

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
REP. JOE NEGUSE
TESTIMONY ON H.R. 5458 AND H.R. 5459
MONDAY, JULY 13, 2020

Thank you Chair Haaland for the opportunity to speak on behalf of two of my bills being considered during today's hearing: H.R. 5458, the "Rocky Mountain National Park Boundary Modification Act," and H.R. 5459, the "Rocky Mountain National Park Ownership Correction Act." These bills will expand and protect one of our most treasured and historic national parks, one that I am proud is located within Colorado's second congressional district.

Established in 1915 by President Woodrow Wilson, Rocky Mountain National Park is home to many of our nation's iconic landscapes. People from all over the world are drawn to the park, each for their own reasons: to experience nature, to seek solitude, to enjoy scenic grandeur, to watch wildlife, and partake in outstanding recreational activities. I myself hold a number of treasured memories in this special place, hiking with my family and making memories with loved ones. It is something that holds deep meaning for many Americans, and especially Coloradans.

Because of this majesty, it would come as no surprise why the park continually breaks attendance records. In 2019, the park attracted 4.7 million visitors, breaking its record for the fifth time in six years, and maintaining its position as the third-busiest park in the national park system. As more people are drawn to this special place, our appreciation only grows for those who seek to protect and expand it.

That is why I am so honored that the witness testifying on behalf of HR 5458, former Astronaut Vance Brand, is joining us today. The *Rocky Mountain National Park Boundary Modification Act* would formally codify a generous donation of 40-acres of land into the park boundary, made by Mr. Brand. The property is located adjacent to the eastern boundary of the park and would add additional protection for the park's high-elevation ecosystem and provide recreational access between private lands and three popular trails that connect to a network of hundreds of miles of trails.

While this donation alone is worthy of recognition, it is hardly the only manner in which Mr. Brand has served his country. A native of Longmont, Colorado, Mr. Brand served as a commissioned officer and naval aviator with the U.S. Marine Corps from 1953-1957. Following release from active duty, he continued in Marine Corps Reserve and Air National Guard jet fighter squadrons until 1964.

Two years later, in 1966, Mr. Brand was one of the 19 pilot astronauts selected by NASA. As an astronaut, he held management positions relating to spacecraft development, acquisition, flight safety and mission operations. Mr. Brand flew on four space missions, logged 746 hours in space, and commanded three Shuttle missions.

It is inspiring to witness someone who has already served their country so greatly, remain steadfast in their selfless dedication to our nation. We all have so much to learn from Mr. Brand's example of public service.

Additionally, I am proud that today we are considering H.R. 5459, the *Rocky Mountain National Park Ownership Correction Act*. This bill would correct a bank error dating back to 1972, where a 0.18-acre plot of land containing the Forsyth family cabin was erroneously transferred to the Rocky Mountain National Park when the park service purchased a larger surrounding parcel. The Forsyth family, seeking to regain legal ownership of its cabin and the plot on which it sits, proposed an exchange of properties. This exchange has the support of Rocky Mountain National Park and the Park Service.

These bills are common-sense measures to expand and protect Rocky Mountain National Park, and they enjoy support from local stakeholders, including the town of Estes Park, Larimer County, and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

Public lands are who we are as Coloradans, they drive our outdoor recreation economy and inspire our commitment to sustainability. H.R. 5458 and 5459 will ensure that we continue to protect Rocky Mountain National Park for future generations to enjoy. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance these pieces of legislation.