



**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**
Save the past. Enrich the future.

**Comments of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
House Committee on Natural Resources Democratic Forum:
Countering Extremism on America's Public Lands
June 15, 2016**

House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva and Members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to provide comments for your consideration during the public forum titled, *Countering Extremism on America's Public Lands*. My name is Pam Bowman, and I am the Director of Public Lands Policy at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We look forward to working with the Committee as you address the many issues facing America's public lands, as well as the need for sustaining our nation's rich heritage of cultural and historic resources that generate lasting economic vitality for communities throughout the nation.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded charitable, educational and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 in order to "facilitate public participation in historic preservation" and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws.¹ The intent of Congress was for the National Trust "to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings."² With over 800,000 members and supporters, the National Trust has worked with public agencies, Native American tribes and the public to preserve thousands of historic and cultural sites across the country.

Cultural Resources on Public Lands

The National Trust's primary work is saving places, and we know that the story of our nation has also unfolded on the land – the mountains, valleys, plains, and rivers that have harbored and inspired us for millennia. Amid these landscapes are nationally significant cultural resources – ancient pueblo cliff dwellings, Native American sacred sites, historic trails, and homesteading cabins that are often our only physical evidence of centuries of American history.

That is why, from the Great Bend of the Gila, a crossroads of human activity for thousands of years, to Chimney Rock National Monument in Colorado and the Palisades in New Jersey, to sacred sites in Arizona such as Oak Flat and the Grand Canyon, we are working with the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, preservationists and conservationists all over the country to protect America's historic and cultural resources.

The federal system of public lands includes a vast array of America's historic and cultural resources. For example, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for managing over 250 million surface areas that contain "the largest, most diverse, and scientifically most important body of cultural resources of any Federal land managing agency."³ These BLM lands contain well over a million cultural sites, including historic and archeological sites. In addition,

¹ 54 U.S.C. §§ 312102(a), 320101.

² S. Rep. No. 1110, 81st Cong., 1st Sess. 4 (1949).

³ "Preserve America" Report, Executive Order No. 13287, Progress Report, September 2005. U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

the U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres of public land, containing an estimated two million cultural resource sites and over 25 National Historic Landmarks (NHLs).

While our federal system of public lands and its collection of cultural resources has been the envy of the world, it now faces renewed challenges. Recent legislative proposals in Congress and in some states seek to transfer control of America's public lands to state governments—a risky scheme with numerous downsides and unforeseen consequences.

Federal vs. State Role in Public Lands Management

The federal government has the legal responsibility, capacity, resources and expertise to adequately maintain our nation's public lands, ensure continued open access, and to protect the cultural resources that lie within these landscapes. A transfer of federal lands to states would mean that the federal laws that protect these places would no longer apply, putting millions of irreplaceable historic and cultural artifacts at risk.

An extensive list of federal statutes have protected our nation's cultural resources for generations, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Antiquities Act and Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). These important laws apply only to *federal* public lands. If these public lands were transferred to state control, they would lose the protection of federal laws governing historic and cultural resources.

While the federal stewardship of public lands has not been perfect, we strongly believe that a well-funded system of federal management is the best way to ensure continued public access to and enjoyment of these national treasures. We are deeply concerned that these nationally significant lands, resources and landscapes would not have the same consistent management or funding support if there were large scale transfers of lands to state or local governments.

In 2010, because many states were struggling to maintain the historic and cultural resources under their jurisdiction, the National Trust listed the nation's state parks and state-owned historic sites on our annual list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Adding federal public lands to state ledgers would force state taxpayers to pay for the protection of cultural resources and the management of potentially millions of acres of public lands, a burden that could lead to states auctioning these lands off to the highest bidder.

Transferring America's public lands to states would not only be a burden to state taxpayers, it may also limit access to these lands and the nationally significant historic and cultural resources they contain. Such transfers would divide America's public lands into a disparate, piecemeal, state-by-state collection of isolated parcels and would hamper our nation's ability to carefully protect these lands and their cultural resources.

Conclusion

As stewards of our nation's public lands, Congress needs to strengthen, not dismantle, our nation's system of public lands. Public lands belong to all Americans and they should be managed for the benefit of all Americans. By ensuring that federal land managers have the necessary funding and support, Congress can ensure that our national heritage is preserved for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.