

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Wilderness Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
July 10, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on seven public lands bills.**
- **I would like to extend my gratitude to the bill sponsors joining us today to testify.**
- **At the onset I'd like to recognize the work of my fellow Subcommittee members, Ms. DeGette and Mr. Huffman, in bringing forward strong bills for our consideration today.**
- **I would like to welcome our witnesses, many of whom have traveled a long way to speak about the personal and national significance of these proposals.**
- **One of the first bi-partisan actions taken by this Congress was to pass S.47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act.**
- **That bill, now law, helped protect more than 2 million acres of public lands, including 287 miles as wild and scenic rivers and 1.2 million acres as wilderness nationwide – 250 thousand of those**

wilderness acres are in New Mexico and were also included in my ANTIQUITIES Act.

- **The bills before us today propose designating more public land as part of our National Wilderness Preservation System.**
- **They would expand our National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.**
- **They create new opportunities for a future generation of Americans to access and recreate on our public lands.**
- **And they help enhance connectivity, protect healthy habitats, and respond to climate change.**
- **Now, I know some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have come prepared to oppose the concepts before us today.**
- **But I encourage all members to judge these bills on their merits, not through ideological or partisan lenses.**
- **In 1964, Congress had the foresight to enact the Wilderness Act and followed up with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act shortly after in 1968.**

- **But now, more than ever, there is a desire and a need to protect our lands and waters in their natural condition.**
- **We know how protected public lands contribute to local economies and help grow our multi-billion-dollar recreation economy, but Congress' ability to permanently protect wild places for their untamed nature provides so much more.**
- **We can realize benefits ranging from protected watersheds that provide clean drinking water to millions of Americans to conserving intact natural systems that provide wildlife habitat and buffer against climate change.**
- **Some of these bills have been decades in the making, the product of grassroots engagement and stakeholder input.**
- **Others build on more recent gains or strive to be forward thinking in addressing emerging challenges.**
- **While the bills before us are diverse in their purpose, they all provide opportunity for connection, recreation, and resilience.**

- **They recognize the importance of healthy, natural environments to local communities and urban areas alike.**
- **They reach beyond county lines to provide places to reconnect with a system much larger than ourselves, and acknowledge that some places simply cannot be improved upon by humans.**
- **And for all the debate that ensues in this Committee about how we should manage our public lands, the reality is that we can't dismiss the urgent need to act.**
- **Around the world wild places and the species that depend on them are disappearing at an alarming rate.**
- **As human driven climate change increasingly impacts our natural world, permanently protecting public lands is one of the best ways to ensure these places continue to exist, as we know them, for the benefit of future generations.**
- **I would like to thank the sponsoring members for their leadership on these issues.**
- **And to the witnesses, thank you again for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony.**

- **I'd now like to recognize the Ranking Minority Member for 5 minutes.**