

LATINO CONSERVATION ALLIANCE



June 9, 2016

Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva
House Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Statement on Forum – Countering Extremism on America’s Public Lands

Dear Ranking Member Grijalva and distinguished members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

On behalf of the Latino Conservation Alliance (LCA) – an alliance of Latino organizations with a shared purpose of protecting our public lands – we thank you for hosting an important forum on combating extremism on America’s public lands.

LCA believes that our public lands and open spaces are cherished national treasures that merit the utmost protection, care, and accessibility to all of our citizens – including Latino families. LCA works to promote inclusive policies that encourage continued access and enjoyment of our lands for generations to come. It is of concern to us, then, that the rise of extremism on our public lands and open spaces, and hostilities toward the public servants and officers who are charged with the safekeeping of our open spaces, is on the rise. While the siege in Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, Oregon is indicative of an increased extremist posture toward public lands officials, it is certainly not the only one. In fact, the Bureau of Land Management documented an 86% increase in incidences of violence against BLM employees in 2015.^[i] These increases in violence and extreme acts are of deep concern to LCA and its member-organizations. We expect that our treasured lands will be safe, clean, and accessible for all families and individuals, including Latinos, who should feel comfortable and welcomed during their visits.

As we commence the centennial year of the national parks service, we urge the Administration to intensify its efforts and commitment to diversify our parks and public lands. Sadly, these extremist attacks place that charge at-risk. This is evidenced by the documented destruction of cultural artifacts during the Bundy siege at Malheur.^[ii] These types of acts, coupled with the threat of violence, serve as a chilling and provocative message that undermines outreach and engagement efforts to create a more inclusive environment in our parks and public lands. We look forward to substantive policy prescriptions and recommendations following this important forum, and we offer our support in helping to develop lasting solutions to what is certainly a significant and growing problem on our parks, public lands, and open spaces.

Sincerely,

Latino Conservation Alliance

[i] (Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, 2016)

[ii] (Keeler, 2016)