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NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN DOC HASTINGS

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Secretary Salazar Confirms Costs of ESA Litigation & Settlements are Unknown

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today during a Full Committee hearing on the President’s FY 2013 budget, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar agreed that reforms to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are needed to make it less lawsuit driven and admitted that he doesn’t currently know how much the Department spends on ESA-related litigation costs. The Natural Resources Committee held a Full Committee hearing last year examining how ESA litigation is costing jobs and impeding true recovery efforts.

“The Interior Department, along with NOAA, is actively involved in more than 200 lawsuits and legal actions concerning the ESA, specifically on candidate listings, habitat designations, and recovery plans. All Department resources spent defending these suits are resources that are not going to recovery, but rather to lawyers and special interest groups,” said Chairman Hastings at the hearing. “Last year, the Interior Department entered into settlements with certain plaintiffs that would result in requiring the Department to make decisions affecting petitions to list over 700 species under the Endangered Species Act. I am concerned that this could very likely undermine transparency and science-based ESA decisions, particularly when lawyers are being paid attorneys fees in these settlements and deadlines are being set by federal courts. Congress and the public should be allowed to know how these settlements came about and the requirements that they will impose.”

Chairman Hastings specifically asked Secretary Salazar, *“Do you know, or does the Department keep track of, how much money is spent by the Department on litigation costs, including payments made to settle lawsuits?”*

The Secretary responded that he has asked for information in terms of how much is paid out in settlements.

The Secretary went on to say that *“I do think it’s important that we move forward with ESA reform and that we find ways of dealing with these conflicts in a manner that is not as litigation-driven and conflicted-ridden as it has been.”*

Watch the full exchange between Chairman Hastings and Secretary Salazar:



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