

Statement of the Honorable Doc Hastings House Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

H.R. 1370, Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act

H.R. 4382, Southern Nevada Readiness Center Act

H.R. 4789, Douglas County, Washington Land Conveyance

S. 56, Rio Grande Natural Area Act

March 9, 2006

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for holding this important hearing on various federal lands bills, including my legislation – H.R. 4789 – that would convey certain BLM properties to the Douglas County Public Utility District.

The Douglas County PUD operates the Wells Hydropower Project on the Columbia River, in North Central Washington. As the federal project license holder, the PUD manages the Wells dam and the associated reservoir for multiple purposes, including power generation, fish and wildlife protection, and recreation. Almost all of the land encompassing the project area is owned by the PUD, with the exception of several small BLM holdings.

The PUD believes – and I agree – that a higher level of resource and recreation management can be achieved on these lands if they are under PUD ownership. This would enable the PUD to manage the project across the landscape, and it frees the BLM from the expense of attending to small pieces of property that are far from the large contiguous blocks of BLM land in the state. For this reason, I introduced H.R. 4789, which would facilitate the conveyance of these parcels at fair market value to the Douglas PUD.

The Douglas PUD has a stellar reputation as a steward of the environment. They worked diligently with the federal government to develop a model comprehensive Habitat Conservation Plan to address the aquatic resources of the area. In addition, under the fish and wildlife requirements of their FERC license, they rigorously protect the riverbank areas and wildlife – including bald eagle nests on PUD lands.

Douglas PUD also ensures that the public has access to the area for recreation purposes. This is another important aspect of land management that is guaranteed by the Wells Project FERC license. If the PUD acquires these BLM parcels they would continue to offer public access consistent with this requirement.

In the weeks since I introduced this legislation, the PUD and the BLM have reviewed land records and have identified three additional parcels suitable for inclusion in this proposal. These three additional parcels are all associated with the Wells Project or are within the boundaries of the Wells Project. This would bring the total land involved to approximately 620 acres.

I am not aware of any opposition to this proposal, which I believe will benefit the PUD, the BLM and the natural resources of the area. I stand ready to work with the Committee and the Administration to resolve whatever technical concerns there may be.

Mr. Chairman, thank you and the members of the Committee again for holding this hearing this morning. I also want to state my appreciation for your excellent staff who have all been extremely helpful to me in the development of this legislation.