

Ranking Member Neguse Opening Statement
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on Six Bills
June 27, 2024

- Thank you, Chairman Tiffany.
- Good morning, everyone. It's been another busy week for the Federal Lands Subcommittee, with a legislative hearing on six bills today.
- From historic sites associated with the War 1812 to studying new heritage areas in Maui and designating new wilderness in Chair Westerman's home state of Arkansas, I'm sure we'll cover a lot of ground today.
- The bills on today's docket serve as a reminder of the wide range of benefits and uses associated with our parks and public lands - they protect natural ecosystems, safeguard our cherished cultural heritage, and provide the backdrop for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities.
- So, it is imperative that we continue to identify new places worthy of conservation and we fight to secure sufficient resources so that federal land managers have the resources they need to steward and protect them for present and future generations to come.
- As members of the Federal Lands Subcommittee, we collectively have the opportunity to champion new conservation opportunities—something I was proud to lead when I served as Chair of this Subcommittee, and continue to advocate for today.
- Despite the debate and disagreements we often engage in regarding the management of our public lands, it is clear that we need to do more to protect the health of our public lands.

- As made clear by today's hearing, there are still plenty of places throughout the country that deserve increased protection and conservation, and I'm eager to learn more about each of these bills.
- Importantly, this is one of the first hearings we have held in the entire 118th Congress that features conservation designations.
- This is a great first start, and I thank the Chairman for including these measures in today's hearing. But I would also like to remind my friends across the aisle that there is a long running list of additional bills - sponsored by members of both parties - to create new national parks, designate new wilderness and withdrawals, and protect some of the most special places across our great nation.
- This includes my CORE Act, which I've talked about many times in this Subcommittee, and so many more. Our constituents support real conservation, enhanced recreational opportunities, and even ways to accelerate tribal co-stewardship and enhance protections for sacred sites.
- But first, let's turn to today's agenda.
- H.R. 309 and H.R. 6843 expand the boundaries of existing National Heritage Areas, while H.R. 8219 will direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating Lahaina as a National Heritage Area.
- Driven by grassroots initiatives, National Heritage Areas preserve areas of significant importance to communities through natural, cultural, and historic resources. These sites also serve the community by providing recreational and economic opportunities. I'm particularly glad to see H.R. 8219 from my friend Rep. Tokuda on today's agenda, as I am a proud original cosponsor of the bill.

- Then we have H.R. 6826 to redesignate the visitor and educational center at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in honor of Paul S. Sarbanes, who was instrumental in ensuring the preservation of the vaunted site. This is a fitting tribute.
- Finally, turning to the other key topic on today's agenda: wilderness.
- Enacted in 1964, the Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System to protect the natural environment, which today stands at approximately 111 million acres of protected land.
- Only Congress can designate new wilderness, and while many have supported these designations throughout the country over the years, as is the case with H.R. 3971, which would expand the Flatside Wilderness Area in Arkansas, new designation also come with concerns regarding limitations on access for historical and traditional uses.
- H.R. 8206 serves as an example of these potential concerns and conflicts. This legislation would prohibit any future wilderness designations within the boundaries of the Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida.
- My understanding is that this bill was developed as a response to the National Park Service draft Backcountry Access Plan for future management in this area.
- In particular, the Miccosukee Tribe has expressed specific concerns about their traditional access and use of Big Cypress.
- I look forward to hearing directly from Chairman Talbert Cypress and hope that we can identify a solution that allows the planning process to proceed.

- With that, I yield back.