

Statement of the Honorable Doc Hastings
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 523, Douglas County, Washington Land Conveyance
May 10, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

Thank you for holding this important hearing on pending public lands legislation, including my bill – H.R. 523 – that would convey certain BLM properties to the Douglas County Public Utility District.

The Douglas County PUD operates the Wells Hydropower Project on the Columbia River, in North Central Washington. As the federal project license holder, the PUD manages the Wells dam and the associated reservoir for multiple purposes, including power generation, fish and wildlife protection, and recreation. Almost all of the land encompassing the project area is owned by the PUD, with the exception of several small BLM holdings.

I believe a higher level of resource and recreation management can be achieved on these lands if they are under PUD ownership. This would enable the PUD to manage the project across the landscape, and it would allow the BLM to concentrate its limited resources elsewhere in the state where there are large contiguous blocks of BLM land.

The Douglas PUD has a stellar reputation as a steward of the environment. They worked diligently with federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and environmental groups to develop a model Habitat Conservation Plan for salmon and steelhead. This was a very difficult thing to accomplish and took many years to realize. In addition, the PUD rigorously protects other forms of wildlife found in the area and provides for public access wherever possible. For all intents and purposes, they are the day to day land managers of the project area.

For those of you from areas of the country without public power entities, I would note that the Douglas PUD is a public agency under Washington state law with elected commissioners who meet regularly in public meetings. This legislation would facilitate the conveyance of land from one public agency to another.

For members of the Subcommittee who were at the hearing on this issue last year, I thank you for unanimously supporting this bill, both in Committee and later on the House floor. I regret that a number of common sense lands bills had to be reintroduced this year because they were ultimately not passed by the other body. However, I hope that you will approve this legislation again and that it will be moved quickly to the full House for further consideration.

Again Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the members of the Subcommittee for holding a hearing on this legislation today. I urge the favorable consideration of this bill and look forward to working with you and your staff on this issue.