



February 25, 2020

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Chairman, Subcommittee on
National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don Young
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Haaland and Ranking Member Young:

The Surfrider Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to testify and provide this statement for the record regarding the February 27, 2020 hearing on H.R. 4236, the Reducing Waste in National Parks Act.

The Surfrider Foundation is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our ocean, waves and beaches. Founded in 1984, the Surfrider Foundation has been advocating for plastic pollution reduction laws for over a decade through our grassroots Rise Above Plastics campaign and Plastic Pollution Initiative.

Plastic pollution on our beaches and in our parks overwhelmingly comes from products that we use for a few minutes, are discarded into the environment, and then persist in our streets, waterways and ocean for a lifetime. We believe that critical change is needed to stem the current flow of single-use plastic pollution. We advocate at the local, state and federal level for product restrictions and better product alternatives that encourage everyday citizens to switch to reusables.

Plastic is problematic from the point of raw material extraction to its eventual disposal and dispersion. Roughly two-thirds of all plastic ever produced remains in the environment—either as pollution in oceans and other landscapes, as microparticles in air, soil, and rain, or as microparticles in humans and animals.¹

The bill establishes a voluntary program to restrict the sale of single-use plastic bottled water sales and reduce bottled water litter across the National Park System. Much like the Obama-era guidelines, the bill would require National Park Service regional directors to work with park superintendents to develop a program for recycling and reducing the use of single-use plastic bottles for each unit of the National Park System.

Americans consumed nearly 14 billion gallons of bottled water in 2018, reaching \$19 billion in sales. In the next three years sales are expected to exceed \$24 billion. This bill presents a cautious and sensible step to begin to reduce this staggering number.

There are four main reasons why the Surfrider Foundation supports this bill.

First, the bottles are made from plastic. It is no secret that plastic pollution is a problem. In 2015, over 400 million metric tons of plastic were produced worldwide, and an estimated 8 million metric tons of

¹ Center for International Environmental Law, [*Plastic & Health: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet*](#) (Feb. 2019).

plastic are going into the ocean as pollution every year. Only a dismal 9% of plastics are recycled, twelve percent of plastics are incinerated, and the remaining 79 percent of plastic waste ends up going to landfills or being polluted into the environment.² Recycling alone is not the solution to plastic pollution.³ The first resort must be source reduction of plastic, which is the focus of this bill.

Second, this policy would address single-use plastic water bottle litter in national parks, particularly on trails. Single-use plastic beverage bottles and caps are consistently one of the top 10 items collected at litter clean-ups.⁴ Plastic bottle caps are made of polypropylene and when littered in the aquatic environments they often float on the water's surface due to their relatively light density. Bottle caps floating on the ocean's surface look like food to many animals, including fish and birds, most notably the Laysan Albatross. One study estimates that nearly 90% of the world's seabirds have eaten plastic.⁵

Plastic pollution is not limited to our oceans. Plastics also plague national, state and city parks, clog drains and waterways and disrupt the aesthetics of our environments. Plastic litter can migrate into pastures on ranchland where it is consumed by livestock and can contaminate crops.

Third, we are beginning to hear more and more about bottled water as an extractive industry, as water rights for bottled water at spring sites become increasingly disputed.⁶ More than half of the bottled water sold in the United States comes from municipal tap water.⁷ Bottled water comes from some of the most drought-ridden places in the country, including California.⁸

Fourth, the sale of bottled water generates avoidable greenhouse gas emissions throughout the process.⁹ From extraction of oil to manufacturing, from transportation to disposal, each of these steps generates emissions. In the bottled water sector, one of the biggest costs is transportation, bottles are often trucked 1,000 miles. Even when a bottle is recycled there are emissions from manufacturing and transport.

² Geyer, R., Jambeck, J.R. & Law, K.L., [Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made](#), *Science Advances*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (2017)

³ Hoyer, John, [Circular Claims Fall Flat: Comprehensive U.S. Survey of Plastics Recyclability](#), Greenpeace Reports (Feb. 2020).

⁴ The Ocean Conservancy, [Top Ten Items](#), (May 2017).

⁵ Wilcox, Chris, Van Sebille, Erik & Hardesty, Britta Denise, [Threat of plastic pollution to seabirds is global, pervasive, and increasing](#), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (Aug. 2015).

⁶ Brown, Alex, [States look at banning, restricting bottling firms from tapping local groundwater](#), The Washington Post (Feb. 2020).

⁷ Food & Water Watch, [Tap Water vs. Bottled Water](#)

⁸ Perkins, Tom, [The fight to stop Nestlé from taking America's water to sell in plastic bottles](#), The Guardian (Oct. 2019).

⁹ The Story of Stuff Project, [The Story of Bottled Water with Annie Leonard](#) (Mar. 2010).

All of these environmental harms are avoidable by drinking clean and safe tap water where available.

This bill merely requires Regional Directors to consider the elimination of the sale of single-use water bottles. Regional Directors must go through a very specific analysis before moving forward with a ban, including the amount of waste that would be eliminated, the infrastructure costs and funding sources for bottle refill stations, the cost and availability of BPA-free reusable containers, input from concessioners, the ability to provide visitor education at the park and online including the feasibility of posting signs so that visitors can easily find refill stations.

There are many reasons to believe that this bill will be successful, not the least of which is that we have implementation data from the 23 parks that participated in the program. A 2017 National Park Service report found that this Obama-era policy prevented at least 1.3 million single-use plastic water bottles from being purchased, used, and discarded every year.¹⁰

The Grand Canyon is one example of a National Park that implemented the bottled water ban. After implementing the policy, the Grand Canyon National Parks decreased the amount of plastics going to landfill as well as the volume of plastic being recycled, which before the policy went into effect made up about 20% of what was going to the landfill and 30% of what was being recycled. The Park saw decreases in litter associated with single-use plastic water bottles along both inner canyon and rim trails as well as below the rim.¹¹

Our national parks stand as symbols of sustainability, conservation, and environmental education for the millions of park-goers that visit them annually. In order to preserve these lands and these values for generations to come, national parks across the country should phase out the sale of single-use plastic water bottles.

Sincerely,



Jennie Romer
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¹⁰ National Park Service, *Disposable Plastic Water Bottle Recycling and Reduction*, Program Evaluation Report (May 2017).

¹¹ Grand Canyon National Park, *Analysis of potential impacts/effects of bottle ban* (2012).