

**Opening Statement of  
Congressman Wally Herger  
Before the House Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Oversight Field Hearing on  
*"Restoring Public Access to the Public's Lands:  
Issues Impacting Multiple-use on Our National Forests"*  
Monday, September 19, 2011 at 10:00 AM PT  
Sacramento, California**

*As prepared for delivery.*

Thank you, Chairman Bishop, for coming to Northern California to hold a hearing on the practices of the Forest Service. Your understanding and attention to the needs and concerns of the West is unsurpassed in Congress and I greatly appreciate your holding this field hearing.

The Northern California area I represent contains all or part of nine national forests. Accordingly, the practices of the Forest Service have a significant impact on the local communities where they are situated. Sadly, many rural forest communities have been devastated by the decline of the timber industry and other restraints on multiple-use access. These communities have been hurt by excessive government regulations and the abuse of the judicial system by fringe groups. The decline of the timber industry has cost thousands of jobs and goes hand in hand with the decline of our forest's health. Our national forests are 82% denser than they were in 1928. The dense underbrush contributes to their sickness and results in catastrophic fires that burn hotter, longer, and at a larger scale. Today's hearing will highlight the fact that the victims of these regulations and lawsuits are the rural communities with high unemployment, the schools with greatly reduced funding, and an environment with unhealthy forests.

I have long advocated for commonsense and balanced environmental regulations, particularly for our forests. Over a decade ago, Senator Dianne Feinstein and I worked together to pass the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act. This bipartisan legislation was the result of a partnership among local governments, concerned citizens, the local environmental community, and timber industry representatives who worked together to return commonsense management to our national forests. Yet, despite having passed the House of Representatives 429 to 1 and being signed into law by President Bill Clinton, the Quincy Library Group pilot project has been prevented from achieving its goals because of groups that abuse the appeals and environmental review process to stall implantation of this law. Because of these frivolous actions, local citizens have been blocked to protect themselves and their communities from the growing threat of catastrophic wild fires.

The Forest Service is also contributing to the decline of our rural forest communities. Recently, the Forest Service's implementation of the Travel Management Rule in California has failed to achieve the balance of protecting multiple-use access with protecting our resources. They have classified gravel roads as highways, thereby limiting off-road vehicle access to hundreds of miles of roads. This is not consistent with county policy and it fails the common-sense test. I believe that we can protect our federal lands while ensuring Americans have multiple-use access to

them. We do not need to lock away our national forests to assure their protection. Instead, the Forest Service is causing significant harm to our rural forest communities through impractical regulations and practices.

In the face of our severe economic challenges, we need to institute commonsense forest management practices so that local communities can utilize their natural resources and prosper. These lands belong to the people, and local needs should drive their management. If we utilize more of our natural resources, we can foster job growth, generate revenue for the treasury, and help prevent catastrophic forest fires. I appreciate the sacrifices the witnesses made to participate in this hearing today. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass the common-sense reforms we need to prevent abusive lawsuits, restore our forests, protect our communities, and create jobs in rural areas.