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TODD YOUNG
CHIEF OF STAFF

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

Opening Statement of
Chairman Doc Hastings
Committee on Natural Resources
On Wednesday, July 17, 2013
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Full Committee Oversight Hearing on

"The Department of the Interior Operations, Management, and Rulemakings"

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DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

Our Nation's public lands and resources - from energy to minerals, timber and water - are an essential component of our economy. They help power our homes and businesses, provide vital water supplies to farmers and communities, enable high-tech manufacturing, and provide opportunities for all types of recreational activities. Most importantly, our resources help put Americans to work and increase our country's economic competitiveness.

The agencies and programs overseen by the Interior Department support millions of American jobs and bring in the second highest source of revenue to the Federal Treasury. The policies of the Interior Department directly impact the lives of every American in this country, which is why it is absolutely essential that the Department recognize and understand the importance of balancing the responsible use and management of our natural resources with conservation.

Unfortunately, under the Obama Administration we've experienced four and a half years of flawed and economically devastating policies that have kept the American people's resources under lock-and-key. In my opinion, the direction of the Interior Department has veered far off course and clear, troubling patterns have emerged that I believe need to be fixed.

First, is the pattern of imposing new regulations and policies that directly cost American jobs.

In no area is this more painfully evident than with the Department's energy policies. Under the Obama Administration, gas prices are up and federal energy production is down. The Department has implemented one of the most restrictive offshore drilling plans that keeps 85 percent of areas off-limits, has leased the lowest number onshore acres for energy production, and canceled numerous lease sales. Now the Department is pursuing unnecessary and duplicative regulations on hydraulic fracturing on federal and tribal lands - adding new layers of red-tape on this job-creating practice that has been successfully regulated by the states for decades.

The Obama Administration is also aggressively pursuing a war on coal, which is really a war on jobs, energy prices and communities. One of the most egregious examples of this is the Department's continual efforts to rewrite the Stream Buffer Zone Rule, even though this flawed and redundant rulemaking process has already cost millions of taxpayer dollars and will only cause further economic harm and job loss.

Second, the Committee has witnessed an alarming pattern of decisions being made either unilaterally without proper input from the people and communities directly impacted, or policies being negotiated behind closed-doors with environmental groups that have a penchant for lawsuits. Both ways of decision-making lack transparency and lead to bad policy decisions.

For example, over the past four years the Department has attempted to unilaterally impose land-use designations, such as the Wildlands Secretarial Order, that would severely limit public access and multiple-use of our public lands. Similarly, the National Blueways Secretarial Order creates new unilateral authority to designate entire watershed as National Blueways and impose severe water and land use restrictions.

The Endangered Species Act mega-settlements are an example of closed-door agreements with litigious environmental groups. These settlements will force decisions on hundreds of species listings and habit designations across the country over the next few years and disregard local input and ongoing conservation efforts. The threat of lawsuits should not drive public policy decisions, but we have seen time and time again, from ESA to forest management, where that is unfortunately the case.

Finally, the lack of transparency has been another pattern that has emerged from the Obama Administration's Interior Department. In the past two and a half years, the Department has refused to cooperate with the Committee's legitimate oversight efforts, refused to provide documents, refused to comply with the Committee's subpoenas, refused to answer questions, and refused to make witnesses available to testify or to answer questions by Committee staff. These actions are made worse by the fact that the Department still does not have a permanent Inspector General – a person needed to act as an independent watchdog.

These destructive patterns that cost jobs, block public input, and disregard transparency must come to an end. The Department must get back on track to being a job-creator for the good of our country and economy.