

Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing
Restoring the Federal Land Management Workforce
March 19, 2009

Today our Subcommittee will be conducting an oversight hearing to explore the issues impacting the morale and effectiveness of our public lands workforce. We will hear testimony from groups that represent the employees in the field – those who protect the forests, manage the range, and serve the millions of park visitors each year. Their offices may be the top of Mt. McKinley, or a raft in the Grand Canyon, cruising timber in the Pacific Northwest, or riding the Wyoming range. These are jobs that most Americans only dream about, yet by their own accounts, their morale is among the worst of all federal employees. According to survey data, federal prison guards and IRS agents enjoy their jobs more than Park Rangers. We want to know why.

For years, we have increased our expectations of these employees while chronically underfunding their programs. “Do more with less” is a common mantra. Today, we are asking these beleaguered employees to address the impacts of climate change, fight increasing and more severe wildfires, balance energy development with resource protection, and get every child to play outside, while still keeping trails in good repair, rangelands healthy and restrooms clean.

Our federal land management workforce faces a looming wave of retirements and loss of institutional capacity. At the same time, these same agencies routinely rate very poorly on surveys of employee satisfaction – surveys that young job seekers use to guide their career choices. Today we look forward to hearing from the Partnership for Public Service, producers of the report Best Places to Work in the Federal Government, who will shed light on these low ratings and offer suggestions for improvement.

Nobody knows the issues faced by these employees better than the employees themselves, so today we will also hear testimony from three witnesses representing rank and file employees of the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and US Forest Service. These witnesses dedicate a great deal of their personal time and energy to addressing these issues on behalf of their peers, and we appreciate the effort it took for them to be here today for this important hearing.

Last February, the Department of Interior Inspector General completed a review of problems in the United States Park Police, including those that directly impact employee morale. Today, we will hear testimony which will bring us up to speed on progress to date in achieving, what former NPS Director Bomar called, “management excellence within the Park Police”.

These dedicated stewards at our federal land management agencies have protected and conserved our lands and their resources for over a century. The work they do is a model for nations around the world. This committee must support them and give them the tools they need to face the challenges that lie ahead. I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today.

I would now like to turn to Ranking Member Bishop for any opening statement he may have.