

**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
OVERSIGHT PLAN  
111<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**Under clause 2 of Rule X of the House of Representatives, each standing committee of the House has general oversight responsibilities to determine whether laws and programs addressing subjects within its jurisdiction are being implemented in accordance with the intent of Congress and to determine whether they should be continued, curtailed or eliminated. The Committee intends to review the following laws, programs and issues within the Committee's jurisdiction during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress:**

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

Planning for the Impacts of Climate Change: Federal land, water, fish, and wildlife resources will be vulnerable to a wide range of physical, biological, economic, and social effects as a result of climate change. At the same time, public lands and resources represent some of the best opportunities we have for implementing natural resource adaptation strategies to help mitigate some of those effects. Unfortunately, a recent Government Accountability Office report found that federal resource agencies have largely failed to address climate change in their strategic plans; resource managers have limited guidance concerning whether or how to address climate change and are unsure of what actions to take; and resource managers do not have sufficient site specific information to plan for and address the effects of climate change on the federal resources they manage. The Committee expects to consider and promote legislation that would establish an integrated federal program to address the impacts of climate change on our natural resources.

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

Endangered Species Act Implementation: The Bush Administration spent eight years seeking to undermine the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the protection it provides our nation's most imperiled species. High ranking political appointees used their positions and influence to meddle in scientific decisions under the ESA and alter policy outcomes, potentially harming species and certainly harming the integrity of the law, as well as the morale and reputation of the agencies charged with its implementation. The Committee will work closely with the new Administration to restore transparency, consistency, and accountability in the implementation of the ESA, ensuring that sound science is the basis for decision-making under the law.

**INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Budget Oversight: The Committee will review the President's budget request for programs and activities related to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other Department of the Interior agencies with tribal-related programs.

Consultation: The Committee intends to schedule an oversight hearing with the new Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Chairman of the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC), and the Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS) to discuss the goals of the Obama Administration for Indian Country and their plan for consultation with tribal governments.

Trust Reform: The Department of the Interior (DOI) has moved several programs and millions of dollars out of the BIA and into the Office of Special Trustee (OST). The Office of Special Trustee was established by the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act of 1994 to oversee trust fund management reform throughout the DOI. The Committee will review the effect this expansion of OST has had on Indian tribes, including resource and trust management, trust fund management, appraisals, and probate.

Tribal Justice, Law Enforcement and Homeland Security related issues: Several issues related to tribal justice and law enforcement will be addressed. Twenty-five Indian tribes govern over 260 miles of land that is either adjacent, or directly accessible, by boat, to international borders. In addition, tribal lands are home to several potential terrorist targets such as dams, hydroelectric systems, and oil and gas pipelines, but Indian tribes have been excluded from receiving direct funding under the Homeland Security Act. The Committee intends to conduct a hearing on the efforts of Indian tribes to protect US/tribal borders. The Committee plans to explore the effects of placing this responsibility on Indian tribes, while providing few resources or assistance.

In addition, tribal governments are the primary law enforcement agents and emergency responders for over 56 million acres, or 2%, of the United States. With staggering rates of unemployment (over 80% on some reservations), devastating poverty, and underfunded police and rescue agencies, many Indian reservations are prime targets for crime. The Committee will conduct hearings to explore the funding shortages that cause some tribal police forces to severely restrict activities part way through the fiscal year. The issue of gangs and drugs on reservations and how to address the violence they bring will also be considered.

Moreover, the Committee will build on its work from the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to examine the status of detention facilities throughout Indian Country. In September of 2004, the DOI Office of Inspector General (IG) released a report entitled, *Neither Safe nor Secure - an Assessment of Indian Detention Facilities*. This report found longstanding neglect and BIA indifference toward safety and security concerns at the detention centers. Almost all facilities were found to be operating below minimum staffing levels. All aspects -- from funding, to staffing, to maintenance, to training, to record-keeping -- were found wanting. It is anticipated that oversight activities will also include a review of the response of BIA to the report, including what, if any, improvements have been made since 2004.

Additionally, the Committee proposes to undertake an assessment and oversight of tribal court systems. Indian tribal courts across the country operate with various degrees of competency and support. Strengthening tribal court systems and clarifying court jurisdiction is paramount to the operation of strong tribal governments and vibrant, self-sufficient Indian economies. Unfortunately, for decades there has existed a lack of clarity regarding the jurisdiction of tribal courts that is impeding the delivery of justice to Indian communities.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA): The Committee has requested that the GAO study the use of funds appropriated for the implementation of NAGPRA. Upon receipt of the study, the Committee intends to hold a hearing on the results as well as proposals to strengthen implementation and enforcement of the Act. In the interim, the Committee will continue to focus on other NAGPRA issues, such as the status of the culturally unidentified remains database, and sacred sites issues.

Tribal Recognition: The Committee can anticipate that federal tribal recognition reform bills will again be introduced in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress as well as bills to address the recognition of individual tribes. The Committee will continue to work on these bills and will collaborate with the Obama Administration to reform the current federal administrative process.

Economic Development: The Committee expects to examine what is needed to spur economic development on Indian reservations. This endeavor will extend in several directions including: the need for infrastructure conducive to development; established tribal plans, tribal laws and regulations relating to business operations and possible environmental effects; incentives that would encourage businesses to locate on Indian reservations; effective tribal court systems; and increased access for tribes to financial capital seed money. In short, the Committee's goal with this examination will be to ensure strong, stable tribal government structures that are prepared to operate business development and foster relationships with outside enterprises for the betterment of all involved.

Infrastructure: Many of the most dangerous roads, bridges, and dams in the United States are located on Indian land. In addition, the lack of basic infrastructure on Indian land impedes the health, safety, education, and economic development of Native peoples. It is expected that the Obama Administration will pursue an aggressive program to improve infrastructure nationwide. The Committee intends to conduct a hearing to collect needed information to ensure Indian lands and Indian tribes are included in any new infrastructure initiatives during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Energy: Several issues related to energy in Indian Country are likely to be addressed. With regard to renewable energy development, many of the best locations to develop wind and solar energy exist on Indian land. The Committee intends to hold a hearing on how best the federal government can assist Indian tribes in the development and retailing of renewable energy resources. Legislation, if warranted, will be pursued. In addition the Committee will facilitate the inclusion of Indian resources in any energy initiative proposed during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Regarding oil and gas development, 20% - 30% of all onshore oil and gas resources are located on Indian lands. Often mining leases on Indian land bring far less revenue to the Indian owner than do leases on non-Indian land. The Committee expects to conduct oversight into the causes of these disparities and contemplates pursuing any changes needed to address such inequities.

Regarding energy efficiency, the Committee intends to conduct a hearing to determine the energy efficiency of federal buildings and facilities located on Indian lands, the cost of inefficient buildings, and the steps necessary to make those buildings more energy efficient.

Missing Indian Health Service (IHS) Equipment: After receiving information regarding missing IHS equipment, the Committee, jointly with the House Oversight Committee, requested the General Accountability Office (GAO) conduct an investigation of the management of IHS equipment in certain offices. The GAO reported to the Committee that millions of dollars worth of equipment is missing from the IHS. In addition the GAO recommended new policy and procedures to the IHS to ensure that this problem does not reoccur. The Committee intends to hold a hearing to determine what the IHS has done to address the situation.

## **INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE**

Budget Oversight: The Committee will oversee that portion of the President's budget which relates to the insular areas of the United States, including five principal U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and three freely associated states (Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Palau). The Committee will review the President's budget requests for the programs and activities of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Regulation Reform: The Committee anticipates reviewing the need for, and advisability of, reducing or enhancing those federal rules and regulations falling within its jurisdiction which relate to the insular areas of the United States.

Normalizing Immigration and Border Security: The Committee recognizes that U.S. territories are also U.S. borders and that certain U.S. territories are viewed as strategic and vital to the defense of the U.S. because of their locations. Two U.S. territories (American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) have previously been allowed local control over immigration policy by Congress, and were exempt from U.S. immigration law. The enactment of Public Law 110-229 provides for extending U.S. immigration laws to the Northern Marianas in a flexible manner and over a transition period scheduled to commence in the summer of 2009. The Committee intends to hold hearings on the rules and regulations being promulgated by the Department of Homeland Security, in coordination with the Department of the Interior and the Department of Labor, providing for this transition period.

