

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
September 19, 2019**

- **Thank you all for attending this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on two bipartisan bills that focus on improving recreational opportunities on our shared public lands.**

- **I would also like to thank our witnesses, many of whom have traveled great distances to join us today.**

- **I'm proud to have worked with my New Mexico colleague Senator Martin Heinrich, Subcommittee Ranking Member Curtis, and other bipartisan members of the Committee to introduce H.R. 3879, the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act, more commonly known as the SOAR Act.**

- **I'm also glad that today's hearing includes related legislation introduced by Ranking Member Bishop.**

- **H.R. 3458, the Recreation Not Red Tape Act has similar language and goals to the SOAR Act regarding recreation permitting.**

- **That bill also includes additional provisions that would prioritize recreation on our public lands, recognize the benefits of getting outdoors for active duty service members and veterans, and promote trail maintenance efforts.**
- **As these bills move through the process I hope we can engage with all stakeholders to ensure a broadly supported effort.**
- **At this point, we should all be familiar with how public lands contribute to our nation's outdoor recreation economy, estimated to support 7.6 million direct jobs and \$887 billion in annual consumer spending.**
- **Our public lands draw people from around the United States, and the world, to experience these landscapes first hand.**
- **In public lands states like New Mexico and Utah, we've experienced first-hand the challenges and opportunities of a growing demand for more outdoor recreational experiences.**

- **Whether it's an outdoor equipment manufacturer, traditional outfitters and guides, or private industries looking to provide their employees with a higher quality of life, businesses are drawn to our states by our public lands.**
- **Outdoor recreation is not just good for the bottom line. Our communities also gain the mental and physical benefits of time outside.**
- **We know that recreation on public lands and waters is a major economic and public health multiplier, but high demand and complex permitting requirements stretch agency resources and create barriers to access.**
- **Although it's easy to simply characterize these challenges as "Red Tape," my interest in these bills is to promote access for those who benefit the most from formative outdoor experiences, such as urban populations, low-income families, and underserved or at-risk communities.**
- **I look forward to hearing from all our witnesses today, but I'm always glad to have a New Mexican testifying in this Subcommittee.**

- **My constituent, Matt Baker-White, will be speaking about work with Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions, based out of Albuquerque.**
- **And, along with our other witnesses, I hope we can more clearly draw the connection between these bills and the important work of broadening opportunities to access our public lands.**
- **Lastly, and at minor risk of upsetting the bipartisan support for these bills, we must recognize how climate change is impacting our ability to recreate on public lands.**
- **Back in May, this Subcommittee held a hearing that explored the nexus between climate change and recreation.**
- **Witnesses testified to more seasonal uncertainty, reduced snowpack, uncharacteristic fish and wildlife migrations, and extreme heat and wildfire – all affecting their ability to hunt, fish, recreate and make a living at outdoor dependent businesses.**

- **Although these bills are not explicitly about climate change impacts, it is important to recognize that climate change is contributing to more circumstances where permit holders are unable to utilize their permitted days or activities, and it is changing visitation patterns on our public lands.**
- **Addressing these climate driven concerns helps support small businesses and ensures that our land management agencies remain nimble in the face of climate uncertainty.**
- **Before I recognize the Ranking Member I just want to offer a brief apology. There are several other Committee hearings this morning and I'll have to be stepping out momentarily.**
- **To our witnesses, I just wanted to again thank you for being here today and reassure you of how valuable your testimony is to our efforts.**
- **I'd now like to recognize the Ranking Member for his 5 minutes.**