



**Statement of James G. Northup
Executive Council Member, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Representative Cox, Representative Gohmert, and Members of the Subcommittee; Good Afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Jim Northup. I serve on the Executive Council of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks. The Coalition is a non-profit organization composed of more than 1,800 retired, former, and current employees of the National Park Service (NPS), who collectively have nearly 40,000 years of experience managing and protecting national parks and national park visitors. We believe that our parks and public lands represent the best of America and advocate for their protection and effective management.

I personally worked for the National Park Service for over 36 years, 24 of those years as a law enforcement commissioned ranger. I worked as a field ranger, supervised law enforcement commissioned rangers at Grand Teton National Park and Grand Canyon National Park and served as the Chief Ranger at Big Bend and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. For the last 12 years of my career, I served as a park superintendent, providing oversight to the resource and visitor protection programs, including law enforcement, at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and Shenandoah National Park.

The Coalition is supportive of the law enforcement function within the Department of the Interior (DOI). We believe in rigorous professional standards for law enforcement programs and strongly support the use of both in-car and body camera systems by DOI law enforcement officers and park rangers. The Coalition is also an advocate for periodic evaluation of DOI law enforcement programs against accepted professional standards, by third-party accrediting organizations.

Within the National Park Service, there are two groups with responsibility for law enforcement functions within our national parks. The U.S. Park Police, who serve primarily in the more urban parks of Washington D.C., New York, and San Francisco. And U.S. National Park Rangers, who are duty stationed in the other units of the National Park System. Both groups function as fully commissioned federal law enforcement officers.

I think it would be of interest to the Committee to know that in-car video systems have been in use by U.S. National Park Rangers in numerous parks for many years. And more recently, the use of body cameras by National Park Rangers also has become widespread. The National Park Service has advised me that at last count, body cameras were in use by over 1,000 commissioned rangers in over 100 parks. Though not mandatory, the NPS has been very supportive of the use of both in-car and body camera systems by field rangers. They are strongly supported by both management and field rangers. We understand that, based on a 2015 memorandum, the U.S. Park Police do not use body-worn cameras at this time.

I can tell you from my personal experience, that while video footage of a law enforcement encounter never tells the entire story of an incident, it does provide critically important information about incidents where almost everyone is under a great deal of stress, there are conflicting perspectives, and memories are known to be faulty. I have used this information to review use-of-force incidents, arrest procedures, and complaints filed against Rangers. These systems clearly promote professionalism, protect the public interest, and often protect law enforcement officers.

However, we agree with the 2018 Inspector General's report that DOI's policies on the use of this equipment needs to be fully developed and be consistent with accepted professional standards. The Department's policy on law enforcement, DM 446, has been silent on this issue for too long, resulting in individual bureaus each developing their own policies. And even where use of the equipment has been encouraged, as in national parks, each individual park has had to develop its own program. We believe the IG's report contains excellent recommendations for how this program should be implemented throughout the Department.

While we strongly support the use of this equipment, we also believe that this cannot be an unfunded mandate from Congress. I can tell you that the parks that do not have an in-car or body cam program likely do not have one because they simply cannot support a program within current park budgets. If Congress wants to see DOI use this equipment consistently throughout all the bureaus, Congress must provide the funding necessary to properly manage the program, purchase the equipment, provide the training, maintain the equipment, manage the data by accepted professional standards, and effectively manage the Freedom of Information Act requests and other release issues associated with the gathering of this information.

The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks believes that the use of both in-car and body cam systems by Department of Interior Law Enforcement Officers, and park rangers is imperative to having a law enforcement program that is totally professional, transparent, accountable to and trusted by the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today and I would be happy to answer any questions you have for me.