

Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
May 11, 2022

- Thank you all for joining us for a Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands legislative hearing on four U.S. Forest Service bills dealing with conservation and recreation.
- I am grateful to my colleagues who sponsored these bills and to today's witnesses for their testimony.
- As we begin, it's important to take stock of where we are in this Congress.
- So far during the 117th Congress, my first as Chair of this Subcommittee, we've held 13 legislative and four oversight hearings.
- Including today's hearing, this Subcommittee will have considered 50 Democratic bills and 22 Republican bills, and we've received testimony from 138 outside witnesses - 94 invited by the majority and 44 invited by the minority.
- As Chair I have endeavored to be more than fair, and we've enjoyed some bipartisan success, including passing into law bills like my Amache National Historic Site Act and MAPLand.
- Other bills we've considered in this Subcommittee, including the REPLANT Act, Legacy Roads and Trails, and my legislation, the Joint Chiefs Partnership, were included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- Although I do not have a bill on the agenda today, I'd be remiss not to highlight one of my top-priorities, the Colorado Outdoor

Recreation and Economy Act, more commonly known as the CORE Act.

- Many of us were encouraged to see the Senate Natural Resources Committee report a bipartisan recreation policy bill last week.
- Unfortunately, the CORE Act, which was included in the same markup, didn't secure a single Republican vote.
- This is despite years of work to develop local consensus, determine appropriate protections, and engage with the diverse range of stakeholders that rely on these lands for clean water, wildlife, recreation, and other economic opportunities.
- Instead of engaging in good faith efforts to achieve meaningful conservation and recreation gains, my colleagues offer vague complaints about critical minerals, gas prices and wildfire to oppose any Democratic conservation or climate legislation.
- For example, instead of inviting a witness to communicate the local support for their bill today, my colleagues invited a country commissioner to talk about wildfire.
- Yet, at our hearing last month on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, many of my Republican colleagues voiced opposition to critical investments in wildfire and ecosystems, despite the clear consensus that the Forest Service is desperately under resourced and understaffed.
- I agree that balance is important to successful public land management, but the status quo of our public lands laws is heavily weighted in favor of extractive uses like drilling and mining.

- That's why it remains the prerogative of Congress to achieve balance through laws and policies that provide for conservation, recreation, and ecosystem needs.
- This is the precise intent of H.R. 279, the Roadless Area Conservation Act, sponsored by my friend and colleague Representative Gallego.
- Roadless areas conserve all the best values of the National Forest System, including clean water, wildlife, and recreation.
- H.R. 279 would simply codify existing protections established two decades ago to protect the largest remaining and most extensive tracts of undeveloped roadless lands.
- The prior century of unrestrained development and associated roadbuilding fragmented national forests and contributed billions to annual maintenance costs.
- Today, roadless area values are widely understood and successfully incorporated into collaborative land management planning efforts across the country.
- Next, H.R. 7329, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act, by Rep. Huffman would expand the Smith River National Recreation Area into the State of Oregon and add 75 miles of wild and scenic rivers within the Smith River watershed.
- H.R. 7329 is a reminder that political boundaries are not always appropriate for landscape-scale management.
- We also have a bill included at my colleague's request, H.R. 7399, the Land Between the Lakes Recreation and Heritage Act.

- This bill demonstrates bipartisan support for recreation designations and the importance of sustained funding for our public lands and waters.
- Last, I'm pleased to consider legislation from Rep. Blumenauer.
- H.R. 7665, the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Recreation Enhancement and Conservation Act would address a range of long-standing recreation, transportation and management issues that are familiar with this part of Oregon.
- Truly a comprehensive bill, it is noteworthy to mention this bill includes a title specifically intended to honor and elevate tribal treaty rights.
- Earlier this year, the Committee held a hearing on "Examining the History of Federal Lands and the Development of Tribal Co-management", and I'm encouraged to see an example of how we can begin to move that conversation into practice.

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