



NPCA Position on Legislation before the Committee on Natural Resources

September 9, 2025

Dear Representative,

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our 1.6 million members and supporters nationwide, we write to share our thoughts on select legislation ahead of a hearing in the Committee on Natural Resources scheduled for September 10, 2025.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a bedrock environmental law that helps keep national parks and their surrounding landscapes protected for current and future generations. At the heart of NEPA is its guarantee of public engagement, which allows communities impacted by federal actions to weigh in and be heard. Changes to NEPA must be considered with care and should ensure that the public maintains their ability to weigh in.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, the 2025 budget reconciliation bill, and the Supreme Court's decision in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County*, have already notably altered NEPA's implementation. Although these changes were intended to address frustrations with NEPA, these reforms have not been in place long enough to understand their effect. Further legislative efforts are therefore currently unnecessary. It is also important to recognize that Congress and the previous administration have repeatedly acted to improve permitting efficiency while maintaining environmental safeguards. Reforms such as FAST-41 (2015), the IJA (2021), the IRA (2022), and CEQ's Phase 2 NEPA regulations (2024) have provided additional staff, resources and oversight, reduced timelines, codified categorical exclusions, and leveraged technology to modernize reviews.

H.R. 4503 - ePermit Act: NPCA appreciates the intent of this legislation, which would aim to modernize and digitize the environmental review process. As the committee considers this bill, we must acknowledge the lack of capacity at the federal land management agencies tasked with analyzing projects and executing permit approvals. Chronic underfunding and staffing shortages persist across federal agencies responsible for NEPA reviews. We urge members of the committee to support strategic investments in staffing and resources which can lead to measurable improvements in timelines and review quality. We also suggest including provisions in this bill for automatic notification for tribes and local communities impacted by a proposed project as soon as documents are received.

H.R. 4776 - Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act (SPEED Act): NPCA **opposes** this legislation, which attempts to weaken NEPA to the point it would potentially not apply to most development. This approach ignores the ongoing implementation of recent reforms that have already shortened review timelines and improved efficiency. Weakening NEPA would replace clear, science-based rules with a chaotic patchwork of agency-specific procedures, as seen in the CEQ interim final rule issued April 2025, which rescinded uniform NEPA regulations and left over 80 federal agencies to establish their own rules. The result could be longer, more litigious processes resulting in uncertainty for both project developers and communities, along with increased risk of environmental harm.

The current proposals will do little to lower costs for the average American or increase the speed of permitting or environmental review. Instead, Congress should focus on adequately funding and staffing agencies which, guided by

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science and public participation, can deliver permitting that is both faster and better, as evidenced by results under the IRA, CEQ's Phase 2 rule, and FAST-41 implementation. Without these foundational investments, legislative reforms will simply shift power to corporate interests at the expense of communities and ecosystems.

National parks do not exist in isolation and what happens outside their borders can have adverse effects on the parks and their connected landscapes. Development on public lands adjacent to national parks can disrupt visitors and cause harm to the parks as well as the waters, air and wildlife that pass through them. A truly reformed permitting system must commit to science-based decision making. It is our hope that the members of this committee can agree that there are some places that are too special to develop and that guardrails for development are necessary to reduce harm as much as possible for our special places and local communities.

Thank you for considering our views. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Charlie Olsen at (colsen@npca.org).

Sincerely,

Christina Hazard
Legislative Director