

**H.R. 1657, H.R. 3107, H.R. 3200,
AND H.R. 4984**

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 1657, TO PROVIDE FOR A LAND EXCHANGE IN THE CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST, MINNESOTA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, “LAKE WINNIBIGOSHISH LAND EXCHANGE ACT OF 2023”; H.R. 3107, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ESTABLISH THE FEDERAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON OUTDOOR RECREATION, “IMPROVING OUTDOOR RECREATION COORDINATION ACT”; H.R. 3200, TO REQUIRE THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE AND THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CARRY OUT CERTAIN ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GATEWAY COMMUNITIES, TO AMEND THE FEDERAL LANDS RECREATION ENHANCEMENT ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DIGITAL NATIONAL PARKS AND FEDERAL RECREATIONAL LANDS PASS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, “GATEWAY COMMUNITY AND RECREATION ENHANCEMENT ACT; AND H.R. 4984, TO AMEND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STADIUM ACT OF 1957 TO PROVIDE FOR THE TRANSFER OF ADMINISTRATIVE JURISDICTION OVER THE ROBERT F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL STADIUM CAMPUS TO THE ADMINISTRATOR OF GENERAL SERVICES AND THE LEASING OF THE CAMPUS TO THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FOR PURPOSES WHICH INCLUDE COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, “D.C. ROBERT F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL STADIUM CAMPUS REVITALIZATION ACT”

**Tuesday, September 19, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:17 p.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Tiffany, Fulcher, Stauber; Neguse, Leger Fernández, and Grijalva.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to consider four bills: H.R. 1657, Representative Stauber’s Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act; H.R. 3107, Ranking Member Neguse’s Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act; H.R. 3200, Representative Zinke’s Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act; and H.R. 4984, Representative Comer’s D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act.

I ask unanimous consent that Representative Zinke of Montana be allowed to participate in today’s hearing from the dais.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN**

Mr. TIFFANY. Today, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands continues our work developing a comprehensive recreation package.

While the House was away from DC during the August recess, we were busy at work. We had boots on the ground all across the country meeting with people, and hearing about the issues everyday Americans are facing. This Committee held a hearing in Yosemite. While the hearing focused on the need for forest management and combating the wildfire crisis, I was reminded how valuable these iconic places are to Americans who recreate there. Having had my first opportunity to go there is spectacular.

Engaging in outdoor activities, whether it is hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, or simply spending time in nature is not just important to us as individuals. It is part of our nation's heritage. Despite the important role public lands play in outdoor recreation, there are often conflicting levels of access to the land and facilities provided by Federal land managers, and convoluted policies among the various agencies. That is exactly what the bills on today's agenda seek to address.

The bills we are considering today would increase access to public land, enhance coordination among the Federal land management agencies, reduce bureaucracy, and provide for the long-term planning of two important recreation sites.

Representative Zinke's bill, the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act, will support gateway communities, create better data on visitation to develop a digital pass so Americans can access the park with their mobile device. Importantly, the bill requires the National Park Service to engage with local stakeholders before closing or reducing access to a park, except for health and safety risks.

Last year, visitors to national parks generated a record high of over \$50 billion in economic benefits and supported over 378,000 jobs. Legislation like Representative Zinke's bill will help gateway communities build on this success and continue to grow their rural economies by creating reliable, dependable access to Federal lands.

I would also like to highlight legislation from my neighbor, Representative Stauber, that would provide certainty and predictability to a favorite hunting and fishing lodge in his district on Lake Winnibigoshish. H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023, would facilitate a land exchange between the owners of the lodge and the Forest Service. I would like to commend Representative Stauber for years of hard work he has put into crafting this locally-driven solution that will benefit his constituents.

Like Representative Stauber's legislation, Representative Comer's D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act is a locally-driven solution that would provide for increased recreation here, in Washington, DC. The legislation before us represents years of negotiations to ensure a long-term solution for the future development and use of the 142 acres of land known as the RFK Memorial Stadium campus. To promote and enhance outdoor recreation, the bill ensures any development of the site will maintain at least 30 percent parks and open space, and ensure access to the Anacostia River and Anacostia River Trail.

Finally, Ranking Member Neguse and Representative Lawler's bipartisan bill, H.R. 3107, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act, would establish the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation to coordinate policies among the various land management agencies. I am interested in learning more about this proposal, and whether it could potentially decrease bureaucracy and redundancies among the Federal land management agencies.

Each of these bills addresses a unique aspect of outdoor recreation, from rural to urban communities, local to national issues, and from immediate issues to long-term planning. I thank each of the sponsors of today's bills for their commitment and work.

I would also like to thank our panel of witnesses for being here today to offer your unique expertise in the field of outdoor recreation.

With that, I will now recognize Ranking Member Neguse.

And Ranking Member Neguse is not here at this point, so let's go into our first panel.

I would just highlight for our panel we do have votes that are coming up at 2:30, and we are going to get as far as we can, and then we will go vote.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press the "on" button on the microphone.

We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I would like to introduce Mr. Mike Reynolds, the Deputy Director of Congressional and External Relations at the National Park Service.

Deputy Director Reynolds, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MIKE REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL
PARK SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on three of the bills on today's agenda. I would like to submit our full statement for the record and summarize the Department's views.

H.R. 3107 would require the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation, or FICOR, composed of most of the agencies that manage Federal lands and waters for recreation purposes.

The bill would require FICOR to meet as frequently as appropriate to coordinate recreation policies across Federal agencies, including implementation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and many other matters. The legislation would provide a statutory basis for FICOR, which is currently administratively established, through a July 2022 Memorandum of Understanding among the agencies.

Since the MOU was signed, FICOR has developed an operational charter and a 2-year work plan, focusing coordination on priority topics such as permitting and fees, partnerships, visitor use planning, youth engagement, and more.

The Department supports H.R. 3107, with amendments to make the bill consistent, to the extent possible, with the July MOU. We would also recommend language that assures long-term sustainability for funding and capacity, and that all land and water management agencies currently participating in FICOR be included.

H.R. 3200 would require the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service to carry out certain activities related to recreational opportunities. These activities include collaborating with other entities to better understand and address gateway community needs, providing public involvement in decisions that reduce access to national park units, establishing a single visitation data reporting system for recreation visits to Federal and tribal lands, and establishing a digital National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 3200, but would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on certain provisions of the bill. We are broadly supportive of congressional efforts to provide Federal land management agencies with greater authorities and flexibilities to respond to changing needs and evolving challenges in a time of increased visitation to our public lands. We would welcome the opportunity to continue collaborating with you to advance these goals.

H.R. 4984 would direct the transfer of administrative jurisdiction of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium campus from the National Park Service to the General Services Administration, and direct the development of a new 99-year lease between the GSA and the District of Columbia. The lease would permit a number of uses, including a stadium and commercial and residential development, subject to the approval of the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts.

The Department supports the goals of H.R. 4984. Our principal interest is ensuring that the legislation provides sufficient protection for park and recreational areas that the National Park Service has long been responsible for administering in this part of the District, where the former stadium and adjacent park lands are located.

Importantly, from our perspective, the lease would require that the District ensure that any commercial or residential development

not adversely impact lands under the National Park Service's jurisdiction; that 30 percent of the leased land be designated as parks and open space; and that development provides for access to the Anacostia River and does not interrupt the Anacostia River Trail.

The Department would like to recommend some amendments to the bill as drafted. Furthermore, we would ask for your support as the bill advances through the legislative process to ensure that it continues to provide for the protection of a sufficient amount of land for open space and park and recreation purposes, consistent with the Federal Government's historic commitment to that goal. We look forward to working with you toward that end.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions that you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Reynolds follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL T. REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR
CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
ON H.R. 3107, H.R. 3200, AND H.R. 4984

H.R. 3107, "Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act"

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3107, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation.

The Department supports H.R. 3107 with amendments. The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Army, and the Department of Commerce regarding their views on this bill's provisions, particularly as they affect the U.S. Forest Service, the Corps of Engineers, and the National Marine Fisheries Service, respectively.

H.R. 3107 would require the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), composed of the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The bill would require FICOR to meet as frequently as appropriate to coordinate recreation policies across Federal agencies, including implementation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and many other matters that are common to agencies that manage Federal lands and waters for recreational purposes. The legislation would provide a statutory basis for FICOR, which is currently administratively established.

Our Nation's public lands, waters, and the fish and wildlife they support are an important resource for the American public. These places provide a diversity of outdoor recreation experiences for tens of millions of Americans each day and improve the social well-being of urban and rural communities across the United States. These recreational opportunities are supported by agency work both on and off federal lands. Outdoor recreation also contributes significantly to the national economy and the economies of local communities.

Federal land and water management agencies have long-standing responsibilities for the conservation and sustainable use of the resources within the places they manage. The need for interagency coordination of Federal departments and agencies with the responsibility to manage lands and waterways for outdoor recreation has a history dating back to at least 1946 with the development of the Federal Recreation Committee, which was soon after redesignated as the Federal Interagency Committee on Recreation. Since then, there have been several iterations of this organized coordination, including the most recent Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation reestablishment in July 2022 through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) signed by the Secretaries or Assistant Secretaries of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Army (Civil Works), the Department of Commerce (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and the Department of the Interior. Collectively, these agencies manage an area of more than 730 million non-overlapping acres that consist of parks, lakes, monuments, wild and

scenic rivers, Reclamation water projects, wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries, forests, and marine sanctuaries and wilderness areas.

The overall goal of the FICOR, as defined in the recent MOU, is to institutionalize and facilitate better coordination and collaboration among Federal agencies whose missions or programs include providing outdoor recreation and conserving or sustainably managing natural and cultural resources. FICOR provides a framework to address common outdoor recreation-related challenges and opportunities since each of these land and water management agencies are also facing similar challenges related to balancing resource protection, local environmental and economic vitality, and visitor use and enjoyment.

Many of these agencies have also recently benefited from significant Federal investments to address critical needs and improve the visitor and outdoor recreation experiences provided through the Great American Outdoors Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act.

Since FICOR's 2022 reestablishment, the agencies have collectively developed an Operational Charter and a two-year workplan focusing coordination on priority topics which include permitting and fees, policy and regulations, equitable workforce, outdoor recreation for all, intergovernmental and community collaboration, partnerships, youth engagement, data and technology, and visitor use planning. The workplan also includes coordination to ensure the long-term sustainability of FICOR through identifying funding and establishing a well-vetted organizational structure.

The Department would appreciate the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on amendments to make the bill consistent, to the extent possible, with the July 2022 interagency MOU, including the areas identified for coordination. We would also recommend language that assures long-term sustainability for funding and capacity, as well as a federal family approach not driven by any one agency but rather managed equally between Departments. DOI also recommends that all the land and water management agencies currently participating in FICOR be included in the proposed legislation, including by acknowledging that the definitions referenced in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act do not apply to all the agencies currently participating and referenced in the FICOR MOU.

H.R. 3200, "Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act"

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3200, to require the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to carry out certain activities to enhance recreational opportunities for gateway communities, to amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to provide for the establishment of a digital National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass, and for other purposes.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 3200, but would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on certain provisions of the bill. The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture for its views regarding provisions that affect the U.S. Forest Service.

Section 3 of H.R. 3200 directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to collaborate with State and local governments, Tribal governments, housing authorities, applicable trade associations, nonprofit organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to improve the understanding of the economic impacts of visitation on gateway communities and identify community needs, including housing shortages, demands on existing municipal infrastructure, and accommodation and management of sustainable visitation. The bill further directs the Secretaries to use existing authorities to seek to address the identified community needs by entering into agreements with gateway communities; offering corresponding leases, rights-of-way, or easements; entering into public-private partnerships; or providing financial assistance under existing programs.

Section 4, which is the only section of the bill that is specific to the National Park Service, would require superintendents of national parks to conduct public meetings, consult local stakeholders, and provide a 60-day public comment period for any action that would reduce access to a park for a reason not connected to a specific emergency-type incident. Because the National Park Service currently conducts public outreach and solicits public comments for access-related actions at parks such as establishing reservation systems, the Department would like to better understand the purpose of this provision and to work with the sponsor and the Committee to clarify it accordingly.

Section 5 would require the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to establish a single visitation data reporting system to report annual visitation data across all the units of Federal recreational lands and on land held in trust for Indian Tribes, if requested by a Tribe. The data would include estimates for multiple cat-

egories of recreation activities. This section would also require the establishment of a “Real-time Data Pilot Program” that would make available to the public data on visitation at: selected Federal land management units; other Federal, State, and local recreation sites near the selected units; and other lesser-known recreation sites near the selected units, in an effort to encourage visitation among recreation sites. In selecting the Federal land management units to participate in the pilot program, the Secretaries would be directed to solicit feedback from gateway communities. The pilot program would consist of 15 units managed by land management bureaus of the Department and five by the U.S. Forest Service; within five years, the program is to include 80 additional sites, 50 of which would be managed by the Department’s bureaus.

Section 6 of the bill would require the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, by January 1, 2024, to establish a digital version of the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass that can be stored on a mobile device and make that pass available to pass purchasers. The National Park Service, on behalf of all participating Interagency Pass Program agencies, has been actively working on establishing digital passes at individual sites as an option for visitors since it launched a pilot in the fall/winter of 2016/2017. Digital site-specific passes are currently offered at over 80 NPS locations as well as other agency locations.

