

Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
Opening Statement
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
July 14, 2022

- Thank you all for being here today for this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands’ legislative hearing on ten bills.
- I would like to start by thanking the sponsoring Members of Congress as well as our witnesses for joining us today to speak about the personal and national significance of these proposals.
- This month we celebrated the 4th of July, which marks the day in 1776 when the Second Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence. Nearly 250 years later, we still endeavor to achieve its stirring proclamation that “all Men are created equal”.
- Today’s hearing will be an impactful reflection on history, equity, and on who and what we choose to commemorate - commemorations of heroic acts and commemorations of cruel injustices that cannot be forgotten.
- This Committee has the responsibility to ensure that the stories we preserve and tell in our national parks represent all Americans and that our history celebrates the good work that lifted people up, but also recognizes the harmful atrocities that have worked to keep people down.
- In addition to hearing about bills to regulate commercial filming on public lands, honor the nation’s first Holocaust Memorial, and designate new memorial in Washington DC to recognize the contributions of service animals, Thomas Paine, and esteemed French diplomat Jean Monnet, we will hear today about a number of bills designed to increase representation and inclusivity throughout the National Park System.
- This includes H.R.8086 from Representative Ruiz from California. This bill expands the existing César E. Chavez National Monument, creating a new national historical park with multiple sites across California and Arizona.

- President Obama's had the foresight to use the Antiquities Act to designate the existing César E. Chavez National Monument, and Representative Ruiz's bill provides Congress with the opportunity to ratify and expand on that momentous decision.
- The legislation follows recommendations finalized by the National Park Service in 2012 from its study of the life of César Chavez and the history of the farmworker movement in California and the West.
- Moving from the West to the Southeast, we will also consider H.R. 7912, the Evaluating Lynching Locations for National Park Sites Act introduced by Representative of Cohen of Tennessee. This bill authorizes the National Park Service to study and determine the possibility of designating a network of sites associated with lynching – acts of extrajudicial violence and murder perpetrated against African American citizens.
- This bill will help us shed light on the painful and malicious acts of violence that occurred in the Memphis area between 1877 and 1950. There is no amount of justice or healing that can repair the damage from the lynchings that took so many lives. However, elevating the whole and accurate truth will help us have a meaningful conversation about race.
- While Representative Cohen's bill will highlight some of the physical manifestations of racism perpetuated throughout our history to further the national conservation around race relations, we will also be looking at several bills designed to lift up the stories and contributions of black Americans.
- For example, H.R. 6438 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the site known as Dearfield, in Weld County, Colorado.
- I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of this important bill so that we can tell the inspiring story of black Americans during the Homesteading period of our history and hope to see it move swiftly through the committee process.
- We will also consider H.R. 6799 to examine the options for protecting the John P. Parker House in Ripley, Ohio. John Parker, who was originally born into slavery, was a significant and active member of the Underground

Railroad, risking his life to help others secure freedom. His story is one that deserves to be told, so I look forward to hearing more about that bill.

- Telling America's stories equitably also means acknowledging our mistakes in idealizing people who were cruel and malicious to others.
- To that end, we will consider H.R. 1256, the Francis G. Newlands Memorial Removal Act from Representative Eleanor Norton Holmes, which directs the Department of the Interior to remove the brass plaque bearing the name Senator Francis G. Newlands from the grounds of the memorial fountain located at Chevy Chase Circle in the District of Columbia.
- Francis Newlands was avowed white supremacist who throughout his long political career attempted to use his power and influence to disenfranchise black Americans, perpetuate racial segregation, and dehumanize people of color.
- Elected leaders from DC and Montgomery have endorsed removing his name from this fountain, and I hope that this committee can stand with those communities.
- Our national parks have always been central to America's heritage and essential to our identity as a nation. These bills represent the Committee's efforts to see that the national parks are equitable in defining that identity. We must not forget our shameful past while we also recognize the triumphs of the human spirit to overcome long-time injustices.
- We still have a long way to go to ensure that the National Park System represents the full American story; these bills are a step in the right direction.
- Thank you again to the sponsoring Members and witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimonies.