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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

**Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
House Committee on Natural Resources
At the Subcommittee on Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Oversight Field Hearing on
“Failed Federal Forest Policies: Endangering Northwest Jobs, Forests and Species”
Longview, Washington
Monday, May 21, 2012**

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I thank Congresswoman Herrera Beutler for joining me here today. This hearing comes more than twenty years following approval of the Northwest Forest Plan and after the Northern Spotted Owl’s listing under the Endangered Species Act.

To put it simply, the Northwest Forest Plan has failed. It has failed the health of national forests. It has failed the economic well-being of rural counties and schools, has cost tens of thousands of Northwest timber-related jobs and the closure of hundreds of mills and affected wood-products industries. And, it has failed to recover the Spotted Owl.

Nationwide, federal agencies are not managing the land they are required to manage. Amidst our nation’s current \$15.7 trillion debt, the Interior Department’s and Forest Service’s own estimates reveal \$22 billion in maintenance backlogs for lands managed by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Worse, since the Northwest Forest Plan, an average of 355,000 acres per year of Northwest national forests has been destroyed by wildfire. Yet, agencies continue to request and spend more money to contain wildfires and acquire even more land.

In Washington, the Forest Service is already responsible for managing over 9 million acres of forest land contained within seven national forests. Timber harvests of those forests declined 84 percent over the past decade, resulting in a loss of jobs and economic certainty, and a breach of the federal government’s commitments to rural forest communities.

Each year, Washington’s national forests grow three times faster than they die. The Forest Service harvests just 2 percent of new growth, yielding about \$13 million in revenue. In contrast, the State of Washington, which manages in trust about one-fourth the amount of the Forest Service’s lands, produces *seven times* more revenue than the Forest Service for local governments, universities and state school construction.

Despite the Administration's promises to streamline regulations on federal lands, it instead finalized a National Forest Planning Rule that de-emphasizes active management and statutory multi-use requirements. The EPA has also failed to defend its longstanding rule exempting forest management activities from Clean Water Act permitting requirements and is pressing ahead with imposing yet another damaging and burdensome regulation on forest management.

Most concerning, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued sweeping critical habitat proposals for the Spotted Owl that amount to a huge land grab in Washington, Oregon and California—13 million acres—including nearly 2 million acres of private property. The proposals are based largely on outdated data from the 1990's, don't include an economic impact analysis, and do little, if anything, to immediately address the main cause of the owl's decline—another predatory owl—the Barred Owl

Earlier this year, Secretary Salazar toured an "ecological pilot timber sale project" as part of the Bureau of Land Management's "Western Oregon Strategy." The project—"Pilot Joe" produced only enough timber to run a single mill for a week. I expected to inquire about the status of BLM's sales," but BLM unfortunately declined to participate in today's hearing.

One constant undercurrent is the Endangered Species Act. Extreme groups file lawsuit after lawsuit to block human or job-creating economic activity tied to the forests, yet the results are more catastrophic wildfires, more diseased and dying trees, and destruction of owl and species habitat. Private landowners seeking "safe harbor" either can't afford or don't trust the federal government's discretion, which appears driven by the constant threat of more lawsuits.

Action must be taken now to protect rural communities and private property from these burdensome regulations. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and to receive constructive input on how, going forward, we can improve forest health, create jobs and recover the Spotted Owl.