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Opening Statement by
Chairman Rob Bishop
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
At the Oversight Field Hearing on
"Explosion of Federal Regulations Threatening Jobs and Economic Survival in the West"
Monday, March 12, 2012
Elko Convention Center, Elko, Nevada

As many of you aware, federal regulations, particularly with regard to land-use, is a topic of strong debate back in Washington D.C and especially in the West, like here in Elko, Nevada. The United States is a nation that has been blessed with extraordinary natural wonders as well as plentiful and accessible natural resources. Given the federal government's ownership of over 600 million acres of the land containing these resources and incredible natural sights, much of this debate is centered on how to best balance the many competing and worthy uses of public lands and resources.

Public lands policy through much of our history and right up into the second half of the 20th century focused on developing our resources to provide the raw material for a growing, prosperous and freedom-loving nation.

However, the last four to five decades have witnessed a paradigm shift towards a hands-off lands policy, or preservation. While there is certainly nothing wrong with designations aimed to preserve small areas of special significance— if such designations are made with the full input and consideration of local communities like, for example, the Pine Forest Range bill Mr. Amodei sponsored - what has been lacking though, is proper balance.

Unfortunately for many of our rural communities, the well-intentioned laws passed during this shift have allowed for a minority of extremists to abuse the regulatory process and bring multiple-use of our federal lands to its knees. This tragedy is evident across the expanses of federal land in my home State of Utah and throughout the West. It is particularly obvious on the 193 million acres of National Forest land managed by the Forest Service, as that is what no doubt has brought you all here today.

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.

We will hear from witnesses this afternoon who will describe 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.