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House Natural Resources / Federal Lands Subcommittee Hearing  
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**Written Statement Supporting H.R. 5729, the North Rim Restoration Act of 2025  
(Crane)**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members of this important Subcommittee.

My name is John Dillon. I am a small business owner, born and raised in Northern Arizona. I have spent my entire adult life and built my career at Grand Canyon. My parents owned a small sporting-goods store and hiking guide service there before I was born. I raised my three children there as well when I was then President of Scenic Grand Canyon Airlines, the world's oldest air tour operator which started in 1927. Today I am the Executive Director of the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association, representing the 16 small businesses that run river trips through the Canyon. I have spent the last 32 years of my life passionately advocating for and sharing Grand Canyon with millions of visitors from around the world – all from the air, on the ground, and rafting the river. Yes, I'm a total "Canyon nerd"! Even my Instagram handle is @grandcanyonman.

I'm here today on behalf of hundreds of family-owned businesses and dozens of rural communities in Northern Arizona and Southern Utah whose very survival depends on the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park.

The Grand Canyon is indeed GRAND in every sense of the word! The name Grand Canyon was popularized by Major John Wesley Powell after his first expedition through the Canyon in 1869. Interestingly enough, Congress helped sponsor his second expedition of the Canyon in 1871 to continue surveying, mapping, and learning everything possible about this magnificent place.

**Yes**, it is huge! It is just over 1900 square miles of some of the harshest and remote environments anywhere. It is 277 river miles long, up to 18 miles wide from rim to rim, and averages about 1 mile deep. We are very proud that it is entirely located within the Great State of Arizona, but the Grand Canyon's land area is almost the size of the State of Delaware!

**Yes**, it is one of the world's most studied landscapes with the most incredible geological cross-sections of the Earth's crust going back nearly two billion years. It is the perfect open textbook revealing the last five to six million years of the Earth's history, including rock layers, ancient seabeds, and volcanic activity. Even the Apollo astronauts physically trained and studied geology at Grand Canyon before landing on the moon!

**Yes,** it is an ecological refuge, hosting approximately 1750 plant species, 91 mammal species, 450 bird species, and numerous reptiles, amphibians, and fish, including many threatened or endangered species.

**And Yes,** it is considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and what many believe is the crown jewel of the National Park Service system, often said to be “Our nation’s very best idea!”

But it is much more than that. For us, the Canyon is our home. It is our backyard, our workplace, our place for recreation, solitude, and even our place of worship. It is the place that eleven Native American tribes who also share deep cultural, spiritual, and historical connections consider to be their ancestral homeland since time in memoriam. It is deeply important to all of us who live there and the surrounding areas.

It is not just important to us locals. It matters to millions of visitors from all over the world. And in our nation’s history, we have been advocating to preserve, protect, and share Grand Canyon for well over 150 years.

Just 10 years after Major Powell’s second expedition, the first bill to establish Grand Canyon as a National Park was introduced in 1882 by then-Senator Benjamin Harrison. The bill, and subsequent attempts in 1883 and 1886, were unsuccessful.

In 1893, after becoming our 23<sup>rd</sup> president, Benjamin Harrison used his executive authority to establish the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve by presidential proclamation.

In 1903, our 26<sup>th</sup> president, Theodore Roosevelt visited Grand Canyon where he gave an incredibly emotional speech from the South Rim. There he said, “...*What you can do is to keep it for your children, your children’s children, and for all who come after you, as the one great sight which every American should see.*” His words remind us that Grand Canyon is more than just a place. It is a testament to America’s commitment to preserve it but also provide the ability for everyone to responsibly visit and experience it as well. In 1908 President Roosevelt used the Antiquities Act and declared Grand Canyon a National Monument.

It took just over another decade of advocacy before finally our 28<sup>th</sup> President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill which created Grand Canyon National Park on February 26, 1919.

Most people don’t know that Grand Canyon was also designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 for its immense geological significance, outstanding natural beauty, and rich ecological diversity. It is recognized as a place of universal value for all humanity.

The Grand Canyon also is the economic epicenter for all of Northern Arizona and Southern Utah. The National Park Service carefully tracks not only visitors, but the economic impacts to the region. They measure dollars spent in categories like camping, gas, groceries, lodging, recreation, dining, retail, and transportation. In 2022, North Rim visitors pumped almost \$73 million into rural gateway communities and supported several thousand jobs. This is what we depend on.

