



**Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor  
Hearing on “Solving the Climate Crisis:  
Natural Solutions to Cutting Pollution and Building Resilience”  
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis  
October 22, 2019**

*As prepared for delivery*

The climate crisis is a complex problem and there is no single, easy way to solve it. We have to explore every opportunity we have to keep carbon pollution out of the air and reduce climate risks and rising costs to people and their communities.

Over the past few months, this committee has gathered information through hearings and site visits so that we can build common-sense solutions to the climate crisis. We’ve examined the transportation sector, the electricity sector, the industrial sector, and the buildings sector. We’ve discussed the importance of innovation, investing in clean energy, rebuilding our infrastructure in a smart way, and creating good jobs in the process.

Today, we’re switching gears to discuss a powerful solution that’s all around us: nature.

The world’s ecosystems can help us solve the climate crisis. Protecting and restoring our lands and our waterways -- and our natural spaces – can provide a tremendous opportunity to capture and store significant amounts of carbon.

As you’ll hear from our witnesses today, America’s forests, grasslands, wetlands and agricultural lands can store more carbon. Such carbon sequestration or sinks have the potential to store the equivalent of over one-fifth of the net emissions in the United States every year. America’s farmers likely will develop solutions for the land that can be shared across the globe.

Nature also can help solve other climate change challenges. Take wetlands, for example. Whether it’s mangroves in Florida, or marshes in coastal Louisiana, wetlands are highly effective at storing carbon. They also make our coastal communities more resilient by buffering the impacts and reducing the costs of storm surge, sea level rise, and flooding.

Trees are another key natural climate solution. In fact, recent studies show that forests have the greatest potential to mitigate climate change. Trees can also help in the fight for climate justice. It turns out that urban forestry can reduce the effects of urban heat islands, protecting low-income communities from extreme heat. And investing in better forest management practices to reduce carbon pollution can also help protect communities from destructive wildfires.

Oceans, bays and lakes are helping us store and absorb carbon, but they are stressed by acidification and warming. We must be mindful not to overload them and trigger ecosystem collapses that would harm everything dependent on them, including us.

Nature offers us plenty of incredible resources to mitigate climate change, but only if we work to protect it. Every 30 seconds, our country loses a natural area the size of a football field to human development.

When ecosystems are degraded or used for development, the carbon that they store is released into the atmosphere, contributing to a warming climate that will transform the way we live. On the other hand, when natural spaces and ecosystems are protected and restored, they have the capacity to do incredible things, like filter our air and water, reduce heat in our cities, and help protect our communities from extreme weather events.

The choice is clear.

Protecting nature provides immediate, cost-effective opportunities to dramatically reduce emissions and create more resilient communities.

Local communities are hungry for a deeper partnership and resources to adapt to the rising costs and impacts of climate change.

I look forward to hearing from you on the best natural solutions to solve the climate crisis. Thank you for being here today.