

**Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands with
Subcommittee on Water and Power
Joint Oversight Hearing
Mountain Pine Beetle: Strategies for Protecting the West
June 16, 2009**

Thank you Chairwoman Napolitano.

Now is a particularly relevant time for us to discuss this problem, because this is the season that many beetles will be looking to infect new trees. In addition to describing the mountain pine beetle epidemic, we must also focus on how we respond to this challenge.

The few isolated communities that have had success fighting off the bark beetle have developed extensive action plans, combining efforts at every level of government. Some of these efforts were focused on protecting healthy trees, while other steps were taken to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. There have been some successes on both fronts.

There are many reasons that the plan of a small community can't be applied to the entire West. However, we can learn from these

successes, much of which are credited to strong community support. Private land owners, city officials, and residents all came together to carry out the necessary work. We will need to develop an approach that has a similar level of support.

Let me just note, that level of support will NOT be easy to come by if cutting corners in the NEPA process is the cornerstone of our plan. Instead, we need to focus on the best strategies for solving this problem without creating another one for future generations. Are there places we can protect from infestation, and what are the options for preventing catastrophic wildfires?

There are still many questions about the best way to respond to this epidemic, and I hope that we can answer some of them today. I want to thank all of our witnesses, many from Colorado, for making the trip to D-C, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.