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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
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Opening Statement by
Chairman Rob Bishop
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Oversight Field Hearing on
"Impact of the Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic in the Black Hills"
Hill City, South Dakota
July 10, 2011

As Prepared for Delivery

As you can see around you, the Mountain Pine Beetle has turned most of the Black Hills, 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 four million acres across South Dakota, Wyoming and Colorado alone. A sharp decline in forest management has left these forests in an extremely unnatural and unhealthy state, the result of which has been a feeding frenzy for the beetles but only dead trees for the rest of us.

Not only do these conditions create an overwhelming risk of catastrophic wildfire to mountain communities, but the resulting danger of falling trees threatens recreational use and access to our federal lands. And obviously the sight of a dead forest is simply unappealing to many who come to enjoy the Black Hills and Rocky Mountain West.

Fortunately, we are in a position to change course on this issue. Active 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 our care.

I thank Representative Kristi Noem for her leadership on this issue and for inviting the Subcommittee to South Dakota so we can see firsthand the impacts of this issue and the path towards addressing it. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and now recognize Ms. Noem for five minutes for any statement she may have.