Puerto Rico Self-Determination: In the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee convened two legislative hearings on competing measures to advance Puerto Rico's political status. The Full Committee, consequently, favorably reported H.R. 900 (as amended) to the House. The Committee will continue to examine legislation to resolve Puerto Rico's political status.

Guam Military Buildup: The Committee will continue to exercise its oversight responsibility to examine the effects of relocating U.S. military forces from Okinawa, Japan, to Guam. The Committee recognizes the many challenges facing both the government of Guam and the federal government to address issues which will impact Guam's civilian community.

Infrastructure and Alternative Energy Development: The Committee plans to explore initiatives to increase and expedite infrastructure development in all U.S. territories. In addition, the Committee anticipates reviewing alternative energy proposals and plans which would reduce reliance on imported fuel and maximize the use of both alternative and indigenous sources of energy.

Compacts of Free Association: The Committee will exercise its oversight authority of funding and program assistance to the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, in accordance with the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-188). Additionally, Public Law 99-658, which established the free association relationship between the United States and the Republic of Palau, contemplates a review of the terms and related agreements of the Compact in the fifteenth year of the political relationship. The Committee intends to oversee any formal negotiations leading up to the fifteenth anniversary between the United States and the Republic of Palau.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species: Roughly 169 countries are party to this international agreement that provides worldwide protection for endangered plants and animals by ensuring that trade does not threaten their survival. In 2010, member countries will assemble in Doha, Qatar for their regular meeting where proposals for protecting new species under the Convention will be considered. The Committee intends to hold hearings on proposals by the United States and other countries and will examine the strategies that the United States plans to pursue to achieve and promote species conservation.

Coastal Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Over the past two years, NOAA's National Ocean Service and the coastal states have engaged in a comprehensive visioning process involving federal, state, and non-governmental stakeholders to redefine our national approach to managing the nation's coastal zone. During the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, several bills were introduced that offered potential amendments to the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), specifically regarding alternative renewable ocean energy, coastal climate change adaptation, retention of working waterfronts, preserving coastal open space and wildlife habitat, and strengthening our system of National Estuarine Research Reserves. In addition, legislation was also considered to facilitate and promote regional federal-state ocean governance partnerships. The Committee plans to refine these ideas and further collaborate with NOAA, the coastal states, and other stakeholders to shape CZMA legislation to provide a new vision and the necessary tools to manage our dynamic ocean and coastal regions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Improving Ocean Governance: Two national commissions released reports earlier this decade offering recommendations to improve collaboration among federal agencies and federal programs and policies that are aimed at the management and conservation of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. As economic and energy development in our oceans increases at a rapid pace, the need for the reforms recommended by these Commissions to resolve conflicts and facilitate effective decision-making becomes even more urgent. In the last Congress, the Committee held hearings on these reforms and began the process of considering legislation to implement the highest priority recommendations of the Commissions. The Committee expects to continue that effort in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Implementation of the Magnuson Act: Among other changes to our federal fishery management system, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act (MSRA) of 2006 mandated: 1) the implementation of annual catch limits and accountability measures to end overfishing; 2) the revision of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) procedures for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act; and 3) the development of new criteria and standards for any Limited Access Privilege Program. The Committee will continue to conduct oversight regarding policies, rules, and fishery management plan amendments designed to fulfill these and other mandates set out in MSRA to ensure that the law is being implemented as Congress intended. The Committee will also examine the appropriate levels of funding needed to implement the law effectively.

International Fisheries Management and Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) Fishing: Internationally, IUU fishing is a significant marine resource conservation problem that has serious impacts on U.S. fishermen and on economies around the globe. The MSRA of 2006 directed NMFS to publish a biennial report on the status of IUU fishing (including the occurrence of unacceptable levels of bycatch), to establish procedures for certifying those nations, and to evaluate subsequent progress to reduce the impacts of such fishing practices on protected living marine resources. The Committee will monitor these activities and may advance legislation to strengthen enforcement mechanisms to discourage IUU fishing.

