

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
H.R. 496, Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Establishment Act
June 16, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on H.R. 496, the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Establishment Act. The bill would designate approximately 18,610 acres of Federal land in the Alabama Hills of Inyo County, California, as the first National Scenic Area within the BLM's National Conservation Lands. H.R. 496 would also authorize a small Federal land conveyance to resolve an encroachment issue and would direct the Secretary of the Interior to take approximately 132 acres of Federal land into trust for the benefit of the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe. The BLM supports the protection of the Alabama Hills as part of the National Landscape Conservation System ("National Conservation Lands") and looks forward to working with the committee to address important concerns detailed below.

Background

The Alabama Hills in Inyo County, California, contain unique geologic features that have attracted photographers, cinematographers, and recreationists for generations. The area provides stunning views of the Sierra Nevada mountains and has spectacular natural arches, rolling hills, and vibrant wildflowers that have drawn visitors locally and from afar. Recreationists enjoy hiking, sightseeing, rock climbing, photography, camping, stargazing, mountain biking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, rock hounding, motor touring, hot air balloon excursions, and tours of historic film locations in the Alabama Hills. The area also serves as a backdrop for iconic Hollywood movies and remains a popular location for commercial filming; the BLM's local field office issues between 20 and 40 commercial film permits in the Alabama Hills every year.

H.R. 496 is the outgrowth of a grassroots, community-based effort led by the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, a local organization with which the BLM partners on public land stewardship and outdoor education projects in the Alabama Hills. In August 2013, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to support the designation of the Alabama Hills as a National Scenic Area.

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H.R. 496 would designate approximately 18,610 acres of public land managed by the BLM in Inyo County, California, as the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area, subject to valid existing rights, to be managed as a unit of the BLM's National Conservation Lands.

The BLM's National Conservation Lands conserve, protect, and restore nationally significant landscapes that are recognized for their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values. Each of the units of the National Conservation Lands designated by Congress to be managed by the BLM is unique; however, these designations typically have critical elements in common, including:

withdrawal from mineral entry under the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws; limiting off-highway vehicles to roads and trails designated for their use; and language that charges the Secretary of the Interior with allowing only those uses that further the conservation purposes for which the unit is established. The Alabama Hills National Scenic Area as designated by the bill would share these key components and would protect the Alabama Hills' stunning scenic qualities and preserve for future generations its many recreational opportunities. The BLM supports the protection of the Alabama Hills as a unit of the National Conservation Lands.

Under the bill, the Secretary of the Interior would also take into trust approximately 132 acres of Federal land for the benefit of the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, subject to valid existing rights, and would assume administrative jurisdiction of approximately 40 acres of Federal land currently managed by the Forest Service to improve management efficiency in the area.

Finally, H.R. 496 authorizes the conveyance of a portion of approximately 4 acres of Federal land to resolve an ongoing encroachment issue by an adjacent property owner. The adjacent property owner would be permitted to make an offer for this land within 120 days of the completion of an appraisal, and would be required to pay all administrative costs associated with the conveyance – including the costs of any environmental, wildlife, cultural, or historical resources studies.

Analysis

The BLM supports the incorporation of the Alabama Hills into the National Conservation Lands, taking land into trust for the benefit of the Tribe, and the conveyance to resolve the encroachment issue. We would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee on language and technical amendments related to the establishment of new utility facilities or rights-of-way, management plan consultation, the procedures and requirements for taking land into trust, commercial recreational services, and other minor technical modifications to the map and designation language. As drafted, the BLM is concerned that the bill would limit the Bureau's ability to manage utility rights-of-way consistent with the purposes of the scenic area as outlined in the bill, and we would like to work with the sponsor on language to ensure sufficient management flexibility. In addition, the BLM recommends that the bill cite Section 2002(b)(2)(e) of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 to clarify that management of the proposed area would be consistent with similar designations within the National Conservation Lands, which we understand is what the sponsor intends. The BLM also requests that the committee give consideration to the specific name of this future unit of the National Conservation Lands. Currently, there are no other National Scenic Areas under the BLM's management. However, there are many successful National Conservation Areas and Outstanding Natural Areas.

The bill would also require the BLM to formally consult with utility companies and other private entities. The BLM highly values its government-to-government consultation relationship with tribes and respects its consultation and cooperating agency responsibilities with Federal, state, and local government entities as required by existing law and policy. Moreover, current BLM policies already emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for input from interested or affected stakeholders into the planning process, and the BLM regularly engages with relevant Resource Advisory Councils consistent with Federal law. The inclusion of formal consultation authority for corporations, non-governmental organizations, or individuals would represent a major and, we believe, unnecessary shift in the BLM's relationships with external parties. As a result, the BLM

strongly recommends striking the expanded consultation requirements from the bill. The BLM would continue to engage in collaborative efforts with local authorities and other interests, consistent with current policies and legal authorities. However, should the bill sponsor believe that an additional mechanism is needed to affirm current practice, then the BLM would recommend the establishment of a Resource Advisory Council for seeking advice and input from the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group and other stakeholders, and would support the inclusion of language in the legislation for this purpose.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 496, the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Establishment Act. We appreciate the sponsor's work on the protection of this incredible area and we look forward to working with the sponsor and the Subcommittee on this important legislation.

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
H.R. 1138, Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act
June 16, 2015**

Thank you for the invitation to testify on H.R. 1138, Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Additions Act. The Department of the Interior supports H.R. 1138 as it applies to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on technical modifications to the legislation and minor boundary modifications to improve manageability. We defer to the Department of Agriculture regarding provisions of H.R. 1138 which apply to National Forest System Lands.

Background

The Boulder-White Clouds area of central Idaho captivates the imagination with crystal lakes, high mountain backcountry, and abundant wildlife. Hunters, hikers, ranchers and other stakeholders have come together to support preservation of these unique and treasured lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the BLM.

The lands managed by the BLM in this region represent diverse ecosystems ranging from lower elevation sagebrush and grasses to lodgepole and limber pine at the higher elevations. There are large forested areas in the upper reaches of Bear, Mosquito, Sage, and Lake Creek drainages. The highest point is Jerry Peak at over 10,000 feet where there are spectacular vistas of the surrounding mountain ranges. Herd Lake, at over 7,000 feet, is a small blue gem within the steep rocky terrain. From the small Herd Lake campsite visitors can hike the trail along the creek to Herd Lake. The shores of the lake have scattered pines and there are wonderful opportunities to fish for rainbow trout.

This varied and magnificent terrain provides habitat for wildlife, including deer, elk, black bear, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, and antelope. Coyotes and golden eagles are also common. The area is attractive to hunters and a significant portion of the yearly visitation occurs during hunting season.

H.R. 1138

H.R. 1138 is the result of many years of collaborative efforts by the Idaho Congressional delegation. Their dedication to resolving public land use issues in central Idaho is commendable. Title I of the bill designates three new wilderness areas – Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness (approximately 117,000 acres), White Clouds Wilderness (approximately 91,000 acres), and Hemingway-Boulders Wilderness (approximately 68,000 acres) and contains provisions related to their administration. Approximately 24,000 acres of the proposed Jerry Peak Wilderness are managed by the BLM, along with approximately 450 acres of the proposed White Clouds Wilderness. The FS manages the other federal lands within the proposed wilderness areas. The Department of the Interior supports the proposed wilderness designations on lands managed by the

BLM and welcomes the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Committee on minor boundary modifications to the Jerry Peak Wilderness to improve manageability. We would also like to recommend minor modifications to management language to be consistent with usual wilderness management language. Section 108 releases nearly 80,000 acres of BLM-managed lands in four wilderness study areas (WSAs) from WSA restrictions.

Livestock grazing on the public lands designated as wilderness, and in the surrounding area, is addressed in section 102(e) of the bill. The BLM supports this standard language on the management of livestock grazing on public lands within designated wilderness. Section 102(e) also establishes the “Boulder White Clouds Grazing Area” on nearly 770,000 acres of public lands administered by the FS and BLM – surrounding and including the three areas designated as wilderness. Under the provisions of this section, ranchers with Federal grazing permits or leases within this area may choose to voluntarily donate their permits or leases to the Secretary of Agriculture or Interior. The Secretaries are required to accept these donations, and to permanently terminate all grazing on the land covered by the permit or lease. Partial donation and congruent partial termination of grazing is also provided for under this subsection. Grazing can be a compatible use within wilderness, and there is a long history of legislation accommodating grazing within wilderness designations. However, we also recognize and support the proposal by the Idaho delegation to allow voluntary and permanent reductions in grazing in these unique and environmentally sensitive areas.