The Department appreciates the intent of this bill and is broadly supportive of congressional efforts to provide the various Federal land management agencies under its jurisdiction with greater authorities and flexibility to respond, based on the best available data and evidence, to changing needs and evolving challenges in a time of increased visitation to our public lands. We would welcome the opportunity to continue collaborating with the bill sponsors and the Committee to advance these goals.

H.R. 4984, The D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior’s views on H.R. 4984, the D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act.

The Department supports the goals of H.R. 4984. Our principal interest is in ensuring that the legislation provides sufficient protection for park and recreational areas within the area that the National Park Service (NPS) has long been responsible for administering, directly or through a lease, in the part of the District of Columbia (District) where the former stadium and adjacent parklands are located. The Department defers to the General Services Administration (GSA) for its views on the aspects of the legislation that pertain to that agency.

H.R. 4984 would amend the District of Columbia Stadium Act of 1957 to direct the Secretary of the Interior to transfer administrative jurisdiction of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus (Campus) to the Administrator of the GSA. The GSA would assume the NPS’s responsibilities under the Federal government’s current lease with the District. The legislation would direct the development of a new 99-year lease between the GSA and the District that would permit a number of uses, including a stadium and commercial and residential development, subject to the approval of the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts.

Importantly from our perspective, H.R. 4984 would require that, as a condition of using the Campus for commercial and residential development, the lease would require that the District ensure that the development does not materially degrade or adversely impact any lands under the jurisdiction of the NPS; that 30 percent of the land be designated as parks and open space; and that development provides for public access to the Anacostia River and shall not interrupt the Anacostia River Trail. These requirements would help preserve the Federal government’s historic commitment to maintaining significant portions of land in this part of the District as park and recreational space.

The Campus sits on land administered by the NPS as part of Anacostia Park. Originally envisioned by the 1901 McMillan Commission as public gardens and recreation space, Anacostia Park was established in 1918 when Congress directed the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge the Anacostia River flats and use the fill to create new parkland. In 1924, Congress established what would eventually become the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) which directed the management of Anacostia Park as part of the park, parkway, and playground system of the Nation’s capital. In 1933, Executive Order 6166 transferred NCPC’s responsibilities for management of the park, parkway, and playground system, including Anacostia Park, to the NPS.

The District of Columbia Stadium Act of 1957 previously called for transferring the entire Campus to the District following the repayment of the costs to construct the stadium. However, the Campus remained the property of the Federal government. As amended in 1986, the act directed the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to convey ownership of the stadium building, only, to the District and establish a 50-year conditional lease for the stadium grounds and surrounding parking. The 1986 amendments required that the property be used for the purposes of recreation facilities, open space, and public outdoor recreation facilities in addition to a stadium. The lease entered into between the NPS and the District in 1968, pursuant to the 1986 amendments, is set to expire in 2038.

The lease area is approximately 142 acres, including the 11 acres that were occupied by the District-owned former stadium structure. Under the current law, if the leased property were no longer used for the purposes allowed by the 1986 amendments and under the lease, the lands would revert to the Secretary to be administered as part of Anacostia Park and the District would bear the costs of removing structures, or rehabilitating the stadium or land, as the Secretary determines appropriate.

The District currently manages approximately 851 acres of parkland across the city and the leasing of land as directed in H.R. 4984 would present an opportunity for the District to add to those lands and improve its park system. The bill's additional permitted uses (commercial and residential development) would allow the District to implement its plan to transform the Campus from acres of asphalt to a complex focused on community sports, recreation, park space and cultural amenities. The bill's requirement that 30 percent of the land be designated for parks and open space as a condition for residential and commercial development would guarantee public access to a sizable amount of park land and outdoor recreation areas.

Additionally, the bill's parks and open space requirements would complement NPS park land in the immediate vicinity. Of particular note, within the vicinity is a 32-acre riparian buffer which contains a portion of the Anacostia River Trail and serves as a critical transition from the 142 acres of leased lands to the Anacostia River. This transition zone protects the river from runoff that would otherwise carry sediments and pollutants into the water. It is critical to ensure that this area is maintained as a riparian buffer.

The Department would like to recommend some amendments to the bill as drafted and looks forward to working with Congress. Furthermore, because there are three House committees reviewing this bill and many more steps ahead in the legislative process, we would ask for your support as the bill advances to ensure that it continues to provide for the protection of a sufficient amount of land for open space, park and recreation purposes, consistent with the Federal government's historic commitment to that goal. We look forward to working with you toward that end.

Chairman Tiffany, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. MIKE REYNOLDS, DEPUTY
DIRECTOR, CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Mr. Reynolds did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Tiffany

Question 1. During the hearing, you mentioned the National Park Service (NPS) coordinates with local, county, and state governments ("stakeholders") based on civic engagement policies and have definitions of communication and coordination in policy manuals.

1a) How does the NPS define coordination?

1b) Will you provide citations for laws, statutes, codes, regulations, and policy manuals directing the NPS to coordinate with stakeholders?

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Deputy Director Reynolds.
I would like to introduce Ms. Jacqueline Emanuel, the Associate Deputy Chief of the National Forest Service.

Associate Deputy Chief Emanuel, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JACQUELINE EMANUEL, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. EMANUEL. Chairman Tiffany, thank you very much for the invitation to testify today. I am Jacqueline Emanuel, Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System for the USDA Forest Service.

My work in the National Forest System includes policy oversight and direction for recreation management, which is the subject of two bills you are considering today. Our recreation program provides a wide array of recreational opportunities on our public land, including 159,000 miles of trails, 370,000 miles of roads, and nearly 30,000 recreation sites. In fact, our recreation program is the primary pathway that more than 160 million visitors used to connect with their national forests last year alone.

Recreation is the largest economic driver of the national forest, contributing more than \$13.7 billion to America's GDP and supporting more than 161,000 jobs. Gateway communities play an important role in creating and sustaining this recreation economy.

At the Forest Service, we see a strong need to engage across boundaries in more comprehensive recreation planning with gateway communities and other stakeholders to identify sustainable solutions to the growing demand for outdoor recreation on Federal and other public lands.

As we reimagine recreation, we are challenging ourselves to think differently about how we deliver recreation into the future. Our vision is grounded in engagement with others, including new and diverse audiences such as our gateway communities.

Regarding the bills being discussed today, H.R. 3200, the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act, aims to enhance recreation opportunities for gateway communities and to provide digital versions of the National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Passes. USDA supports the goals of this bill. We would welcome an opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and bill sponsors to improve upon the current legislation in support of these goals.

USDA supports H.R. 3107, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act. This bill would codify the Federal Interagency Council on Recreation, or FICOR. USDA is a charter member of FICOR, an organization which has proven itself instrumental in forwarding interagency initiatives in support of outdoor recreation.

USDA supports the goals of H.R. 1657, Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023. This bill would direct the Forest Service to exchange approximately 13.8 acres of Federal land located in the Chippewa National Forest for approximately 38 acres of non-Federal land in Itasca County, Minnesota. We would like to work with the Subcommittee and bill sponsor on technical improvements to the bill to address our concern with the land exchange timeline.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's focus on improving recreation management on public lands and in our neighboring gateway

communities. We also appreciate your interest in a proposed land exchange that enjoys local support. We look forward to working with you. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Emanuel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JACQUELINE EMANUEL, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF,
NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE—FOREST SERVICE
ON H.R. 1657, H.R. 3107, AND H.R. 3200

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, regarding various Federal land management bills. USDA defers to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) as to the effects of these bills on any DOI bureaus and the federal lands under their jurisdiction.

Background

The USDA Forest Service manages 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands, comprising 193 million acres in 41 states and Puerto Rico. National forest and grassland outdoor recreation offers the widest possible array of opportunities to experience Federal lands, which are home to three million acres of lakes, 400,000 miles of streams, 122 Wild and Scenic Rivers for rafting, kayaking and other watersports, and 159,000 miles of trails for horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling, mountain biking, hunting, and more.

The Forest Service is deeply committed to connecting all Americans to the outdoors, and we value the important role played by outfitters and guides, resorts, non-profit organizations, and other concessioners in connecting people to recreation opportunities in the national forests and grasslands. Outdoor recreation attracts people to visit, live, and work in gateway and rural communities and supports the health, well-being, and economic vitality of those communities. In fiscal year 2021, recreation on National Forest System (NFS) lands contributed more than \$13.7 billion to America's gross domestic product and supported more than 161,500 full and part-time jobs, the vast majority of which are in gateway and rural communities.¹

In fiscal year 2021, there were 156 million recreation visits to national forests and grasslands. When we include the number of people who pass through these beautiful forests and grasslands to enjoy the scenery and travel on scenic roads and byways, that number increases to 456 million visits. Recreation pressure has been particularly significant in national forests close to urban areas.

Moreover, the recreation program on NFS lands sustains more private sector jobs per program dollar than any other Forest Service program and provides the single largest economic stimulus for many local communities adjacent to or within NFS boundaries. Outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities are consistently ranked as one of the primary reasons people move to rural towns and can be a leading contributor to small town economies. The Forest Service administers over 30,000 commercial recreation special use authorizations for activities that generate nearly \$2 billion in revenue for special use authorization holders. In particular, the Forest Service administers 127 ski area permits and approximately 8,000 outfitting and guiding permits.

USDA appreciates the recognition by this Subcommittee of the importance of recreation on Federal lands to our national economy, as well as the sustained interest in finding solutions to recreation management challenges. We understand these challenges, and we know that we can further enhance recreation opportunities on Federal lands. Seeking to continue the momentum built through the Great America Outdoors Act and the Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the Forest Service has initiated a national strategy and action plan called Reimagine Recreation. The Forest Service is also a foundational member of Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), which is partnering across all land and water management agencies to better coordinate delivery of opportunities and access for outdoor recreation. This effort will clarify and change the way we deliver recreation opportunities. We are building our vision by engaging with new and diverse audiences.

¹2021 National Visitor Use Monitoring survey. These numbers reflect total benefits (direct, indirect, and induced).

H.R. 3200—Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act

H.R. 3200, the “Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act,” requires the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to carry out certain activities to enhance recreational opportunities for gateway communities. The bill also amends the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) to provide for the establishment of a digital National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

Section 3 seeks to enhance understanding of the economic impacts of visitation on gateway communities and to identify the needs of those communities, such as housing and other infrastructure necessary to accommodate and manage growing levels of visitation. The bill would require the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to seek to meet the identified needs through a variety of mechanisms under existing law, such as financial assistance, cooperative agreements, and public-private partnerships.

However, Section 3 also includes the provision that USDA can provide financial or technical assistance to a gateway community under an existing program to remedy any identified economic needs, such as housing shortages and to address demands on existing municipal infrastructure. The Forest Service lacks authority to provide direct economic development assistance in gateway or rural communities. Authority for this function rests in USDA-Rural Development. Forest Service initiatives in the recreation economy space are linked to program authorities. Because the Forest Service lacks any authority to provide financial assistance beyond NFS boundaries, this bill would need to give that authority to the Secretary of Agriculture.

Section 4 of H.R. 3200 requires the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct certain procedures before taking any action that will reduce access to a National Park. USDA defers to the Department of the Interior on any impacts on NPS related to this provision.

Section 5(a) of this bill would require the Secretaries to establish a single visitation data reporting system to report annual visitation data in a consistent manner. Section 5(b) of this bill would require USDA to select five national forests for a pilot program to make visitation data available to the public, including data and resources publicly available from existing nongovernmental platforms. The bill would allow the data to be provided directly by the agency or indirectly through its partners. Within five years of enactment, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior would be required to select an additional 80 units for this program. Section 5 also would require the Secretaries to share information about lesser-known recreation sites through a variety of media platforms to disperse visitation among recreation sites.

The Forest Service currently collects visitor use data and monitors trends in visitor use annually through the National Visitor Use Monitoring program and makes visitation data publicly available on its website. To the extent this bill would require the agency to provide real-time visitor use data to the public, the agency would like to work with the bill sponsor to address technical concerns. USDA would like to work with the Subcommittee and bill sponsors to better understand the visitation data requirements in Section 5 and to make technical improvements to the bill.

Section 6 of this bill would amend existing legislation under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would require the establishment of digital versions of the America the Beautiful—National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands passes no later than January 1, 2024. Due to technical requirements and the time needed to implement the conversion to digital passes, we recommend amending this deadline to January 1, 2026, to allow sufficient time to implement this change responsibly and effectively.

USDA recognizes the important role and needs of gateway communities in sustaining the recreation economy. We are helping to invest in community well-being, expand the outdoor recreation economy, and provide access to the outdoors for underserved populations. We have partnered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Border Regional Commission to launch the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program, which provides planning assistance to help rural communities leverage outdoor recreation as an economic development strategy. USDA Forest Service, Rural Development, and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture are also collaborating to support the recreation economies of rural forest gateway communities by providing technical expertise and funding to develop recreation infrastructure and capacity beyond the boundaries of NFS lands. We have identified a strong need to engage across boundaries in more comprehensive recreation planning to identify sustainable solutions to the growing

demand for outdoor recreation on Federal and other public lands. Collaborative, all-lands recreation planning is at the heart of our Reimagine Recreation effort.