Marine Mammals: A number of discrete marine mammal issues merit the Committee's attention during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. These include increasing protections for North Atlantic Right Whales, bolstering recovery efforts for Southern California Sea Otters, and assessing the impacts of ocean noise associated with a wide range of activities. The Committee intends to conduct oversight hearings on these issues and consider legislative initiatives as appropriate.

Shark Conservation: The Committee will advance legislation to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000. In addition to eliminating an unintended enforcement loophole and addressing the difficulty that has become apparent in implementing the statute's percentage-based standard, the Shark Conservation Act of 2009 will promote the conservation of sharks internationally and in a manner consistent with the expectations placed on U.S. fishermen.

Marine Aquaculture in Federal waters: Currently, there exists no comprehensive federal permitting and regulatory system for the siting of aquaculture facilities in the Exclusive Economic Zone, and NOAA has sought legislation to establish this authority. Such a system is needed to avoid the piecemeal approach to permitting that now poses threats to both the marine environment and public health. The Committee intends to hold hearings on legislation to authorize a coordinated set of enforceable federal regulations to address program administration, permitting and site selection issues, and characterize, monitor, and mitigate the potential, specific and cumulative ecological impacts of offshore aquaculture operations.

International Whaling Commission: The Committee will continue to monitor the activities of the U.S. Delegation as it participates in negotiations on the future of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The Committee intends to hold an oversight hearing to elucidate the new Administration's position heading into the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting of the IWC, with an emphasis on maintaining the United States' commitment to the commercial whaling moratorium.

Invasive Species: Invasive, nonnative species can harm the economy, the environment, other animal species' health and human health. The Committee's evaluation of these negative impacts and the inadequacies of the current injurious wildlife provisions of the Lacey Act Amendments of 1981 identified the need for a proactive approach. The Committee expects to advance legislation authorizing the FWS to establish a risk assessment process to control the importation of invasive wildlife species.

Reaffirming U.S. Global Leadership in Coral Reef Conservation and Science: In recognition of the persistent threats and tenuous health of global coral reef resources, the Committee, during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, reported and the House passed comprehensive legislation to reauthorize and strengthen the Coral Reef Conservation Act. Although the Senate did not act on this initiative, the need for this legislation remains undiminished. The Committee will look to pass legislation in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to amend the Act to increase support for local coral reef action strategies, to strengthen international cooperation and enforcement of coral reef protections, to enhance effective federal coordination by giving statutory authority to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, and to explicitly authorize the Secretary of the Interior to protect coral reef resources under the department's jurisdiction.

Advancing Bird Conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Committee remains concerned that many bird populations around the world, including some populations of popular waterfowl species that are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), are depleted or in rapid decline due to factors related to climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation, disease, and incidental mortality. The Committee will review implementation of the MBTA and assess whether this venerable wildlife statute and other migratory bird conservation strategies, such as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), remain effective in addressing contemporary impacts affecting bird populations, especially the escalating development of wind energy. In addition, the Committee anticipates considering whether legislation to authorize migratory bird joint ventures or legislation to incrementally increase the price in the Federal Duck Stamp is necessary at this time.

Addressing U.S. Needs for Advancement and Innovation in U.S. Ocean Science, Research and Technologies: Recognizing the need to jumpstart efforts to address the declining investments in and attention to U.S. ocean science, research, and technology, the Committee moved through the House, during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, a substantial legislative package regarding ocean mapping, integrated ocean observations, undersea research and exploration and enhanced science and research concerning ocean acidification. While none of these non-controversial bills became law, the Committee will again move this package in recognition of the broad bipartisan support they garnered and the substantial scientific, economic and environmental benefits these bills will generate for the American public.

Enhancing Our Understanding and Use of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): The underlying science justifying the use of marine protected areas as a resource management tool – including the use of no-take marine reserves – has matured in recent years, and the use of MPAs has become more widespread. The Committee expects to carry forward efforts initiated during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to reauthorize the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. The Committee plans to also examine the establishment of three new marine national monuments in the Western Pacific Ocean and the release of a final management plan for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument for the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. In addition, the Committee anticipates investigating the Administration’s implementation of Executive Order 13158 regarding marine protected areas and the release of final guidelines for the development of a national system of marine protected areas.

