

**Opening Statement
Ranking Member Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing on Forest Service Planning
November 15, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, Congress has tasked the Forest Service with a difficult balancing act. Among the requirements placed on the agency in the National Forest Management Act is “coordination of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness.” The Forest Service must “determine forest management systems, harvesting levels, and procedures in the light of all uses.”

In passing such legislation, we in Congress have the luxury of simply requiring the Forest Service to strive for balance among a variety of competing, and at times conflicting, multiple uses; the agency itself has to deal with achieving such balance on the ground, in the real world, in thousands of different resource management decisions on 225 million acres.

The Forest Service’s Proposed Planning Rule, Travel Management Rule and system for issuing special use permits are not perfect; each is shaped by public input, scientific research, litigation from a variety of types of plaintiffs and the pros and cons of a bureaucratic decision-making process.

But while these and other Forest Service policies are not perfect, they are also not part of a vast conspiracy to “lock up” federal land; they are not ill-informed nor are they developed in secret.

A good use of our time today would be to question Chief Tidwell, former Chief Dombeck and the other witnesses regarding how the latest versions of these policies were developed and how they align with existing Congressional mandates.

A poor use of our time today would be to play gotcha by asking the Chief to respond to questions regarding the merits of individual road closures or specific use permits or

individual planning outcomes. To legislate on general principles, but then evaluate using specific, unproven anecdotes is inherently unfair.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues, the Chief, former Chief Dombeck and the other witnesses joining us today regarding the difficult balancing act in which the Forest Service is engaged.

The Proposed Planning Rule, Travel Management Rule and special use permit system are works in progress and hopefully these and other tools will enable the agency to achieve the significant goals set for the Forest Service by Congress on behalf of the American people.