

**Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Remote Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
July 13, 2021**

Thank you all for being joining us virtually today as Subcommittee meets to hear five bipartisan bills primarily focused on ways we can quickly expand and build on recent efforts to improve landscape-scale restoration, protect critical watersheds, and reduce wildfire risk.

Climate change continues to impact our country with record heat and drought being felt throughout the West.

In 2020, when my district was directly impacted by record setting Colorado wildfires, I started meeting with experts in Colorado to learn more about how our communities can successfully mitigate wildfire risk.

At the end of April, in a Wildfire Oversight hearing in this Subcommittee, Professor Schultz from Colorado State University, testified to how collaboration, partnerships, and dedicated funding are critical to establishing shared conservation goals and yielding measurable results.

To those ends, my legislation, H.R. 3211, the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act would authorize the Joint Chiefs Partnership between the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service and the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

By authorizing \$90 million annually through 2030 – double the current funding level – the Joint Chiefs Partnership would help grow community support for forest and grassland landscape-scale restoration projects in Colorado and around the country.

I'll address H.R. 3211 in more detail later and I'm excited to have a constituent here to testify to how this program benefits Front Range Communities.

Next, we have legislation by Rep. Panetta of California to significantly increase resources for reforestation and recovery efforts following recent extreme wildfires.

Without spending a taxpayer dollar, H.R. 2049, the REPLANT Act, would make an estimated \$123 million---quadruple the current statutory cap---available annually through the Reforestation Trust Fund and require a national reforestation strategy.

This legislation will enable the Forest Service to plan long-term, and fully fund, National Forest System reforestation and restoration needs, while investing in outdated reforestation infrastructure.

In another example of how Congress can build on the ongoing efforts of the U.S. Forest Service and their partners we have legislation by Rep. Schrier of Washington State.

H.R. 2816, the Legacy Roads and Trails Act, would build on a decade of programmatic success by authorizing road and trail maintenance

funding that prioritizes watershed health and habitat connectivity, while supporting recreation, saving taxpayers money, and creating local jobs.

I've similarly included funding for this program in my 21st Century Conservation Corps Act and look forward to working with Rep. Schrier on this legislation.

In a final case study in support of collaborative, watershed-based conservation efforts we have H.R. 3132, the Lake Tahoe Restoration Reauthorization Act, introduced by Rep. Amodei of Nevada.

Since inception in 1997, the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program has implemented 746 projects with an estimated \$2.6 billion invested.

Of this amount, approximately \$790.8 million (32%) was provided by the federal government showing how sustained federal investments are critical to the long-term success landscape-scale projects.

All four of these bipartisan bills build on existing authorities to improve resilience to wildfire by investing in landscape-scale restoration, watershed health, and habitat protection.

Congress should pursue every opportunity to make more resources available for the restoration of naturally resilient landscapes, but the last bill on the agenda today is a reminder of what protecting our National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands is all about.

The bipartisan Veterans in Parks Act, H.R. 4300, would help prioritize access for Veterans, members of the armed service, and the Gold Star Families who have fought and sacrificed to defend these American treasures.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues, the Administration, and other witnesses in support of these bipartisan bills.