Strengthening the U.S. Commitment to International Wildlife Conservation: The Committee invested substantial time during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress considering reauthorizations of and additions to the Multinational Species Conservation Fund and conducted oversight concerning illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products. During this Congress, the Committee intends to move legislation to expand the Multinational Species Conservation Fund to address the needs of great cats, canids and cranes. In addition, the Committee will look to advance legislation to provide a comprehensive authority to clarify the Secretary of the Interior’s responsibilities in international wildlife conservation and to coordinate the activities of the federal government in this regard. Additionally, considering the global reach of U.S. Armed Services, the Committee might also consider legislation to reauthorize the Sikes Act to improve its effectiveness and coordination with broader conservation initiatives.

## **ENERGY AND MINERAL**

Budget Oversight: The Committee will examine the budgets and capacities of energy and minerals related programs within the U.S. Geological Survey, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Minerals Management Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service.

1872 Mining Law: The Committee will again consider comprehensive legislation to reform the nation’s mining law, and examine issues germane to bringing the nation’s hardrock minerals policy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unlike nearly every other country in the world, the 1872 Mining Law conveys rather than leases hardrock minerals on public lands, and development occurs on a claim without a production royalty paid to the federal government. Considerations for the Committee include how to structure a royalty for mining gold, copper, uranium and other valuable hardrock minerals which produces fair return to the taxpayer but also supports a healthy industry, and the lack of a clear and enforceable national environmental standard for mining.



Regulation of Coal Ash: Approximately 129 million tons of coal ash (combustion “byproducts” or “wastes”) was produced in the United States during 2006. By one estimate, coal ash generation will increase at least 25% by 2020. In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee will consider legislation to address the appropriate role of the federal government in assuring the safe disposal or reuse of coal combustion waste. A 2007 draft assessment by the Environmental Protection Agency revealed risks to human health and the environment from the disposal of coal waste in landfills and surface impoundments, and a 2006 National Research Council report recommended enforceable federal standards for coal waste disposal in mines.

Offshore Drilling: The Committee will consider the question of whether, where and under what terms future offshore oil and gas development should occur during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. The federally-owned Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) is responsible for producing nearly 15% of the nation’s domestically produced gas and over a quarter of domestically produced oil. In Fiscal Year 2008, oil and gas activities on the OCS brought in over \$18 billion in bonus bids, rentals, and royalties. As a major source of energy and revenue for the United States, vigorous and extensive oversight of the offshore oil and gas program is critical. Further, with over 500 million acres of the OCS now open for leasing activity due to the recent expiration of the executive withdrawal and Congressional moratorium, questions about where, when, and how drilling should occur in the previously protected areas of the OCS must be addressed by the Committee.

The Committee intends to aggressively pursue oversight of these issues by conducting a comprehensive review that examines all facets of the oil and gas program on the Outer Continental Shelf. The rate of development of existing leases, the environmental impact of drilling, the effect of OCS oil and gas production on energy security and energy prices, the views of local communities on drilling activities, and more will all be addressed. The Committee will ensure that any new oil and gas activity in the OCS is done in an environmentally and fiscally responsible manner – protecting not only the scenic beauty of our shorelines, but also the return that the American people deserve from the use of their oil and gas resources.

Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Programs: During the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee will continue to assess the strengths and weaknesses of federal onshore energy program management, organization, and policies. Reviews are anticipated to include:

- Recent analyses by the General Accounting Office on ways the Department of the Interior can encourage diligent development, the use of categorical exclusions as allowed by the Energy Policy Act of 2005, and fluid minerals bonding.
- Recommendations by western governors for improvements in energy development, particularly coordination and planning between federal officials and policies and state and local officials to facilitate leasing while also protecting wildlife corridors and crucial habitat.
- Concerns raised by conservationists and western state citizens that resource management plans and leasing decisions are increasingly inconsistent with agency stewardship requirements. For example, six Utah Resource Management Plans (RMPs) covering 11 million acres completed in 2008 allow oil and gas exploration and development across a majority of lands which BLM itself identified as having important wilderness characteristics, and in some areas abut our national parks.

- Questions about community impacts from energy development, and the pressure that various kinds of energy development places on water supplies.

