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**MEMORANDUM**

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5/22/2019 4:13 PM

**To:** Congresswoman Alma S. Adams

**From:** Katherine Stewart

**Date:** Wednesday, May 22, 2019

**Re:** **Natural Resources Committee** – National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee  
Legislative Hearing including H.R.1179, African-American Burial Ground Network Act

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**Date:** Tuesday, May 21, 2019

**Location:** 1334 Longworth House Office Building

**Time:** 10:00 am

**Staff:** Katherine Stewart

**Topics:** **Legislative hearing on the following bills:**

- **H.R. 182 (Rep. Keating)**, To extend the authorization for the Cape Cod National Seashore Advisory Commission.
- **H.R. 307 (Rep. Hice)**, Preserving America's Battlefields Act
- **H.R. 473 (Rep. Neguse)**, To authorize the Every Word We Utter Monument to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes.
- **H.R. 1088 (Rep. Marshall)**, First Infantry Recognition of Sacrifice in Theater Act (FIRST Act)
- **H.R. 1130 (Rep. Rush)**, Fort Pillow National Battlefield Park Study Act"
- **H.R. 1179 (Rep. Adams)**, African-American Burial Grounds Network Act
- **H.R. 1248 (Rep. Pingree)**, York River Wild and Scenic River Act of 2019
- **H.R. 1472 (Rep. Adrian Smith)**, To rename the Homestead National Monument of America near Beatrice, Nebraska, as the Homestead National Historical Park.
- **H.R. 1487 (Rep. Lieu)**, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Boundary Adjustment Study Act
- **H.R. 1727 (Rep. Connolly)**, Complete America's Great Trails Act
- **H.R. 2369 (Rep. Rice)**, Long Island Aviation History Act
- **H.R. 2427 (Rep. Sarbanes)**, Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network Reauthorization Act of 2019
- **H.R. 2490 (Rep. Fortenberry)**, To amend the National Trails System Act to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study on the feasibility of designating the Chief Standing Bear National Historic Trail, and for other purposes.
- **H.R. 2525 (Rep. Ryan)**, Steel Valley National Heritage Area Act

## **Hearing Format**

Three Panels

### **Panel 1: Members of Congress** (5 minutes each, NO QUESTIONS)

<b>Estimated Time</b>	<b>Member</b>
10:10-10:25	Rep. Tim Ryan
	Rep. Chellie Pingree
	Rep. Adrian Smith
10:25 - 10:40	Rep. Jeff Fortenberry
	Rep. Gerald Connolly
	Rep. Alma Adams
10:40 - 10:55	Rep. John P. Sarbanes
	Rep. Kathleen Rice
	Rep. Bobby Rush
10:55 - 11:10	Rep. Rodger Marshall
	Rep. William Keating
	Rep. Joe Neguse

### **Panel 2: National Parks Service**

### **Panel 3: Outside Witnesses** (5 minutes each)

- Subcommittee members each get 5 minutes to ask questions
- All non-Subcommittee members may ask questions for 5 minutes after all Committee members have gone.

### **H.R. 1179 Witness: Angela Thorpe**

**Director, NC African American Heritage Commission, NC Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources**

#### **Background**

As an Air Force brat, Angela Thorpe called half-a-dozen cities, domestically and abroad, “home.” However, her family’s roots are tied to the small, tobacco-farming community of Pinetops, NC. Angela returned to her roots after receiving a B.A. in

History with a minor in African American studies from the University of Florida; she pursued an M.A. in History with a concentration in Museum Studies from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. As a graduate student, Angela worked to connect marginalized communities and their stories to traditional museum spaces. This was achieved most notably with her involvement with the Greensboro Historical Museum’s community-based exhibit “Warnersville: Our Home, Our Neighborhood, Our Stories,” which won an AASLH Award of Merit in 2016.



After receiving her M.A., Angela worked briefly at The HistoryMakers video oral history archive in Chicago, IL. She returned to North Carolina to serve as the first African American Historic Interpreter at the President James K. Polk State Historic Site in Pineville. Here, she worked to draw in diverse

audiences through developing inclusive program and leading community engagement initiatives. Angela began serving as the Associate Director of the NC African American Heritage Commission in 2017.

Angela has written on museum professionals, public history and race for the National Council of Public History. She has also spoken on diversity and inclusion, and community engagement, in museums at state conferences, and was awarded a Diversity & Inclusion Fellowship by the American Alliance of Museums in 2016.

### **H.R. 1179: African-American Burial Grounds Network Act (Rep. Adams, D-NC-12)**

H.R. 1179, the African-American Burial Grounds Network Act, was introduced by Representative Alma Adams on February 13, 2019. H.R. 1179 would authorize NPS to establish the U.S. African-American Burial Grounds Network program to coordinate and facilitate federal and non-federal activities to identify, interpret, preserve, and record unmarked, previously abandoned African-American burial grounds. The bill would also create a voluntary national database of historic African-American burial grounds, with the consent of private property owners, to help communities share and preserve their local history.

