

Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
April 28, 2022

- Thank you all for joining us today for a Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands legislative hearing.
- I would extend my gratitude to my colleagues who have sponsored these bills, as well as today's witnesses for their testimony.
- Last week, we marked both Earth Day and National Park Week, so it is only fitting that we contemplate a range of bills that demonstrate the many values preserved within our national parks.
- National parks protect the crown jewels of the cultural and natural world: our most pristine wilderness, our most iconic landscapes, and our most cherished and revered stories.
- All of this is made possible by the hard work and ingenuity of the National Park Service. The agency has a broad portfolio that ranges from managing visitation to providing vital technical and financial support that ensures the preservation of historic resources.
- But with this broad portfolio comes related challenges.
- Americans love their parks, indicated by rising visitation and popularity over the last several years, but this increased interest has brought overcrowding, site maintenance issues, and other management challenges to the forefront.
- That's why we are committed to providing the National Park Service with the resources necessary to manage these special places.

- The FY22 omnibus appropriations law Congress passed earlier this year provided the agency with a nearly 5 percent increase in overall funding.
- Last year’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided \$1.7 billion to improve roads and bridges, update transportation systems and support climate resilient infrastructure upgrades.
- And the House-passed Build Back Better Act included \$1 billion for new rangers and staff across the National Park System, funding we hope to see included in a future vehicle.
- As America’s national parks continue to rise in popularity, we must continue investing in their long-term management and sustainability.
- However, while we recognize these needs and challenges, we must continue to work to ensure our parks tell the whole American story.
- This is a steadfast commitment of this subcommittee.
- In fact, just earlier this week we sent a bill to expand the Brown v Board National Historical Park to the President’s desk for his signature.
- Today, we will consider H.R. 6805, the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Act, introduced by Representative Adams of North Carolina.
- This bill will establish a grant program within the Department of Interior to support the preservation, maintenance, and upkeep of historic African American burial grounds, many of which have been lost and neglected over time.

- An initiative like this presents an exciting new opportunity for the National Park Service to ensure these sacred grounds are not paved over by development or otherwise forgotten.
- I'm glad that we will also consider my bipartisan legislation H.R. 7218, the Colorado National Heritage Areas Reauthorization Act, which would reauthorize Colorado's three heritage areas—including the Cache la Poudre (Poo-der) National Heritage Area in my district.
- I look forward to hearing testimony from Ms. Sabrina Stoker in a bit who is joining us today from the Poudre Heritage Alliance.
- We will also consider H.R. 6589, the Historic Preservation Fund Enhancement Act, introduced by Subcommittee for the Indigenous People of the United States Chair Leger-Fernandez of New Mexico.
- Since it was established in 1966, the Historic Preservation Fund has become a critical tool to protect historic resources.
- However, as Congress continues to support new infrastructure, promote wildfire resilient communities, and provide access to clean water, the need for this funding continues to grow.
- While many may not realize the crucial, often unsung work of State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, their efforts are essential to the timely consideration of nearly every major project through Section 106 reviews and related requirements.
- To keep pace with demands for this essential work, preservation funding needs continue to grow, which is why H.R. 6589 contemplates permanently authorizing and doubling the amount of available funding for this work.

- We will also review two bills that allow us to consider one of the critical issues facing the world, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.
- H.R. 7075, the Ukrainian Independence Park Act, introduced by Representative Spartz of Indiana would designate a parcel of federal land in Washington D.C. as the Ukrainian Independence Park.
- Representative Spartz was born in what is now Ukraine and is the first Ukrainian-born woman to serve Congress.
- I thank her for her work on this important issue, and I'd express my sincerest support for the people of Ukraine.
- This symbol of solidarity does not ease the horrors being inflicted on Ukraine by Putin's barbaric war, but it is nonetheless an important gesture that speaks to the power of parks.

With that, I yield back my time and recognize the Ranking Member for his opening remarks.