Accountability in Royalty Management/Royalty in Kind Program: The Committee will continue to aggressively review the collection of royalties, rents and bonus bids accrued from leasing federal oil and gas resources on federal lands and waters—\$24 billion in FY 2008, the second largest revenue stream to the federal Treasury after taxes.

Historically, the federal agencies tasked with tracking and collection of these revenues have not performed in an adequate or transparent manner. As evidenced by a series of independent assessments undertaken at the insistence of the Committee, there has been gross malfeasance in the federal oil and gas program. As Interior Department Inspector General Earl Devaney has said, “Short of a crime, anything goes at the Department of the Interior.” Sadly, as the Committee learned from a series of reports issued in the past two years, Interior employees did not stop short of committing crimes.

During the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Committee used its authority to investigate allegations of corruption at the Department of the Interior, requesting additional Inspector General (IG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigations of the Minerals Management Service (MMS), and holding four oversight hearings into the federal royalty management program. These efforts culminated with a hearing in September 2008 on the latest findings by the Inspector General detailing an array of ethical problems at MMS, including inappropriate outside employment, rigged contracts, drug abuse, and sexual relationships between MMS supervisors and oil and gas industry employees.

The Committee will continue its work to rectify the gross malfeasance and inadequacies unearthed in the federal oil and gas royalty program by closely tracking MMS’ implementation of the GAO and IG recommendations, requesting additional investigations by these entities, and by taking a fresh look at the overall structure of the federal royalty system to determine what improvements can be made in the collection of rents, bonus bids and production royalties from oil and gas development both onshore and offshore.

Renewable Energy On- and Off-shore: The Committee plans to perform oversight on programs and policies for renewable energy development on federal lands and waters, including reviews to ensure that permitting processes— whether for solar, wind, or geothermal resources— are fair and efficient, assure that transmission needs are met, and that fees and rental rates are appropriate.

There is a growing body of renewable energy laws and regulations governing siting and development. The Bureau of Land Management will prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to determine where large-scale deployment of solar power is compatible with other land management goals by 2010. At the same time, BLM faces a backlog of more than 130 applications representing a combined total of more than 70 gigawatts of solar potential. The agency also recently proposed new rules to encourage geothermal energy development on federal lands via competitive leasing. Additionally, the Minerals Management Service is currently drafting regulations for the OCS Alternative Energy and Alternate Use Program. The Committee intends to conduct oversight of these agency activities, and examine how to facilitate development of clean, renewable resources in the most appropriate places on public lands and waters, consistent with other land management responsibilities, and in light of the potential to create jobs and a low-carbon economy.

Oil Shale and Tar Sands Leasing: In 2008, the Bureau of Land Management hastily finalized rules to facilitate commercial oil shale leasing on 2 million acres of public land in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming after a congressional ban on the final rules expired at the end of September 2008. The many unknowns about oil shale as an energy commodity make it incumbent upon the Committee to question calls for large scale oil shale development. While the Energy Information Administration's long-term forecast envisions commercial oil shale production in the United States eventually if oil prices are high (\$102 per barrel of oil in 2020 and \$118 in 2030) the EIA also notes "considerable uncertainty" about future unconventional crude production, citing potential climate rules that would increase costs, possible water access restrictions in the West and other environmental limits. The Committee proposes to examine such questions as the water requirements for oil shale production, the status of the six research and development leases currently underway to test technologies for extraction, the impacts of oil shale and tar sands development in other nations, the amount of energy needed for full-scale production (and attendant increases in U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide) and potential western community impacts.

Carbon Sequestration: Coal plays a major role in meeting U.S. energy needs, and will continue to do so in coming decades. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is the key enabling technology to ensuring that the U.S. can continue to take advantage of our vast domestic resources of coal without contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. CCS entails injecting carbon dioxide underground in ultra-deep geological reservoirs. The U.S. has the geological capacity to store carbon emissions in depleted oil and gas reservoirs for several decades. Capacity in other geological reservoirs is estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of tons, enough to store current levels of domestic emissions for over 300 years. This technology is still under development, but many experts are optimistic about its advancement. The Committee is committed to advancing carbon sequestration on public lands and ensuring this technology is safely developed and disseminated, and anticipates performing oversight on the Administration's implementation of Section 714 of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which was drafted by the Committee and directs the Department of the Interior to develop a recommended framework for managing geological sequestration on public lands. The Committee will also oversee the United States Geological Survey's efforts to develop geological and terrestrial carbon dioxide sequestration capacity assessments.

