The House Committee on Natural Resources
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
Oversight hearing on Public Lands and our Clean Energy Future

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Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at this oversight hearing on public lands and our clean energy future.

I currently serve as Director of California Energy Strategy for The Nature Conservancy, where I lead our efforts to advance California's transition to a low-carbon economy while protecting ecologically important lands and waters. Over the past 10 years, our California team has partnered with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a collaborative and science-driven approach to deployment of renewable energy on public and private lands. Together, we have worked to inform new planning approaches, develop policy, and create incentives to scale renewable energy and grid infrastructure while protecting critical lands and waters.

The Nature Conservancy has over 60 years of experience working with private landowners, federal, state, local, and tribal governments across the nation. We are the world's largest conservation organization with over one million members. We work in 72 countries around the world to conserve the lands and waters upon which all life depends.

Climate change is one of the world's most urgent challenges and an immediate risk to our communities, economies, and the Conservancy's mission. We believe there are practical, innovative solutions that can support thriving economies, advance a clean energy future, protect communities against climate impacts, and advance the conservation of critical lands and waters. Our efforts to address climate change include informing policy, creating scalable demonstration projects, developing cutting edge science, and collaborating with the private sector.

Deploying renewable energy to provide communities with reliable, low-cost, low-carbon electricity is a priority for the Conservancy to address climate change. Our efforts are grounded in sound science and collaboration. Our work on renewable energy deployment has been designed to use our scientific and conservation expertise to inform local, state, and federal land-use plans, and to provide science and policy analysis to state and federal regulatory agencies that develop and implement clean electricity policies and solutions.

Ambitious climate and clean energy goals are rising across the United States, from utilities and private corporations to cities and states. Providing low-carbon electric service to communities across the country will require the development of significant amounts of new renewable resources at local and grid scales, and a transmission system that can efficiently and cost-effectively move clean power when and where it is needed. These resources will complement investments and innovations in energy efficiency, demand response, and electricity storage.

Establishing ambitious goals is an essential first step to driving policy frameworks that can enable the technological solutions necessary to mitigate and slow the worst impacts of climate change. For these goals to be met, public lands, especially in the western United States, will play a key role.

The messages I hope to leave you with today are these: First, renewable energy does not need to conflict with conservation of critical lands and waters. Second, smart planning for renewable energy and conservation can yield better outcomes for businesses, communities, and the environment. Third, public lands play an important role in transitioning America's energy mix.

In just 10 years, the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – recognizing the tremendous wind, solar and geothermal resources on our public lands – have developed extensive expertise in planning and permitting utility-scale renewable energy while balancing the multiple values and uses of those lands.

Millions of acres of public lands across the western United States have world-class renewable resources and critically important lands and waters, creating the potential for conflict between conservation and climate goals. Such conflicts can unnecessarily degrade the habitat, biodiversity and other values of natural landscapes. They can also seriously impede renewable energy development. Projects proposed in areas of high conservation value have been subject to multi-year delays, significant cost increases and, in some cases, have been abandoned. In California, recent research sponsored by the Conservancy found that across public and private lands, utility-scale solar energy projects sited on lands with high conservation value took on

average twice as long to permit (34 months) as compared to projects sited on lands identified as having low conservation value (14 months).

Between 2008 and 2016, DOI and BLM pioneered a new approach to utility-scale renewable energy development on public lands that relied upon proactive, landscape-scale planning to direct development in a way that would minimize conflict and delay and thereby accelerate the growth of renewable energy. The approach used a science-based, structured decision-making process to balance multiple objectives. Those objectives included renewable energy development, protection of critical lands, recreation, cultural values, and military readiness.

The implementation of this planning approach presents the greatest opportunity for avoiding the adverse impacts of energy development. First, new energy facilities are sited to *avoid* impacts to the most critical lands. Second, technology choices, facility operating protocols and modifications to project footprint are made to further *minimize* impacts. Third, there is *restoration* to resources where impacts occur when technically feasible. Fourth, effective off-site measures are undertaken to *compensate* for remaining impacts. This proactive approach *reveals* tradeoffs early in the process versus *discovering* tradeoffs later down the line when options to avoid, minimize, optimize and prioritize are limited and often more expensive. Landscape-scale planning can provide predictability for project proponents by directing renewable energy development to designated or pre-planned areas, including lands that are already degraded or disturbed. Facilities can be permitted, built and operational more quickly, supporting the sustained pace of renewable energy deployment needed to address climate change.

