

**Opening Statement**  
**Chair TJ Cox**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**DEI at DOI**  
**September 17, 2020**

Good afternoon.

It is no secret that the Department of the Interior has a White, male dominated workforce. In fiscal year 2018, nearly half of all Interior employees identified as a White male, while only 5 percent identified as Black and only 6 percent as Hispanic or Latino, despite the nation's population being 13 percent Black and 18 percent Hispanic or Latino. It's even worse at many of Interior's bureaus.

At the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service, over 80 percent of employees identify as White. White employees are also over-represented among promotions and senior positions at DOI.

This dramatic lack of representation of people of color has persisted from administration to administration. While the Trump Administration has made efforts to address the issue at Interior, comments and actions that trample these efforts cannot be ignored. Former Secretary Ryan Zinke repeatedly stated throughout his tenure that "diversity isn't important."

Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management, William Pendley, has a decades-long history of promoting policies and rhetoric attacking the rights of Native peoples. Forty one percent of all of the Bureau of Land Management's black employees worked at the headquarters office in DC until Pendley recently moved it to Colorado, telling them to uproot their families or lose their job, all in the name of back of the napkin cost savings claims that have still not been adequately analyzed or justified.

A recently released White House memo called diversity trainings addressing critical race theory and white privilege "divisive, anti-American propaganda."

These are not the actions of an administration with the goal of creating a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

Still, Interior's problem dates back to its founding and beyond. We cannot begin to address diversity, equity, and inclusion at Interior without first confronting the historical foundations that continue to exclude underrepresented groups from these spaces. The history of public lands and conservation in this country is steeped in a legacy of white supremacy, systemic racism, and the silencing and displacement of Indigenous communities and people of color.

The very notion that the American wilderness was an "untouched" resource needing protection erases the 12,000-year history of Indigenous peoples who conserved the land for subsistence for centuries. This, quote, "park concept" that gave us national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite led to the forced displacement and genocide of thousands of Native Americans. It is impossible to separate the roots of American conservation from its racist origins.

The legacy of this approach to conservation is persistent. Of the 419 national park sites managed by NPS, only 112 center on the stories and cultures of people of color, women, and other underrepresented groups. The lack of representation in the storytelling of our parks and public lands helps explain why only one in five park visitors is a person of color. How can we expect people of color such as many of my constituents, nearly 75 percent of whom are Hispanic or Latino, to engage with a conservation institution that was set up to exclude them since its inception?

The months-long protests across the country in response to the May 25 murder of George Floyd by a police officer shows that Americans are ready to have these hard and nuanced conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of American society, including environmental and conservation groups and government agencies. The Interior Department and its bureaus can answer this call by ensuring the white-male dominated culture rooted in the agency's very origins is replaced with a culture that results in the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of traditionally underrepresented communities.

The Committee cannot credibly ask groups and agencies to look at their internal biases without doing the same. This Committee has historically also not always been the best example of diversity and inclusion. However, under the leadership of Chair Grijalva, Committee leaders have made progress in putting this issue at the forefront of decision-making. We look forward to hearing the recommendations from our witnesses not only as guidance for the Department of the Interior and environmental and conservation groups but also for us, the Committee set to oversee them.

Thank you to everyone for joining us and a special thank you to our witnesses for giving their time to be here with us today.