

Chair Grijalva
Full Committee Oversight Hearing – Tribal Co-Management
Opening Statement
March 8, 2022

- Hello, and welcome to the House Natural Resources Committee's hearing entitled "*Examining the History of Federal Lands and the Development of Tribal Co-Management.*"
- I appreciate our Committee members joining us today and hope this will be an insightful and productive hearing.
- Today's hearing is one that I believe is long overdue – both in this Committee and Congress.
- Fundamentally, tribal co-management provides an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to work alongside federal agencies to manage federal lands and resources.
- Indigenous perspectives are uniquely significant for cultural preservation and can improve management practices, particularly when coupled with Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge.
- Through tribal co-management, we can lift up Indigenous voices, while continuing to meet our obligations to protect the climate and conserve federal lands.

- During my time as Chair, this Committee has consistently worked to elevate the voices of tribal governments in the federal decision-making process by strengthening tribal sovereignty and reaffirming tribal self-determination.
- The expansion of tribal co-management on federal lands further builds on that essential work.
- But if we want to begin this conversation about tribal co-management meaningfully, first, we must acknowledge and come to terms with this country's history.
- The European colonization of this continent and the founding of this country are built on the dispossession of land from Indigenous Peoples by force, coercion, and bad faith legal agreements.
- Indigenous Peoples, the original caretakers of these lands and resources, were forcibly displaced.
- Congress must formally acknowledge that the lands we now know as the United States are the ancestral homelands of millions of Indigenous Peoples, who were killed, removed, or relocated.
- It is equally important to acknowledge that, while many tribes suffered and were exterminated through these acts, many tribes still persist and call these lands home today.

- As uncomfortable as it may be to hear, this is our history, and it must be considered honestly and respectfully.
- To that end, I plan to introduce a resolution formally acknowledging the federal dispossession of these lands from Indigenous communities and calling on the federal government to include tribal governments and Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in the management of these lands.
- I am working with the Government Accountability Office to review how federal land management agencies work with tribes on their ancestral lands.
- And I am working on soon-to-be-introduced legislation with Senator Martin Heinrich (NM) that would better protect tribal sacred sites.
- While the history of land dispossession and violence can never be fully redressed, I believe there are opportunities to bring tribal communities back into the management of their ancestral homelands.
- In doing so, we can support Indigenous communities while improving land management based on expertise developed since time immemorial.

- I'm encouraged by the Biden administration's renewal of the White House Tribal Nations Summit, with its focus on protecting tribal sacred sites, incorporating Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, and engaging tribes in land management.
- I look forward to working with my colleagues in the administration and Congress to expand and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and history in land and resource management across the country, especially on our public lands.
- I'm grateful to have the opportunity to host this conversation and hope the insights provided help develop a roadmap for the significant expansion of tribal co-management.
- But I want to be clear: today is a starting point, and efforts to expand co-management must continue in the weeks, months, and years ahead.
- Before we turn to our panel, I would like to thank our witnesses for their expert testimony.
- I want to recognize the tribal leaders testifying Lieutenant Governor Carelton Bowekaty (Bow-uh-cot-ee) from the Pueblo of Zuni and Chair Melvin Baker from Southern Ute.

- I also want to acknowledge that we are honored to have a historic Administration witness, National Park Service Director Charles F. Sams.
- Director Sams is the first Senate-confirmed Park Service Director in nearly five years and the first tribal citizen to lead the agency. He is an enrolled member of the Cayuse and Walla Walla of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.
- So, thank you all again for your participation today. I sincerely look forward to the conversation.
- I yield back and recognize Ranking Member Westerman for his opening statement.