

*Opening Statement
Subcommittee Chairman Raúl Grijalva
Budget Oversight Hearing
February 26, 2008*

The Subcommittee will come to order.

Let me begin by welcoming Director Bomar, Chief Kimbell and Deputy Director Bisson to our hearing today. The Subcommittee very much appreciates your making the time to join us to discuss your budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

Let me also say that BLM Director Caswell had intended to be here today but is unable to join us for health reasons. Our thoughts are with Director Caswell and we know that Mr. Bisson will perform ably as his stand-in today.

The priorities adopted by this Administration are not my priorities. Over the last eight years, programs and agencies which safe-guard our natural, cultural and historic legacy have received wholly inadequate funding due to short-sighted decisions placing higher priority on energy development, tax relief for those in the very highest tax brackets and war.

These short-sighted decisions have long-term consequences which are only now becoming apparent. The overall health of our national forests, our ability to prevent forest fire, infrastructure in our National Parks and the health of our public lands have all been compromised, and it will take much longer to repair this damage than it took to cause it in the first place.

Sadly, this budget request is not up to the job of fixing all that the last eight years has left broken. For

example, the United States Park Police would receive a small increase in funding under this budget. However, according to the Inspector General and the *Washington Post*, the Park Police are so understaffed and underfunded that the agency fundamentally can not accomplish its mission; leaving some of the most treasured icons in our nation at risk.

The State and Private Forestry program – money that could be used to pursue coordinated, locally-focused strategies to combat threats to rural communities and forest health – would be slashed by 58% under this request. According to the National Association of State Foresters, these cuts would be “disastrous.” The solution to the budget challenges faced by the Forest Service is not abdication of its core responsibilities as a leader in forest management and a good neighbor to local communities.

Spending on backlogged maintenance in the National Parks in this budget seems generous until you realize that, by one estimate at least, the maintenance backlog has ballooned to \$8 billion since President Bush took office.

This Administration's scramble to drill at all costs on BLM land has left scars that may never fully heal – and left the Administration pushing a “Healthy Lands Initiative” whereby the American people will pay the costs of this run-away energy development, rather than the companies which reaped the profits.

Clearly, the senior leaders before us today use their considerable expertise and experience to do the best they can with the resources available to them. They are to be commended for their efforts.

It is my hope that the recent pattern of Congressional action to increase funding for these agencies will continue and that a new administration, regardless of party, will join us in the work of beginning to reverse this long and unfortunate decline.

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