

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Russ Fulcher**  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1154, H.R. 1286, H.R. 1316, H.R. 1424,  
H.R. 1908, H.R. 1925 H.R. 2024, H.R. 2107, H.R. 2359, H.R. 2899,  
H.R. 3222, and H.R. 3616  
June 15, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. Today we meet to discuss twelve bills related to National Heritage Areas.

I would like to first express my dissatisfaction with the lopsided nature of this hearing, which includes ten bills sponsored by Democrats and just two sponsored by Republicans. The ten Democrat bills we are considering today are double the total amount of Republican bills that have received hearings in the first six months of this Congress. Let me repeat that. We will consider double the amount of Democrat bills - in one day - than we have for Republican bills this entire Congress.

Needless to say, only considering five Republican bills in the six months of Congress is a poor statistic. I hope we can

rectify the unbalanced nature of this hearing by including additional Republican bills during the Subcommittee's hearings in July.

I would also like to note that the Majority is holding this hearing on National Heritage Areas today instead of prioritizing other important topics such as forest health and wildfires, the implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act, and additional hearings on the administration's Fiscal Year 2022 budget. Few things could be more urgent than ensuring we are wisely stewarding billions of dollars of taxpayer money to fix the iconic treasures of our National Parks.

I'd like to now turn my attention to the topic of today's hearing. The National Park Service currently oversees 55 National Heritage Areas intended to commemorate, conserve, and promote important natural, scenic, historic, cultural, and

recreational resources. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the first National Heritage Area, the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Area. In his dedication speech, President Reagan referred to National Heritage Areas as “a new kind of national park” that married heritage conservation, recreation, and economic development.

Unlike lands within the National Park System, which are federally owned and managed, lands within National Heritage Areas are primarily in State, local, or private ownership or a combination thereof. National Heritage Areas can be an effective tool to establish public-private partnerships for conservation and historic preservation without adding more land to the federal estate. We cannot continue to add units to the National Park System in perpetuity or we will risk continuing to fall further and further behind on our maintenance obligations.

In creating National Heritage Areas, however, we must be careful to ensure that private property rights are protected. The Fiscal Year 2021 appropriation for National Park Service assistance to National Heritage Areas was nearly \$24 million. Congress originally intended for National Heritage Areas to receive federal seed money and progress to a point where appropriations would no longer be required. In fact, in 1994, during House Floor debate on National Heritage Areas, then National Parks Subcommittee Chairman Bruce Vento, a Democrat from Minnesota, stated, “the amount of support is limited... and there is a limit to the length of time or the amount of money the Federal Government can be in a heritage area. In 10 years, we are out of there. Then they are on their own and we all get the benefit of that conservation.”

Despite this clear assurance, National Heritage Areas dating back to 1984 continue to request and receive annual federal support. In recent years, both the Obama and Trump Administrations supported reducing appropriations for National Heritage Areas and urged Congress to return to the original concept of National Heritage Areas by promoting self-sufficiency.

This year, the funding authorizations for 30 of the existing 55 existing National Heritage Areas are set to expire on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Congress must address these expirations in a way that encourages National Heritage Areas to become less dependent on federal appropriations, either through a gradual phase out of federal funding or by establishing a competitive grant program for management entities to compete for federal funds. I look forward to hearing some new and innovative ideas

for our National Heritage Areas during this hearing today and working with my colleagues across the aisle to address these reauthorizations in a bipartisan fashion.

I would also like to highlight the two Republican bills on today's hearing. First, we have H.R. 2107, the Nation's Oldest Port National Heritage Area Act sponsored by Congressman Rutherford of Florida. This bill would establish the Nation's Oldest Port National Heritage Area composed of four natural watersheds across four northeast Florida counties. Its boundaries would include the Port of Jacksonville at the mouth of the St. Johns River and historic St. Augustine, the nation's oldest city, founded in 1565.

We will also be discussing H.R. 3616, the Bear River National Heritage Areas Study Act, sponsored by our Subcommittee colleague, Congressman Blake Moore of Utah.

This bill requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study assessing the suitability and feasibility of designating the Bear River National Heritage Area in northern Utah and southern Idaho. The Bear River area straddles the Utah-Idaho border where the Great Basin and Rocky Mountains meet and the area is home to the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, Golden Spike National Historical Park, numerous Mormon history sites, the Oregon Trail, and abundant natural beauty. Idaho does not currently have any National Heritage Areas, so I am looking forward to seeing the results of this study and I commend Congressman Moore for his work on this legislation. Finally, this summer, millions of acres will burn because of poor land management practices and never-ending environmental litigation. While we discuss these National Heritage Areas, it is crucial to remember the disaster our Federal Forests and lands face because of a lack of logging and grazing, long time

practices that have proven effective in preventing unnecessary loss of property, life, and prosperity in the West.

With that, I'd like to thank each of the witnesses for being with us today and I look forward to hearing the testimony. I yield back.