Abandoned Mines: The Committee will also examine shortcomings in hardrock abandoned mine management and funding, and the potential to create economic and employment benefits through mine reclamation. In 2008, the Inspector General found that thousands of abandoned mines pose dangerous physical safety and serious environmental hazards, and the GAO determined that while the BLM has improved its management of financial assurances for hardrock mining, for about 52 mining operations financial assurances are still about \$61 million less than needed to fully cover estimated reclamation costs—leaving the taxpayer vulnerable to growth in an already enormous reclamation cost burden.

## **NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS**

Budget Oversight: The Committee will review the Administration's budget requests for the National Park Service (NPS), Forest Service (FS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) programs and activities.

Fire: Combating wildfires continues to be the most serious challenge facing the Forest Service. The costs of such emergency activities have overwhelmed the agency's entire budget, to the point of syphoning funds away from fire prevention programs. The Committee will continue examining this issue in an attempt to develop solutions which might break this current destructive cycle.

Land Exchanges and Conveyances: The Committee intends to explore development of consistent standards governing disposal of federal land. The purpose of such standards will be to insure proper environmental review of disposals as well as a fair rate of return for taxpayers.

Fee Authority: The Committee expects to continue reviewing implementation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and the impacts of new and higher fees on resources and visitors.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): The Committee remains concerned regarding the Forest Service's aggressive use of categorical exclusions from NEPA's environmental analysis requirements for activities impacting forest resources. Implementation of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and other laws and policies impacting NEPA implementation will be explored.

Roadless Areas: The Committee plans to continue examining the Bush Administration's efforts to evade and undermine the Roadless Rule along with efforts by the Obama Administration to fully implement the rule.

Wilderness: The Committee expects to conduct oversight on the role wilderness is to play in federal land management. Much of the debate on this issue over the last several years has mischaracterized the value of wilderness and the impacts of wilderness designations. The Committee will explore these misconceptions.

Wild Horses and Burros: BLM has announced the agency's intent to euthanize thousands of wild horses and burros currently living on public lands due to a lack of funding and acreage on which to manage them. The Committee will continue examining the management of these iconic animals to develop alternatives to slaughter.

Energy Development: Aggressive energy development under the Bush Administration has had significant impacts on public lands and resources. The Committee will continue examining these impacts, including difficulties for owners of split estates, appropriate corridor placement and construction, and the role public lands could play in combating global climate change.

Bison: The federal agencies and states involved in the partnership to manage Yellowstone Bison have made progress in updating the existing Inter-Agency Bison Management Plan in response to concerns identified in a Government Accountability Office report conducted at the Committee's request. The Committee will continue monitoring this progress and examining strategies for avoiding lethal removal of these iconic animals.

Exclusive Use Agreements: The Committee proposes to examine instances where private entities, some for profit, are granted exclusive use of land or facilities owned by the National Park Service. The Committee will explore such arrangements to insure that they occur only in limited circumstances and are clearly in the public interest.

Concessions: The last significant changes to NPS concessions management policy were made more than a decade ago. The Committee intends to examine implementation of the Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998 to identify continuing problems and possible solutions.

U.S. Park Police (USPP): The Park Police continue to be underfunded, undermanned and under-equipped as the demands placed on the agency continue to increase. The Committee intends to conduct oversight on the mission and challenges facing the USPP.

Environmental Education: The Bush Administration engaged in an effort to undercut interpretation and education programs. The Committee plans to examine the state of environmental education in our parks, forests and public lands; assess what needs to be done to revitalize these programs; and spotlight the importance of these efforts, including those that connect urban and disadvantaged youth to parks.

Land acquisition: The Bush Administration pursued a strategy of starving federal land acquisitions that left federal agencies without the means to acquire crucial inholdings, such as an important property in the heart of Zion National Park. Further, property owners who want to sell their lands to federal agencies have often waited for years for money to become available. The Committee expects to examine the backlog of critical acquisitions, and will also consider the need to acquire land to connect ecosystems and provide migration corridors and open space needed to give species a fighting chance for adaptation and survival in the face of climate change.