Title II of H.R. 1138 provides for the conveyance, at no cost, of 12 small tracts of public lands to local governments for public purposes. The BLM generally supports the conveyances of nine individual parcels of BLM-administered lands to local governments, but notes that some of the parcels to be conveyed contain habitat for the Greater Sage-Grouse. We appreciate the sponsor’s willingness to work with us on modifications to some of the conveyances to minimize impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. We defer to the FS regarding three conveyances of National Forest System lands. As provided in the bill, each of the conveyances of lands managed by the BLM would be for uses consistent with public purposes allowed under the R&PP Act, which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to lease or convey public lands at nominal cost for recreational and public purposes, including parks and other facilities benefiting the public. In general, the BLM supports appropriate legislative conveyances if the lands are to be used for purposes consistent with the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act, if the conveyance includes a reversionary clause to enforce this requirement, and if the benefitting local government is responsible for the administrative costs of the conveyance.

Among the proposed conveyances of BLM-administered public lands are 10 acres for a fire hall, 80 acres for a waste transfer site to Custer County, and 23 acres to the city of Clayton for a cemetery. The BLM has reviewed each of these conveyances in the bill. We believe they are in the public interest, and support their no-cost conveyance for uses that would be allowed under the R&PP Act if the bill is amended to provide that the receiving parties cover the costs of the conveyances, including any needed surveys and the preparation of conveyance documents.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 1138. We applaud the work of the Idaho delegation, and the vision and commitment of the bill's sponsor, Congressman Mike Simpson, who has championed the effort to protect these unique landscapes in Idaho for over a decade in partnership with his colleagues in the Senate.

We look forward to working with Members of the Idaho delegation and the Committee to make further, minor modifications to the bill to permanently protect these important landscapes as a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System and to affect the land transfers directed in the bill to provide specific public benefits to local communities.

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 482, TO REDESIGNATE OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA AND REVISE ITS BOUNDARY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

June 16, 2015

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding H.R. 482, a bill to redesignate Ocmulgee National Monument in the State of Georgia and revise its boundary, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 482 with a technical amendment. This legislation has three components: it would redesignate the national monument, expand the monument's boundaries, and authorize a special resource study of the Ocmulgee River corridor in Georgia from Macon to Hawkinsville. With respect to the special resource study, the Department feels that priority should be given to the 33 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

Ocmulgee National Monument, authorized by Congress in 1934 and established by Presidential proclamation in 1936 after the purchase of lands by local citizens, encompasses 701 acres in two separate units. The Main Unit (656 acres), includes seven prehistoric mounds, a funeral mound, a reconstructed earth lodge, prehistoric trenches, and numerous archeological features. This unit also includes the site of a British colonial trading post dating to 1690 (which the Creek Indians frequented), the historic Dunlap House, an Art Moderne visitor center, Civil War earthworks, substantial urban green space, six miles of hiking trails, and a picnic area. The smaller Lamar Mounds Unit (45 acres), named for a Late Mississippian agricultural society, is located about two and one-half miles southeast of the Main Unit. Both sites are part of a larger archeological area known as the Ocmulgee Old Fields.

In 1999, the Ocmulgee Old Fields was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "traditional cultural property," the first location in the eastern United States to receive this designation. The monument and surrounding area is the site of one of the largest archeological investigations in North American history. The investigation and recovery of artifacts and information in this area was instrumental in the development of scientific archeology. The traditional cultural property extends well beyond the current boundaries of the monument to encompass areas traditionally associated with the cultural beliefs and practices of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and related tribes.

