

TESTIMONY OF
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Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
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Legislative Hearing

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Westerman, members of the subcommittee, on behalf of all who love America's national parks, I truly appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My name is Will Shafroth and I am the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation, the official philanthropic partner of the National Park Service.

Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation was founded on a legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life acted to establish and protect our national parks. Today, the National Park Foundation carries on that tradition as the only national charitable nonprofit whose sole mission is to directly support the National Park Service.

Working together with the National Park Service and a dedicated community of people and organizations who champion the cause of our parks, the National Park Foundation strives to preserve and restore these great places and to ensure that all people are able to discover their own personal connections to national parks.

The Foundation work includes supporting NPS in resiliency and sustainability, landscape and wildlife conservation, history and culture, youth engagement and education, outdoor exploration, and supporting the broad community of park partners.

In fiscal year 2020, a time of unprecedented challenge, the National Park Foundation raised more than \$107 million, answering the call to those who sought refuge in the outdoors, all while looking to expand its work at history and culture sites. I'm pleased to report that the Foundation is on track to exceed this amount in fiscal year 2021, providing more support for programs like service corps and Open Outdoors for Kids. These programs ensure that we are connecting young people to parks and developing the next generation of park stewards.

Today the subcommittee is reviewing a total of nine bills, all of which, in their own way, would, if enacted, provide a fuller story of our collective American history. The National Park Foundation defers to the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior on the merits of these bills. The Foundation does, in a general sense, support ideas or themes that work to fully tell the stories of all Americans, making parks more relevant to everyone – especially people who haven't found a connection to these national treasures.

As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, I'd like to highlight the work the Foundation does to better tell the stories of the contributions of Latinos/Hispanics throughout in our nation's history. We do this work though through the Foundation's Latino Heritage Fund. Established in 2011,

the Latino Heritage Fund works to preserve Latino history, stories, and contributions to the United States—both past and present—through national parks.

These stories are present in almost all national parks across the country, some of which were specifically established to protect and interpret nationally significant places and stories associated with Latino heritage.

With the support of its donors, NPF works in collaboration with the National Park Service and other partners to preserve and share stories that commemorate Hispanic heritage in parks and communities across the country. This includes working with NPS to identify innovative ways to engage current and future park visitors, increase relevancy and access, and build a culture that values diverse ideas and embraces the meaningful participation of all.

Examples of work in the fund include the following:

- Funding the NPS' [American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study](#) in 2013. The theme study features essays by nationally recognized scholars addressing the contributions and experiences of Latinos and provides a framework as the NPS continues to work with partners and communities to identify, preserve, and interpret buildings, landscapes, and other sites that tell stories of Latinos in the United States. Due in part to the theme study's research, eleven Latino history sites have been designated as new National Historic Landmarks.
- Helping to establish César E. Chávez National Monument as a unit of the National Park System, which commemorates the home and final resting place of César E. Chávez. The site, located in California within an area known as Nuestra Señora Reina de La Paz (Our Lady Queen of Peace), also served as the former headquarters for the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which Chávez co-founded with Dolores Huerta. In 1966, the NFWA merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to create the United Farm Workers of America.
- Supporting the NPS and Washington Trust for Historic Preservation's youth summit for Latino students and teachers. The summit engaged younger generations in historic preservation in their communities and equipped teachers and preservation organizations with the tools needed to motivate and engage Latino youth on stewardship of historic places and national parks.
- Partnering with NPS, Mission Heritage Partners, and American YouthWorks' Texas Conservation Corps to support four cultural landscape apprentice positions for local Hispanic and Latino young adults at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas. According to NPS, "cultural landscapes reflect our multi-generational ties to the land, with patterns that repeat and change to remind us of the depth of our roots and the unique character of our present." As it applies to these apprenticeships, participants learn skills from NPS mentors through hands-on work in grounds preservation, maintenance,

and landscape bed rehabilitation. Another key aspect of the work involves preserving the historic *acequias*, the Spanish word for irrigation canals.

National Parks are a uniquely American idea, truly supported by all of us. With the National Park System now in its second century, the National Park Foundation is committed to telling the story of *all* Americans through programs like the African American Experience Fund, Women in Parks, and the Latino Heritage Fund.

Like the National Park Service, and all in this room, we are dedicated to preserving and protecting these most treasured spaces, as well as ensuring that all who wish to visit are able.

During the last 18 months, so many found refuge in our nation's parks. It is my hope that we can all continue to find solace, and a piece of ourselves in these special places. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee, and welcome your questions.