Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is James D. Ogsbury and I am the Executive Director of the Western Governors’ Association. WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization representing the Governors of 19 Western states and 3 U.S.-flag islands. We are pleased to have this opportunity to provide testimony with respect to the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act of 2013 (H.R. 596).

Energy policy and the development of energy resources are major priorities for every governor in the WGA. Western Governors believe that American energy independence is an achievable goal, as is the protection of our wildlife, land and environmental resources. Energy resources are prevalent on federal land managed by the Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture. In fact, well over half the acreage of some western states is owned and managed by federal agencies. For instance, 84% of the land in Nevada is managed by federal agencies.

The West, America’s energy breadbasket, has the nation’s richest wind and solar energy resources. A significant amount of wind and solar production occurs on federal lands in the West. The BLM alone manages more than 19 million acres of public lands with excellent solar energy potential in six Western states. The agency further manages more than 20 million acres of public lands with substantial wind energy potential. Current wind and solar projects on BLM lands generate enough energy to power over four million homes.

Western Governors welcome development of these important resources and support the sharing of revenues derived from renewable energy leasing on federal lands with impacted states and counties. Local governments incur costs associated with the
development and operation of wind and solar energy projects located on federal lands. Congress recognized this increased burden in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (42 U.S.C. 15873(a)) when it created a program for the sharing of revenues gained from geothermal energy production on federal lands. As a result, state and local governments in affected areas have been able to deliver critical governmental services and make needed capital improvements to accommodate development of geothermal energy resources.

HR 596 would likewise facilitate development of wind and solar projects on public lands. A portion of energy production royalties and leasing fees would be remitted to the counties and states in which the projects are located. The bill would also create the Renewable Energy Resource Conservation Fund to conserve fish and wildlife habitat and ensure access to federal lands for recreation, hunting and fishing.

Governors seek to minimize the environmental impacts of energy infrastructure. Shared lease revenues from renewable energy development can be used by state and local agencies to support land water, and wildlife conservation in affected areas.

Western Governors support continued and accelerated deployment of renewable energy projects -- and the associated growth in clean energy jobs -- in Western states. They look forward to helping meet the current and future energy needs of the United States while ensuring protection of our precious natural resources. Enactment of H.R. 596 will help them achieve these goals. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on an issue of such great importance to the western states.