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Statement of Doc Hastings

on the

H.R. 4888, The Cabin Fee Act of 2010.

April 22, 2010

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

First, I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling this hearing on a bill that is critically important to the 14,000 American families who own cabins on land in our National Forests. Unless Congress acts to bring about a course correction, many thousands of these people may be forced to abandon family cabins as the currently planned fee hikes go into effect.

I also want to thank Forest Service Chief Tidwell, who I met with last week, and the Deputy Chief who is here today to testify, for the willingness of the Forest Service to work with us to find a legislative solution that can head off this impending tragedy. The fee schedule spelled out in my bill was crafted to be balanced and fair to both the cabin owners and the Treasury, but I am more than willing to consider other proposals as long as they provide a simple, predictable system and do not result in fees that are beyond the reach of our constituents.

A number of my constituents are cabin owners and I appreciate the help and support I received from them along with cabin owners throughout the country who have banded together to bring the problem of spiking cabin fees to our attention.

Many of the private cabins on Forest Service land are simple, rustic structures hand-built by the grandparents of the current owners early in the last century and passed down from generation to generation. And although there may be a few that are large and showy, the overwhelming majority of the cabins are modest family retreats. The purpose of this bill is to keep the fees affordable for people such as teachers, factory workers and retirees, not just millionaires – which is just what will happen if we don't address the problem.

The cabin owners affected by this bill are charged an annual fee for use of the land on which their cabin sits. They do not get any ownership rights to the land. They have only a temporary and highly restricted use-permit for, basically, the footprint of their cabin.

Because a limited use-permit is not comparable to the rights acquired when someone owns property in fee simple, it has proven impossible under current law to establish a fair process for setting the fees charged the cabin owners.

The current system has resulted in unrealistic, arbitrary fee hikes that are completely unaffordable for average families. For example, the Seattle Times reported last year that cabin owners in Lake Wenatchee were recently notified that their fees will increase more than one thousand percent, from \$1,400 to more than \$17,000 by 2011.

Skyrocketing fees also make these part-time homes unmarketable, leaving families who are unable to pay the high fees, also unable to sell their cabins.

Having family owned cabins encourages wholesome outdoor recreation which I believe is a very important use of our vast system of public land.

By encouraging a broad and diverse range of activities in of our National Forests, we foster the kind of sound stewardship that allows us more fully to obtain the many benefits these lands can contribute.

Again, I want to thank you for scheduling this hearing and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.

Unless we act to establish a realistic pricing structure, families across our nation may be forced to tear down their cabins because they can neither afford the fees themselves nor find a buyer for their cabin.

The bill I introduced will establish a simple, predictable fee-setting system based on a tiered structure. And because future fee increases will be tied to inflation, it will eliminate the current administrative burden of constant appraisals and appeals.

This legislation will provide a sensible, long-term solution that will keep these cabins affordable and accessible to Americans, while still providing fair compensation to the federal Treasury for the use of the land.

Providing access to public lands is an important part of the mission of the Forest Service, and action is needed to make certain that recreational cabins aren't priced out of existence.