



April 15, 2021

The Honorable Paul Tonko
Subcommittee Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment & Climate
Change
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David McKinley
Ranking Subcommittee Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment & Climate
Change
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Tonko, Ranking Member McKinley, and all Members of the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change of the Committee on Energy and Commerce:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to share our views on, and enthusiastic support for, two bills being heard before the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change of the Committee on Energy and Commerce on April 15, 2021, H.R. 2021, the Environmental Justice for All Act and H.R. 516, Environmental Justice Mapping and Data Collection Act of 2021.

H.R. 2021, Environmental Justice for All Act

The Environmental Justice for All Act was developed over a year-long process that included environmental justice leaders, frontline communities, and a wide range of stakeholders. This helped shape the policy while keeping the most impacted communities on the front-end of the policymaking process. The development of this legislation represents a critical step towards meaningful community engagement, collaboration, and environmental justice action to alleviate environmental racism nationwide.

From the inclusive public process that involved a diverse set of stakeholders and impacted communities, H.R. 2021 is rooted in the moral principle that all people have the right to pure air, clean water, and an environment that enriches life. The Environmental Justice for All Act is informed by the belief that federal policy can and should strive for environmental justice, health equity, and climate justice for all deliberately overlooked and underserved communities. This legislation establishes that Congress and other federal agencies should seek to achieve environmental justice, promote meaningful public involvement, provide technical assistance on environmental justice issues to communities, and cooperate with Tribes, States, and local governments to address environmental injustice.

TWS supports H.R. 2021 as a whole and believes that legislation should center historically underrepresented populations to better address existing inequities. We

commend Chair Grijalva, Representative McEachin and their staff on pulling together a diverse coalition of contributors to this legislation and believe that it has strengthened the outcome of these community-based discussions. Below we have highlighted a few areas that we support and have particular expertise in:

Equitable Access to the Outdoors

H.R. 2021 would ensure more equitable access to parks, thus promoting individual health and economic benefits, specifically through inclusion of the Every Kid Outdoors Act, Outdoors for All Act, and Transit to Trails Act. These programs prioritize and directly serve deliberately under-resourced and overlooked communities by addressing inequities in access to parks and natural outdoor spaces. There are proven benefits to investing in parks and recreation. The outdoor recreation economy accounts for billions of dollars in consumer spending and supports millions of jobs. By improving connectivity with outdoor recreation, more people can benefit from outdoor industry employment opportunities, as well as the physical and mental wellbeing associated with recreating outdoors. If we maximize the opportunities for all people to experience the physical, mental, and social benefits of nature, then every community — regardless of race, income or zip code—will be stronger, healthier, and more resilient for generations to come.

Fair and Just Transition

The Environmental Justice for All Act would increase the onshore coal, oil, and gas royalty rate to ensure companies pay a fair price and that the public is compensated properly for private use of our shared public lands. The legislation also establishes a Federal Energy Transition Economic Development Assistance Fund and two new fees on the oil, gas, and coal industries to support communities and workers as they transition away from greenhouse gas-dependent economies.

Transparent and Inclusive Federal Decision Making

H.R. 2021 ensures early and meaningful community involvement opportunities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when federal agencies propose an action that can harm the health and environment of an environmental justice community. The bill directs Federal agencies to solicit robust Tribal representation throughout the NEPA process for an activity that could impact an Indian Tribe, including activities impacting off-reservation lands and sacred sites. Federal agencies would also be directed to conduct and compile environmental and health research while soliciting community input particularly with indigenous communities. Additionally, H.R. 2021 would require the consideration of cumulative impacts in permitting decisions and ensure that permits issued pursuant to such acts demonstrate a reasonable certainty of no harm to human health.

Collaboration and Representation

The Environmental Justice for All Act would establish channels of collaboration between federal agencies and environmental justice communities, including Tribal and

indigenous populations, to ensure meaningful and transparent community collaboration in the development and implementation of environmental justice strategies and research. The bill would also bolster protections through the expansion of legal rights and recourse for impacted communities and individuals when faced with discrimination. Lastly, through agency trainings on justice and community grants to fund environmental justice initiatives and research, H.R. 2021 will generate educational benefits both for those in government and those in the community about the environment as a contributor to public health issues.

TWS supports the expansion of legal rights for people and communities experiencing environmental injustice, ensuring early and meaningful involvement of frontline communities in federal decision making, increasing environmental justice training for agency staff, providing resources to expand environmental justice programs, promoting equitable access to quality outdoor spaces, and ensuring just transitions for workforces in impacted communities. For these reasons, TWS supports the Environmental Justice for All Act and urges all Members of the Committee to support H.R. 2021.

H.R. 516, Environmental Justice Mapping and Data Collection Act of 2021

Introduced in January, this bill would take ground-breaking steps toward identifying and connecting environmental justice communities with policy outcomes. Supported by a broad coalition of over 70 grassroots environmental organizations and 40 leading environmental justice scholars, this legislation aims to create and authorize funding for a system to identify the demographic factors, environmental burdens, socioeconomic conditions and public health concerns that are related to environmental justice and collect data through community engagement and a government-wide interagency process, including the EPA, Commerce, HHS, DOI, USDA, HUD, DOE, DOT and others in consultation with an advisory council of relevant stakeholders. This data would be used to build an interactive layered mapping tool depicting which communities experience environmental injustices.

This interagency supported tool will be essential in following through on the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to direct at least 40% of funding for a clean and climate-safe future into communities burdened by environmental injustices.

TWS supports this evidence-based method for identifying communities overburdened by environmental injustices and likewise agrees with the need to prioritize directing funding for a clean energy and climate-safe future towards these communities. For these reasons, TWS supports the Environmental Justice Mapping and Data Collection Act of 2021 and urges all Members of the Committee to support H.R. 516

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Dan Hartinger
Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society