USDA supports the goals of H.R. 3200 to enhance recreation opportunities for gateway communities and to provide digital versions of the America the Beautiful—National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands passes. We would welcome an opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and bill sponsors to improve upon the current legislation in support of these goals.

H.R. 3107—Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act

H.R. 3107 legislatively establishes an interagency council known as the Federal Interagency Council on Recreation (FICOR), composed of representatives from the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, Forest Service, United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Among other purposes, the bill would charge FICOR with coordination of recreation management policies across Federal agencies, including implementation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (16 U.S.C. 6801 *et seq.*).

On July 20, 2022, the Secretaries of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior and the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that re-established FICOR administratively, with the purpose of creating more safe, affordable, and equitable opportunities for Americans to get outdoors. This MOU renewed and re-energized FICOR, which was originally created administratively in 2011 but was suspended by the previous administration. FICOR provides a focus on improving access to nature, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities, and providing the public with improved and more affordable experiences on America’s public lands and waters.

FICOR has been instrumental in forwarding interagency initiatives promoting youth outdoor activities and policy and data coordination in support of outdoor recreation. The USDA Forest Service is a charter member of FICOR and supports H.R. 3107, which would codify FICOR in statute.

H.R. 1657—Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023

H.R. 1657 would direct the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service to exchange approximately 13.8 acres of Federal land in Itasca County, Minnesota located in the Chippewa National Forest within the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation boundary for approximately 38 acres of non-Federal land in Itasca County, Minnesota, which is owned by Big Winnie Land and Timber, LLC, (BWLTL). Subject to the provisions of this Act, if BWLTL offers to convey the non-Federal land to the United States, the Secretary shall, not later than 180 days after receiving the offer (1) accept the offer, (2) convey to BWLTL all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to the federal land; and (3) accept from BWLTL all right, title, and interest of BWLTL in and to the non-federal land. The exchange would be for equal value, or the values shall be equalized by a cash payment, subject to an exception. The land acquired by USDA would be added to and managed as part of Chippewa National Forest.

USDA supports the goals of H.R. 1657, “Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023.” The bill would extend benefits to the public by exchanging developed shoreline for a larger, undeveloped parcel in which the Forest Service would no longer need to administer a special use permit. While we are supportive of the bill, the Department has concerns with the 180-day time frame allotted to complete the exchange. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and the bill sponsor to refine this language and make other technical refinements to meet the bill’s intent.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have for me.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MS. JACQUELINE EMANUEL, ASSOCIATE
DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Questions Submitted by Representative Tiffany

Question 1. During the hearing, you mentioned the Forest Service coordinates with local, county, and state governments ("stakeholders").

1a) How does the Forest Service define coordination?

Answer. The type of coordination with stakeholders conducted by the Forest Service varies depending on the context and applicable legal requirements, as discussed in response to Question 1b.

1b) Will you provide citations for laws, statutes, codes, regulations, and policy manuals directing the Forest Service to coordinate with stakeholders?

Answer. Several authorities provide for Forest Service coordination with stakeholders. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Section 14(a) of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, 16 U.S.C. § 1612(a), and its implementing regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 216, require the Forest Service to provide notice and opportunity to comment on formulation of standards, criteria, and guidelines applicable to Forest Service programs. Forest Service directives implementing these authorities state that it is the policy of the Forest Service to ensure appropriate intergovernmental communication when developing or amending directives that are subject to public notice and comment. Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1109.12, Ch. 30, sec. 34.
- Forest Service regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 212, Subparts A and B, require the agency to coordinate with stakeholders when designating National Forest System (NFS) roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands for motor vehicle or over-snow vehicle use.
- The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019, Pub. L. No. 116-9, Title IV (Sportsmen's Access and Related Matters) (Dingell Act), requires the Forest Service to coordinate with stakeholders on proposed temporary and permanent restrictions and prohibitions on hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting on NFS lands. Forest Service directives implementing this requirement are in FSH 5309.11, Chapter 30, section 34.
- Forest Service regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 261, Subpart C, provide for public notice and opportunity to comment on permanent restrictions and prohibitions applicable to a Forest Service region.
- The Forest Service engages with stakeholders and other members of the public on proposals to establish, modify, or eliminate a recreation fee consistent with section 804 of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), 16 U.S.C. § 6803, and Forest Service directives at FSH 2309.13, Chapter 30, section 32.8.
- The Forest Service also engages with stakeholders and other members of the public in connection with National Environmental Policy Act compliance for proposed projects, including decommissioning of developed recreation sites pursuant to recreation site assessments.

Question 2. H.R. 3200 would require the National Park Service to coordinate with local stakeholders, hold public meetings, and open at least a 60-day comment period before any action is taken to reduce access. Does the Forest Service support including similar requirements before reducing access to National Forest System lands?

Answer. Because the Forest Service generally conducts public outreach and solicits public comments for access-related actions needed on NFS lands, we would like to better understand the purpose of this provision and to work with the sponsor and the Committee to clarify it accordingly. The provision as drafted would preclude the agency from timely issuing short-term orders to address immediate public health and safety or resource concerns in specific areas, as authorized by the Dingell Act (authorizing emergency orders without public notice and comment) and the agency's travel management regulations at 36 C.F.R. § 212.52(b)(1) and (b)(2) (authorizing temporary, emergency closures and temporary, emergency closures based on determination of considerable adverse effects without public involvement).

Question 3. Earlier this year during another hearing focused on recreation, the Forest Service followed up and assured me there are plans and funding available to rehabilitate boat launches at Beaver Lake, Cisco Lake, Stock Farm, Twin Lake, and Mondeaux. Will you provide an update on the status of these boat launches?

Answer. The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest remains on schedule for the planned rehabilitation at Beaver Lake, Cisco Lake, Twin Lakes, Stock Farm, and Mondeaux Flowage using funding under the Great American Outdoors Act. The boat landing rehabilitations for Beaver Lake, Cisco Lake, Twin Lakes, and Stock Farm are anticipated to be completed in fiscal year (FY) 2024. Additionally, the planned fishing pier rehabilitation or replacement at Mondeaux Flowage is anticipated to be completed in FY 2025. The fishing ramp will remain open during rehabilitation or replacement of the fishing pier at Mondeaux Flowage.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Associate Deputy Chief Emanuel.
I now recognize Mr. Cory Smith, District 1 Commissioner for Itasca County in Minnesota.
Commissioner Smith, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CORY SMITH, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 1,
ITASCA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cory Smith. I serve as County Commissioner representing the citizens of Itasca County in northern Minnesota, home of the Chippewa National Forest and Lake Winnibigoshish.

I want to thank Representative Stauber for introducing H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023, along with Ranking Member Neguse and Representative Huffman for their co-sponsorship of this bill.

The land exchange bill would transfer 13.8 acres along Lake Winnibigoshish to the owners of Bowen Lodge, which is a fishing-hunting resort that has played an important role in our community since 1982. The transfer will ensure 1,640 feet of shoreline and permanent access to the lake for recreation. In return, Bowen Lodge would transfer 38 acres of land to the U.S. Forest Service to be added to the Chippewa National Forest. Transferring this acreage to the Chippewa National Forest will allow greater management of land and ensure the public has the best access to recreate and enjoy our beautiful natural resources.

Bowen Lodge is a third-generation, family-owned resort dating back to 1925. The Heig family, which operates the Lodge today, and have done so for over 40 years. Over those three generations, this family continues to be stewards of the land. From their state-of-the-art septic systems to their shoreline improvements, they have taken strides to protect the health of Lake Winnibigoshish and the landscape around them. Bowen Lodge has had an impact on so many other resorts on the lake, as well, and that is one of the reasons that Lake Winnibigoshish continues to thrive.

On a local level, there is nothing but support for this land exchange. As a community leader, I would like to again express that the Heig family and Bowen Lodge has gone above and beyond for all Minnesotans when it comes to taking care of Lake Winnibigoshish and the Chippewa National Forest that surrounds them.

Not only an elected official in Itasca County, but also as a local resident that is raising my family and a growing business in the area, I feel the time is now to complete this land exchange. This is an absolute win-win for everyone.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill today, which I firmly believe will benefit the citizens of Itasca County and ensure greater access to countless Minnesotans who seek to recreate along Lake Winnibigoshish.

I look forward to answering any of your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER CORY SMITH, ITASCA COUNTY
ON H.R. 1657

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Cory Smith, and I serve as a County Commissioner representing the citizens of Itasca County in Northern Minnesota, home to the Chippewa National Forest and Lake Winnibigoshish.

I want to thank Representative Stauber for introducing H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act for 2023, along with Ranking Member Neguse and Rep. Huffman for their co-sponsorship of this bill.

This land exchange bill will transfer 13.8 acres along Lake Winnibigoshish to the owners of Bowen Lodge, which is a fishing and hunting resort that has played an important role in our community since 1982. This transfer will ensure 1,640 feet of shoreline and permanent access to the lake for recreation. In return, Bowen Lodge would transfer 38 acres of land to the U.S. Forest Service, to be added to the Chippewa National Forest. Transferring this acreage to the Chippewa National Forest will allow greater management of the land, and ensuring the public has the best access to recreate and enjoy our beautiful natural resources.

Bowen Lodge is third-generation family-owned resort, dating back to 1925. The Heig family, which operate the lodge today, have done so for over 40 years. Over those three generations this family continues to be stewards of the land. From their state-of-the-art septic system to their shoreline improvements, they've taken strides to protect the health of Lake Winnibigoshish and the landscape around them.

Bowen Lodge has had an impact on so many other resorts on the lake as well, and that is one of the reasons Lake Winnibigoshish continues to thrive. On a local level there is nothing but support for this land exchange. As a community leader I would like to again express that the Heig family and Bowen Lodge has gone above and beyond for all Minnesotans when comes to taking care of Lake Winnibigoshish and the Chippewa National Forest that surrounds them.

Not only an elected official in Itasca County, but also as a local resident that is raising my family and growing a business in the area, I feel the time is now to complete this land exchange. It is an absolute win-win for everyone.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill today, which I firmly believe will benefit the citizens of Itasca County and ensure greater access to countless Minnesotans who seek to recreate along Lake Winnibigoshish. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Commissioner Smith.

I now recognize Mr. Randy Brodehl, Commissioner for Flathead County in Kalispell, Montana.

Commissioner Brodehl, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF RANDY BRODEHL, COMMISSIONER,
FLATHEAD COUNTY, KALISPELL, MONTANA**

Mr. BRODEHL. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, thank you very much for holding this hearing to discuss legislation to support gateway communities and enhance recreation in our public lands. My name is Randy Brodehl, and I am a Flathead

County, Montana Commissioner. I previously served in the Montana House of Representatives and as a local fire chief, and I offer my testimony today on behalf of the National Association of Counties.

Flathead County is in northwest Montana, and has a population of 120,000 people. We are a gateway to three national forests, a national wildlife refuge, the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, two national wildernesses, and Glacier National Park. Recreational access to these Federal lands is our primary economic driver.

Visitations to Federal lands have exploded in recent years. Glacier National Park has seen approximately 3 million visitors annually since 2017, apart from when it was closed for COVID. While this has led to a rapid economic growth in our gateway community, there are significant drawbacks to our population increasing several times our number of residents for a few months out of every year.

Three years ago, Glacier National Park implemented a reservation permit system for Going-to-the-Sun Road. And Going-to-the-Sun Road is the only road that goes all the way through the park. This reduced visitation by about a half a million people in 2022. This year the park requires permits for all vehicles, likely further reducing visitation levels.

When the Federal Government pushes down on our gateway communities, we can suffer millions of dollars in economic loss. H.R. 3200, the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act, requires Federal land agencies to conduct public meetings, consult local stakeholders, and allow for public comment. Counties appreciate Congressman Ryan Zinke and Senator Steve Daines for introducing this bipartisan legislation.

When visitors cannot acquire a park entry permit, they recreate in our gateway communities. Flathead Lake is a massive tourism draw. Unfortunately, for the first time in 50 years, the Bureau of Reclamation did not release enough water to keep Flathead Lake at full capacity, exposing the lake bottom, closing marinas, stranding boats, and exposing irrigation pump intakes.

With access to Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake curtailed, our visitor numbers faded, doing significant harm to our economy. Without the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act we are destined to repeat this devastating action every year because county and state officials do not have a seat at the Federal decision-making table.

Flathead County's access to U.S. Forest Service lands, wilderness areas, and national wildlife refuge lands has remained virtually the same for the past 60 years, while tourism numbers have quadrupled. The Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act will support expansion of recreation enhancements in our gateway communities by considering more option actions like adding campgrounds, opening roads in our forests, trails in our wilderness areas, and greater access to our wildlife refuge, and also educating our visitors about options in gateway communities.

For us in the Flathead, the Act will let us help with best practice decisions. H.R. 3200 would ensure the public has access to their lands, and it lessens the burden of increased visitations on commu-

nities. The bill requires the U.S. Department of the Interior to collaborate with counties, states, tribes, and various stakeholders to identify the needs of gateway communities in affordable housing, infrastructure, maintenance, and visitor accommodations.

The Department could provide technical or financial assistance, issue leases or rights-of-way, and special use permits to meet our community needs.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture would also be allowed to provide similar assistance to businesses like hotels, campgrounds, and restaurants. These new authorities will create the crucial partnerships that bring visitors back to Federal lands and sustainability growth in gateway community economies.

