmental regulations to hinder front-line Border Patrol agents’ critical mission of securing our border from illegal immigrants, including potential terrorists. The current, senseless practice fails to protect our federal lands, which see a constant flow of illegal immigrants carelessly crossing them. It also fails to protect our homeland, which remains vulnerable to terrorists who seek to take advantage of unpatrolled Interior-managed lands.” – Chairman King

“The Government Accountability Office recently reported that less than half of the U.S.-Mexico border is under the ‘operational control’ of the Border Patrol. At the same time, the Administration has prevented the Border Patrol from accessing federal lands in the name of environmental preservation. This misguided decision has a two-fold effect. Because the Border Patrol is prohibited from securing federal lands, drug smugglers and human traffickers trample the earth and terrorize communities. And because the border remains porous, illegal immigrants continue to come to the United States. This doesn’t make sense, but our bill does. The American people – not the plants – need to be protected now. And by stopping the illegal activity along the border, we will preserve wilderness areas for future generations to enjoy.” – Chairman Smith

“Chairman Bishop’s bill is focused on the goals of protecting our environment and keeping our country safe. This bill would end the federal agency turf war along the border. It’s a common sense solution that I hope will have bipartisan support. I commend Rob Bishop for his determined pursuit of this vital national security and environmental issue.” – Chairman Hastings

“For one federal agency to prevent a second federal agency from doing its congressionally-mandated job in order to appease a third federal agency is the definition of dysfunctional government, and why there is such a thing as congressional oversight. Our Border Patrol officers are the best in the world at their job and will protect our citizens if we will simply do our job as legislators to remove the federal red tape that is preventing them from securing federal lands.” – House Republican Conference Secretary John Carter (TX-31)

National Security and Federal Lands Protection Act:

- Prohibits the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture from taking action on public lands which impede border security.
- Authorizes Secretary of Homeland Security to have immediate access to any public lands managed by Federal Government for purposes of securing the border.
- Border Patrol agents would have access to maintain and construct roads, construct fences, use vehicles to patrol and set up surveillance equipment.
- Exercises same environmental waiver authority found in the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 that Congress extended to DHS Secretary Chertoff in 2008 to construct U.S.-Mexico border fence
- Through that authority, prevents environmental regulations from impeding Homeland Security’s ability to have operational control of the U.S. border.

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