## **WATER AND POWER**

Budget Oversight: The Committee intends to hold hearings to review the spending priorities of the Bureau of Reclamation, the Water Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the Power Marketing Administrations (PMAs).

New Era of Western Water Management: Water is the lifeblood of communities and economies throughout the West. Drought conditions, climate change impacts, and water use conflicts are undermining the reliability of water supplies for municipal and agricultural use. Small farmers are feeling the pressure to convert their lands for development. Improving the reliability of water supplies requires innovative approaches and coordination with local water managers.

Over the past fifteen years, it is clear that the era of large, new federal water projects is ending. New water supplies for a growing West will come from water reuse projects, water conservation efforts, or appropriately-scaled storage. The demand for water reuse projects is increasing yearly and outpacing federal funding. At present, there is a nearly \$1 billion backlog in water reuse funding at the Bureau of Reclamation. The Committee plans to examine whether the Bureau of Reclamation and the Water Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey are adapting to the changing needs of water managers facing a host of new challenges. Specifically, the Committee will conduct oversight on how water reuse and conservation can ameliorate water shortages related to drought and competing water resource demands. The Committee expects to also examine aging water infrastructure across the West, and how the health of the economy and climate change could have detrimental impacts on water infrastructure.

The Committee proposes to also review information related to the potential for groundwater storage through the USGS aquifer study program, and examine the effects from less USGS stream-gage data for water supply.

Planning for Climate Change Impacts: Climate change is altering the historic cycle of snowfall and snowmelt that regulates the flow of water from the high mountains into streams. Generally, there is less snow, earlier snowmelt, and more rain. The water delivery infrastructure of reservoirs and canals was designed to capture snowmelt and steadily provide water for municipal and agricultural uses throughout the year. Changing precipitation patterns impact the ability to capture and deliver water in traditional ways. Further, less water at critically dry times impacts both aquatic and terrestrial species. The U.S. Drought Assessment indicates that many western states continue to experience unprecedented drought. It is critical that we better understand how climate change impacts the hydrologic cycle for both humans and their environment. The Committee intends to hold hearings to better define what role federal agencies need to play in identifying both the impacts of climate change on water supplies and ecosystems, and problem-solving adaptation strategies.

Klamath River, California and Oregon: The Klamath River is heavily impacted by a Bureau of Reclamation irrigation project and federally-licensed hydropower projects. Salmon populations of vital importance to Indian tribes and non-Indian fisheries have reached historically low levels. Federal improvements to the river have caused controversy for years. There have been ongoing settlement discussions among affected interests and the governors of California and Oregon directed at resolving river management disputes. The Committee expects to conduct hearings on a settlement proposal, and will consider, among other things, the relationship of a Klamath River settlement to other fishery restoration and river management initiatives in the region.

California Bay-Delta: The ecological health of California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is in a crisis. Water deliveries from the federal and state system are being driven by federal court rulings. Drought conditions are exacerbating the impact of reduced water deliveries and forcing water restrictions throughout the state. Meanwhile, state-level initiatives are seeking to address the long-term management issues associated with the Delta ecosystem. The Committee intends to actively engage federal and state water managers on the range of issues impacted by water deliveries in California through oversight and, potentially, through legislative hearings. The Committee is sensitive to the economic and social impacts of the reduced water deliveries, as well as the governance of new water infrastructure. The Committee will seek to highlight those impacts.

Lower Colorado River Basin Operation and Management: The Colorado River Basin states have demonstrated their ability to work together to resolve complex water management problems, but many challenges remain. Committee oversight activities will include consideration of the nexus between water supply and demand in the Lower Colorado River Basin, a continued examination of invasive species like the Quagga mussel and its effects on hydropower and water deliveries, and a look at the Shortage Sharing Agreement and its application in an era of climate change.

The Committee also expects to consider how California's changing administration of its share of the Colorado River will affect the agriculture-dependent communities and coastal urban areas that are dependent on, or expect to use, Colorado River water.