H.R. 3200 would create a digital version of the America the Beautiful Public Lands Pass so visitors can more easily access Federal lands of all kinds. This will reduce wait times at visitor centers and entry gates.

The bill would also establish a pilot program, in consultation with gateway communities, to provide real-time visitation data and help to drive people to lesser-known recreation sites, which will also reduce wait times and decrease the pressure on the most visited Federal lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to tell Flathead County's story. Counties urge Congress to adopt H.R. 3200 expeditiously, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Brodehl follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. RANDY BRODEHL, COUNTY COMMISSIONER,
FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA
ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES
ON H.R. 3200

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands, thank you for holding this hearing to discuss legislation to support gateway communities and enhance recreation on public lands.

My name is Randy Brodehl, and I have been a Flathead County, Montana Commissioner since 2019. I previously served in the Montana House of Representatives and as Chief of the Kalispell, Montana Fire Department. I offer my testimony today on behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Flathead County is located in northwest Montana on the border with Canada. We have a population of 120,000 people and serve as a gateway to three national forests, a national wildlife refuge, the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, two national wildernesses, and Glacier National Park. Recreational access to these federal lands is the primary economic driver in Flathead County.

Impacts of increased visitation to gateway communities

Visitations to federal lands have exploded in recent years. Glacier National Park alone has seen approximately three million visitors annually since 2017, apart from 2020, when the Park was temporarily closed due to the covid pandemic. While this has led to needed, rapid economic growth in Flathead County, there are significant drawbacks to our population increasing to several times our number of residents for a few months out of the year.

Three years ago, Glacier National Park, under direction of the U.S. Department of the Interior, implemented a reservation permit system for the Going-to-the-Sun Road, the only road that goes all the way through the Park. This reduced visitation by half a million people in 2022. This year the Park chose to further restrict visitation by requiring permits for vehicles coming into every entrance of the Park. While the numbers impacted are not yet available, it will be significant and likely more than last year. The financial impacts are not felt by the National Park Service but are an incredible loss to our communities where tourism is king. Park

Superintendents do not respond to the needs of gateway communities, so losses attributed to decisions made by the National Park Service are ignored.

Like the rest of the counties surrounding national parks, we are a tourism-based community, so when the federal government pushes down on our gateway communities, we can suffer millions of dollars in economic losses. H.R. 3200, the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act, is in response to this and requires Superintendents of affected national parks to conduct public meetings, consult local stakeholders, and allow for public comment.

When visitors are not lucky enough to get one of the coveted park entry permits, it is typical for them to spend time and tourism dollars recreating in our gateway communities. Flathead Lake, the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, is a massive tourism draw. An unanticipated domino effect to the Park's ticketing system became exceedingly apparent this year and left our community reeling when the Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) changed Flathead Lake water level policy without consideration of the impacts to the economies of lake communities. The Bureau chose to not release enough water to keep Flathead Lake at full capacity, letting it drop 30 inches by mid-summer, exposing the lake bottom and closing marinas, stranding boats, and exposing irrigation pump intakes. This is something they have never done in the 50 years they have been managing the lake level by release of reservoir waters above the lake. With federal lands and water access being curtailed, our visitor numbers faded, doing significant harm to our economy, and discouraging future tourism. All of this was done without seeking public or local government input. Without the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act, we are destined to repeat this devastating action every year because county and state officials do not have a seat at the federal decision-making table.

Flathead County's access to U.S. Forest Service lands, wilderness areas, and National Wildlife Refuge lands has remained virtually the same for the past 60 years, while tourism due to our local federal lands' attractions have quadrupled. The Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act will support expansion of recreational enhancements in our gateway communities by considering more options and actions like maintaining water levels, adding campgrounds, opening roads in our forests, trails in our wilderness areas, greater access to our wildlife refuge, and educating our visitors about more options in gateway communities. The Act will give counties a seat at the table and let us help with best practice decisions.

H.R. 3200, The Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act

Congress should ensure the public has access to their lands and partner with counties and stakeholders to lessen the burden of increased visitations on communities. H.R. 3200 would help meet these goals. Counties appreciate Congressman Ryan Zinke and Senator Steve Daines for introducing this bipartisan legislation and encourage Congress to swiftly pass it to provide needed support to federal lands gateway counties throughout the country, especially in the West.

First, the bill requires the U.S. Department of the Interior to collaborate with counties, states, Tribes and various stakeholders to identify the needs of gateway communities in affordable housing, infrastructure maintenance and visitor accommodations. The Department would be allowed to provide technical or financial assistance, issue leases or rights-of-way and special use permits to meet community needs in these areas. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture would be allowed to provide similar assistance to businesses like hotels, campgrounds and restaurants. These new authorities will create the crucial partnerships that bring visitors back to federal lands and grow the economies of gateway communities in a sustainable manner.

H.R. 3200 would create a digital version of the America the Beautiful public lands pass so visitors can more easily access federal lands of all kinds. This will help to reduce wait times at visitor centers and entry gates, including during the summer tourist season. The bill would also establish a pilot program in consultation with gateway communities to provide real-time visitation data and help to drive people to lesser-known recreation sites, which will also reduce wait times and decrease the pressure on the most visited places in our public lands system, like Glacier National Park.

Conclusion

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to tell Flathead County's story. Counties urge Congress to enact policies to help gateway communities adjust to the rapid increase in visitations to federal lands. We urge Congress to adopt H.R. 3200 expeditiously. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Commissioner Brodehl.
I now recognize Ms. Ambreen Tariq, Senior Program Director for the Outdoor Recreation Round Table.
Ma'am, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF AMBREEN TARIQ, SENIOR PROGRAM DIRECTOR, OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. TARIQ. Good afternoon, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Committee. On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, thank you for having me here today.

Our industry is in strong support of several important recreation provisions, including the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act and the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act.

I would also like to thank the sponsors of these bipartisan bills: Representatives Zinke, Peltola, Neguse, Lawler, and Moore, whose leadership will help strengthen coordination and focus on the recreation economy for Federal agencies and rural communities.

ORR is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations, representing more than 110,000 businesses in the industry. According to the Department of Commerce, outdoor recreation generated \$862 billion and 4.5 million American jobs in 2021. That is 2 percent of our GDP and 3 percent of all U.S. employees. Our industry's growth rate tripled that of the national economy from 2020 to 2021, as we saw people flocking outdoors to benefit for their mental and physical health, quality of life, and strengthening rural economies.

In my role as Senior Program Director, I work on issues of workforce, access, and economic development related to outdoor recreation. I also coordinate Together Outdoors, a coalition aimed at making the outdoors more welcoming and inclusive for all through business engagement and partnerships.

My family and I moved to the United States when I was young, actually to Minnesota, and we somehow stumbled into the outdoors, where we surprisingly found refuge through stressful immigrant lives, and that is why I am passionate about advocating for outdoor recreation so that everybody's American dream can include access and benefits from the outdoors.

The bills we are discussing today are about Federal Government working better for businesses, states, and the American people so we can have a better return on investment for taxpayer dollars and create the best policies for industry's biggest opportunities and challenges. Whether it is a motorcycle dealership in Wisconsin, a ski resort in Colorado, or a family-owned outfitter by a national park, recreation businesses need certainty to make investments in their employees and better serve their customers.

Both bills provide this much-needed certainty through good government collaboration and helpful tools for main street businesses and rural communities.

There are many agencies whose work impacts outdoor recreation. Coordination through the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation can help break down government silos to resolve multi-jurisdictional challenges and improve efficiencies. Institutionalizing

FICOR will also help agencies better collaborate around important issues like how to welcome more people outdoors, including diverse and under-represented communities. As outdoor recreation continues to grow, this level of coordination is necessary to ensure agencies are aligned internally and to streamline engagement externally for industry stakeholders.

Post-pandemic, more people are choosing to live where businesses can recruit and retain employees. Much of this growth is happening in and around rural gateway communities. Sustainable development of recreation economies near parks, forests, and BLM lands is critical to supporting their conservation needs and the needs of small and mid-sized businesses who form the backbone of these communities.

The Gateway Communities and Recreation Enhancement Act will help planning in ways that address challenges around housing, overcrowding, and workforce development. Based on our industry's growing workforce challenges, investing in vocational training programs and public-private partnerships could help increase the capacity and potential of rural partnerships.

Also, a unified way of collecting and showcasing real-time visitation data will help disperse visitor use to lesser trafficked areas. This, in turn, can help alleviate overcrowding without local communities feeling the economic harms of reduced tourism.

As you finalize these pieces of legislation, I hope a few minor changes in my written testimony can be made to the bills before they move through Committee, especially around including all agencies that manage Federal lands and waters.

This common-sense package of bills we hope will include the two we are discussing today, which are wins for Republicans, Democrats, businesses, and the American people, including future generations of outdoor lovers who also deserve to benefit from the outdoors.

We hope a transformative recreation package will pass and be signed into law this year, and we look forward to working with you and your Senate counterparts to ensure this. Thank you again, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Tariq follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMBREEN TARIQ, OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE
ON H.R. 3107 AND H.R. 3200

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this hearing. Our industry is in strong support of several important recreation provisions, including the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act (H.R. 3107) and the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act (H.R. 3200). I would also like to express our appreciation to the sponsors of these bipartisan pieces of legislation—Representatives Zinke, Peltola, Neguse, Lawler, and more—whose leadership on these bills will help strengthen coordination and focus on the recreation economy for both federal agencies and rural communities.

In my role as the Senior Program Director at ORR I work on issues of workforce, access, and economic development related to outdoor recreation. I also coordinate a program called Together Outdoors, a coalition that aims to increase diversity and nurture an environment where all people have welcoming outdoor experiences in outdoor recreation through engagement, partnership, and action. I have over a decade of experience in labor and environmental and this has given me a unique perspective into how business bottom line is intrinsically connected to our natural resources and land and water management decisions and outcomes.

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is the nation’s leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations representing the more than 110,000 outdoor businesses in the recreation economy and the full spectrum of outdoor-related activities. Recently released data from the U.S. Department of Commerce shows that outdoor recreation generated \$862 billion and 4.5 million American jobs in 2021, comprising 2% of the nation’s economy and 3% of all employees in the country.¹ The data also shows that outdoor recreation’s growth tripled that of the national economy from 2020–2021 as we saw more people flocking to the outdoors and valuing how important time outside is to our mental and physical health, quality of life, as well as helping strengthen rural communities and economies.

Despite the increased numbers our industry is seeing in visitation and participation, there are growing challenges to consider. How do we accommodate more visitors while ensuring quality outdoor recreation experiences and the health of our public lands and waters? How do we support businesses impacted by canceled trips and travel or closures from fires and smoke? How do we make sure communities have the assistance they need to support sustainable recreation while advancing equitable access to front-country and backcountry outdoor recreation? These bills, along with several other bipartisan and bicameral provisions we hope to see come together in a recreation package by the end of the year, are about the federal government working better for businesses, states, the communities who rely on recreation assets, and the American people who enjoy them. Whether it is a manufacturer in Wisconsin, a ski resort in Colorado, or a family-owned diner outside a popular national park, businesses in our industry are like others in that they need certainty to continue to make investments in their employees and serve their customers. Both bills provide this much-needed certainty through good government collaboration at the highest levels and on-the-ground tools for main street businesses and rural communities.

Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR)

While several land and water management agencies have traditionally been the main entities prioritizing outdoor recreation policies, virtually the entire federal government is engaged with aspects of today’s thriving outdoor recreation economy. Coordination among these agencies helps to build a collaborative culture by which they can share innovative ideas, approach challenges that cut across various jurisdictions, and work together to make long term and beneficial impacts. This is much like what ORR does for our members every day—bringing together industry leaders to work on issues that improve and grow the entire recreation community, whether you are a hunter, climber, RVer, hiker, boater, or biker.

As outdoor recreation continues to grow in importance for policy priorities—from rural economic development and transportation to health and equity—this level of coordination is critical because it ensures that agencies are aligned internally and provides a single point of contact externally for outdoor recreation stakeholders—including our members and the industry.

The Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation could help important efforts, like Together Outdoors, by bringing together agencies around important issues of welcoming new users outdoors and telling the stories of those communities who have diverse and historic relationships to our public lands and waters.

At its core, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act is about breaking down government silos so we can see a better return on investment for taxpayer dollars and come up with the best policies for our industries’ biggest opportunities and challenges. This legislation will result in better management of our federal lands and waters, more coordinated policies across federal agencies, and valuable interactions with non-federal partners.

As you finalize this legislation, I would like to suggest a few small changes to the bill before it moves through committee.

1. Many agencies are doing important work for our sector that are not currently members of FICOR and we hope many others will also engage in this policy space. As such, it is important to ensure that FICOR has the ability to add new members, as necessary.
2. It would be more appropriate for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a whole to be included in this group rather than NOAA Fisheries, because NOAA is larger in scope and includes other recreation activities like scuba diving and boating.

