



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

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Witnesses: Federal Land & Water Grabs Must STOP *National Blueways Order an Assault on Economy & Property Rights*

West Plains, M.O. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a [field hearing](#) in West Plains, Missouri on “*Stopping Federal Land and Water Grabs: Protecting Property Rights from Washington, DC Edicts.*” The hearing examined the harmful effects of the Obama Administration’s National Blueways Order that imposes a unilateral federal watershed designation process with questionable legal authorities, little to no community input, and a lack of transparency.

“The principle focus of today’s hearing is the fever-dream of leftist environmental groups in conjunction with the Interior Department to declare vast watersheds as ‘National Blueways.’ As we review Obama Administration documents, we discover that the so-called rewards for the White River included imposing buffer zones, seizing almost 300,000 acres of land, forcing conservation plans on the region’s farms, and banning human activity from flood plains,” said Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock (CA-04). “To date, the Obama Administration has met the Subcommittee’s requests for more information on the Interior Department’s Blueways program with silence. The Congress and the American people are entitled to forthright answers from this administration, NOT stonewalling. This is particularly urgent in light of the avowed intention by the program’s supporters to turn their sights on all 3.5 million miles of American streams and rivers.”

“This ‘Blueways’ system is just another symptom of the larger disease that plagues the current administration in Washington DC. Un-elected, un-accountable bureaucrats working in secret are making sweeping changes that would dramatically affect our district,” said Rep. Jason Smith (MO-08). “The National Blueways system was not the first time that the federal government tried to take away our property rights, and it will not be the last. A vigilant, well-informed citizenry is essential to American democracy. Our government was created by the people, for the people, and of the people – IT SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THOSE PEOPLE. Unelected bureaucrats in Washington DC don’t know how important property rights and access to these waterways is to our district, and they certainly don’t know how best to manage them.”

Communities in the White River Watershed have experienced the heavy hand of the federal government’s National Blueways Order. On January 9, 2013, the Obama Administration designated the White River Watershed, an area encompassing 60 counties and over 700 miles of mainstream river along the Southern Missouri and Northern Arkansas border, as a

National Blueway. This arbitrary designation was never open to public comment and review and if enacted would cause economic harm to the area and infringe on property rights.

Amid growing outrage and opposition from members of Congress and local stakeholders, the Obama Administration withdrew its designation of the White River Watershed as a National Blueway on July 3, 2013. Just days later at a House Natural Resources Full Committee [oversight hearing](#), Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced that the National Blueways Program was on “pause.” Even with these developments, there is still growing concern that the White River Blueway designation could still be resurrected in some fashion.

Witnesses at the hearing reacted harshly to the Interior Department’s arbitrary and secretive designation of the White River Watershed as a National Blueway and shared how this designation would negatively affect their communities:

“We saw unelected federal bureaucrats threaten our way of life with the proposed Blueways designation. Especially offensive to me is the fact this decision was made by the United States Department of the Interior with no input or involvement from local stakeholders, nor with any approval or oversight from Congress. This appalling lack of transparency and accountability would have produced a policy that dramatically infringed upon the rights of property owners, done irreversible damage to the economies of our communities, and greatly impaired our ability to properly manage and conserve our lands, which is something we have done successfully for generations without the assistance of the federal government.” - Rep. Robert Ross, Missouri House of Representatives, District 142

“I am deeply concerned by the fact that while this ‘Blueways’ designation affects over one million people in two states, this was not brought to the public’s attention until just a few weeks ago. Not only was the public not informed, neither were the local, county, state or federal elected officials who represent this area. Agriculture is Missouri’s number one industry and I have grave concerns that this Blueways designation would cause additional and unnecessary burdens through regulation which could be detrimental to our farmer’s livelihoods. This designation is seen as a direct threat to our property rights.” - Rep. Sonya Murray Anderson, Missouri House of Representatives, District 131

“Even a small change to the existing rules and regulations, that the people who live in these counties have to live with, will cause an economic tipping point to be reached. Financially the Federal Government, who pay no property taxes, moves in and establishes more draconian rules and regulations that do not enhance the biosphere of this environment but only placates the environmental activist, that as a rule know nothing about our area. Please stop hiding behind artfully worded Blue Way plans, ‘Scenic Riverways General Management Plan’, ‘Clean Stream Acts’, ‘Wilderness Area’ plans, and historical land acts.” - Thomas B. Cox, Landowner, Current River Watershed

“There are far too many specific problems and concerns within the Blueway designation document for me to address. It was clear that it was written from a third

party perspective that had an environmental fantasy vision separate and apart from the history of the area, the economic and social realities of the region, and the property owners, farmers, businesses, cities, towns, counties and states that own this area. This was, and still is, repugnant.” – State Senator Missy Thomas Irvin, Assistant President Pro Tempore, Arkansas State Senate, District 18

“While the government has withdrawn this Blueway initiative we are quite certain that they will regroup and devise a plan by a different name to accomplish their hidden agenda! It is our intent to band together with other groups in Missouri and Arkansas to oppose the continued attacks on our property rights and personal freedoms. American business owners, land owners and recreators should never have to live in fear that their government will on a whim grab their land. We need stronger protections in the law from this abuse. We need better reform of the regulations to prevent this overreach.” – Jerry King, Voice of the Ozarks

The Department of the Interior was invited to testify at today’s hearing but declined to attend.

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