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

**Opening Statement of**  
**Chairman Doc Hastings**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**On Tuesday, March 1, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**Before the Full Natural Resources Committee**  
**Oversight Hearing on: "The Impact of the Administration's Wild Lands Order on Jobs and**  
**Economic Growth."**

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Late last year, just two days before Christmas, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar issued a Secretarial Order implementing sweeping new wilderness policy for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This order directed BLM to designate areas with wilderness characteristics as "wild lands."

The term "wild lands" may be new, but the Administration's motives are not. This order is a clear attempt to allow the Administration to create *de facto* Wilderness areas without Congressional approval.

I've repeatedly stated that oversight of the Obama Administration's actions will be a top priority of this Committee. It's decisions such as this that make our oversight role a necessity.

Today's hearing will allow us to closely examine the impacts of the "wild lands" order and hear directly from governors and local officials on its effect upon jobs and the economies of communities across the West. The Administration chose not to consult or listen to these elected leaders or their communities before the Secretarial Order was dictated. This hearing provides the first forum and opportunity for them to be heard by their elected government. That is not how our system is supposed to work.

Again, that is why the specific purpose of this first hearing was to hear from these state and local leaders. Additional hearings are planned, including one featuring Department officials and allowing them a full forum to discuss and defend this Secretarial Order.

The Administration was eager, however, to also participate at today's hearing and requested an opportunity for BLM Director Abbey to testify. As Chairman, I honored this request from the Administration with the understanding that previously invited citizens traveling here to Washington, DC to appear as witnesses were not displaced.

To accommodate Director Abbey, the hearing has been restructured to condense all of the local witnesses to one second panel, which is going to be a tight squeeze. Director Abbey will appear on our final panel, in deference to these witnesses.

Before examining the widespread impacts of this order, the Administration's lack of legal authority to impose such a policy deserves emphasis. The Wilderness Act of 1964 very clearly gives Congress, and only Congress, the statutory authority to create new Wilderness areas.

It's absurd for the Obama Administration to claim that giving wilderness a different label of "wild lands" will somehow pass legal muster. Clever semantics cannot circumvent the law.

We will ask specifically where this authority comes from.

Under this "wild lands" order, approximately 220 million acres of BLM land, the majority of which is in the West, is under threat of being treated as *de facto* Wilderness. Designating land as Wilderness imposes the most restrictive land-use policies. Lands that are currently used for multiple-use – including recreation activities, agriculture, ranching, American energy production and other economic activities – are in danger of being placed off-limits.

This Secretarial Order will disproportionately impact rural communities, who depend on public lands for their livelihoods. These communities have already been hit hard by onerous existing federal restrictions and by the current economic crisis. They suffer from some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. The "wild lands" order threatens to inflict further economic pain. This is just one more example of the onslaught of harmful actions that the Obama Administration is imposing on rural America.

The Administration claims that this order will be good for jobs. How does preventing public access to public's land result in new jobs?

If this was such a boon to local jobs, then why did they bury the order's announcement on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, just two days before Christmas.

More job loss is what this order threatens.

I'm eager to hear from Western Governors and local officials who can tell us first-hand how it will impact jobs in their states. And I'm also eager to hear the opposite view.

This Secretarial Order is a clear invitation for lawsuits and will lead to further divisions among groups and communities over the use of public lands. This order will tie the hands of BLM land managers, who may fear that any decision will land them in court, and delay the reasonable and responsible use of our public lands.

I believe in responsible stewardship. There is a need to care for our most treasured national lands. Yet, multi-use public lands must remain open to public enjoyment and available to help build our economy and create jobs.

The local communities who depend on this land must be part of the process – not after the fact, not once the Secretary has issued his order, but from the beginning.

This Administration should be on notice that unilateral decisions and orders to impose restrictive, job-destroying policies will be met with firm resistance.