All of that ended on July 4, 2025, when lightning ignited the Dragon Bravo Fire — the 7th largest wildfire in Arizona history. It ultimately consumed over 145,000 acres, destroying 113 structures including the historic 1937 Grand Canyon Lodge, visitor cabins, employee housing, NPS buildings and equipment, and nearly all of the utilities and infrastructure. Hundreds of Park Service and concessioner employees were evacuated, many losing their vehicles and personal belongings. Visitation stopped overnight.

There are far too many individual businesses impacted to name here today, but I'd like to recognize a few.

The Jacob Lake Inn is synonymous with the North Rim. It was started by the Bowman family in 1923, just 4 years after the National Park was established! My friend, 5<sup>th</sup> generation owner Melinda, told me they had to refund almost \$350,000 in just reservation deposits for this year. She said, *"We've dealt with the Great Depression, World Wars, wildfires, and so many other catastrophes completely out of our control. We've been through three mega-fires and COVID just in the last five years, but when the Grand Canyon Lodge burned to the ground, we knew our economy had gone up in smoke with it."*

Nearly all of the businesses located in Page, Marble Canyon, Fredonia, Kanab and Panguitch are in the same terrifying position. Many will not survive another lost season — or two, or three — while the normal governmental appropriations and planning process crawls forward.

The Arizona Office of Tourism echoes this urgency, calling the Grand Canyon *"Arizona's iconic natural wonder that draws millions from around the world, fueling our state's \$29.3 billion tourism economy and highlighting the majestic beauty that makes our home so special."* They recognize it as the crown jewel driving jobs, tax revenue, and pride across our region.

Hatch River Expeditions, based in Marble Canyon, Arizona, has been operating since 1929. They are believed to be the oldest river outfitter in the United States, possibly the world, and will soon celebrate 100 years of operations! Western River Expeditions, Colorado River and Trail Expeditions, and Tour West River are based in Fredonia, Arizona. Grand Canyon Expeditions is based in Kanab, Utah. Wilderness River Adventures is based in Page, Arizona. These businesses, along with the other 10 multi-generational outfitters based in Flagstaff, Arizona take approximately 22,000 guests through Grand Canyon each season and employ over 1000 guides and support staff. They purchase all of their supplies including groceries, gas, ice, propane, guest lodging and transportation from other local companies. This industry has an enormous impact in the millions of dollars to these rural towns.

H.R. 5729 gives the National Park Service, via the Department of Interior, the emergency contracting authority it needs to rebuild critical visitor facilities and modernized infrastructure immediately. This is not about new development or expansion — it is about

restoring what existed for nearly a century so these rural pioneering families, communities, and jobs can survive.

We respectfully urge the committee to advance this bipartisan legislation without delay.

Thank you, Congressman Crane and the bill's co-sponsors, for your leadership.

I'm happy to answer any questions.

## Resource Information provided by the Grand Canyon National Park on Dec 5, 2025

Parkwide: [Report: Grand Canyon visitation creates billion dollar economic impact locally | Local News | azdailysun.com](#)

North Rim Visitation (2022): 322,146 visitors

North Rim (2022) (primary + secondary):

Directly Affected Sector	Total Spending	Spending by Nonlocal Visitors	Jobs	Labor Income	Value Added	Output
Camping	\$728,616	\$691,929	10	\$355,919	\$526,178	\$728,616
Gas	\$3,836,133	\$3,764,789	6	\$308,349	\$506,078	\$842,649
Groceries	\$2,397,210	\$2,349,995	9	\$364,743	\$504,632	\$796,020
Lodging	\$18,849,770	\$18,667,315	190	\$5,767,972	\$11,377,797	\$18,849,770
Recreation Industries	\$9,654,849	\$9,546,742	144	\$4,924,752	\$5,797,578	\$9,654,849
Dining	\$9,182,972	\$9,059,017	117	\$3,328,359	\$5,000,478	\$9,182,972
Retail	\$3,735,744	\$3,680,079	32	\$1,209,268	\$1,422,373	\$2,077,366
Transportation	\$6,013,465	\$5,927,639	42	\$1,670,348	\$3,895,748	\$6,013,469
Secondary Effects	\$0.00	\$0.00	167	\$6,957,609	\$12,445,122	\$24,591,259
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$54,398,758</b>	<b>\$53,687,505</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>\$24,887,319</b>	<b>\$41,475,985</b>	<b>\$72,736,967</b>