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

Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Thursday, April 10, 2014
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Full Committee Oversight Hearing on

"Tribal Forest Management: A Model for Promoting Healthy Forests and Rural Jobs"

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Today's hearing looks at the state of tribal forestry, which has implications for forest management more broadly. Indian tribes manage more than 18 million acres of forests across the country to provide for job-creating timber harvests while also meeting cultural and environmental purposes. This vision of "multiple use" land management, which is alive and well in the tribal context, compares favorably with the Forest Service, which too often defaults to "non-management" of forests in the face of endless litigation and environmental review.

I will touch first on the specific tribal issues we will review today before speaking to the continuing need to reform Forest Service land management.

Tribal forest management is unique in that the Interior Department is required by statute to provide for an independent assessment to be completed once every ten years reporting on the status of tribal forests nationwide. The third of these Indian Forest Management Assessment Team reports, or "IFMAT" reports, was completed last year.

In part, IFMAT III raises concerns about the adequacy of appropriated funding levels for tribal forestry. Obviously, we welcome your thoughts on this matter, but I must remind our witnesses that this is an authorizing and not appropriating committee – though sometimes some may wish it were otherwise.

It is also notable that much of the IFMAT report focuses on the forest health accomplishments and innovative forest practices taking place on tribal forests across the country. We look forward to hearing from you about how Indian tribes appear to be able accomplish more on the ground, often working with much fewer resources, than their counterparts in the Forest Service.

I will remind everyone that last year this committee heard from a number of witnesses – including tribal governments – about the problems that characterize the federal forests under Forest Service management. This committee continues to take a strong interest in

addressing these issues in a comprehensive way.

Over the last two decades, federal regulations and lawsuits have essentially shut down our national forests and have led to a rapid decline in timber sales and loss of associated jobs. Inadequate forest management has stripped rural counties of necessary funds to pay for vital services, including schools and emergency responders.

In addition, this lack of active forest management has caused significant degradation of forest health and left our forests increasingly susceptible to wildfires. As the IFMAT report notes, these poorly managed Forest Service lands often present significant wildfire threats to tribal forests. Congress attempted to address this issue under the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004, which allows tribes to propose hazardous fuels reduction projects on adjacent Forest Service lands. Yet this authority is rarely used, in part due to the uncertainties that come with the Forest Service's seemingly endless environmental regulatory process.

I must point out that it's been over six months since the House passed comprehensive legislation addressing these issues, and the Senate still has failed to act. H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act, is a bipartisan bill that would create over 200,000 jobs, provide stable funding for counties to use for education and infrastructure, improve local management of our federal forests, and help reduce the risk of wildfire. It's well past time for the Democrat-controlled Senate to get off the sidelines and take action to help our rural communities and save our national forests.

This committee stands ready to work with the Senate on this issue. What we will not do, however, is accept a piecemeal approach that takes care of a few but leaves everyone else behind. The challenges facing our rural communities due to the neglect of our national forests will only be remedied with a national approach.

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