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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515
Opening Statement of
Chairman Tom McClintock
Subcommittee on Federal Lands

On Thursday, March 19, 2015
1334 Longworth House Office Building

**Joint Oversight Hearing on "Examining the Spending Priorities and Missions of the
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration in the President's FY 2016 Budget Proposal."**

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Good morning. Today, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands and the Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans hold a joint hearing to review the policies of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and to examine the President's Fiscal Year 2016 budget requests for these agencies.

Thriving fish and wildlife populations are integral to the proper stewardship of our public lands, and these agencies play a crucial role in managing them. Sometimes, however, we need to remind them that our public lands are to be managed for the public good – and not to indulge the ideological whims of political extremes.

I feel compelled at the outset to raise two issues that are illustrative of this problem and absolutely critical to the economic survival of a long neglected species – the human population.

California is suffering the worst drought in recorded history. Last April, knowing that the rainy season was over, the snow pack was gone, and reservoir levels were critically low, the National Marine Fisheries Service under NOAA insisted on the release of 70,000 acre feet of critically needed water to adjust water temperatures for the fish. That was enough water to meet the annual needs of a city of a half a million people. This year the situation is dire. Our snow pack is at less than 20 percent of normal, our reservoirs are at critical levels – some already near empty -- and yet the agency continues to press for additional water releases next month. If those plans go forward, New Melones, Tulloch and several other reservoirs will be empty before the end of the summer. That means no water for people and ironically, no water for fish either.

Another example of priorities gone terribly askew is the continuing effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to place severe limitations on two million acres in the Sierra Nevada Mountains by declaring it as critical habitat for the Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog and the Yosemite Toad.

This is essentially the footprint of the entire Sierra Nevada from Lassen County all the way down to Kern County. That means severe limits on public use essential to the local

economies and public safety of these communities, including grazing, recreational activities and fire suppression programs.

This, despite the fact that the service admits that human activity is not a serious threat to these populations. The two primary reasons for the decline are non-native trout that prey on these species and the Bd Virus that is affecting amphibian populations throughout the West.

Ironically, these restrictions will severely impact recreational activities including trout fishing, which is actually helping the frog by controlling trout populations.

Similar restrictions are threatened on vast tracts of land throughout the western United States, most notably for the Lesser Prairie Chicken and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, with little care or concern for the enormous economic damage of these actions. States, local governments, industries, landowners, and others have gone to extraordinary lengths and invested millions of dollars in robust protection plans and conservation efforts for those species. Unfortunately, those efforts went largely ignored by the Service. There is another western revolt brewing over other Fish and Wildlife Service actions with regard to the Greater Sage-Grouse, Northern Long-Eared Bat, Gray Wolf, and several other species.

Since a significant portion of the Service's budget is dedicated to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), widespread problems with its administration merit particular attention. These problems include a lack of data transparency, too little focus on species recovery and delisting, and a recurrent failure to coordinate with state and local governments.

The Service requests millions of dollars to add new lands to the federal estate, despite significant maintenance backlogs on National Wildlife Refuge System lands. While currently facing a deferred maintenance backlog of \$1.3 billion, the Service has requested only \$139 million for refuge maintenance, which is less than the amount requested for land acquisition. The Service has also proposed to eliminate the discretionary portion the National Wildlife Refuge Fund, which provides revenue sharing payments to counties with NWRS lands.

I hope that both of these agencies are willing to work with Congress to better prioritize their policies and budgets while restoring the mission of the agencies – to manage and protect America's crucial biological resources for the PUBLIC good.

We certainly have our work cut out for us.