

**Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
June 15, 2021**

- **Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands’ legislative hearing on twelve National Heritage Area bills.**
- **I want to thank the bill sponsors for their tireless work on behalf of these important sites, and I want to thank today’s witnesses, who will share their stories about these proposed heritage areas.**
- **We are taking on a lot today, so in the interest of time, and in hopes of hearing more from our distinguished colleagues and panel, I will keep my opening remarks brief.**
- **Since 1984, Congress has established 55 National Heritage Areas across the country, creating opportunities for heritage conservation, outdoor recreation and economic development.**
- **National Heritage Areas are grassroot initiatives that engage communities in heritage preservation by combining natural, cultural and historical resources into landscapes that tell important stories of our nation’s past.**

- **These sites elevate the stories and contributions of diverse communities, increasing representation and telling a more complete American story.**
- **They provide opportunities for the Federal government to invest in communities, leveraging public-private partnerships to support historical preservation.**
- **Above all, heritage areas are community-driven, community-managed initiatives, which I suspect is why they receive such strong, bipartisan support here in Congress.**
- **However, we are currently approaching an inflection point for these sites.**
- **By the end of 2021, 32 of the 55 national heritage areas will lose their funding authorization.**
- **Congress must swiftly remedy this looming fiscal-cliff.**
- **As we do so, we should consider the future of the Heritage Area program.**
- **The breadth of bills we'll consider today demonstrate the consistent interest from American communities in having their resources protected as National Heritage Areas.**

- **I very much look forward to hearing those stories and to learning more about these proposed sites.**
- **But, in the long term, the piecemeal system of establishment and individual authorization is no longer working for heritage areas or for the park service.**
- **It is past time for Congress to establish a clear, consistent system for the administration and oversight of Heritage Areas.**
- **We need to provide certainty to NPS and to the local coordinating entities they partner with that Congress will continue to lift up these important resources.**
- **I believe Rep. Tonko's bill is an effective way to achieve those goals, and I look forward to hearing more from him about his efforts.**
- **I also want to talk about how the growing heritage area program fits within the full scope of the National Park Service's responsibilities.**
- **Heritage areas serve an important role in highlighting our shared history, but in an era of declining staffing and budgets, we need to ensure that we are providing NPS with the resources it needs to adequately manage them.**

- **I hope our distinguished guest from the administration can help us identify the resources and steps necessary to support all the important work done by the National Park Service, including Heritage Areas.**
- **Once again, thank you to all of you for being here today. I look forward to our conversation.**