



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE  
**CLIMATE CRISIS**

**Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor  
Hearing on “America’s Natural Solutions:  
The Climate Benefits of Investing in Healthy Ecosystems”  
April 1, 2022**

*As prepared for delivery*

Nature provides us with critical, low-cost tools to tackle climate change. And that’s no April Fools’ joke. Whether it’s forests, grasslands, or mangroves, healthy ecosystems can help significantly draw down the heat-trapping gases that are fueling the climate crisis. Natural places also serve as vital defense structures, providing communities with a cost-effective buffer against worsening climate impacts. As Congress works to fast track affordable clean energy, and as we strive to address the rising costs of climate disasters, we also must invest in nature-based solutions that can help us meet America’s climate goals and lower costs for Americans.

Restoring and conserving our natural resources will be necessary to avoid permanent damage to the land that we love. So far this year, the number of fires and acres burned across America are nearly double the 10-year average, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Sea level along our coastline is projected to rise up to 12 inches in the next 30 years, according to NOAA. And nearly 60% of the continental United States is already experiencing drought conditions. These climate impacts increasingly will harm important sectors of our economy, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, and tourism. Unless we take urgent action, these industries will be permanently impacted by the climate-fueled loss of species and habitats, which is already taking place. American lives and livelihoods are at stake.

Investing in healthy habitats today will unlock incredible climate benefits for years to come. Thriving ecosystems remove carbon pollution from the atmosphere by acting as natural carbon sinks – and they can significantly help keep temperatures in check through the end of the decade. The same can be said for our bays, lakes, and ocean – which collectively absorb enormous amounts of heat-trapping carbon dioxide. Just in my community of Tampa Bay, healthy coastal habitats have the potential to remove about 74 million tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by the end of the century, according to analysis by Restore America’s Estuaries. That’s about the same as taking 15-and-a-half million gas-powered cars off the road.

Beyond these climate benefits, investing in healthy habitats also can bolster local economies. Ecosystem restoration projects often act as economic engines, generating local jobs in planning, engineering, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, recreation, and forestry. It’s important we source these jobs locally, and that we carry out these projects with each community’s needs in mind: from planning, to implementation, to listening to disadvantaged communities and Tribes.

Over the past few years, Congress has made good progress on conservation and restoration. With the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act, we made significant investments to enhance parks,

forests, wildlife areas, and other public lands. In that bill, we permanently funded the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which supports recreation and conservation projects across the country. And we established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Fund, which will address the maintenance backlog affecting critical infrastructure in our national parks and public lands.

And through President Biden's historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we devoted nearly \$1.5 billion for coastal resilience and community-based restoration, and \$2 billion for forest and rangeland restoration. It also includes permanent funding to restore national forests affected by wildfires and other events, as well as millions of dollars to restore fish passages, establish safe wildlife crossings, and protect our estuaries.

But our work is not done. We must be proactive and incorporate new projects. We must invest in capacity building to bring these solutions to every community. And we must work towards our goal of conserving at least 30% of all U.S. lands and ocean areas by 2030. Preserving America's unique natural heritage has broad bipartisan support, so I look forward to today's discussion.