¹U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Value added by Industry as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product” (accessed Friday, September 15, 2023)

3. FICOR should be supported equally across all necessary Departments, rather than just by one agency, to ensure commitment of support from the various land and water management agencies. And, since FICOR is already up and running with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), this legislation should be flexible enough in design to allow continued coordination practices by the principals of the agencies.
4. We greatly appreciate that the legislation invites state representatives to FICOR meetings, and we recommend this invitation be extended to include Tribal participation as well.
5. The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and several of our members have been extremely active in working with states to create state Offices of Outdoor Recreation. To date, 20 such offices have been created. These offices are tasked with state coordination around outdoor recreation and have had a great impact on state policies as well as coordination among red, blue, and purple states to leverage best practices from across the country that drive business and build thriving communities. FICOR should coordinate with these states and any others who create state Offices of Outdoor Recreation, as well as with state leaders and interests.

Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act

Post-pandemic, more people are choosing to live where businesses know they can recruit and retain employees. Much of this growth is happening in and around rural gateway communities. Attention to the authentic and sustainable development of recreation economies in places near parks, forests, and Bureau of Land Management lands is critical to supporting not only conservation of those natural resources that are often the driving forces behind this growth, but also the small to mid-sized businesses who are the backbone of these communities.

The Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act will help communities plan for recreation in ways that support key areas like housing, over-crowding, and workforce development.

1. As we are seeing one of our biggest issues in workforce, the opportunity to capitalize on vocational training programs and public-private partnerships could help increase the capacity and business potential of rural entrepreneurship.
2. A unified way of collecting and showcasing real-time visitation data will also help disperse visitor use to lesser-trafficked areas. This will help alleviate the overcrowding we are seeing in some of our iconic places, but without local communities feeling the economic harms of reduced tourism. Having a single model that can compare and contrast location-based activities with accurate, real-time data on visitor movements and recreational activities will allow land managers, lawmakers, and businesses to make more informed decisions around resource allocation and management. This will also help visitors who plan and save for months for such a trip to make better choices around how, when, and where they take these trips.
3. Similar to the FICOR legislation, we suggest that this bill expand to other agencies like NOAA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A better definition than using the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act-related agencies might be found in the Every Kid in a Park Act, which encompasses a broader range of agencies that provide recreation-related services on public lands and waters.

First-ever Recreation Package

I would also like to thank this Committee for your continued work on bringing together bipartisan and bicameral bills in a first-ever recreation package. Similar legislation, the America's Outdoor Recreation Act, has passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee unanimously twice. This common-sense package of bills, which I hope will include the two we are discussing today, is a collection of important outdoor recreation policies—some of which have been worked on for decades. Many of them fix deeply urgent needs for climbers, anglers, hunters, RVers, and all the businesses who provide world-class outdoor experiences. There is no bigger legislative priority for the entire outdoor recreation industry than AORA. We hope this transformative bill will pass and be signed into law this year and we look forward to working with you and your Senate counterparts to ensure that happens.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the outdoors and for advancing these important bills. Both recreation bills discussed today are wins for Republicans

and Democrats, American businesses, and the American people—not just today's recreationists but also future generations of outdoor lovers who we hope will gain the same benefits we do from time spent in nature. Thank you again.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Ms. Tariq.

I will now recognize Mr. Delano Hunter, the Acting Director for the D.C. Department of General Services, to testify for 5 minutes. Mr. Hunter.

**STATEMENT OF DELANO HUNTER, ACTING DIRECTOR, D.C.
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. HUNTER. Good afternoon, Chairman Tiffany and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. My name is Delano Hunter, and I am the Acting Director of the Department of General Services for the District of Columbia under the leadership of Mayor Muriel Bowser. And prior to 6 months ago, I served 4 years as the District's Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, where I developed a keen understanding of the importance of recreation in our city. Now, as the Director of DGS, I am responsible for the construction and maintenance of facilities, including DC's parks.

What I know from both roles is that recreation and the facilities where recreation happens contribute greatly to the overall wellness of our community. With this understanding and on behalf of Mayor Bowser and the 700,000 residents who call Washington, DC home, I am pleased to testify in support of H.R. 4984, the D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act.

This bill was introduced by Chairman James Comer of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee and our Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton. For more than 30 years, Congresswoman Norton has worked with Congress on legislation to make the nation's capital a more dynamic place to live, work, and visit. This monumental legislation has the potential to transform and expand recreation in our city for generations to come.

Washington, DC has a rich tradition of recreation and sport. We are proud that for 3 consecutive years, DC has been ranked the No. 1 big-city park system in the nation by the Trust for Public Land, which ranks the 100 most populous cities and is considered the gold standard for park evaluation. This distinction recognizes that we have Federal parks and local recreation amenities that complement one another, a system that is the result of a strong, trusting, and long-standing partnership between the District and National Park Service.

Look no further than the revitalization of Franklin Park in downtown. This once under-utilized green space that over the years has fallen into disrepair has now become a hub of activity for residents, downtown office workers, and tourists alike. In addition to having a beautiful space and a playground for children, the park frequently hosts movie nights, festivals, and concerts. This transformation of Franklin Park was only made possible through a cooperative management agreement between the District and the National Park Service.

This partnership is nothing new. The D.C. Stadium Act of 1957 is a foundational example of the early trust NPS placed in the District. Of course, to many, the RFK site is synonymous with the glory years of the Washington football franchise now known as the Commanders. It was also home of the Washington Senators, and enabled the return of major league baseball to the District with the Washington Nationals. D.C. United also called this site home during their early years, and it was there that they won multiple major league soccer titles.

Beyond professional sports, RFK hosted countless high school and college athletic competitions. And as a native Washingtonian and former athlete at the Spingarn High School across the street from RFK, I participated in the winning spirit at RFK.

Today, however, the winning spirit along the Anacostia River banks can only be found in a handful of youth soccer fields surrounded by eroding parking lots, and lacking any significant investments. Despite the District's investments in fields and nearby trails, most of the 190-acre campus sits empty day in and day out. Instead of connecting our community or serving as a grand entryway to the east side of our monumental core, it is mostly a desolate sea of asphalt.

We can do better. Under the District's stewardship, we can transform and activate the RFK campus so that it becomes a world-class destination for families, residents, and visitors, while also better connecting our beautiful waterfront to the neighborhoods along its banks. This revitalization will complement investments already underway, including the 20-mile Anacostia Riverwalk Trail; the investments in the fields at RFK, which are a collection of soccer fields; and also investments in environmental programming in Kingman and Heritage Island.

We envision increased access to organized leisure and recreation opportunities. We also see the potential for economic development, which could include housing and professional sports.

From the perspective of youth sports, we envision the campus becoming a premier destination for athletic competition. DC is no stranger to world-class athletes. Unfortunately, they travel far and wide to participate in the highest level of competition. Amenities at this type of sports complex, which would be under the leadership of our Department of Parks and Recreation, would include an Olympic swimming pool, a gymnastics training facility, an indoor track and multi-purpose field, a boxing training facility, a health and fitness club, and so much more.

The expansive potential for the RFK campus is why Mayor Bowser included seed funding, and she unequivocally supports this legislation. However, to become a reality, the work of this Committee and, indeed, this Congress is essential.

Today, the RFK site is at a legal stalemate, bound by a nearly 70-year-old lease that expires in 15 years. This stalemate prevents the comprehensive redevelopment necessary to revitalize this site. The District has a proven history of activating NPS lands to premier conditions that are consistent with a world-class capital city. We did it at Franklin Park. We have transformed Federal spaces across DC, including at the wharf and Saint Elizabeth east

campus and Walter Reed. And given the opportunity, we will do it again at RFK.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hunter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DELANO HUNTER, DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
GENERAL SERVICES FOR WASHINGTON, DC

ON H.R. 4984

Good afternoon, Chairman Tiffany and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. My name is Delano Hunter, and I am the Acting Director of the Department of General Services for the Government of the District of Columbia under the leadership of Mayor Muriel Bowser. Prior to six months ago, I served four years as the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation for the District of Columbia where I developed a keen understanding of the importance of recreation in our city. Now, as the Director of DGS, I am responsible for the construction and leasing of facilities, including DC's parks.

What I know from both of these roles is that recreation, and the facilities where recreation happens, contribute greatly to the overall wellness of our community.

With this understanding, and on behalf of Mayor Bowser and the 700,000 residents who call Washington, DC home, I am pleased to testify in support of H.R. 4984, the D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act. This bill was introduced by Chairman James Comer of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee and our Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton. For more than 30 years, Congresswoman Norton has worked with Congress on legislation to make the nation's capital a more dynamic place to live, work, and visit. This monumental legislation has the potential to transform and expand recreational opportunity in the District of Columbia for our residents, our region, and the more than 20 million visitors who come to our city each year.

Washington, DC has a rich tradition of recreation and sport. We are proud that for three consecutive years Washington, DC has been ranked the number one big city park system in the nation by the Trust for Public Land through its annual ParkScore Index, which ranks the 100 most populous U.S. cities and is considered the gold standard for park evaluation.

This very honorable distinction recognizes that we have federal parks and local recreation amenities that complement one another—a system that is the result of a strong, trusting, and long-standing partnership between the District and the National Park Service. Look no further than the revitalization of Franklin Park in downtown. This once-underutilized greenspace that, over the years, had fallen into disrepair has now become a hub of activity for residents, downtown office workers, and tourists alike. In addition to having beautiful spaces and a playground for children, the park frequently hosts movie nights, festivals, concerts, and more; including, just recently, a celebration of the new football season. The transformation of Franklin Park was only made possible through a Cooperative Management Agreement executed between the District and NPS.

This partnership is not new. The DC Stadium Act of 1957 is a foundational example of the early trust NPS placed in the District. Of course, to many DC residents, the RFK site is synonymous with the glory years of the Washington football franchise now known as the Commanders. It was also the home of the Washington Senators and enabled the return of Major League Baseball to the District with the Washington Nationals. DC United also called the site home during their early years and it was there that the team won multiple Major League Soccer titles. Beyond professional sports, RFK hosted countless high-school and college athletic competitions. As a native Washingtonian and former athlete of the Spingarn Senior High School across the street from RFK, I personally participated and enjoyed the winning spirit at RFK.

Today, however, the winning spirit along the Anacostia River banks can only be found on a handful of youth soccer fields, surrounded by eroding parking lots and lacking any significant investments. Despite investments in these fields and nearby trails, most of the 190-acre campus sits empty day in and day out. Instead of connecting our community or serving as a grand entryway on the east side of our monumental core, it is a mostly desolate sea of asphalt.

We can do better! Under the District's stewardship, we can transform and activate the RFK campus so that it becomes a world-class destination for families, residents, visitors, and athletes, while also better connecting our beautiful waterfront and the

neighborhoods along its banks. This revitalization will complement investments already underway, including investments in the 20-mile Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, led by the District's Department of Transportation; investments in The Fields at RFK, managed by Events DC; and investments in and environmental programming on Kingman and Heritage Islands, under the stewardship of the DC Department of Energy and Environment. We envision increased access to organized recreation and leisure activities such as cycling and kayaking, and more outdoor space for cultural activations. We also see the potential for economic development, which could include housing and professional sports.

From the perspective of youth sports, however, we envision the RFK campus becoming a premier destination for youth athletic competition. From basketball to cheerleading to boxing to ice skating and track and field, the District is home to many young athletes at the top of their sport. Unfortunately, without a centralized home or training facility, our athletes routinely travel outside of DC to compete in the highest-level tournaments and events. Mayor Bowser's vision is for Washington, DC to host those events. That way we cannot only showcase our local talent, but more families, coaches, and organizations will see DC as a launching pad for America's athletes.

The amenities at this type of sports complex could include:

- Olympic swimming pool
- Gymnastics training facility
- Indoor track and multipurpose field
- Boxing training facility
- Climbing center and obstacle course
- Health and Fitness Club
- Indoor bowling alley
- Indoor skating rink
- Learning & creativity center for children
- Amphitheatre
- Indoor/outdoor café
- Outdoor and Indoor basketball and tennis courts

The expansive potential for uses at the RFK campus is why Mayor Bowser included seed funding in her budget to build a DC DPR Sports Complex.

Mayor Bowser also unequivocally supports this legislation. However, to become a reality, the work of this Committee and, indeed, this Congress is essential.

Today, the RFK site is at a legal stalemate bound by a nearly 70-year-old lease that expires in 15 years. This stalemate prevents the comprehensive development necessary to revitalize the site. The District has a proven history of activating NPS land to premier conditions that are consistent with a world-class capital city. We did it at Franklin Park, we've transformed federal spaces across DC, including at the Wharf, the St. Elizabeths East campus, at Walter Reed, and, given the opportunity, we will do it at RFK.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Director Hunter.

At this time, the Committee will stand in recess, subject to the call of the Chair. I will be back here immediately after votes, and we will resume Committee activities with questions from Members as soon as we return.

Thank you very much for your testimony. We are in recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. TIFFANY. The Committee will come to order.

And I would like to recognize Representative Stauber for 5 minutes on H.R. 1657.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. PETE STAUBER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Neguse. I want to thank you for convening this important hearing today and allowing me to present today H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023.

I, first of all, want to thank my constituent, Itasca County Commissioner Cory Smith, for his willingness to testify on the legislation.

I would also like to thank Ranking Member Neguse and Representative Huffman for their co-sponsorship of this bill, along with my Minnesota delegation colleagues, Representative Fischbach and Representative Finstad, for their support.

This land exchange bill is a simple land exchange that will help ensure management of our public lands is fit for purpose and help accomplish the focus of this hearing: expanding access to outdoor recreation on our public lands.

