

Opening Statement of Deputy
Ranking Member John Curtis (UT-03)
House Committee on Natural
Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands

Legislative hearing on H.R. 306, H.R.
434, H.R. 823, and HR. 1708
April 2, 2019

As the chair noted, today the
Subcommittee will consider four bills.

H.R. 306, the “Kettle Creek Battlefield
Park Study Act,” authored by
Representative Jody Hice of Georgia,
directs the Secretary of the Interior to
conduct a special resource study of
the Kettle Creek Battlefield in Wilkes
County, Georgia, to determine the

national significance of the site and its suitability for inclusion as a unit of the National Park System.

The battle of Kettle Creek during the American Revolution was one of the most important battles of the American Revolutionary War. While the National Park Service and other preservation organizations have done an especially diligent job preserving Civil War battlefields, considerably less Revolutionary war sites have been conserved.

H.R. 306 offers the opportunity to study the Kettle Creek Battlefield site and determine the best options for preservation.

Next we will be considering H.R. 434, the Emancipation National

Historic Trail Act offered by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas. This bill amends the National Trails System Act to establish the Emancipation National Historic Trail extending from Galveston to Houston, Texas. This trail will commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation and the Juneteenth holiday.

Next, we will be considering H.R. 1708, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act authored by Representative Adam Schiff of California. This bill adjusts the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in California to include the Rim of the Valley Unit. This bill adds

approximately 191,000 acres to the existing 154,000 acres that currently comprise the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

This is a massive expansion to an already sprawling national recreation area. Of particular concern is the National Park Service's ability to reduce hazardous fuels buildup within the expansion. Last year's Woolsey fire burned nearly 100,000 acres of land including more than 21,000 of the 23,595 acres (88%) owned by the National Park Service within the national recreation area.

This begs the question about whether this is the best time to expand the national recreation area

by nearly 200,000 acres, even if only a portion of that acreage is federally owned.

Finally, we will be considering the H.R. 823, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act authored by Representative Neguse of Colorado. This bill creates land restrictions for approximately 400,000 acres of land in Colorado in the form of new wilderness, recreation and conservation areas.

While the stated goals of this legislation to protect and enhance outdoor recreation in Colorado are certainly admirable, and I do not have an ideological opposition to this effort, it is regrettably clear that the proposed language before us does

not reflect the local consensus that I believe is critical for lands bills of this magnitude.

And while I appreciate the views of the stakeholders who support the bill, substantial stakeholder concerns about this bill have been raised by impacted counties, recreation groups, forestry health advocates, as well as the relevant federal agencies.

Equally troubling is the fact that a significant portion of the lands impacted by this legislation are located in Congressman Scott Tipton's district in western Colorado. Congressman Tipton was not consulted on this legislation, and in fact did not even hear about this

bill until the day it was publicly announced.

This sadly appears to be a troubling trend from my democratic friends on this committee.

Two months ago, I offered an amendment to our committee rules to ensure greater transparency and member notification for bills impacting other members' districts that was rejected as outlandish and unnecessary.

Mere hours after that rule was voted down, many of those same committee members, without any prior notification or consultation with me or my staff, introduced an

enormous lands bill that affected lands exclusively in my district.

Public lands decisions should be made with local collaboration and input. They have real consequences for communities on the ground who live with the consequences of these significant federal land management decisions.

As with any compromise, balance is key. There is no room for “winner take all” mentalities if you want to achieve lasting public land management agreements. I saw this first hand in Emery County, where we worked closely with our House delegation counterparts to earn their support before introducing legislation.

I hope this committee will take the time to hear from all voices as we carry out our work, especially those most directly impacted by the legislation we seek to advance, and those public officials who were elected to represent those voices.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today and look forward to hearing their testimony. With that, I yield back.