

Opening Statement of
Deputy Ranking Republican John Curtis
House Committee on Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3651, H.R. 3681,
H.R. 4236, and H.R. 4512
02.27.2020

I would like to thank Chair Haaland for convening this hearing about four bills that deal with sustainability and recreation on our nation's federal lands. As we begin the second century of the existence of the National Park System, we should be mindful of the dual mission that the agency is charged with – both to conserve park resources and ensure they are left unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

I think it's fair to say that the National Park Service has sometimes struggled with the dual nature of its mandate. Each of these bills touches on an element of the National Park

Service's mission and I would like to comment on each bill briefly.

H.R. 3651, offered by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska would authorize the Missouri River Basin Lewis and Clark Interpretive Trail and Visitor Center Foundation to use up to 40 acres of non-developed and underutilized land in Nebraska City for outdoor recreation. The land was previously conveyed to the Foundation for the exclusive use as a historic site and interpretive center for the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. This bill would allow the excess land to be used to meet the community's needs, such as provide a site for additional public parks and other public amenities.

We will also be discussing H.R. 3681, offered by Congressman Levin of California. This bill directs the Department of Energy, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service to collaborate on the Green Spaces, Green Vehicles Initiative to facilitate the

installation and use of zero-emissions vehicle infrastructure on certain public lands. I appreciate the sponsor's interest in this area and share his dedication to being a good steward of our environment. Climate change is an important issue, and bipartisan conversations are necessary if we are to make progress on impactful solutions, not just proposals that make us feel good. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this topic.

H.R. 4512, offered by Congresswoman Barrágan of California, would establish a new mandatory appropriation for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership by allocating 20 percent of Land and Water Conservation Fund revenues under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act. While I commend the sponsor for her work to bring recreation to areas lacking such opportunities, I have concerns that this bill may be duplicative of existing LWCF uses. In general, Congress should exercise extreme caution when establishing new mandatory spending. Mandatory appropriations puts a

program on financial autopilot, and often results in ballooning and out of control spending when left unchecked.

Finally, the Subcommittee will consider H.R. 4236 offered by Congressman Quigley of Illinois. This bill would authorize each regional director of the National Park System to establish a program to recycle and reduce the use of disposable plastic bottles within each System unit located in the region. Regional directors would also be authorized to eliminate the sale of water in disposable plastic bottles within their units.

This bill would legislatively reinstate former National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis' policy which eventually led to 23 units banning the sale of bottled water. While I am certainly supportive of working to reduce single-use plastics and litter on our public lands, I am concerned that reinstating the bottled water sales ban is short sighted and would create a

dehydration risk for many visitors to our National Parks.

Before we consider this bill, I would like to know if the previous ban resulted in any significant decrease in plastic waste in the parks, as most of the parks did not follow even the most minimum requirements to evaluate and monitor the sales ban's effects. Ironically, the 2011 ban did not ban the sale of other drinks in plastic bottles, such as soda or juices, and did not prohibit visitors from bringing in their own bottled water.

We should not ignore the safety issues this bill could pose. We are experiencing record visitation to the National Parks in my district and many other parks across the country – many of which are in arid and remote areas. In the last few years, we have seen multiple deaths in our parks, including Arches in my district, at least partially related to dehydration and heat sickness. We can and should encourage visitors to use reusable bottles and refill at available

filling stations. However, we should not be making water potentially inaccessible to visitors.

There are many important issues facing our National Parks, including a twelve-billion-dollar maintenance backlog. As somebody with two national parks in my district, I have seen firsthand the negative impact this has on visitors. I hope that we can keep the availability of recycling containers a part of that conversation to address any impact plastic water bottles could have on parks, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all solution of banning bottles all together.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to hearing their testimony. Thank you, and I yield back.