

Subcommittee Chair Neguse  
NPFPL Ov Hearing  
Opening Statement  
March 23, 2021

Thank you all for being here today for this first meeting in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

I want to welcome all of our members, returning and new.

I am humbled by the opportunity to preside over this Subcommittee, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that it is among the most effective in Congress – we have an important role to play and big shoes to fill.

I appreciated the chance to serve under former-Chair Haaland during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, and I sincerely look forward to working with her in her new role as Secretary of the Interior.

Working with Chair Grijalva, Secretary Haaland did much to expand the reach of this Subcommittee, ensuring that it served all Americans, protected communities, and worked to secure our climate and environment for future generations.

I intend to continue that impressive legacy. As I said, we have big shoes to fill.

Yet, I know that we are up to the task. We were already able to steward a major public lands bill out of the House, building on legislation that we considered during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

This package, which included my Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act, would protect wild areas, expand recreational opportunities, and create jobs. It was an ambitious effort, and I hope it can set the tone for the work we must do together.

As we begin that work here today, I thought it was only appropriate that we spend a moment taking stock.

The past four years under the previous administration saw unprecedented changes to the management of our public lands.

We saw protected landscapes opened to mining and drilling. Environmental statutes were weakened, science came under attack, and the public was cut out of the process.

This Committee consistently raised objections to practices not in the public interest, and I am confident that the new administration will give many of these decisions a second look.

Unfortunately, fragile ecosystems have already been threatened and we need to act now before that damage becomes irreversible.

All the while, the climate threat has only grown, with larger and more destructive fires, longer droughts, and more devastating floods as a constant reminder of lost time, of our failure to act.

We must consider what role we want our public lands to play in the future of this nation. This includes supporting the Biden administration's ambitious goal of protecting 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 and incorporating climate protections into land management.

These goals require targeted federal investments, bold leadership, and a willingness to follow the science.

We will hear today from witnesses who can help us frame this work. They have demonstrated experience managing our lands, protecting communities through resilience planning, and creating well-paying jobs for Americans.

They know how crucial the federal government's role is in expanding economic opportunity and protecting the environment.

The jobs we can create, from guides to trail builders, scientists and engineers, can help support communities and the environment while fostering a just transition.

That's why I introduced the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Corps Act, which would provide funds to support a natural resources and conservation workforce, invest in critical restoration and wildfire mitigation priorities, and support the ongoing management of our national parks, forests and public lands.

Now, I know there is not unanimous agreement on this path, and I welcome the chance to hear from those with other perspectives. I hope their input and concerns will only make this Subcommittee's agenda stronger.

But I would encourage all my colleagues to see this moment as an opportunity. Let us embrace bold ideas.

Together, we can ensure that our lands serve the public interest and that they are a key part of the climate solution.

I look forward to joining you all in this important work.