

QUESTIONS FOR CONGRESSMAN JOE NEGUSE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
HEARING ON H.R. 2532: THE TRIBAL HERITAGE AND GRIZZLY
BEAR PROTECTION ACT
THURSDAY, MAY 15TH, 2019 2:00 PM

OPENING

I'd like to take a moment to welcome everybody to this hearing, where we'll be discussing much-needed legislation— the Tribal Heritage and Grizzly Bear Protection Act—put forward by our Natural Resources Chairman.

This is an issue that is especially important to me, so I would like to thank Chairman Huffman for letting me chair the hearing today.

I'd especially like to thank our witnesses, among them leaders in tribal governance and spiritual matters – your perspective on this issue deserves the utmost attention, and we are so happy you could join us here today. This subcommittee covers wildlife issues, endangered species, and ecosystems. But what is easy to forget is how inextricably PEOPLE are linked to wildlife issues. I commend Mr. Grijalva for making environmental justice, and the threat of climate change on our natural world, a top priority for this committee by ensuring that our natural resources are protected for ALL people.

In today's hearing, we will be focusing on an issue that has brought more Native American tribes together on a treaty than ever before: the grizzly bear. This bear is held sacred by scores of Native American tribes across the country; in fact, over 170 tribes have signed the Grizzly Treaty: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration, in support of conservation measures for the grizzly bear, which is the foundation for this bill.

Unfortunately, it comes as no surprise that recent attempts by the Administration to remove protections for the grizzly, as well as blatant disregard for proper Tribal consultation, warrant our attention.

It's estimated that at one time, over 50,000 grizzly bears roamed the continental United States. Now, that number is just around fifteen hundred, with about 700 of those residing in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In 2017, the Trump administration removed Yellowstone grizzly bears from the federal list of threatened species. Following that decision, the states of Wyoming and Idaho proposed a trophy hunting season for grizzly bears in their states. The proposal would have allowed hunters in those states to kill bears just outside of Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

Native American tribes sued. And they weren't the only ones - the decision to delist the grizzly bear was contested by nearly 30 plaintiffs, including Native American tribes, environmental groups, and individuals. Luckily, in September 2018, a federal judge ruled that the decision to delist the grizzly bear was erroneous. But, both the federal government and the state of Wyoming have appealed that decision, so we're still in the midst of this legal battle.

While these decisions are postponed in court right now, the fact is that we are dealing with an administration that places the interests of trophy hunters and industry above those of Native Americans and their heritage, and which refuses to properly consult Native American tribes.

Grizzly bears hold tremendous spiritual significance to numerous Native American tribes, and many of these tribes have felt robbed of their traditions since the grizzly bear's disappearance from their lands. While I certainly appreciate the desire for recreation, it is wholly wrong to kill an animal, purely for sport, that has only just begun to recover from near extinction and is of significant spiritual value to our nation's native peoples. There are certainly issues we need to address through proper scientifically informed management - like how to keep people and bears safe now that there is more and more interaction - but allowing a hunt of these endangered bears is clearly not a solution.

The legislation put forward by Mr. Grijalva is modeled after the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Congress protected bald eagles even after these species had recovered biologically under the ESA. Because of their symbolism to the American West and their importance to so many tribal nations, the grizzly bear deserves similar protection.

H.R. 2532 balances the management of this incredible species with proper consultation with tribes. It sets strong conservation standards for grizzly bears and their habitat, bans trophy hunting in the lower 48 states, and permits the take of

grizzly bears under only a narrow set of circumstances. The bill also requires that conservation and management of the species be conducted in close consultation with federally recognized Native American tribes.

Let's make this a priority for our subcommittee, the way that Native American tribes have shown it's a priority to them, by unifying around this issue through the Grizzly Treaty. We have a real opportunity here to right some wrongs, and I think this bill is a great start. So, with that, I'm looking forward to hearing what our tribal leaders and scientists have to say on this matter, and I'll now turn it over to the Ranking Member for his remarks.