

Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
Opening Statement
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
September 14, 2022

- Thank you all for being here today for this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands’ legislative hearing on three bills.
- This hearing continues the Committee’s efforts throughout the last two Congresses to elevate the role of Indigenous Peoples in the management of their ancestral lands.
- And I want to thank our esteemed panel for joining us to share their expertise on this important work.
- I think the breadth of knowledge captured by our panel – which includes representatives of two federal Departments, an elected tribal Chair from Arizona, a tribal historic preservation officer from Florida, and the President of the largest Indigenous Organization, a former Chairwoman herself – speaks to the growing recognition across the government and the country that these issues are essential and must be considered.
- Indigenous communities are the original stewards of the lands we now know as the United States.
- For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples have called these lands home, hunting, fishing, building communities and cultures, practicing various religions and coming to know these places intimately.
- Unfortunately, for far *far* too long, the posture of this Congress and this Government was to ignore these connections and this history.
- From extermination through termination, the United States has dispossessed Indigenous communities of their ancestral lands and made every effort to sever connections to place and culture.

- I think the Chair put it well in our March Full Committee Hearing on co-management: this is a history that cannot ever be compensated, but we can and must take steps to acknowledge it and respond.
- I believe the bills and issues we are considering today are an important effort to do just that.
- These three items – all sponsored by our Full Committee Chair, the esteemed Gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Grijalva – represent a major step forward in expanding the role Indigenous communities can and should play in the management of their ancestral lands.
- In total, they would amend omissions in existing law to ensure tribal governments can equitably engage in the federal disposal process; would protect an important cultural landscape in Southern Arizona; and would establish a visionary new system to ensure tribal governments have a seat at the table when land management decisions are being made.
- These bills help set the stage for the work that should be done now, while establishing a clear path for this Committee to follow in the future.
- And while I will turn to the Chair in a moment to hear more about his legislation, I want to thank him for his work on these important proposals.
- It speaks volumes that several of these bills are supported by national and regional tribal organizations – some of whom are represented here today – as well as individual tribal governments across the country.
- This is essential work, it is morally necessary, but I also believe it will benefit all of us, helping to put knowledge back on the ground to support communities and to help in the fight against climate change.
- Before I close, I also want to take a moment to acknowledge that, in a season filled with political messaging and policy disagreements, we may not be so far apart from our colleagues across the aisle on these issues.

- This very afternoon, the Subcommittee for the Indigenous Peoples of the United States plans to hear a bill, led by a senior Republican member, that incorporates significant components of H.R. 8108 which we are hearing here today.
- While I recognize we won't agree on all of the issues before us, I think it is significant that there is common ground in acknowledging these past injustices, and I hope we can find space to rectify them as we bring this Congress to a close.
- With that, I will yield the balance and turn to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.