

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL T. REYNOLDS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS, REGARDING “SECURING OUR BORDER, SAVING OUR NATIONAL PARKS”.

October 18, 2023

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views about how border security might affect national parks.

The National Park Service (NPS), along with the Department’s other land management bureaus, recognizes the significant ecological and cultural values of the lands managed by the Department, including those along the United States’ international borders, and we take very seriously our responsibility for protecting and conserving these lands on behalf of the American people. We also work closely with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in particular the U.S. Border Patrol, a component of Customs and Border Protection, who have been given the responsibility for securing these international borders. However, the Department does not have jurisdiction over immigration policy and therefore we defer to DHS regarding broader questions about immigration and border security policy.

Regardless of proximity to U.S. national borders, NPS actions are ultimately based on a commitment to protect and conserve resources in accordance with the law. Conservation — a core NPS mission — occurs regardless of the immigration status of individuals who enter the lands we manage.

Our National Park System has been called “America’s best idea” because it represents the first decision by any nation to conserve land in this way — both for the enjoyment of the public and for its own sake. The goal of the National Park Service is to provide for the conservation of natural and cultural resources in 425 national parks as provided by law, for this and future generations.

Each year the National Park Service responds to a wide array of emerging challenges that include not only the impacts of migration, but also extreme weather events, overcrowding, and staffing challenges. Examples of these challenges include the 2021 Dixie megafire that impacted Lassen Volcanic Park, the major flooding at Yellowstone National Park last year, the recent 1000-year flood event at Death Valley National Park, and the unprecedented post-pandemic increase in visitation at many of our parks. Although the NPS faces many of the same resource and funding constraints that other federal agencies, cities, towns, organizations, and businesses face across the country, we will continue to rise to meet these challenges and work daily to sustain these remarkable places that the American people have entrusted to us.

When managing lands along our international borders, the NPS, along with the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, closely coordinate with DHS agents on the ground, to ensure that field operations are conducted in a manner that avoids or minimizes the environmental impact on federal lands in accordance with the law. As part of the Biden Administration's all-of-government response to the influx of migrants and asylum seekers, we work with these agencies and with the U.S. Forest Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, on a cohesive, cooperative approach to border security, while Congress and others work to comprehensively address immigration policies generally. We are proud of the strong working relationship based on cooperation and a mutual commitment to accomplishing our important agency missions.

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.