

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Remote Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
June 18, 2020**

- **Thank you all for attending the 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, as well as to our witnesses, for taking the time to be here with us today.**
- **Throughout these past few months, our nation has been in crisis – battling an unprecedented global pandemic that has thrown American lives into disarray.**
- **We are living in a new reality. One where Americans have changed their daily routines and made personal sacrifices to protect one another from the coronavirus. One where countless individuals have joined together to help vulnerable communities.**
- **Now, as our country is coming to terms with another deadly crisis – the legacy of American racism that has permeated every facet of our society – I am hopeful that we, as Americans, will dedicate the same selfless courage and determination towards addressing the institutional racism that plagues our country.**

- **We are living with new constraints on how we conduct business, but this has not stopped the Committee from continuing its oversight work and from elevating important perspectives.**
- **Since the start of the pandemic, the Committee has held digital forums on critical issues, including the administration's decision to prematurely reopen national parks and wildfire response and preparedness during the coronavirus pandemic.**
- **Oversight remains a vital function of Congress – today maybe even more so than ever – but it is also Congress' job to find solutions. To consider and enact laws that help make our nation safer, more equitable, and a place that is representative of our shared humanity.**
- **The bills before the Subcommittee today are an appropriate place for us to resume our legislative duties, as they touch on many of the priorities for this Subcommittee.**
- **Today, we will consider proposals that promote conservation and enhanced educational opportunities by improving land management efficiencies.**

- **We will review legislation that will help bridge the digital divide between rural and urban communities – helping the nearly 30 million Americans stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide, who have struggled to keep up in a world where stay-at-home orders increased everyone’s reliance on the internet, reap the economic, educational, and public safety benefits that come with access to advanced broadband.**
- **We will discuss bills that highlight the need to protect unique landscapes and stories representative of the American experience, and that address impacts of unauthorized drone incursions on wildfire suppression.**
- **And we will hear about the importance of recognizing and respecting traditional uses on our public lands.**
- **In my home state of New Mexico, acequias and land grants have long played a critical role in our way of life.**
- **For more than a century, land grant communities in the Southwest have fought for recognition and access to their historic communal lands, which are necessary to sustain the land-based heritage and agricultural economies of many New Mexico communities.**

- **I would like to commend my good friend and colleague, Congressman Ben Ray Luján, for his efforts to highlight the importance of land grants and acequias, and to ensure enhanced access and consultation between the federal government and local stakeholders.**
- **Thank you again to the sponsoring Members of Congress and witnesses here with us today.**
- **I look forward to hearing your insights and to working with you all to move these important proposals through the legislative process.**