

DOI OVERSIGHT HEARING 6/6/13

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Wyden

- Good morning. The purpose of this hearing is to review the programs and activities of the Department of the Interior.
- This hearing marks the first time that Secretary Jewell has testified before the Committee since her confirmation in April, so I'd like to welcome her back to this Committee and I look forward to hearing her statement in just a few minutes. I believe this hearing also marks the final time that Deputy Secretary David Hayes will appear before the Committee before he leaves office later this month, so I'd like to extend my appreciation to him for his great work as Deputy Secretary over the past 4½ years in his second tour of duty with the Department.
- I'd like to take a minute to highlight a few provisions in the Department's current budget proposal. Overall, I am pleased with this Administration's proposed budget for the Department of the Interior, which is \$11.7 billion, nearly a 3 percent increase over the 2013 Continuing Resolution level. Budgets are places where you've got to make tough decisions and I think this Administration in many particulars has done a good job of putting the money in the right places.
- President Obama has made the conservation of our public lands, through our national parks, and I strongly support the president's commitment to encouraging outdoor recreation, and support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a high priority, and I strongly support that commitment.
- Outdoor recreation as we have talked about in this committee is a major, major business and a jobs producer for our country. Studies have found that Americans spend \$646 billion each year on outdoor recreation. That equates to over 6 million direct American jobs. Secretary Jewell understands a whole lot about this because she's been living and breathing it in the private sector and is acutely aware of the link between conservation, jobs, and economic growth.
- I am encouraged to see that the Administration has proposed partial mandatory funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in fiscal year 2014 and

intend to see full mandatory funding starting in 2015. I look forward to seeing the legislative proposal to authorize full and permanent annual funding for this program. LWCF is a critical component in the country's efforts to conserve lands and provide areas for people to get outside and recreate.

- With respect to our national parks, I have been exploring new ways to provide necessary funding for our parks. I have talked about this at length with National Park Service Director Jarvis and I want to discuss it further with the Secretary this morning because clearly with the enormous challenge presented with by sequestration, we ought be looking at fresh ideas, creative new ideas that bring in the private sector, look to public-private partnerships to do a responsible job of the needs of our parks in a fiscally challenging environment.
- Turning to energy issues, the Department plays an important role in providing energy resources for our Nation. Significant strides were made during Secretary Salazar's tenure on the siting of renewable energy projects on public lands. The Department just this week announced its first lease sale for renewable energy projects on the OCS. Secretary Jewell we're going to encourage you to continue these efforts in the area of renewable energy. I am pleased to see strong budgetary support for the Department's New Energy Frontier initiative, which promotes responsible energy development on our public lands.
- As thje secretary knows and colleagues we've talked a lot about it here, we're particularly concerns about the management of our forests. As the length and severity of both drought and wildfire seasons has increased year after year due to climate change, it is clear that Federal forests are in poor health – making them more vulnerable to catastrophic forest fires.
- As we talked about just a couple of days ago in this room, I am troubled that the President's budget request included nearly a 50% reduction in hazardous fuels treatments for the Department of the Interior.
- As we discussed on Tuesday, you were not here, but I'm sure you've gotten the report, we're anxious to work with you, Secretary Vilsack and we want the Office of Management and Budget side to be included as well, in an effort to improve our policies with respect to fire budgeting.

- Finally, I am grateful that the Administration's budget proposes to extend the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program as a permanent program at the full funding level in FY 2014. The secretary knows how strongly we feel about the Secure Rural Schools program. That of course appears in the Forest Service's budget this year, there is a very important component of it that is run by the Bureau of Land Management for the O&C lands.
- I will be working on legislation to address both a short-term reauthorization of these programs, and long-term funding for counties as well as jobs from increased forest management.
- And on that point, I appreciate the proposed budget increase of \$1.8 million in the O&C Forest Management Program to increase the volume of timber offered for sale and for other forestry work. That is of enormous importance to Oregon.
- As the Secretary knows, we're focused on increasing the harvest, let me underline that, increasing the harvest on O&C lands. I've recently released a framework for legislation to make that happen, and I look forward to working the Administration, with colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and to making it a bicameral effort with the House of Representatives as well.
- With that, I'd like to recognize Senator Murkowski for any comments she wishes to make and following that we'll turn to Secretary Jewell for her statement.