Lake Winnibigoshish, located in the Chippewa National Forest, is home to Bowen Lodge, a premier, family-owned fishing lodge right in the district that I have the privilege of representing. And it has been in operation and welcoming Minnesotans since 1925. For the past four decades, Bill and Gail Heig have operated Bowen Lodge, serving as incredible stewards of Lake Winnibigoshish and providing incredible fishing and recreation for a countless number of my constituents over the years.

Currently, Bowen Lodge has a 20-year lease with the U.S. Forest Service to lease approximately 13.8 acres of shoreline along the lake, where they operate their marina. Under the Heig's stewardship, Lake Winnibigoshish has remained accessible to the citizens of Itasca County. It is important that the shores of Lake Winnie be open for all of those who want to recreate and enjoy what it has to offer.

This land exchange bill would facilitate a land exchange between Bowen Lodge and the Forest Service, providing permanent access to the lakeshore and marina, along with certainty for the greater Itasca community. In exchange for this land, the resort would convey approximately 38 acres of nearby land to the Forest Service, which then would be added to the Chippewa National Forest.

Notably, the Heigs purchased the 38 acres of nearby land in 2021, after a California-based mega-resort developer sought to purchase this parcel of land in order to build a massive luxury resort which would have changed the face of Lake Winnie. Instead, the Heigs purchased this land to preserve recreational access for the local community and preserve the biodiversity of the area. Now the Heigs are seeking to convey this land to the Chippewa National Forest, since it is in the best interest of the public for the Forest Service to take stewardship of this land and preserve public access, rather than out-of-state developers being able to change the community forever.

This exchange would better align proper boundaries, put the right acreage under the right management, and ensure my constituents have the ability to boat, fish, and enjoy beautiful Lake Winnie. This exchange is supported by the local community in Itasca County, including the local County Board of Supervisors and

environmental organizations. It is also supported by the U.S. Forest Service and leadership of the Chippewa National Forest, which we will hear about this afternoon.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my bill before the Committee today, and I look forward to our discussion.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Stauber.

Now, I would like to recognize the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Representative Grijalva.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. We are in the question part of the panel, or not yet?

Mr. TIFFANY. If you have a statement.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Oh, yes, I appreciate that. Thank you for indulging.

Mr. TIFFANY. And then we will go to questions after.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

Mr. GRIJALVA. Let me first thank you for holding this hearing and these four bills related to outdoor recreation.

I would like to address my remarks to H.R. 4984, D.C. Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Campus Revitalization Act, introduced by House Oversight Committee Chair, along with Representative Holmes Norton, who fiercely represents the District of Columbia.

The RFK Stadium has had a long and storied history. It was, of course, home to the Washington football team during their three championship runs. And in the 60-plus years since its construction, it has hosted men and women's World Cup matches, car races, bike rides, Grateful Dead shows, and much, much more. It has had a good run, but the stadium is now past its prime and slated to be torn down.

Of course, there is a lot of interest in the future development plans for the site, and the stadium is located in a prime location in the heart of Washington, DC. The land could help address many of the city's needs, including increasing the stock of available, affordable housing and securing access to open space. I believe achieving the right balance here is key.

The land is currently administered by the National Park Service as part of the Anacostia Park and, as highlighted in the Interior Department's testimony, part of a long-standing plan for public gardens and open space. As drafted, H.R. 4984 includes language that guarantees that 30 percent of the property is issued for open space and park land. However, DOI has requested to work on further amendments to ensure the viability of these guarantees.

This is, Mr. Chairman, the critical part of this legislation and any further plans for the site. So, I would encourage the Committee to continue working with the Department as this bill moves forward in the legislative process.

I also want to note that for over 50 years, the stadium site has been an enduring tribute to the life and legacy of Robert Francis Kennedy. One way or another, whether through legislation or some other guarantee, this should remain a lasting feature of the site.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that while there appears to be broad support in DC government for this bill, there is not a

unified position on what should be developed on this site or whether or not, for example, there should be a new stadium. And if so, if tax dollars should pay for it.

In addition, there is a strong desire to ensure affordable housing is a part of the equation. I hope, Mr. Chairman, as we move forward, that these issues remain part of the equation, and there are not any attempts to hamstring the District's decision-making ability on these issues, and that they work in concurrence with the Department and with the sponsors of the legislation to deal with those three points that I brought up.

With that, I yield back, sir, and thank you for the indulgence.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Grijalva. Now we will go on to questions at this time, and I am going to start out with 5 minutes worth of questioning.

First, Ms. Emanuel, in regards to closures on Forest Service land, I have experienced multiple closures on National Forest Land System land and amenities throughout my district in northern Wisconsin. I hear about it from frustrated constituents. In fact, we are going to have a hearing in regards to this coming early October. It is from people who want to recreate, hunt, fish, camp, and enjoy our Federal lands.

Does the Forest Service coordinate with local stakeholders before reducing access?

Ms. EMANUEL. So, the question is whether we coordinate with the state entity on a closure?

Mr. TIFFANY. State and local.

Ms. EMANUEL. State and local. When we must close an area, the closure is usually related to public health and safety, and we have a process for noticing that, and we generally coordinate with all affected parties any time we have to close an area.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, it is your understanding that you always contact those local and state governments that are being affected by this?

Ms. EMANUEL. I would say that that is the plan. I mean, the ideal situation would be to coordinate any closure with an affected stakeholder. I don't know that that can always happen, depending on what the situation is.

Mr. TIFFANY. The requirement to coordinate, isn't that a requirement?

Ms. EMANUEL. To coordinate closures? If it is our land, and it depends on the reason for closure, but I would think that we would generally reach out and connect with all affected parties, especially if it is a longer-term closure.

Mr. TIFFANY. How does the Forest Service define coordination?

Ms. EMANUEL. Working with others, communicating.

Mr. TIFFANY. If you go back to, like, FLPMA and some of the other overriding statutes that were put in place over 50 years ago, they specifically required coordination.

And I don't know, Mr. Reynolds, if you want to jump in also in regards to this, you are certainly welcome to, either one of you, if you want to answer that question.

How is coordination actually practiced with local communities?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I will chime in and just say we, much like our Forest Service colleagues, have it in policy. For example, there are

civic engagement policies under our director's orders. There is the definition of communication and coordination in our policy manuals for the field superintendents. So, much like the Forest Service, we do require that standard of our field employees, and we are happy to talk about it if it is not happening.

Mr. TIFFANY. Representative Zinke's bill would require the National Park Service to coordinate with local stakeholders, hold public meetings, and open at least a 60-day comment period before any action is taken to reduce access. Would the Forest Service support including similar requirements before reducing access on the National Forest System? Either of you.

Ms. EMANUEL. I am sorry, sir. Could you repeat that?

Mr. TIFFANY. The National Park Service, under this proposal before us, would require at least a 60-day comment period before any action could be taken to reduce access. So, that is really the heart of the proposal. Would you support something similar to that for the National Forest System, in addition to the National Park Service?

Ms. EMANUEL. I think we would have to look and see what policy is in place, and whether or not it is working. But we certainly support whatever outcome you are trying to get after here. If we can improve on the kind of coordination that is needed to give people the kind of experience we want, we want to do that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Earlier this year, during another hearing focused on recreation, I asked the Forest Service about closures of boat ramps and other Forest Service facilities in my district. The Forest Service followed up and assured me there are plans and funding available to rehabilitate boat launches at Beaver Lake, Cisco Lake, Stock Farm, Twin Lake, and Mondeaux. Do you have an update on the status of those boat launches?

Ms. EMANUEL. I can certainly get you a status on those, but I do understand that we are investing in those boat ramps.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, I would just highlight for you that we are having a hearing in regards to access that is coming up here real soon in a couple of weeks. And it is a big concern by a number of my constituents that access is being denied to the National Forest System.

With that, I will yield and I would like to recognize Representative Leger Fernández for 5 minutes for questioning.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, witnesses, for your testimony. As we were moving back and forth between the votes, I was listening to it in my office and over the microphones. And I was really appreciative of the incredible work that each of you are doing with respect for the importance that having coordination and access to our public lands for all Americans is really key.

New Mexico is home to nearly 25 million acres of Federal land, and we understand deeply the importance of creating ways for our people, wherever you live and whatever your socioeconomic circumstances are, to be able to enjoy those lands, especially the beautiful outdoor areas. We have heard over and over again the benefits that these have for your health, the benefits that they have for how you feel, part of a community.

I like to think that, as New Mexicans, we are a people of the land, Native Americans, Latinos, ranchers, we are people who really value our land and landscape.

Mr. Reynolds, thank you for your testimony. I noticed that there is a 10-year survey that was released in 2020 from the Park Service that showed that 77 percent of park visitors were White. But we are a pluralistic society, a pluralistic country, the beautiful mosaic of Black Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, AAPI, the beautiful sort of diversity of our country and of our states. And what is sad is sometimes you read about people who live right next to a public land, but somehow don't make it there.

Can you give us an example of how the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act would help the Park Service implement policies to improve that kind of access for everyone?

You can use New Mexico or other places, if you like. Of course, I am from New Mexico, so if you tell me some New Mexican things, I am going to like it a lot.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes. So, FICOR, which we have been under a Memorandum of Understanding right now, is working really well to talk about, particularly, I think, what you just eloquently spoke of, of serving underserved populations and trying to figure out how best to connect with them.

It is going to leverage, if we could get this to stick around this Committee, the ability to communicate with these communities, the ability for the communities themselves to interact with the agencies. I will use a colloquialism of one-stop-shopping, right? You can get all the land and water management agencies at one time.

So, I think that the consistency in coordination and communication would be a long ways, especially when we are trying to reach larger populations that may not be using, to your point, the public lands. So, that is why we are very in favor of it from that side.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Right. And when we say this land is public land, is your land, people need to really feel that, and they are a part of it. And indeed, I think our public lands helps us create unity in this country.

I think the people I serve with on this Committee really love the countries and the states that they live in, and the public lands that are there. They want to make sure everybody has access to them. And I do appreciate that sentiment that we have on this Committee.

Ms. Emanuel, thank you for your testimony. I also understand that, while we want to increase access to our public lands, we must do so in a way that minimizes the negative impacts that visitors might have, and being respectful of the community's surroundings. Can you discuss how the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act would affect Forest Service coordination with gateway communities on tribal lands?

Ms. EMANUEL. Thank you for that. Yes, I think it can really help us expand and enhance existing partnerships that balance the needs, as you said, of holistic land management and travel and tourism opportunities and support just a little bit better understanding and coordination of how that balancing act can be in service to both heritage and cultural resource tourism, as well as protection of those resources.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you very much.

I have come so close to my time that I will submit any additional questions for the record.

And I do want to appreciate, Mr. Chairman, the hearing you are having today. I really appreciate the bills that you have brought together as a group for us to listen to the testimony and consider today. So, thank you very much.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlewoman yields. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber, for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The pieces of legislation before us today are so important in expanding access to outdoor recreation and ensuring our constituents have access to our public lands.

I would first like to turn to Commissioner Smith.

Commissioner Smith, can you expand upon the importance of the recreation economy to Itasca County?

And how does the Chippewa National Forest contribute to your economy?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Recreation is pretty much our sole investment, especially in my district. It is about 80 percent. Our population jumps up by about 80 percent in the county come every opening of fishing.

Mr. STAUBER. I have been part of that 80 percent, by the way.

Mr. SMITH. Yes. And if you haven't been there, I would tell you to get there. That is the reason why our county jumps up in population is because of the outdoors and the recreation that we have, and that we have had for many a year.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you. In my opening remarks, I mentioned how the Heig family was able to secure a 20-year permit from the Forest Service to operate a marina at Bowen Lodge along Lake Winnie, as well as secure the nearby private lands. If the Heigs were not able to do so, and a large, out-of-state developer was able to secure the land, what kind of effect would that have on the community?

Mr. SMITH. I am afraid it would have been a negative effect.

We love visitors. We thrive on visitors. And that lake association group has created a culture there that is why the lake is pristine and beautiful the way it is.

And let's not forget the Heigs did step up to the plate for our community and for our county when that group was going to come in and maybe weren't in the financial position, but did buy that property.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Deputy Chief Emanuel, in your written testimony you note that the Forest Service has to spend resources to support a special use permit for the acreage under discussion today. Can you share how those resources can be better directed to other parts of the Chippewa National Forest to better serve the local community and its visitors?

Ms. EMANUEL. Any time we free up resources, we are going to be able to direct them into other local sites there on the Chippewa. And I am sure that there is a list of recreation infrastructure projects that could all benefit from additional resources, and I am sure there is no short list for that forest to make those decisions.

Mr. STAUBER. I agree with you, thank you.

Along this area, there is currently a checkerboard pattern of landownership between public and private lands which this legislation would address. Can you expand upon the benefits of consolidating this land?

Ms. EMANUEL. Yes, absolutely. Thanks for that.

We see this a lot in the West, obviously, and it really presents challenges for both private landowners and the Federal land management agencies trying to manage for multiple purposes and reasons. So, to the extent we can strategically connect those places that make sense, it is going to be a better experience for everybody involved.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would like to take the last few minutes here to talk about H.R. 3200, the Gateway Community Recreation Enhancement Act. As I have discussed in this Committee countless times, the district I represent is incredible with public lands that Americans from across the country come to enjoy.

