

Regarding: Submission to *Countering Extremism on America's Public Lands*, the June 15, 2016 Natural Resources Committee forum on public lands to examine the emergence of anti-government extremism threats to parks, forests, wildlife refuges, historic sites and recreation lands across America.

Please accept this submission highlighting ten threats resulting from anti- government extremism that Congress and every American should be concerned about. As senior federal land management agency employees and leaders, we have seen the threats to land and property, employee safety, and civil society that result from unchecked anti-government extremists. This is an issue worthy of Congressional review and we applaud you for examining these emerging threats.

1. Threat to government property, lands and natural resources belonging to all Americans. A wide variety of illegal activities occur on federal lands, many damaging natural and cultural resources belonging to all Americans. The recent illegal occupation by anti-government extremists of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge resulted in damage to facilities, extensive debris, and damage to natural resources that will cost an estimated [\\$6 million](#) to repair. Anti-government rhetoric may be emboldening people to vandalize our national treasures and incidents seem to be [on the rise](#).

2. Threat to safety of government employees. Unfortunately, there has been a long [history of violence](#) against federal employees over the past few decades. Federal land management agency employees such as range ecologists, wildlife biologists, geologists, recreation planners and others often work in remote and isolated conditions and unfortunately, they often [fear for their safety](#). Some employees may not even feel safe sitting at their desks in [federal office buildings](#) due to actions of anti-government extremists. If these [trends continue](#), it will be harder to hire and retain the very best staff.

3. Threat that lands will be sold off to private individuals and corporations. Anti-government extremism fuels misunderstanding and falsehoods about the origins, management challenges and benefits of public lands that are owned by all Americans. It provides cover for those who want to [transfer our public lands](#) to the states and privatize them. Some combination of tax increases and land sales would be required if the states were to take on management and [fiscal responsibility](#) for these lands and all of their incumbent liabilities such as abandoned toxic mines sites. Land currently available to all Americans would be sold for private recreation and hunting enclaves for the wealthy and for mining and resource exploitation by multi-national industrial corporations.

4. Threat to public lands recreation and tourism including the basic rights of public access. Public lands outdoor recreation is enjoyed by [142 million](#) Americans every year. These activities support the overall outdoor recreation industry which contributes nearly [\\$650 billion](#) to the U.S. economy and supports more than 6 million jobs. More than 305 million people visited our national parks last year, an all-time visitation record for the National Park Service and many millions more visited our National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. But these quintessential American vacations and economic benefits are under threat if anti-government extremists succeed in disposing of our nation's public lands.

5. Threat to our national identity as a country blessed with unspoiled, open space. As Americans we celebrate both our love of liberty and justice but also the lands that embody our love of country. Free or low cost access to our nation's public lands is one of America's great equalizers; you don't need to be wealthy to enjoy fishing in gold medal trout streams or spending your vacation surrounded by world class scenery. More than [57 million people](#) live within 25 miles of national public lands and with America's population expected to increase more than 40% by 2050, access to our nation's forests, rivers, grasslands and deserts will be critical to the lifestyle and well-being of our people and communities.

6. Threat that wildfires will become even more destructive and expensive to fight. If the anti-government extremist agenda is successful and lands are transferred from national ownership, fighting wildfires will become [even more difficult](#) as land ownership becomes more fragmented, even more development occurs in the urban-wildland interface, and funding for wildfire suppression becomes disjointed and subject to state budget fluctuations and uncertainties.

7. Threat to wildlife and nature's ability to adapt to climate change. Federal lands are one of the greatest refuges from development, not just for people, but for wildlife. The ability for pronghorn, elk and mule deer to migrate through the seasons and the ability for plants and animals to adjust to increasing drought and warming climates will rely on undeveloped public lands. Our natural areas in the West are [so fragmented](#) that wildlife are typically only about 3.5 miles away from significant human development. If anti-government extremists succeed in thwarting balanced public lands management, development of public lands will increase and parcels will be sold off.

8. Threat to interagency cooperation between local, state and federal agencies and officials. Local, state and federal agencies work together on a wide variety of issues affecting the American people and their lands and resources including land use planning, law enforcement, economic development, wildfires, search and rescue, wildlife management, and other intergovernmental coordination. Anti-government extremism makes this coordination more difficult and there have even been cases of local sheriffs [threatening to arrest](#) federal employees for doing their job managing our national resources.

9. Threat to a civil society where emerging community collaborations are becoming common. Across the West communities, neighbors, public land agencies, businesses and concerned citizens have been coming together to work on [collaborative solutions](#) to natural resource and watershed issues. Successful community-based collaborative partnerships have become a common practice for land management agencies working on watershed restoration, sage grouse conservation, and invasive weeds. Anti-government extremism sows seeds of fear and mistrust instead of collaboration.

10. Threat of lost revenue and economic value to the American people. If anti-government extremists get their way and our national lands and resources are sold off and transferred, billions of dollars of federal revenue will be lost. Activities on lands managed by the [Department of the Interior](#) were associated with about \$200 billion in value added, \$360 billion in economic output, and an estimated 2 million jobs. Various activities on [Forest Service](#) lands contribute more than \$36 billion to America's economy each year supporting nearly 450,000 jobs. These figures do not count the myriad of natural economic benefits such as storing and filtering fresh drinking water for local communities.

Respectfully submitted by the following individuals (names listed alphabetically):

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