

**Opening Statement
Ranking Member Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Hearing on Antiquities Act bills
September 13, 2011**

In many of the debates we have in this committee, I believe my Republican colleagues are on the wrong side of the issue. For example, I believe they are on the wrong side of the issue when it comes to wilderness and I believe they are on the wrong side of the issue when it comes to protecting lands near the border.

And when it comes to designation of national monuments under the Antiquities Act, I believe my Republican colleagues are on the wrong side of the issue – however, I also believe they are on the wrong side of history.

The proponents of legislation to undermine the Antiquities Act – to prohibit the President from acting quickly when necessary -- are on the wrong side of history in two ways. First, they fail to appreciate the enormously valuable and terribly fragile historic

resources the Act was designed to protect.

The pueblo ruins at Chaco Canyon, the ruins of the mission at Tumacacori, the petroglyphs at Agua Fria, the African Burial Grounds in New York City and hundreds of other sites protected as national monuments by Presidents under the Antiquities Act are significant chapters in the story of this nation. These chapters might well have been diminished or even lost had the legislation before us today been in law in years past.

Those who support destructive amendments to the Antiquities Act either fail to realize the value of the resources the Act has preserved or the seriousness of the threats posed to those resources, or both.

Even worse, critics of the Act may believe that there are no new historic sites to discover or no fragile chapters in the American story in danger of disappearing forever. I can assure my colleagues that the work already done pursuant to the Antiquities Act has been

invaluable and the work left to be done is just as significant.

Those proposing to amend the Antiquities Act are on the wrong side of history in a broader sense, as well. History has already affirmed the wisdom of previous national monument designations and history will judge new attempts to weaken the Act harshly.

More than 30 national monuments designated by former Presidents under the Act – some of which were controversial at the time -- have been

reaffirmed and elevated by later Congressional action.

Olympic, Zion, Acadia, Bryce, Carlsbad Caverns, and the Grand Canyon are among the areas protected as national monuments before they were national parks. The verdict of history supporting these decisions is emphatic and those who opposed them have been found guilty of a lack of vision.

As the American people marvel at the stunning cultural and historic artifacts protected in some future national

monument, those proposing to weaken the Antiquities Act today could suffer similar judgment.

We will hear claims that national monuments mean expansion of federal land ownership, or that they harm private property rights or that they harm local communities. None of those allegations are true.

This is not a debate about a federal land grab. This is a debate about whether we want to lose critical natural and cultural resources to unlimited drilling, unending

road building, and unrestricted off-road vehicle use. This is a debate about whether we value our past enough to pass it on to the children of the future. This is a debate about what kind of country we want and what we want it to look like 100 years from now.

This is a debate in which those seeking to undermine the Antiquities Act are on the wrong side of the issue, the wrong side of the American people, and the wrong side of the history that makes us who we are. I yield back.