

Chair Haaland
Opening Statement
NPFPL Leg Hearing – Confederate Commemorative Works
July 21, 2020

- Thank you all for attending today's Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on three bills that grapple with the ramifications of Confederate statues, memorials, and symbols in public spaces throughout the country.
- I would like to start by welcoming the bill sponsors as well as the distinguished panel of witnesses joining us today to speak about this critical issue.
- I would also like to acknowledge the fact that there are not any Republican bills on today's agenda and recognize that this may cause some frustration among my colleagues on the other side of the dais.
- Throughout my tenure as Chair of this subcommittee approximately one-third of the bills scheduled for hearings have come from Republican sponsors.
- I remain committed to finding opportunities for bipartisanship and am hopeful that we can even find some consensus on the issues before us today.

- The national reckoning on racism and injustice precipitated by the tragic murder of George Floyd makes it clear that today's conversation is not only necessary, but long overdue.
- I can't imagine that more than 150 years after the end of the Civil War, President Lincoln would have expected us to still be coming to terms with the legacy of slavery, racial discrimination, and inequality that the Confederacy fought to uphold.
- When it comes to our national parks and public lands, the least we can do is challenge ourselves to question the origin and meaning of the symbols we choose to display.
- President Trump has defended Confederate monuments as "our heritage" and spoken of their "artistic beauty."
- Whatever artistic beauty that may exist in a statue or individual memorial is irrelevant, and it bares mentioning that many Confederate commemoratives works were established decades later at the peak of Jim Crow – a not so subtle reminder of the hate and bigotry that still permeates our society today.

- As we will hear from our witnesses today, many communities across the county have begun to remove statues and other symbols of the Confederacy from parks and other public spaces.
- Yes, some have been removed or toppled by protestors, but just this month alone, 19 statues have been removed. Only 3 were taken down by protestors.
- I point this out not to condone the unsanctioned removal of statues, but as a reminder that without government and community action, these symbols will continue to perpetuate racism and inspire hate and malice on both sides of this issue.
- Especially on public lands, which often have a racist history of their own, it is essential that we tell a story that can be embraced by *ALL* Americans.
- This is not about erasing history. Museums and historic battlefields will continue to tell the story of the conflict and circumstance that led to the Confederacy taking up arms against the United States.
- But our shared heritage need not glorify the hate, bigotry, and intolerance that resulted in a war that claimed more American lives than any other in U.S. history.

- Because, let us be clear, the Civil War was fought over slavery, that is not a subject for debate.
- As a country we must strive to be better, to embrace justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our lives.
- The reckoning on names and statues should not stop at the Confederacy either.
- Looking forward, I hope we can also take steps to address other places throughout the county – forests, wilderness areas, mountaintops – that now have names that glorify individuals responsible for committing unspeakable atrocities.
- Importantly, we also need to invest in education and interpretation to ensure that this history is not lost, or else we are dooming ourselves to repeat it.
- Unfortunately, rather than prioritize education, President Trump has decided to focus on a few acts of petty vandalism to justify sending anonymous federal troops into our cities to kidnap and harass our citizens, often over the objections of local governors, mayors and other civic leaders.

- This is a not how we heal and move forward together as a society, something that we are still seeking 150 years after President Lincoln Second Inaugural Address, which was delivered only weeks before General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and Lincoln's assassination at Ford's Theater here in D.C.
- The last line of that now famous speech, he said, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."
- Clearly, we are still striving for that just and lasting peace.
- With that, I would like to recognize Ranking Member Curtis for his opening remarks.