In addition to the Chippewa National Forest, my home county, St. Louis County, is home to the Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Individuals from across the state and entire country travel there each year. Unfortunately, however, some of those individuals get lost or need medical attention. Rather than the Forest Service responding to those calls, it is local emergency responders in places like St. Louis County that respond to those calls and lead search and rescue efforts. And it is these local emergency responders that have to foot the bill.

It is important that we address these cost burdens that fall on local and county governments in gateway communities in and around our Federal lands. We can't leave our local and county governments hanging. I believe H.R. 3200 can play an important role in building upon collaboration in gateway communities, and find solutions to the funding issue jurisdictions like St. Louis County are facing. When somebody gets lost or injured in the Boundary Waters, it is not necessarily the Forest Service. It is the St. Louis County Rescue Squad, it is the Ely Ambulance, it is the Cook Ambulance, these volunteer rescue squads. And they expel resources and they don't get paid for that cost, and it is using their equipment, and that is a burden on the local taxpayers.

So, one of the things that I think we ought to do, Mr. Chair, is in that piece of legislation really look at how we can reimburse those local communities that respond to our Federal emergencies on our Federal lands.

And I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize Representative Grijalva, the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Reynolds, when Congress initially authorized the District of Columbia to build a stadium, the terms of the lease were very strict. It only allowed development for stadium purposes. H.R. 4984 loosens those terms to include other recreational and commercial development.

Can you discuss how a lease with these expanded areas can remain consistent with what the National Park Service's long-term plan for Anacostia Park is, i.e. the 30 percent public access, open space, public recreation areas?

And in that process, how would issues such as the 30 percent the District of Columbia already has in terms of affordable housing for new development, how would that be mandated since it is a lease and not a law from the District?

And how would the appropriate legacy memorial for Robert F. Kennedy be dealt with? Can they be dealt with in this lease process, or is that a separate issue that Congress must undertake?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you, Congressman. Those are really detailed questions, some of which we would be able to work out if we could get our technical folks to sit down and work out each of those.

But I will give you a top-level bottom line is the Park Service is just very interested in working with GSA, working with Washington, DC. And I defer to them about what they really want with the property to make sure this piece of land is put into a vibrant part of the city, while at the same time our main concern is just making sure, as you mentioned, sir, the 30 percent areas, and particularly access to the Anacostia Waterfront, Anacostia Trail are maintained and/or enhanced as a part of the lease.

So, the leases can be flexible to address the needs, as all the parties see fit, if the legislation doesn't prevent something. So, we would be able to work with all of those things you mentioned as long as we preserve some of the recreation and access concerns.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you.

Let me follow that, Mr. Hunter, thank you for being here. H.R. 4984, in addition to the bold outline in your testimony, vision for the future of RFK Stadium, including recreational and athletic outdoor recreation amenities. These would all be possible under the expanded authorization of H.R. 4984.

In addition to a swimming pool, basketball courts, and other training facilities, this bill is pretty open-ended on the types of development that can be allowed. Can you explain how the District will make decisions about future projects and development on that land?

And if residential development is a component of future plans, how will the District guarantee the construction of affordable housing as part of the mix?

Mr. HUNTER. Sure, thank you for the question, Representative.

First, I would say that the reason we are really excited about this bill is what it can do for recreation. And to your point, it provides an opportunity to really transform how we do recreation here in the city. We have always been proud of our park systems that are comprised of both local and Federal assets. In fact, we have been ranked as having the best big-city park system in the nation for 3 consecutive years.

But there are some gaps there. We have longed for a destination athletic complex where we can further the athletic pursuits of our top athletes, also where we can host tournaments, and also things that we just can't do in some of our neighborhoods where we just

don't have the space. So, I think that this bill contemplates robust recreation opportunities.

As it relates to some of the other components, the Mayor is studying, though she is on the record in support of returning RFK Stadium, but if you look at some of the adjacent developments like in Hill East, it has a very substantial affordable housing component. If you look at some of the other developments along the Anacostia River, we have shown that we can do both recreation, some retail, economic development, and housing, how they can co-exist in the space.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Any reaction to that being part of a lease agreement, this is also, as I see it, and as it was explained earlier on in another form of this legislation, was part of a redevelopment and revitalization initiative, as well, in terms of the area and the region. Is it appropriate to list those as part of a lease process that would kind of bind all the parties, including the Federal Government and Congress, to that commitment?

Mr. HUNTER. That is correct. To Mr. Reynolds' point, typically, when we get to the process of developing a lease, or in some instances a cooperative management agreement, it would spell out the specific uses for that property.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I yield back, sir. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields, and now I would like to recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Neguse, for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOE NEGUSE, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO**

Mr. NEGUSE. I thank the Chairman, and good afternoon to all of our witnesses. It is good to be back in the Committee room, and want to start by saying that I appreciate the focus of today's hearing on the four bills that all have some connection to outdoor recreation, a topic that is incredibly important to my constituents back home in Colorado.

With visitation numbers continuing to climb year after year, the wide variety of outdoor recreation activities that occur on and adjacent to Federal land really have become an economic pillar for countless communities throughout the country, including in my state in Colorado.

As I am sure you all know, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, according to them, outdoor recreation contributed \$454 billion to the national economy in 2021. And my district happens to be home to the most visited national forest in the country, the White River National Forest, and some of the most beautiful outdoor recreation opportunities in the nation. So, I am grateful to have this opportunity to consider some bills that I think are integral to that mission of supporting outdoor recreation that I know is a bipartisan one, and one I think that is shared across party lines.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to talk about my bipartisan bill, H.R. 3107, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act, which would, in effect, codify FICOR, an entity with a proven track record of elevating recreation in a way that makes it more accessible and visible for all Americans. It has been responsible for critical improvements to Recreation.gov and the

incredibly popular Every Kid Outdoors program, among a variety of other initiatives, and I am very excited to help get that bill across the finish line.

I understand that the Department certainly has some suggestions on potential improvements to the bill, and we are very amenable to working, of course, with the Department, with the National Park Service to ensure that the bill is ready to be considered by the Full Committee, and ultimately by the House.

With that, I don't have any particular questions. I appreciate, as I said, the witnesses taking the time to testify today and, of course, the written testimony you have submitted. And I look forward to engaging on these four bills, in particular, in the months ahead.

And with that, I yield back to the Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Mr. Neguse. And I just want to follow up with just a couple of final questions here.

In regards to the Improving Outdoor Recreation Act, Ms. Tariq, what does the membership that you represent, what do they see as important in that bill?

What is the focus that you think is most important?

Ms. TARIQ. Thank you for that question.

One of the most important things for the outdoor recreation industry, in terms of businesses, is the need for certainty to be able to plan and make investments, whether it is in your workforce or your business in itself. So, in improving coordination and improving efficiencies, the ability to be able to plan toward that is extremely important.

Also, the cost effectiveness of not having to start and shut down and start and shut down, and being able to depend on points of contact and actual planning forward. So, in terms of that, that is extremely important for the industry.

Also, the ability to plan forward in terms of the future of equipment and technology. And we can only do that by having a group that we can go to consistently in terms of whether it is guidance, whether it is information, or just access to future plans of whether there is going to be reduced access and what not.

So, I would say that is probably at the center of our priorities.

Mr. TIFFANY. Would you say that notice requirement is helpful?

Ms. TARIQ. Correct, in terms of all stakeholders in addition to businesses, but also local communities, and tribes, and everyone who is really involved and affected.

Mr. TIFFANY. I just want to wrap with one other question for Deputy Director Reynolds.

How many facilities are currently closed or operating with reduced access for reasons other than health and safety?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We try to not necessarily reduce access as much as manage visitors. And there are about 25 parks right now, 21 to 25 parks that I can think of off the top of my head, that have some sort of managed access program.

Mr. TIFFANY. Do you have a tracking on that that the public can access?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We can certainly provide it if it is not readily available. I think that something like this bill can help us to shore those things up, just to be honest with you.

They are tracked locally very much, the parks, as we were talking about earlier. The park superintendents are expected to interface with their communities, and their counties, and their folks around them. But on the national level, it may be harder to find.

Mr. TIFFANY. I think that tracking data would really be nice to have.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Agreed.

Mr. TIFFANY. To the Ranking Member, do you have any follow up questions?

Mr. NEGUSE. I do not.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, with that, I just want to thank all the witnesses for the valuable testimony and Members for your questions.

Members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for our witnesses today, and we will ask that they respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, September 22, 2023. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:17 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submission for the Record by Rep. Westerman

Statement for the Record

Trust for Public Land

In Support of

H.R. 3107 the “Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act”

At Trust for Public Land, we connect people to the outdoors. We create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. We were founded in 1972 on the conviction that all people need access to nature and the outdoors, close to home, in the cities and communities where they live. We work with communities to create parks and protect public land where they’re needed most, as a matter of health, equity, and justice.

We are in support of this Act; however we encourage the Committee to include language which directs FICOR to make part of its purpose to focus on underserved communities, including Native tribes, that don’t have access to public parks within a 10 minute walk to their home.

Spending time outdoors is more than a nicety—it’s a necessity for a happy, healthy life. But access to parks isn’t equal, and disparities often fall on racial and economic divides. In low-income communities, communities of color, and rural areas, parks are fewer, smaller, more crowded, and less maintained than parks in higher-income or predominantly white communities. People need to feel that they are welcome and wanted at our public lands, and that they have open access to the outdoors.

Increasing federal agency coordination and communication on public lands usage must therefore be approached with equity in mind. We therefore urge you to include provisions directing FICOR to focus on bringing equity in the use, access, and opportunities for underserved communities and public lands.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Grijalva

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

September 19, 2023

Re: NPCA position on H.R. 3200—Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act

Dear Representative:

Since 1919, National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. On behalf of our 1.6 million members and supporters nationwide, I want to share our concerns on H.R. 3200—Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act.

H.R. 3200—Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act: NPCA appreciates the intent of this legislation, as well as the continued efforts of the Committee to ensure America's public lands are protected. However, we are concerned H.R. 3200 lacks clarity on the visitation data that will be collected, how that information will be made available to the public, and undermines Superintendent authority. The current budget for the NPS cannot bear the costs and staffing to meet the goals outlined in the bill.

The Visitation Pilot Program as outlined is a massive, resource-intensive undertaking that requires extensive data collection, organization and publication. The Department of the Interior (DOI) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) would require new funding to create a new, publicly accessible visitation data program that meets a standard of excellence visitors can trust when planning their travel and recreation. DOI and USDA do not currently have the technical resources to collect, organize, analyze or publish visitation data at the scale outlined in H.R. 3200. As the Committee has heard before, many parks with high visitation are already understaffed and have been dealing with flat budgets for a decade. Without additional funding, the requirements in this bill are not feasible and Congress cannot reasonably expect successful program implementation.

While the purpose of the Visitation Pilot Program is not explicitly stated in the bill, it is presumably intended to disperse visitors across federal land recreation destinations in an effort to reduce crowd density. Ensuring dispersal techniques are managed properly is a complex and challenging endeavor. While visitor dispersal might provide some relief to parks experiencing intense crowding, unintended consequences of increased visitation in new places adds to management burdens and poses long-term threats to park resources. Dispersal as a visitor use management strategy must be further studied, and the financial and human resource costs must be considered before implementation on the scale proposed in this bill.

Of greatest concern in this bill is Section 4, which limits the ability of an NPS superintendent to reduce access to a park unit unless there is a risk to health and safety. 36 CFR 1.6 outlines the specific circumstances that enable a superintendent to undertake closures. Section 4 of this bill creates an unnecessary burden for superintendents as they work to protect the resources the parks were created to preserve. A park unit can temporarily restrict access to areas of a park for a variety of reasons such as migrating fauna, trail damage, or research. These types of closures do not pose a risk to visitor health and safety, but they are instrumental to ensure the protection of irreplaceable park resources. If this bill were to pass as it is currently written, park managers would have to go through a time consuming NEPA-style public engagement process for simple closures that are routinely undertaken. 36 CFR 1.6 ensures that superintendents can uphold the Organic Act mandate and act responsively to changing conditions. Stripping superintendent authority to make timely closures will harm natural and cultural resources and put some of our most fragile national treasures at risk.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact NPCA's Visitor Experience Program Manager Tucker Johnson (tjohnson@npca.org).

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

CHRISTINA HAZARD,
Legislative Director, Government Affairs

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

September 29, 2023

Hon. Tom Tiffany, Chairman
 Hon. Neguse, Ranking Member
 Subcommittee on Federal Lands
 House Natural Resources Committee
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Re: September 19th Federal Lands Subcommittee legislative hearing on outdoor recreation

Dear Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding September 19th's legislative hearing on outdoor recreation. Multiple bills before the subcommittee would improve and expand sustainable recreation opportunities across the U.S. and provide support to the nation's growing \$862 billion outdoor recreation economy. We encourage you to advance the bills noted below and include them in a first-of-its kind outdoor recreation package in 2023.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Outdoor recreation on federal public lands and waters supports numerous public health and environmental benefits and helps Americans build a lasting connection with their public lands. Recreation also provides far-reaching economic benefits, which are particularly pronounced for rural communities and others in the vicinity of public lands. As these benefits continue to grow alongside overall participation in outdoor activities, action from Congress is needed to modernize how federal agencies plan for and manage recreational use.

