

HONORABLE RAÚL R. LABRADOR
IDAHO'S 1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT



October 28, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Winder
Co-Chair
Federal Lands Interim Committee
Idaho State Senate
Boise, Idaho 83702

The Honorable Lawrence Denney
Co-Chair
Federal Lands Interim Committee
Idaho House of Representatives
Boise, Idaho 83702

Dear Senator Winder and Representative Denney:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with this committee regarding the management of our public lands. I regret that I am unable to deliver my comments in person, but my duties in Congress require me to be in Washington, D.C., today.

I commend the Idaho Legislature for establishing the Federal Lands Interim Committee to further examine issues regarding proper management of federal lands in Idaho. Our great state is blessed with some of the most beautiful and resource rich lands in the entire country, and I believe that proper management of these lands is one of the most important issues facing Idaho. These lands, if managed properly, can provide economic benefits and recreational opportunities for Idahoans, and can serve as a foundation for a strong future for years to come. But proper land management not only serves to benefit Idahoans, it also creates thriving forests and rangelands and provides healthy habitats for wildlife.

Since being elected to Congress in 2010, I have served as a member of the Committee on Natural Resources. As a member of this committee, I have been able to learn in greater detail the federal government's management practices and the laws and regulations that govern them, and I have come to the conclusion that the federal management system is broken. Our laws are outdated, our regulations are ill-advised, our federal agencies are overwhelmed with compliance burdens, and our public lands and communities are suffering. This must change.

As Members of Congress, we must do our part to reform these burdensome and outdated laws and provide stricter guidance to federal agencies that regulate public lands. Currently, our federal land management agencies are required to operate under a series of laws and regulations that delay and prevent the proper management of our public lands and reward individuals and groups financially who through lawsuits seek to prevent the proper management practices.

Recently, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1526, the *Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act*. This bill included legislation I wrote, H.R. 1294, the *Self-Sufficient Community Lands Act*, which transfers the management of about 200,000 acres of federal land in Idaho to the state. Under this legislation, Idaho will have the authority to manage the land in accordance with state management practices. Passing this legislation with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives is a great victory for the state of Idaho, but we still have a long battle ahead before it becomes law. Regardless, I am committed to working with my colleagues in the Senate to pass this important legislation and having the President sign it into law.

I believe it is a step in the right direction for the United States Congress to pass legislation— like the *Self-Sufficient Community Lands Act* – to allow states a greater role in proactively managing federal lands; however, I believe this is only a temporary solution. Congress must eventually reform the federal laws that govern the management of federal lands, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLMPA), and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), so that our public lands can be sustainably managed to create healthy ecosystems and healthy communities.

If Congress is unable or unwilling to fix our broken public land management system, then perhaps the states should be given the opportunity to step into the void and be allowed to manage these precious resources. I commend the committee for taking a thoughtful approach to this issue and look forward to its recommendations.

As you examine these important issues, please know that my staff and I will do all we can to ensure you are successful. I have asked my District Counsel, Aaron Calkins, and my Deputy Chief of Staff in Idaho, Doug Taylor, to work closely with this committee to keep me apprised of your progress and to be constructive participants throughout. And as a member House Natural Resources Committee, I will do my best to provide this committee with access to the same information and resources that are available to me to ensure you are successful in your pursuit of providing recommendations that are thoughtful, sustainable, and worthy of our great state.

I look forward to working with you in this process.

Sincerely,

Raúl R. Labrador