



**SUSTAINABLE NORTHWEST**  
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**Media Contact:**

Maia Enzer, Sustainable Northwest Policy Director: 503 880 6085 (cell)

**Rural leaders urge feds to work with them closely for western land stewardship, jobs and much-needed economic development**

*–Rural voices and experience should drive federal policy and investment priorities*

*– A collaborative approach effectively achieves both rural economic development and federal lands and natural resources management*

*Washington D.C.* – Today, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands heard from western rural leaders that a new approach to creating and maintaining much-needed rural jobs is required – one that results in more innovation, and integrates environmental conservation with economic development. Rural leaders also emphasized the strong economic role watershed and forest restoration and stewardship plays in natural resource-based communities.

After decades of polarization that has stalled progress, leaders from rural communities across the western United States are showing that rural people have the energy and creativity to develop locally crafted solutions that provide resilient, long-term jobs based on good stewardship of the natural environment.

“Partnership and collaboration among unusual allies – federal and state agencies, landowners, forest workers, businesses, and conservation organizations – is key to finding a constructive path forward,” said Maia Enzer, Policy Director for Sustainable Northwest. “It is high time the voices of rural practitioners drive federal conservation policy and investment.”

Melanie Parker, Executive Director of Northwest Connections located in the Swan Valley of Montana stated in her testimony, “We are new voices. We are not the voices of industry and we are not the voices of environmentalism. We are a third way and we are rapidly becoming the new way of doing business in the West.”

Today’s witnesses emphasized the benefit of pro-active strategies and offered practical, long-term solutions. Kristin Troy, Executive Director of the Lemhi Regional Land Trust in Salmon, Idaho explained that the loss of infrastructure and skilled people in rural areas mirrors the environmental losses her community is trying to address. “In a way, the decline of a rural economic sector is not so different from the decline of a species. By the time you are threatened and endangered, you are complicated and expensive to bring back,” said Troy.

But restoration activity offers significant jobs opportunities. Dr. Cassandra Moseley, Director of the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon noted that, “In a new study we found that forest and watershed restoration activities create between 15.7 and 23.8 jobs per \$1 million invested in Oregon.”

Spanning work from public lands forestry to ranching, witnesses presented recommendations for achieving the dual goals of resilient natural resource economies and effective ecological stewardship. Major themes included:

- A focus on “working landscapes.” The public and private lands where America derives food, fiber, recreation and services such as clean water can be conserved and restored while providing good jobs to their owners and managers.
- Collaboration and community-based organizations help resolve natural resource conflicts and are pivotal in spurring rural innovation and business development.
- The unique role that public land communities play as stewards of forests, rangelands, water and wildlife, and the need for targeted federal programs to support the place-based organizations that make this stewardship possible.
- The need to both improve existing and create new programs that build the capacity of local businesses and organizations to care for the land.
- The realization that not all job creation is equal: scarce government investment should focus on high quality jobs and businesses that can offer sustained local employment and provide the best social and ecological value, not just cheap labor.

The witnesses recognized that their recommendations are not an instant fix, “This will take time and its success depends on communities, land management agencies, environmentalists, industry and others working together to find solutions,” said Joyce Dearstyne, Executive Director of Framing Our Community located in the remote town of Elk City, Idaho.

Building on today’s subcommittee hearing, Sustainable Northwest and partners will continue to carry ground-tested solutions to Congress and the Obama Administration’s “America’s Great Outdoors” initiative.

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*Sustainable Northwest has worked for more than a decade to craft and promote policy solutions to land management and rural community development challenges. Entrepreneurial and committed to collaboration, Sustainable Northwest works at the local, regional and national levels to ensure that nature, local economies and rural communities can thrive. The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is an initiative of Sustainable Northwest which promotes integrated policy solutions to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West.*

The hearing will be webcast live at 10:30 AM EDT:

[http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=273&Itemid=](http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=273&Itemid=)

Complete testimony and select quotes can be found at:

<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/testimony071510>

The platform and policy recommendations of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition can be found at:

[www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc/rural-voices-for-conservation-coalition](http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc/rural-voices-for-conservation-coalition)

Hearing witnesses include:

- Melanie Parker, Executive Director, Northwest Connections, Swan Valley, MT
- Joyce Dearstyne, Executive Director, Framing Our Community, Elk City, ID
- Dr. Cassandra Moseley, Director, Ecosystem Workforce Program, Institute for a Sustainable Environment, University of Oregon
- Kristin Troy, Executive Director, Lemhi Regional Land Trust, Salmon, ID
- Jim Stone, rancher and Chairman, Blackfoot Challenge, Ovando, MT (Mr. Stone cannot attend the hearing due to family matters, but submitted testimony.)