

Chair Raúl Grijalva Opening Statement – Hearing of H.R. 5435
“American Public Lands and Waters Climate Solution Act”
and H.R. 5859, “Trillion Trees Act”
February 26, 2020

The Committee on Natural Resources will now come to order.

The Committee is meeting today to hear testimony on two pieces of climate change legislation.

H.R. 5435, the American Public Lands and Waters Climate Solution Act, is legislation I introduced at the end of last year, and H.R. 5859, the Trillion Trees Act, was introduced earlier this month by Congressman Westerman.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that all other Members’ opening statements be made part of the

hearing record if they are submitted to the clerk by 5 pm today.

Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent for Congressman Greg Gianforte to sit on the dais and participate in this morning's hearing. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

First, I would like to welcome our witnesses and particularly thank those of you who have traveled great distances to be here today.

In 2019, the Natural Resources Committee heard from a broad range of voices, including those whose voices are too often not listened to, about how Congress must act to deal with climate change, which is the greatest environmental, economic, and public health threat of our time.

I am very glad that today we have the opportunity to discuss bipartisan solutions to this enormous problem.

For too long, my friends on the other side of the aisle denied that this was even a real issue.

They would reject, or even mock, the overwhelming scientific consensus that the planet is warming, humans are responsible, and urgent action needs to be taken.

So, I appreciate Congressman Westerman's proposal, and I welcome Republicans into what is hopefully a new chapter for their party focused on climate solutions, not climate denial.

We all agree that nature-based solutions are critical to combat climate change.

But we must not lose focus on what the science tells us we must do to stabilize global temperatures and avoid the most catastrophic impacts.

This will require a lot more than planting new trees and protecting existing forests, such as the Tongass.

We must dramatically reduce greenhouse gases and get to net-zero emissions as rapidly as possible, and no later than the middle of this century.

This will require hundreds of steps across all sectors of the economy, coordination across the entire federal government, and legislation from almost every congressional committee.

Our Committee has a very large role to play in this effort.

Oil, gas, and coal extracted from our public lands and waters produce nearly a quarter of America's carbon pollution.

At the same time, our natural landscapes only absorb roughly three percent of our greenhouse gas emissions each year. That's an unhealthy balance.

My colleague from Arkansas recognizes, as do I, that we need to increase how much carbon our landscapes absorb.

We may not agree on the best ways to make that happen, and I have concerns with his bill, but we are on the same page there.

But all the trees in the world won't stand a fighting chance if we don't cut our fossil fuel emissions.

That's why in December, several of my colleagues and I introduced the American Public Lands and Waters Climate Solution Act.

Our bill addresses both sides of the problem. Increasing what our public lands absorb while decreasing what they emit, with a goal of getting to net-zero emissions by 2040.

We can't get there operating the same way we have over the past hundred years.

That's why my bill would pause new fossil fuel leasing on federal lands and waters for a year and require our land management agencies to hit intermediate emissions reduction targets along the road to 2040.

If the departments fail to meet the emissions targets in the bill, they cannot issue more fossil fuel permits or hold new fossil fuel lease sales until they come into compliance.

My bill encourages more renewables on public land, more natural climate solutions, and new technologies such as direct air capture of carbon dioxide, if we can do that safely and effectively on public lands.

We can't simply shut off existing production or close operating mines.

But we can reduce the climate impact of that oil, gas, and coal, which is what my bill is designed to do.

Our bill is also designed to help workers and communities dependent on fossil fuel extraction by setting up a new transition assistance fund.

Money in this fund will be returned to impacted regions to be used for reclamation and restoration of land and water, retraining workers, and diversifying local economies.

Current and future generations are demanding we follow the science and act boldly to limit emissions from fossil fuels.

It's time we listened.