

Questions of the Honorable Debbie Dingell
House Committee on Natural Resources – Subcommittee on National
Parks, Forests and Public Lands

HEARING

Climate Change and Public Lands: Examining Impacts and Considering
Adaptation Opportunities

February 13, 2019

OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you, Chairman Haaland and Ranking Member Young, for convening this hearing to discuss the threat of climate change and the unique challenges it poses to our nation's public lands.

Public Lands are key to the economic and ecological health of Michigan. As they comprise almost 10 percent of Michigan's total land area, these areas drive tens of millions of dollars in tourism and support thousands of jobs.

From the iconic Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore to Isle Royale National Park, these areas are fundamental to Michigan's identity and the state's outdoor recreation economy.

Given the integral role that public lands play in Michigan, I am highly concerned about the effects of climate change that these areas face. We know that public lands will face disproportionate impacts as a result of climate change.

Over the last century, the mean annual temperature experienced across the United States' national park system increased at double the rate of the United States as a whole.

As a result of reduced winter ice and snow cover caused by climate change, the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore will face accelerated loss from increased erosion. Additionally, other national parks both in Michigan and across the United States face potentially existential risks.

The need for action is clear – we must work to address climate change without delay by taking strong and decisive action at the federal level.

Protections for public lands are critical for not only mitigating the impact of climate change on sensitive ecosystems, but also, properly managed, can serve as a climate adaptation solution.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration has elected to ignore the numerous economic, public health, and ecological benefits that public land preservation provides. Instead, they have prioritized oil drilling, mining and resource extraction at all costs.

The administration's actions include rescinding Department of Interior guidance to prepare for the impacts of climate change on public lands, as well as unprecedented actions to put public lands in private hands.

These actions are highly misguided. Instead, we should be renewing our commitment to preserving America's public lands for future generations.

It is my hope that today's witnesses will provide context on the importance of public land protections in addressing climate change, and the key role that they will play as we examine solutions to this pressing issue.