



Testimony of Barry Bushue on Owyhee National Canyonlands Designtation
House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
May 23, 2016

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Oregon's farmers and ranchers, the Oregon Farm Bureau opposes the proposed national monument designation of the Owyhee Desert in Oregon. This designation would affect a 2.5 million acre area in the Owyhee Canyonlands along the Oregon-Idaho-Nevada border, an area larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. We urge Oregon's state legislators to oppose the designation of the Owyhee Canyonlands as a national monument.

For more than a century, the President of the United States has had the power to unilaterally designate federal lands as a National Monument without the consent of Congress, local governments or affected citizens. Since 1906, 145 national monuments have been designated for federal protection. 105 are managed by the National Park Service, 23 by the Bureau of Land Management, 10 by the USDA Forest Service, 7 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and 1 by NOAA Fisheries.

Use of the Antiquities Act for large tract designation does not provide reasonable notice to the public and has gone well beyond Congress' original intent in 1906 to designate the smallest portion of land needed to protect certain objects of genuine historic and scientific interest. These executive actions have led to devastating reductions in economic activity and the loss of jobs in resource dependent communities because there is no requirement to determine what the impact of the designation would have on communities and the local economy, and no local input into the conditions of the designation.

This abuse of the Antiquities Act restricts at best and prohibits at worst, economic opportunity and removes decision making from the states and private citizens. These designations have affected water rights, grazing rights and access to state and private lands. Between 15 million and 17 million acres of land in the state of Oregon is under farm or ranch operation. Roughly 38,000 operators manage these lands—planting and cultivating crops on approximately 5

million acres; raising livestock on pasturelands and rangelands of approximately 10 million acres; and managing forest and woodlands, wetlands and other conservation resources on the remaining 2 million acres.

Farm and ranch land in Oregon is under constant pressure for conversion to other uses. In many cases federal land is checker-boarded, meaning it is intertwined with private property. Other private property is directly adjacent to those federal lands. There is no reasonable or realistic way to expect that those landowners would be able to continue operations as they currently exist. Agricultural land use provides many economic, ecologic and cultural benefits to communities and regions. Most importantly, once converted to a non-farm use, it will likely never return to farm production.

As you know, Oregon is more than 60% publicly owned, either by the state or federal government. Much of the federal land in Oregon isn't maintained, causing great harm to existing farmland and crops. Examples include federal refuges in that were originally bought and developed decades ago to assist farmers with the goose depredation problems. Those refuges are no longer maintained to accommodate the rapidly growing population or provide the promised feed for geese. As a result, wheat, alfalfa and grass seed farms are used for feed, which the refuges are used as a safe haven. This is just one example of many.

Declaring national monuments sounds like a good idea because it seems to have a positive connotation, but it is fundamentally irresponsible, as it works directly against the best interests of the local environment. Proponents of the monument maintain that it would have no impact on private lands or landowners or federal grazing permittees. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are countless examples of national monument designations resulting in restrictions or reductions in grazing across the west. Indeed, one of President Clinton's designations here in Oregon - Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument - expressly called for reductions in grazing, resulting in the buy out of nearly 50,000 acres of grazing permits.

Designations also have a negative impact on the local communities where they are located. For example, the County where the Grande Staircase Escalante national monument is located have seen declines in school enrollment after monument designation. Prior to the designation, the local schools supported about 150 students. Presently, that number has dropped to 50 students, and is expected to drop another 10% this year. Declaring a monument would unquestionably affect the natural resource industry and local economy in Malheur County.

We believe wild areas need to be protected, but maintaining healthy forests and other natural areas over the long haul is a complex process. To reduce economic opportunity on an area in a state that is so desperately in need of jobs and dollars it is blatantly irresponsible. In addition, this comes at a time when much needed timber payments from the federal government have been uncertain in recent years. Rural Oregon can hardly afford to have any more losses.

Finally, as farmers and ranchers, we care deeply about the land. Not only do we live

on the land, we enjoy and depend on the land. We raise our families here and have cared for it responsibly for generations. Our voices are united and opposed to an unnecessary monument declaration that will harm our families, our community and our way of life.

Sincerely,

Barry Bushue, President
Oregon Farm Bureau Federation