Between 1619 and 1865, millions of African Americans were enslaved throughout the United States. Slaves were often buried in remote areas at sites that were rarely documented. Following the Civil War, little changed in where and how African Americans were buried. Today these burial grounds are overgrown and in disrepair. Without accurate records of these burial sites, they are frequently discovered inadvertently during new construction, slowing or halting projects while creating distress for family members and descendants.

## **African-American Burial Grounds Network Act - Talking Points**

*Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing on H.R.1179*

May 20, 2019

Thank you Chairwoman Haaland (“**Ha-Land**”) and Ranking Member Young for the opportunity to speak before your Subcommittee today.

This February, I introduced the **African-American Burial Grounds Network Act** with my colleagues, Representatives Donald McEachin (“**Mc-Each-In**”) and Ted Budd, because it’s *crucially* important that historic African-American burial grounds be documented and preserved.

African-American burial grounds are an important part of the history of the United States that too frequently, have been overlooked or neglected.

Between 1619 and 1865, millions of African-Americans were enslaved throughout the United States.

During slavery, enslaved individuals’ burial sites were often confined to remote areas or marginal property and were rarely documented.

After the Civil War, Jim Crow laws segregated burial sites by race.

Additionally, burial grounds for African-Americans often didn’t receive the type of maintenance and record-keeping that white burial grounds enjoyed.

That’s why today many of these historic burial grounds and cemeteries are in a state of disrepair and in need of preservation or are unmarked.

Without accurate records of these burial sites, they are frequently discovered inadvertently during new construction, slowing or halting projects while creating distress for family members and descendants.

Even in communities that know of and care deeply about their local African-American cemeteries, there is frequently insufficient funding for surveying, preservation, and maintenance.

To help address these problems, I introduced the **African-American Burial Grounds Network Act**.

This bill will ensure that communities can preserve their local history, while better informing development decisions and community planning.

It will:

Create a voluntary national network of historic African-American burial grounds run through the National Parks Service;

Provide technical assistance and grants to local organizations to research, identify, and preserve burial grounds in the Network;

And support the creation of educational materials for community members, local groups, and schools about African-American burial grounds.

This would be a *voluntary* Network, requiring a request from an individual, landowner, private or nonprofit organization, State, or local government for a site to be considered for the Network.

The National Parks Service would then evaluate the sites submitted to it to determine if they qualify for the Network.

And thankfully, many scholars and communities are already leading the way by creating databases to track the location of these sites to better preserve them and prevent their destruction.

However, we must ensure that there is coordination between national, state, and local efforts to restore and protect these sites for future generations.

Additionally, to ensure the protection of burial sites that might be at risk for looting or other harm, H.R.1179 includes safeguards for sensitive information, in keeping with guidelines established in the National Historic Preservation Act of 19-66.

The need for this Network is urgent.

In my District, and throughout the country, there are issues of burial grounds being located too late - by construction - or in dire need of preservation.

All around the country, long-hidden grave sites of African-Americans, have been uncovered in recent years —

In a small park in New York City;

On a plantation in Anne Arundel County, Maryland;

On a college campus in Georgia;

Under a playground in Philadelphia;

Behind an apartment complex in North Carolina.

The list goes on.

In my district alone, there are countless instances of re-discovered sites or sites in need of care.

The Biddleville (“**Biddle-ville**”) Cemetery in Charlotte is a **one-hundred and forty-five year-old** community cemetery for free blacks, with burials dated from 18-86 to 19-82.

It’s a cemetery without a single sign or marker and, until a couple years ago, even a fence.

I went out there this past Saturday with about seventy volunteers to learn how to detect unmarked grave sites and preserve headstones.

Early surveys revealed a small number of burial sites and markers on the property—just over a dozen.

But a team of experts used ground penetrating radar to show us what really lay under the ground we were standing on -- more than **three-hundred burials** are at the site.

Additionally, there have been a number of incidents in Mecklenburg County, and countless incidents nationwide, where construction has inadvertently disturbed burial grounds.

By creating a voluntary database of burial sites & providing funding for identification of sites, we can avoid more of these tragic incidents from occurring *ahead of time*.

That’s better for companies looking to build, and better for the community as well.

And this bill is urgent, because each day more and more African-American burial grounds are damaged or destroyed.

So, I'm hopeful that we will be able to mark-up this important, bipartisan bill and sent it to the House floor for a vote.

One of the best things we can do in life is to ensure we preserve and respect the memory of our ancestors.

As Maya Angelou said, "the more you know of your history, the more liberated you are."

Thank you all for your time and for your consideration.