



**Testimony of Ed Stierli,
Vice President of Government Affairs
National Parks Conservation Association
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
September 16, 2026**

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Ed Stierli and I serve as the Vice President of Government Affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). NPCA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with more than 1.9 million members and supporters across the country, dedicated to protecting and enhancing America's national parks for current and future generations. I initially started at NPCA in 2012, and prior to my current position led our Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, where I had the honor of working alongside Superintendents, local officials, and community members to protect and enhance parks throughout the region, including dozens of historic sites.

Before turning to the bills before the subcommittee, I want to recognize this committee's work to reauthorize the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. NPCA strongly supports that effort. The fund was created by the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020 and expired in 2025, leaving a gap in addressing a maintenance backlog across federal land management agencies that now exceeds \$43 billion. Every month without reauthorization is a month that crumbling roads, failing water systems, visitor centers, and trails wait longer for repair. We urge the House to move the America the Beautiful Act to the floor and help send a final reauthorization to the President's desk. As the country marks its 250th anniversary, there is no more fitting investment in the places that tell our shared story.

I am pleased to speak to you today about two bills that highlight both the opportunities and challenges facing the National Park System.

H.R. 2323: Big Bend National Park Boundary Adjustment Act

Big Bend National Park is a treasured destination for Texans and visitors from all over the world, preserving breathtaking landscapes rich in desert wildlife and thousands of years of history. The soaring vistas, epic hikes and some of the darkest skies in the world bring more than half a million visitors annually. NPCA supports this legislation to adjust the boundary of Big Bend National Park. Expanding the park boundary will bring a rare new water source and sensitive cultural resources ranging from prehistoric fossils to historic ruins under the protection of the National Park Service.

This addition will enhance the protection of the park, bring existing inholdings within its boundaries and will not increase park management costs. Members of the local community and landowners in the region are supportive of this effort. Land will be provided for this expansion only from willing landowners, the legislation explicitly prohibits the use of eminent domain or condemnation to acquire land within this new boundary. While this legislation would protect sensitive resources in one part of the park, other parts of Big Bend are at risk from border barrier construction. In addition to moving this bill, we encourage the committee to take all measures possible to halt border infrastructure construction in Big Bend and the surrounding region.

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We are glad to see the current temporary pause in construction at Big Bend National Park and Custom and Border Protection's commitment to listening to local leadership, community members and stakeholders to develop a plan for border security while working to protect Big Bend National Park for generations to come. The few days that federal contractors began work at the park in early August before the current construction pause resulted in miles of destruction to some of the most recognized and treasured places in the park from Santa Elena Canyon to Mariscal Canyon.

Big Bend is an example of a much deeper crisis of unchecked border infrastructure development through national parks and protected public lands across the Southwest. For years, border infrastructure development has been chipping away at Arizona's national parks. Construction has already begun on a redundant second border wall at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona, which will come dangerously close to Quitobaquito Springs, threatening this rare desert oasis actively used today by local Indigenous communities as a sacred site. In 2018, the first border wall was built through Organ Pipe, waiving existing environmental protections and leaving behind devastating impacts to vegetation and water, as documented by a federal report from the Government Accountability Office. Now, a nearly identical wall is being constructed, bringing further devastation to the ecosystem.

To the east, new construction has already blasted through Coronado National Memorial, the seat of the Huachuca Mountains in one of the last remaining wildlife corridors on the border, critical for rare ocelots, jaguars and other species to move freely across the landscape in order to survive. This destruction of Coronado has led to the closure of the start of the Arizona National Scenic Trail, demonstrating how much the public is losing by the decisions to build walls through these remote and rugged national parks.

Our national parks across the country were established to protect and preserve the most iconic landscapes and stories of America. We urge you to protect these places, following in the footsteps of those community leaders and members of Congress who understand their value and the need to keep them unimpaired for generations to come.

H.R. 1031: Fort Ontario Holocaust Refugee Shelter National Historical Park Establishment Act

NPCA supports the establishment of a national park unit at Fort Ontario. In August of 1944, 982 refugees from Europe arrived in Oswego, New York as guests of President Roosevelt, where they stayed until February of 1946. Fort Ontario was the only shelter of its kind in the United States, and the buildings where those families lived are still standing. The Park Service completed a special resource study in 2024 and found the site nationally significant. That SRS also noted that there is no site in the national park system that tells the story of how this country answered the refugee crisis during World War II. This bill fills that gap, and it does so in partnership with New York State Parks, the Safe Haven Museum and Education Center, and the City of Oswego. We urge the subcommittee to advance it.

NPCA supports adding nationally significant places to the National Park System to tell our nation's important stories, but we urge Congress to provide the funding and staffing needed for these sites and the 433 units throughout the country to adequately protect their resources and to ensure visitors continue to have unforgettable experiences. Unfortunately, appropriations have not kept pace with what these parks need. In addition, NPS lost 13% of its permanent workforce while visitation grew by 19% between 2011 and 2024. That was followed by a 25% loss of full-time staff after a series of deferred resignations and early

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retirement offers made by the Administration to severely reduce the workforce. Inadequate budgets and significant staffing losses have drastically undercut the agency's ability to meet its mission.

NPCA appreciates the subcommittee's attention to these three sites and the stories they preserve. We only ask that new additions be matched by the funding, staffing, and oversight the existing 433 park units need to meet their mission. This is within reach, and with the leadership of this committee, we are confident it can be done. We look forward to working with you, and I am glad to answer your questions.