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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
Before The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations
And
The Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands
Joint Subcommittee Oversight Hearing On
"The Border: Are Environmental Laws and Regulation Impeding Security and Harming
the Environment?"
April 15, 2011

I want to thank Chairman Bishop and Chairman Chaffetz for holding this hearing on the serious security gaps that exist on federal lands along the border. While we all want to protect our parks, forests, wildlife refuges and other public lands, it has become apparent that when environmental laws are used to hinder border security efforts, both security and the local environment suffer.

There are places where the Border Patrol is effectively blocked from routine access to public land used by criminal cartels and human traffickers, unable to use motorized vehicles to patrol these areas, and prevented from placing electronic surveillance structures in the best strategic sites. This not only opens these areas to criminal gangs but also results in environmental havoc.

Environmental degradation along the border is not caused by border security operations; it is caused by a lack of border security operations.

Some of the most dangerous areas along the southern border are the 20.7 million acres of Department of Interior (DOI) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land. This includes 4.3 million acres of "Wilderness areas" where use of motorized vehicles, construction of roads and permanent security structures are prohibited.

We need to give the Border Patrol both the authority and the tools needed to monitor our federal lands on the border. I am pleased to be a co-sponsor of legislation that will ensure that one arm of the government no longer restricts and impedes the other arm's security efforts.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the witnesses for their testimony today. I look forward hearing from them.