

Opening Statement of Deputy Republican Leader Curtis
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing titled “Examining the Spending Priorities and Mission
of the National Park Service”

April 3, 2019

9:00 a.m.

Thank you Representative Haaland. Today, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands meets to review the FY 2020 budget request of the National Park Service. I thank Acting Director, Dan Smith, for being here before this subcommittee for the second day in a row. You need to make sure the Chair validates your parking.

Each year the President submits a budget request, which functions more like a statement of Administration policy priorities for the next fiscal year. While the budget process provides valuable insights into the priorities of the Administration, it is Congress’ job to make spending decisions. One of the functions of the Natural Resource Committee’s oversight responsibility, and of budget oversight hearings, is to review problem areas and make tough decisions.

The National Park Service is the steward of 418 park units, 23 national scenic and national historic trails, and 60 wild and scenic rivers covering roughly 84 million acres.

The President’s FY 2020 NPS budget request focuses on the core mission responsibilities and immediate needs of the National Park System. It also provides a clear commitment to protect funding in the parks and grant programs. The FY 2020 budget does not request funding for

construction of new assets or major land acquisition projects, and instead rightly focuses on improving what NPS already owns.

I am supportive of this approach. The National Park Service should be focused on ensuring that our national parks are well maintained, available for outdoor recreation, and are welcoming and safe for the public.

As my Democratic colleagues review this request from the Park Service, I hope they are prepared to address the clear opportunities for bipartisan cooperation offered by this request. One prime example of a bipartisan opportunity is the maintenance backlog plaguing the National Park Service.

The National Park Service faces a deferred maintenance backlog of nearly \$12 billion. To put that in perspective, it is about four times the size of the entire annual budget of the National Park Service. The funding structure of the National park Service is not keeping up with the liabilities being created by Congress.

This issue hits close to home for me. In Utah, we have a \$219 million dollar backlog at our National Parks. Visitors come from around the world to experience these beautiful places, and this backlog can impact visitor experience and services.

There are efficiency and allocation issues at the National Park Service, but there is also a need for a sustained funding stream. This situation will only get worse and more expensive the longer we ignore it.

Many of my colleagues worked together, including Ranking Republican Bishop and Chairman Grijalva, on a Public Lands Infrastructure Fund in the 115th Congress. In the end, no bill was signed into law. Ranking Republican Bishop made fighting the backlog in our National Parks a priority last Congress, and I hope House Democrats will make an effort to move this bipartisan initiative forward. The Administration and the Senate are willing partners and ready for your leadership.

In addition to the Public Lands Infrastructure Fund legislative proposal include in the budget request, Congress must work to establish a wholistic funding model for the National Park Service. This includes reviewing and adjusting recreation fees that that are collected and retained through FLREA, expanding leasing, offering new concessions opportunities, increasing opportunities for private sector donations and partnerships, and providing funding for the Centennial Challenge.

The Republicans on this Committee are ready to do our part. If solutions to these problems require Congress amending laws, by all means, let's get started.

I yield back.