The BLM's first landscape-scale planning effort for renewable energy, the Western Solar Plan, approved by DOI in 2012, is a successful example. The plan provides a single blueprint for utility-scale solar energy permitting on BLM-administered lands across six southwestern states. It establishes over 285,000 acres of solar energy zones, where incentives are in place to promote predictable and efficient permitting. In 2014, BLM held an auction for solar sites, at the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone in Nevada, which resulted in $5.8 million in bids from energy developers to develop six parcels covering 3,083 acres. In June 2015, BLM approved three large-scale projects on those parcels. This approach reduced the permitting time by more than half.

In my home state, BLM worked in cooperation with the state of California, on a second initiative – the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). This pioneering, eight-year, multi-stakeholder, landscape-scale planning process focused on the development of utility-scale solar, wind, and geothermal energy resources across over 10 million acres of public

lands in California. The planning process engaged local governments, non-governmental organizations, renewable energy companies, tribal governments, utilities, recreational stakeholders and local communities, affording extensive opportunities for public participation, with over 16,000 public comments received. The final land use plan, adopted in September 2016, created 388,000 acres of development focus areas designed to bring certainty and to streamline future wind, solar, and geothermal energy development, with the potential to generate enough renewable energy to power 8 million homes. The DRECP was a landmark collaborative widely supported for bringing certainty and predictability to renewable energy development on public lands in the California deserts.

In response to BLM's February 2018 Notice of Intent to amend the DRECP, a wide range of stakeholders, including the California Governor's Military Council, local governments, and members of Congress, voiced support for maintaining the carefully constructed balance of the DRECP, and the consistency and certainty it provides to the many economic, environmental, and community interests of the California deserts.

Given the complexity of the intensive eight-year effort to create the DRECP, it is understandable that opportunities to improve implementation of the plan have been identified. The DRECP allows for adaptive management that can support innovation and creativity at the local level to improve achievement of the plan's conservation and clean energy objectives.

Over the past decade, dramatic innovations have changed the energy sector, but more are needed to address climate change. DOI and BLM have significant experience in this space, pioneering new planning approaches and rules to promote the responsible deployment of renewable energy on public lands – such as the DRECP and Western Solar Plan. The Conservancy has encouraged DOI and BLM to maintain their focus on implementation of the plans and rules that have been adopted, to evaluate performance against clean energy and conservation objectives, to innovate, and to adaptively manage to improve the existing frameworks. We appreciate the attention of Congress on this important issue and conducting oversight in to how DOI and BLM are prioritizing responsible renewable energy development on public lands and considering resources needed to implement existing the land use plans that have been adopted for these purposes.

The blueprints established through landscape-scale planning – first piloted on public lands and since modeled on private lands – become increasingly important as efforts shift to achieving ambitious clean electricity mandates. Across the country, a growing number of states, utilities, and corporations are pursuing policies to increase deployment of low-cost domestic clean energy. In California, a new landmark energy law requires 100 percent of delivered electricity to

be renewable or zero-carbon by 2045. The footprint of renewable and zero-carbon energy and infrastructure development required to meet deeply decarbonized electricity and transportation sectors will be significant, even with investment and innovation in energy efficiency, demand response, and customer solar.

A new study by The Conservancy, in partnership with two energy consulting firms, models California's 2050 electric sector to determine optimal resource development necessary to meet the state's clean energy goals in alignment with economy-wide decarbonization targets. The study shows that a deeply decarbonized California electric sector is possible, and that the tremendous deployment of renewable energy required can be accomplished while limiting impacts to critical public and private lands across the West and minimizing cost. But a lot is at stake given the scale of development that may be necessary for decarbonization - the study also shows that significant natural resources could be lost. Investing in appropriate planning and policy frameworks is the best way to avoid unnecessary trade-offs on the path to a clean energy future.

The study emphasizes the importance of the investments made in the policy and planning frameworks that support responsible renewable energy development on public and private lands across the West. We encourage DOI and BLM to continue to create new financial and permitting incentives for utility-scale renewable energy located in areas designated as solar energy zones or development focus areas.

We appreciate the bipartisan work from this Committee on the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act (PLREDA) in the last Congress. We look forward to continuing to work with you on legislation to encourage the development of clean energy projects on public lands within solar energy zones or development focus areas identified through existing land use plans. This important legislation would benefit conservation and local communities. It is essential that PLREDA reinforce the smart planning approach to responsible renewable energy development.

America's public lands have a significant opportunity to shape our energy future by developing clean domestic energy, creating jobs, reducing carbon pollution, and protecting natural resources for the benefit of this and future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony to the subcommittee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.