



Committee on Natural Resources

U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 25, 2013

[Permalink](#)

CONTACT: [Press Office](#)

202-226-9019

Witnesses Highlight the Importance of Water Rights For Job Creation & Economic Growth and Local Control

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held an [oversight hearing](#) entitled “*Federal Impediments to Water Rights, Job Creation and Recreation: A Local Perspective*.” The hearing examined growing federal intrusion that costs American jobs and threatens to divert water supplies away from agricultural, recreational, and municipal water use. The hearing focused on federal laws and recent Obama Administration actions, like the Blueways Order, designed to undermine state water law and locally-driven watershed protections and recreation.

“There have been a torrent of complaints from multiple Western States of federal laws and federal officials usurping long-established water rights in a manner that threatens entire sectors of their economies including agriculture, ranching, tourism, and municipal water supplies. We’ve heard of a pattern of conduct by federal agencies that seems abusive, high-handed and contrary to the proper role of the government as envisioned by the Founders. This pattern evinces a design to assert federal control over the water resources traditionally reserved to the states under a time-honored doctrine that recognizes and protects the property rights of water users,” said [**Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock \(CA-04\)**](#).

House Republican Members Rob Bishop (UT), Cynthia Lummis (WY), Scott Tipton (CO) and Doug LaMalfa (CA) also actively participated in the hearing.

[**Randy N. Parker**](#), **Utah Farm Bureau Federation’s Chief Executive Officer**, testified before the Subcommittee on the importance of state water rights. *“Utah is the nation’s second most arid state, second only to Nevada. For our predecessors, protecting and maximizing the use of water resources was not only important, it was a matter of life and death.”* Parker said that over time, the federal government’s precedent of letting states govern their own water rights took a dramatic change of course. *“Federal agents ignored or openly repudiated the principles of prior appropriation and sovereign water rights that had been in place since the settlement of the American west.”* In defending state water rights, Parker called on Congress to *“allow Utah and other western public lands to determine the use of their natural resources including water which are in the best interest of the citizens of the state.”*

The ski industry, which generates \$12.2 billion of economic activity annually, is also feeling the negative impacts of the federal government's water rights overreach. **Geraldine Link**, **National Ski Areas Association's Director of Public Policy**, addressed "*how draconian water clauses that require transfer of ownership of water rights negatively affect a ski area's bottom line – and ultimately jobs in rural economies.*" Link also noted the Forest Service's policy that takes water from private parties will "*not sustain ski areas and rural economies. It will stifle the growth and expansion that help fuel job creation in rural and mountain economies.*" Concluding her testimony, Link issued a clear message to the Federal government saying "*stop trying to take away our water rights.*"

Litigation stemming from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has also undermined state water rights. **William E. West Jr**, **General Manager of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority of Texas (GBRA)**, said that his agency has been "*forced, by the simple filing of a citizens' suit under the ESA, to spend an enormous portion of its available resources to defend the water rights it holds that are needed to develop new supplies.*" He added that "*the State's water resources must be shared for many uses, including population growth, agricultural productivity, environmental needs, and economic development.*"

Russell Boardman, **Conservation District Supervisor from the Shoshone Conservation District in Wyoming**, stressed the importance of local conservation efforts when comparing to the Interior Secretarial Order on Blueways. "*Our conservation district, along with the 33 other districts in Wyoming have taken our leadership roles and responsibilities for local natural resource conservation efforts very seriously, especially as it pertains to watershed restoration and protection. If there is a commitment to grassroots conservation then local efforts should be supported, rather than trumped by Secretarial (Federal) edict.*"

###

NaturalResources.house.gov

