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

**Opening Statement of**  
**Chairman Doc Hastings**  
**House Committee on Natural Resources**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**

**Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Subcommittee Legislative Hearing on**  
**H.R. \_\_\_\_**  
***"Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act"***  
**Thursday, April 11, 2013, at 10:00 am**

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DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

Today the subcommittee will hear testimony on a suite of bills to address the management stalemate that afflicts millions of acres of our federal forests. Amongst those is a proposal I recently announced, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act. This draft legislation is intended as a starting point as we work towards a long-term solution to provide a stable revenue stream for rural counties and schools.

Forested counties, including many in the Northwest, have long depended on a federal promise of revenue from timber sales to help fund vital services such as education and roads. Over a century ago the federal government pledged to actively manage our forests and provide 25 percent of revenues for counties containing National Forest Lands. The federal government has failed to uphold this commitment.

The Secure Rural Schools program was designed to be a short-term solution to continue providing funding after timber sales dramatically declined due to federal overregulation and harmful lawsuits. With the national debt approaching \$16.8 trillion, and billions more added every day, it is becoming increasingly difficult to finance a program that costs nearly \$400 million in annual spending, while ignoring the real consequences of poor management of our national forests.

We need a new approach – right now—that renews the federal government’s commitment to manage resources for the benefit of forested counties and their schools.

Restoring active management of our national forests, as this legislation does, would ensure a stable, predictable revenue stream for counties and schools. Acting management would promote healthier forests, reduce the risk of wildfires, and decrease our reliance on foreign countries for timber and paper goods.

One need not look further than the State of Washington to witness the dichotomy of how poorly managed federal forests impacts both forest health and revenues.

In Washington, the Forest Service is responsible for managing over 9 million acres of forest land within seven different national forests. The Forest Service harvests only about 2 percent of the amount of new growth in Washington, yielding about a half million dollars last year in revenue.

In contrast, the State of Washington, which manages about a quarter of the amount of forest lands of those managed by the Forest Service, produces 1,200 times more revenue per acre than the forest service. The evidence is clear: better management yields more and it is being done right now by states.

Even more disturbing, millions of acres of our federal forests are consumed by wildfire each year. Last year, wildfires burned 9.3 million acres nationwide. To make a comparison, the U.S. Forest Service only harvested approximately 200,000 acres. This means that 44 times as many acres burned as were responsibility harvested.

A further comparison, in the Okanogan, Wenatchee and Colville National Forests, more than 300,000 acres of forests burned. That is more acres than the Forest Service harvested nationwide.

The overgrowth and fuels-loading of these forests will either be reduced by catastrophic wildfire, or active management could be implemented to remove excess forest growth effectively and responsibly.

This draft legislation and other bills before the Subcommittee today seek to positively reverse these trends. I commend my colleagues for the legislation they have introduced to help achieve these goals. As the clock ticks on the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools Program and as the wildfire season rapidly approaches, these bills would require the Forest Service to more actively manage our national forests.

With that, I thank our witnesses for being here and I look forward to their testimony.