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

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Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Wednesday, May 07, 2014
1324 Longworth House Office Building

Full Committee Oversight Hearing on "Keeping the Lights On and Reducing Catastrophic Forest Fire Risk: Proper Management of Electricity Rights of Way on Federal Lands"

"The goal of today's hearing is to ensure federal government accountability so that electricity ratepayers will have reliable and affordable power and forests and nearby communities will be protected from avoidable catastrophic forest fires.

As we will hear from today's expert panel of witnesses, federal indecision, delays, and misunderstandings of a federal electricity reliability law are causing serious issues for rural cooperatives, other utilities and their ratepayers that bear all of these costs of maintaining electricity rights of way on federal lands.

Worse yet, we will hear that one federal land management agency could impose unrealistic policies to bury electricity transmission lines under the guise of saving species that would cost a residential customer up to \$400,000 each – essentially bankrupting the utility and doing little for the Greater Sage Grouse.

Almost a decade ago, this Committee held a hearing to uncover similar abuses and federal indifference during the prior Administration. From many accounts, the hearing yielded tangible results for some utilities and their ratepayers. Yet, proving that this issue is not a partisan one, we are here once again to resolve these issues that have been re-appeared over the last few years.

This Committee will hear numerous on-the-ground, real life examples about some of the unnecessary federal delays and inconsistency encountered by those who are only asking to keep the lights on for their customers and not be fined up to \$1 million a day for violating a federal electricity reliability law. We will hear that local utilities face even greater liability for hazardous trees that are the federal government's responsibility.

In fact, it is telling that the Bonneville Power Administration, a federal agency utility tasked with providing millions of Pacific Northwest ratepayers with low-cost energy through 15,000 miles of transmission lines, is here at the table to voice similar concerns with inconsistent and incoherent decisions pursued by agencies under the same Administration.

At a time of poor forest conditions throughout much of the West, we cannot afford to let federal indecision and inter-agency conflicts ignite a powder keg waiting to explode. Catastrophic fires caused by hazardous trees touching power lines only harm the ratepayer and destroy the environment.

It's time that the federal land management agencies adhere to common sense, customer-friendly principles that are not just in response to this hearing but for the long-term. This hearing is a major step in that direction."

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