

Members Call for Limitations on President's Authority to Unilaterally Designate National Monuments

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 13, 2011 - Today, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held a [legislative hearing](#) on six bills that would limit the President's authority to use the Antiquities Act to unilaterally designate new National Monuments within certain states. Last year, an [internal document](#) from the Interior Department revealed 14 areas of federal land that the Obama Administrator has identified as worthy of National Monument designation under the Antiquities Act. The proposed designations would lock-up millions of acres of public lands in the West without local input or Congressional authority, and could restrict access for energy production, recreation, and other job-creating economic activities. To prevent unilateral Administrative action, these bills would require either state approval or authorization by Congress prior to a National Monument designation.

At the hearing, Members stressed the need for local input and the potential impacts these designations could have on jobs and economic growth.

"The Treasured Landscapes memo served as a canary in a coal mine, lifting the veil of the disingenuous agenda hatched by the current Administration to unilaterally lock up millions of acres throughout the West from multiple-use. Using the Antiquities Act would allow the Administration to circumvent the open congressional process, which helps ensure that the livelihoods of communities, residents, businesses and stakeholders are examined and thoughtfully considered before new public land designations are made. Radical special interest groups continue to push the Administration to use the Antiquities Act. Recently former DOI Secretary Bruce Babbitt urged the Administration to use the Antiquities Act as a tool to lock up millions of acres of public lands. In light of these ongoing efforts, it is essential that Utah and other western states put in place a measure similar to that of Wyoming to ensure that the Antiquities Act cannot be used to destroy livelihoods in an effort to fulfill political agendas," **said Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01).**

"In September of 1996, President Clinton used the Antiquities Act to surprise Utah by establishing the 1.8 million acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The State had no warning that this was coming, and once it was done we had no recourse. With the stroke of the pen, 500 high-paying jobs in a rural Utah county disappeared. We thought we had seen the worst that could be done with this Act to score political points at the expense of public-lands states. Last year when the so-called, Treasured Landscapes memo was leaked to this Committee we realized that it could be much worse. We found out that this President is not only willing to abuse the Antiquities Act, but that his Interior Department was getting ready to advise him on where to do it."

Two of the areas they had identified for possible monument designation are in Utah. That is why it is essential that the bills we are discussing today pass and the Congress be given the ultimate say on which areas will become national monuments," **said Senator Orrin Hatch (UT).**

"In the Northern California Congressional District I represent, the federal government owns a significant amount of the land, with it reaching as high as 75% in one county. Local communities collect no taxes from these lands, money that could go to schools and roads. The federal government is also unable to manage it properly. Now the Obama Administration is talking about increasing the number of presidentially-designated national monuments. This would be detrimental to local communities across our nation, and is why I have introduced H.R. 817, which would require Congress' approval for any National Monument designations by the President. ... In the face of severe economic challenges, we need to reform crippling government policies and regulations so that local communities can utilize their natural resources and prosper. These lands belong to the people, and local needs should drive their management, not a one-size-fits-all decree from Washington," **said Rep. Wally Herger (CA-02).**

"The Montana Land Sovereignty Act isn't about stopping new National Monuments. It's simply about making sure that the American public has a voice in the process. ... I didn't introduce the Montana Land Sovereignty Act to undermine the intent of the Antiquities Act. On the contrary, my legislation restores this valuable law to its original intention: the preservation of American antiquities. But the Montana Land Sovereignty Act is also about protecting the American people from the unchecked, unaccountable expansion of Antiquities Act power," **said Rep. Denny Rehberg (MT-At large).**

"It has become public that the Obama Administration is attempting yet another land grab that would add over 13 million acres to federal real estate land holdings. Considering the size of the federal government's existing real estate portfolio, there is no need to continue unilaterally acquiring new lands without any regard to states rights or economies. ... H.R. 302, the Preserve Land Freedom for Americans Act, seeks to give the states a voice and power by requiring state approval for national monument designations by the Federal government. State governments are prepared and best qualified to make these decisions," **said Rep. Virginia Foxx (NC-05).**

"Just as designation of wilderness areas is a Congressional prerogative, I believe the designation of national monuments should also be subject to Congressional oversight. My legislation [H.R. 846, Idaho Land Sovereignty Act] would prohibit any presidential administration from imposing new monument designations in the state of Idaho. Clearly the Obama Administration has given us numerous reasons to believe they need to be reined in with their job killing regulations. ... I don't oppose public lands. I simply oppose efforts by an out-of-touch administration to forcibly lock up public lands with no Congressional oversight," **said Rep. Raúl Labrador (ID-01).**