



GREEN LATINOS
Luchando por la Liberación Ambiental

June 18, 2024

RE: GreenLatinos Opposition to H.R. 5283

While the proposed intent to protect America's public lands is admirable, H.R. 5283—Protecting our Communities from Failure to Secure the Border Act of 2023—proposes false solutions for public land management and misdirects blame to immigrants seeking their right to asylum. Rather than scapegoat undocumented people, we encourage the bill sponsor, Rep. Malliotakis (NY), and Congress to robustly fund Federal land management agencies - a critical impediment to properly stewarding the hundred of thousands of conservation, recreation and historic units under federal jurisdiction - and swiftly work together on compassionate and humanitarian immigrant reception and integration policies.

In an August 2023 report titled “Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY 2013-FY2022 Estimates and Issues”, the Congressional Research Service forcefully demonstrates that every federal land management agency is severely and chronically underfunded. Specifically, the report finds that in FY 2022 the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service had a combined deferred maintenance estimate of \$35.53 billion. A staggering 59% of this \$35.53 billion, or \$21.09 billion represents the total maintenance backlog of the National Park Service. Additionally, in every year analyzed, the National Park Service had the “largest portion of total deferred maintenance and considerably more than any other agency.”

It is the position of GreenLatinos that land management agencies should be robustly funded to manage and steward public lands. Yet U.S. House of Representatives leadership in this 118th Congress consistently act to defund agencies responsible for administering public lands. The House FY24 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill proposed a \$2,654,000,000 [budget](#) for the operation of the National Park Service, nearly just 46% of the actualized NPS budget of \$4,724,284,000 [actualized](#) for FY24. Even with existing NPS funding levels, the Agency does not have adequate resources to address the deferred maintenance estimate which forces the Agency to consider alternative agreements to address maintenance needs on a site by site basis as was done between the City of New York and the National Park Service for Floyd Bennett Field.

In the backdrop of minimal federal funding appropriation, the agreement between the City of New York and the National Park Service was designed to ensure financial gain for the stewardship of Floyd Bennett Field via paid rent. The agreement secures resources for certain



improvements of the site that would contribute to long-term visitor use and enjoyment of the site. ([source](#)).

Moreover, there are a host of activities such as logging, mining, and other energy extraction which directly lead to habitat loss and pollution of some of America's most pristine natural resources. For example, the U.S. Forest Service estimates there are nearly 39,000 ([source](#)) abandoned mines with environmental impacts whose impacts include but are not limited to water contamination, water acidity, metal contamination of soil, erosion, discharged drums and tanks, impairment of scenic vistas, and direct loss of habitat ([source](#)). Methane emissions and other pollutants accelerating the climate crisis pose gargantuan threats to public land maintenance including NPS-administered units ([source](#)). It should be noted that the proponents of HR 5283 do not act to address these critical issues affecting the wellbeing of public lands. In this Congress, the bill's supporters have made reckless attempts to: gut bedrock environmental laws that protect our public lands like the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act; block the Bureau of Land Management Conservation and Landscape Health Rule from implementation; block the Methane Emissions Reduction Program; and force agencies to proceed with the lease of public lands for oil and gas extraction.

Rather than misdirect and mislead the public, we urge Congress to adequately fund federal land management agencies according to need, address the threats of pollution to public land health, prioritize measures to restore ecosystem health, and to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The Senate should prevent the passage of HR 5283, and focus on expediting access to work permits for immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. and providing a path to citizenship for undocumented people and family reunification, including by adopting the Dream Act and creating a path to lawful permanent resident status for long-time recipients of Temporary Protected Status and similar programs.