The bills before the subcommittee would help elevate outdoor recreation as a priority across multiple federal agencies, and would support needed updates and new initiatives to account for the type, extent, and diversity of outdoor recreation activities occurring across the U.S. today. The two bills mentioned below—H.R. 3107 and 3200—closely resemble components of S. 873, America's Outdoor Recreation Act (AORA), which recently passed out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee with a unanimous bipartisan vote. We are highly pleased to see the subcommittee consider outdoor recreation policy in a similar bipartisan manner, and we encourage you to move forward with a bipartisan recreation package similar to AORA before the end of the year.

Our comments on specific bills are below.

Improving Outdoor Coordination Act (H.R. 3107)

Outdoor Alliance supports H.R. 3107, which would make permanent the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR). As the popularity, diversity, and economic impact of outdoor recreation continues to grow, increased attention to recreation management is needed across federal agencies. In many cases, the recreation experience does not abide by jurisdictional boundaries, and recreationists often pass through lands or waters managed by multiple agencies during their time outdoors. FICOR can improve coordination around recreation management between agencies, and can elevate outdoor recreation as a land management priority across the federal government.

FICOR was renewed in 2022 with overwhelming support from the outdoor recreation community. The council's goals include investing in recreation infrastructure, expanding outdoor education and career development, improving coordination with non-federal partners, and improving access to sustainable recreation opportunities on federal public lands and waters. H.R. 3107 builds on these existing goals and would codify FICOR to provide more permanency and consistency to the council's work.

Outdoor Alliance appreciates the bill sponsors' leadership on this issue and respectfully recommends the following changes to H.R. 3107:

- Expand the definitions of “Federal Land Management Agency” and “Federal Recreational Lands and Waters” to include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). These agencies play a critical role in managing recreation lands and waters and recreation infrastructure enjoyed by our community.
- Change §200104(b) to include NOAA in its entirety, rather than just the National Marine Fisheries Service. Multiple departments within NOAA play a role in managing coastal recreation and should be considered by FICOR.
- Clarify that FICOR leadership is shared between agencies by removing reference to “The Secretary” in §200104(a).

Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act (H.R. 3200)

Outdoor Alliance supports H.R. 3200, which will help gateway communities capitalize on their proximity to recreation amenities in building local economies and also establish a digital National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands pass. The significance of outdoor recreation-related tourism in gateway communities has grown in recent years following high levels of participation in outdoor activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. As more communities adapt to high levels of visitation and invest in their outdoor economies, additional support and collaboration from federal land managers can help address housing costs, infrastructure needs, workforce development, and other issues that can accompany recreation-related economic growth. To accomplish this goal, H.R. 3200 requires federal agencies to work with state, local, Tribal, and nonprofit partners to create a needs assessment of gateway communities, and would provide new pathways for resource sharing between the federal government and local communities.

Outdoor Alliance supports Section 4's intent that local stakeholders be notified and have an opportunity to weigh in on potential closures of National Parks. We respectfully recommend adding the phrase “or resource conservation concerns” to the parenthetical language in the beginning of this section in order to account for potential impacts on sensitive ecological resources.

We also appreciate Section 5, which improves how federal agencies communicate with the public regarding visitation to public lands. Current agency reporting makes it difficult for the public—and often land managers themselves—to understand the true location, extent, seasonality, and timing of recreational use across public lands. Innovative approaches like the proposed Real-time Data Pilot Program will help agencies adapt their recreation management to better account for where and when significant recreational use is occurring, including by identifying lesser-known recreation sites.

Thank you for considering our community's input, and thank you for holding this important hearing. We look forward to working with you to expand sustainable, high-quality outdoor opportunities across America's public lands and waters.

Best regards,

LOUIS GELTMAN,
Vice President for Policy and Government Relations

THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

September 19, 2023

Hon. Tom Tiffany, Chairman
 Hon. Neguse, Ranking Member
 Subcommittee on Federal Lands
 House Natural Resources Committee
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express views on two of the bills being considered by the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands during a hearing on September 19, 2023. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

In general, we are pleased that the Committee is holding hearings on recreation bills that can be incorporated into a House recreation package later this year. Doing so moves us closer to getting a bill through Congress. Unfortunately, we think two of the bills on today's docket will need additional work before they will be ready for inclusion in a recreation package. We detail our concerns about both bills below.

H.R. 3107—Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act

TWS supports H.R. 3107 in its goal of making permanent the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR). However, we have several concerns with the bill as it is currently written. These concerns need to be addressed for the FICOR to function effectively and achieve its goals.

TWS joined in the views statement submitted by the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK). That statement enumerated our concerns with the FICOR bill. We urge the committee to incorporate the changes set forth in the OAK views statement when it prepares the FICOR bill for markup. We have attached the OAK views statement to this letter.

H.R. 3200—Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act

TWS does not support H.R. 3200 as it is currently written. Our concerns with the bill are described in detail below.

Significant unfunded mandates

Two sections of this bill impose significant unfunded mandates upon the agencies:

1. Section 3(a) directs the agencies to “collaborate with State and local governments, Indian Tribes, housing authorities, applicable trade associations, non-profit organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to identify needs and economic impacts in gateway communities . . .”
2. Section 5(b) requires the Secretaries to create a data pilot program that predicts visitation in real time and make that data available to the public through multiple media platforms.

In both cases, the agencies are instructed to carry out this work “using existing funds available to the Secretaries.”

Both of these tasks are major undertakings that will require significant agency resources. The second task in particular will be very labor intensive and will require the integration of data sets from multiple sources. This will be a challenging technological development process. Congress should not require the agencies to take on this work with existing funds available. Doing so will force the agencies to neglect their other assigned responsibilities in order to comply with these mandates. If Congress intends to impose new mandates on the agencies, it has a responsibility to provide the additional funding necessary to carry out those mandates.

Conflicting signals regarding technical assistance to communities

Sections 3(b)(1) and 3(b)(2) are internally inconsistent in a way that raises questions about the agencies' obligations to provide technical assistance to communities. Section 3(b)(1) requires the Secretary of Agriculture to provide to businesses in gateway communities the assistance described in section 3(b)(2). However, section 3(b)(2) says the secretary “may provide assistance under paragraph (1)” through

certain enumerated means. Thus, the bill is ambiguous as to whether this assistance is required or is merely authorized and discretionary. Congress should resolve this ambiguity before taking further action on this bill.

Unrealistic expectations regarding visitor use data

Section 5(a) requires the agencies to establish a single visitation data reporting system that provides an estimate of the number of visitors broken down by recreational activity. Developing a unified visitation data reporting system would be a significant improvement over the current piecemeal system. However, we urge the committee to be realistic about the challenges of producing unified data across multiple federal land management agencies. This task will difficult for several reasons.

1. Of the five agencies covered by this bill (BLM, BOR, NPS, USFWS, USFS) only two have entrance gates at which visitors can be counted as they arrive (NPS and USFWS). Two of the five agencies (BLM and USFWS) have completely porous boundaries that make it very difficult to count people upon their arrival.
2. Although some NPS and USFWS units have entrance gates at which the agencies are able to count visitors, this data paints an incomplete picture of visitation at Park Service units and Wildlife Refuges. The reason for this because even units with gates have other entry points through which people can gain access without being counted. In addition, some NPS and USFWS have no entrance gates. As a result, visitation data for NPS and USFWS units is, inherently, an underestimation of visitation.
3. Because their borders are porous, BLM and USFS must use other methods for measuring visitation. Some of the alternative methods currently being used involve labor intensive field surveys that can only be conducted once every five years. This makes the task of producing unified visitation data on an annual basis more difficult.

The differences in data collection methodologies and collection frequency will make it challenging for the agencies to produce unified annual visitation data. Some evolution in the agencies' data collection strategies may be required. If so, the two-year deadline imposed by the bill is likely unrealistic. For these reasons, we urge the committee to revise the bill to give the agencies more time to comply with this mandate.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

PAUL SANFORD,
Director of Policy Analysis

ATTACHMENT

Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK)

September 19, 2023

Hon. Tom Tiffany, Chairman
Hon. Neguse, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

We, the undersigned members and partners of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK) thank you for prioritizing legislation that improves access to the outdoors for children, youth and families. We write to express our views in support of H.R. 3107, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act sponsored by Mr. Neguse and Mr. Lawler, although we recommend a series of changes to improve the bill. Our recommendations are set forth below.

OAK is a national strategic partnership of more than 100 businesses and organizations representing more than 60 million Americans with a common interest in getting young people outdoors playing and learning in nature. Our members and supporters believe that the need to increase access to the outdoors has never been more apparent.

OAK supports H.R. 3107 in its goal of making permanent the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR). FICOR is a council made up of eight federal agencies that manage recreation on federal lands and waters. The Council was originally chartered during a previous administration and was reestablished through administrative action in 2022. Passing legislation that makes the Council permanent will ensure that the Council is able to work together to improve recreational access over the long term.

Although we support legislation making FICOR permanent, we have several concerns with the bill as it is currently written. These concerns need to be addressed for the FICOR to function effectively and achieve its goals. Our concerns are as follows:

1. H.R. 3107 places the FICOR under the authority of the Department of the Interior. This is inconsistent with the FICOR's current structure and mode of operation under which all four of the member departments have equal authority over the council. This balanced operating structure is essential to ensure equal representation and commitment from each of the FICOR members. We recommend that the Committee amend the language in H.R. 3107 to grant all member agencies equal authority over the FICOR.
2. The bill defines "federal land management agency" and "federal recreational lands and waters" by cross-referencing definitions in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, 16 U.S.C. § 6801 *et seq.* (FLREA). These definitions should not be used in H.R. 3107 because they exclude three of the eight FICOR member agencies—the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. We recommend that the Committee formulate definitions for these terms that are specific to H.R. 3107 and that include all FICOR member agencies.
3. The Department of Commerce agency identified as a FICOR member in section (b)(1) of the bill is different from the current FICOR membership and is not the right agency to represent Commerce on the FICOR. Section (b)(1) identifies the National Marine Fisheries Service as a FICOR member. This is the wrong agency. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration should be the identified Department of Commerce FICOR representative.
4. In addition to the eight federal land and water management agencies, Congress should consider assigning a formal role to two additional agencies within the federal government.
 - a. Assigning a role to the Department of Agriculture's Under Secretary for Rural Development would recognize that outdoor recreation is an important type of rural development that can be cost effective because it does not generally rely on heavily built infrastructure. Bringing USDA Rural Development into the FICOR community should help expand rural development opportunities relating to sustainable outdoor recreation activities.
 - b. Working through its Office of Community Revitalization, EPA runs a technical assistance program to support the recreation economy in rural communities. EPA also manages the Urban Waters Federal Partnership program. Through these programs, EPA plays an important role in the nation's recreation economy. To recognize this, Congress should consider assigning EPA a formal role within the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation.
5. FICOR representatives have reported to us that rotating the FICOR leadership on an annual basis provides too short of a time frame for effective management of the Council. We recommend amending (b)(4) to rotate leadership among the Council members on an interval to be determined by the Council and not to exceed 3 years.
6. The Additional Participants provision in section (b)(2) of the bill identifies specific federal departments and agencies that may be invited to participate in the FICOR meetings and activities. We think this enumerated list is unwise and unnecessary. The goal of collaboration with additional federal

agencies can be achieved by using language from section 5(e) of the Memorandum of Understanding establishing the existing FICOR. This MOU language broadly welcomes participation from other federal entities as the FICOR sees fit and does not limit the agencies with which the FICOR may collaborate.

7. We recommend that section (b)(3) be revised to address two problems with the bill. First, the bill does not explicitly call out collaboration with Tribal, Territorial or local governments, which is an important part of the Council's work. Second, we believe that section (c)(8), which identifies the FICOR's work with partners outside of the federal government, is too vague and is out of place in its current location in the bill. To address these issues, we recommend expanding section (b)(3) "State Coordination" to read as follows:
 - (3) Other Coordination.—In determining additional participants under this subsection, the Secretaries may—
 - (A) invite participation in the Council's meetings or other activities from representatives of State, Tribal, Territorial, and local governments.
 - (B) build partnerships between the parties and a range of private, public, Tribal, and non-profit entities.
8. Section (c)(1) specifically calls out the implementation of the FLREA as one of the purposes of the Council's work. As explained above, three of the FICOR agencies are not covered by FLREA. We recommend revising this statement to cover existing and future policies more broadly in a manner similar to the FICOR MOU. This can be accomplished by changing the language of section (c)(1) to read:
 - (1) recreation management policies across Federal agencies, including implementation of new and existing recreation legislation;
9. Finally, it is essential that Congress identify a sustainable and reliable funding source for FICOR operations and operational capacity. Without it, the Council will not succeed. Expecting the agencies to absorb the operating costs of the Council without an identified funding source is simply unrealistic. Congress should address this issue in H.R. 3107.

For questions related to this views statement, contact Paul Sanford, OAK Vice Chair and Director of Policy Analysis at The Wilderness Society. Mr. Sanford can be reached at psanford@tws.org.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on H.R. 3107. We look forward to working with the Committee to improve and pass this vital piece of recreation legislation.

Sincerely,

[OAK member organizations]

