FEDERAL LANDS ACTION GROUP

1310 Longworth House Office Building

October 26, 2015

4:30 PM

Legislative Forum:

More Local Control of Public Lands: Efforts at the State and Local Level

Opening Statement

Welcome to the second forum of the Federal Lands Action Group. We thank you for being here, and we're especially grateful to our four witnesses, all of whom have traveled a long way. We recognize that sacrifice. Your presence here today speaks to the importance of the topic and your dedication to it.

The title of this forum is *More Local Control of Public Lands: Efforts at the State and Local Level*. Like our first forum, back in July, we are focused on dispelling the myth that the federal government is the only possible steward of public lands and, more importantly, discussing innovative ideas for devolving control and management of public lands to state and local governments.

The recent debate about the President renaming Mount McKinley was interesting to me. Amid the debate about whether the name should stay true to President McKinley or reflect the Native American name for the mountain, no one stopped to ask why a bunch of people in DC get to decide what it's named instead of the people who live there! Of course we all know it's because the mountain is on federal land, but it's a glaring example of how easily people forget that there are real people who live on or near these federal lands and whose lives and livelihoods are impacted by the decisions made by federal land managers.

In our first forum, one of our witnesses eloquently addressed the frustrating reality that many of those who make decisions about western public lands will never actually visit those lands or understand the impact of their decisions in more than an academic sense. He said, "For millions of people who live in the American West, it is not enough just to know these beautiful places are there. It is a requirement of life that we use the water, minerals, forage, and other resources of these lands, because throughout most of the West, the federal government owns the resources upon which life depends. The fact that our back yards are also some of the world's most beautiful places is

a happy coincidence to us. It is at once a great blessing, and our everlasting curse. We are blessed to live in an area so spectacular and special that the rest of the nation cares, sometimes passionately, about how we take care of it."

We heard great discussion in that first forum about how states manage public lands more effectively than states. We also had a robust discussion about various ideas for giving states greater control over public lands, including charter forests, various forms of land trusts, and the actual transfer of ownership. We're excited to continue this conversation and look forward to your testimony.

I'll briefly introduce our witnesses and then we'll be pleased to hear from each of them.

Pete Obermueller is the Executive Director of the Wyoming County Commissioners Association. Before his position at the WCCA, Pete was the Legislative Director to United States Representative Cynthia Lummis and served as the Executive Director of the Congressional Western Caucus. A Casper native, Pete is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with a Master's Degree in Public Policy.

David Hinkins is a member of the Utah State Senate representing District 27 since January 1, 2009. Senator Hinkins currently serves on the Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands Committee. Senator Hinkins sponsored the bill creating the Commission for the Stewardship of Public Lands and the Concurrent Resolution on Transfer of Public Lands Act.

Gordon Cruickshank is the Commissioner of Valley County, Idaho. Commissioner Cruickshank has lived in Valley County the majority of his life. Gordon worked on the family farm near Lake Fork, worked private construction and then worked for the Valley County Road Department prior to becoming a commissioner. Commissioner Cruickshank also currently serves as the President of the Western Interstate Region for the National Association of Counties, representing the counties of 15 western states.

Dr. Mike Baughman is President of Intertech Services Corporation (ISC), a Carson City-based consulting firm that assists clients with project management, strategic planning, government relations, economic development, natural

resource policy analysis and National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act compliance. Dr. Baughman also serves as the Executive Director of the Lincoln County Regional Development Authority and the Executive Director of the five-county Humboldt River Basin Water Authority. Dr. Baughman earned a doctorate degree with an emphasis in Environmental Policy from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. His masters and undergraduate degrees in resource economics were awarded by the University of Nevada Reno.

For the sake of getting in a lot of good questions, we'll stick to the five minute rule. And since we are recording the event, please remember to turn on your microphones while you speak.

Mr. Obermueller, the time is yours.