

Chair Grijalva  
Opening Statement  
NPFPL Legislative Hearing  
September 14, 2022

- Thank you, Chair Neguse, and thank you for holding this hearing.
- As you said, today is about continuing the work of this Committee throughout the Congress.
- I'm proud to say that we were able to hold the first ever hearing acknowledging the dispossession of tribal lands, which was also the first ever hearing to fully consider tribal co-management.
- I am grateful to partners who worked with us throughout to plan hearings, to draft legislation, and to make progress on issues like tribal consultation and Indigenous land management.
- This has been a collaborative effort throughout, and the bills before us today are no different.
- So, I want to thank President Sharpe on behalf of NCAI; Ms. Osceola on behalf of NATHPO; and Governor Lewis on behalf of the Gila River Indian Community.
- Your contributions and expertise were essential in crafting this legislation.
- We are grateful you were able to join us today to continue sharing your expertise.
- The three bills before us are quite different, but they all work to achieve one goal: ensuring the unique knowledge and expertise of Indigenous communities is respected and incorporated in the management of federal lands.

- Whether amending existing law, crafting new programs, or putting new protections on the ground, these bills ensure that tribal governments are front and center in the decision-making process.
- The Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act and the Advancing Tribal Parity on Public Lands Act are the result of a multi-year collaboration between myself, Senator Heinrich, NCAI, NATHPO, tribal lawyers and policy experts, and the Wilderness Society.
- These bills will help ensure that tribal governments get a say in how lands are protected, while ensuring that sacred sites on public lands are not up for sale or desecration.
- Unfortunately, the threat to these sites was all too real under the previous administration, and remains so today for places like Oak Flat, Chaco Canyon, and even the Grand Canyon.
- These bills would take an important first step ensuring these landscapes are protected and are managed as cultural landscapes.
- The Great Bend of the Gila Conservation Act represents nearly a decade of work to protect a culturally important and ecologically fragile landscape in my home in Southern Arizona.
- The bill would protect tens of thousands of acres of new conservation lands and wilderness across a landscape dotted with petroglyphs, ancient structures and settlements, and other cultural artifacts.
- But we've made some important updates to this legislation this Congress to ensure that the 13 tribes with ancestral connections to this landscape have a real voice in its future management.
- So, I want to thank Governor Lewis for appearing today to share his expertise with us, and to discuss the importance of these protections.

- Mr. Governor, it is good to see you again, and always good to see a fellow Arizonan on the dais – even if virtually.
- It is also good to have another Arizonan, our BLM State Director, Raymond Suazo on our panel. Mr. Suazo, good to see you again, and thank you for joining us.
- Before I close, I want to acknowledge that this conversation isn't happening in a vacuum.
- There is work being done across the country by Indigenous leaders and tribal communities to protect these sacred sites.
- And I'm happy to say that the Biden Administration, under the Leadership of Secretary Haaland and her team is taking a leading role in these efforts.
- From the Native Nations Summit and the re-establishment of Bears Ears, we have been pleased to see the President and his appointees fully embracing the work of co-stewardship.
- I was particularly pleased to see yesterday's announcement that the Biden administration plans to release new guidelines across several agencies on best practices for co-management.
- This is a major step, that will help put these agreements on the ground in the near future.
- So, I want to congratulate and thank our colleagues from the Executive Branch. I look forward to hearing more about these efforts in today's discussion.
- Thank you all again. I yield back the balance of my time.