REDESIGNATION

H.R. 482 would redesignate Ocmulgee National Monument as "Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park", a more appropriate name for the site. For generations, Middle Georgians have known Ocmulgee National Monument simply as "the Indian mounds." The addition of the word "mounds" to the name would not only clarify the identity of the site for residents of the region, it

would also give all potential visitors a better idea of the principal resource of the site. In addition, the title “National Historical Park” recognizes the complexity of the site and the fact that it is much more than a collection of Indian mounds. The proposed title also provides better identification of the site as a unit of the National Park System.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

H.R. 482 would also expand the boundary of the Ocmulgee National Monument consistent with the preferred alternative of a boundary study the National Park Service completed in 2014. The study evaluated lands that were part of the Ocmulgee Old Fields and found that approximately 2,100 acres of these lands were suitable and feasible for inclusion in the monument. These additional lands would link Ocmulgee’s Main Unit and the Lamar Unit and create a contiguous park unit of approximately 2,800 acres.

Of the 2,100 acres proposed for inclusion in the monument, approximately 707 acres (34% of expansion area) would likely be acquired by donation. The remaining lands, approximately 1,350 acres (66% of expansion area) would likely be acquired through purchase from willing sellers. Based on tax assessments, the value of the private tracts that would be purchased is just under \$2 million, but actual acquisition costs could be higher. Costs would eventually be incurred to demolish non-historic structures. Some relatively low-cost improvements for recreational enhancement are anticipated, such as trailhead kiosks, maintenance of old roadbeds for biking/hiking trails, and installation of canoe launching facilities. Funding for these activities would be subject to the availability of appropriations.

The proposed boundary expansion enjoys strong community support. Resolutions in favor of the expansion have been passed by the Board of Commissioners of Wilkinson County, the Macon-Bibb County Commission, the Historic Macon Foundation, Inc., the Georgia Small Business Lender Board of Directors, and the Hawkinsville-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce. Other organizations and governmental entities have also expressed support for the expansion, including Altamaha River Keeper, the Georgia Conservancy, Main Street Macon, NewTown Macon, the Macon Chamber of Commerce, the Middle Georgia Regional Commission Council, the Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mayor and City Council for the City of Perry, the Georgia River Network, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Save our Rivers INC. and the Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority.

SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

H.R. 482 would also authorize the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the Ocmulgee River corridor between Macon and Hawkinsville, a distance of about 50 miles and an area encompassing approximately 70,000 acres. Although the study area would be contiguous with Ocmulgee National Monument, the size of the area and the complexity of resources warrant the authorization of a special resource study, rather than another boundary study. The study area would encompass a patchwork of privately and publicly owned land, including the Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and two State of Georgia wildlife management areas. It would also include much of the Ocmulgee Old Fields Traditional Cultural Property not already included in the national monument or the proposed expansion of the monument. We estimate that this study would cost approximately \$350,000 to \$500,000. Funding for this proposed study would need to be allocated from the set amount of funding that Congress appropriates for all special resource studies.

Finally, we note that H.R. 482 as introduced has blank lines for references for a map that would depict the boundaries of the expanded and redesignated Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. The National Park Service is developing a map to accompany this bill and we will be happy to submit the map to the bill's sponsor and the committee.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer questions that you or other members of the committee might have.

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 959, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING THE MEDGAR EVERS HOUSE IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

June 16, 2015

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding H.R. 959, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 959. Priority should be given, however, to the 33 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

H.R. 959 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi, for potential inclusion in the National Park System. We estimate that this study will cost approximately \$200,000 to \$300,000. Funding for this proposed study would need to be allocated from the set amount of funding that Congress appropriates for all special resource studies.

Medgar Evers was born in 1925 in Decatur, Mississippi. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943, fought in both France and Germany during World War II, and received an honorable discharge in 1946. He met his future wife, Myrlie Beasley, while a student at Alcorn College in Lorman, Mississippi. Eventually, they had three children: Darrell, Reena, and James.

Mr. Evers' first job following graduation was as an insurance salesman in 1952. He gradually became involved in civil rights causes and action through the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, a society in Mississippi founded in 1951 to promote a program of civil rights, self-help, and business ownership. He later worked on behalf of the NAACP by organizing local affiliates.

In 1954 Medgar Evers applied for admission to the University of Mississippi Law School but was rejected. He filed a discrimination lawsuit against the university with the aid of his attorney, Thurgood Marshall, who later became the first African-American justice on the United States Supreme Court. Even though the lawsuit failed to gain Mr. Evers admittance to the law school, he gained quite a bit of national attention and in the same year became state field secretary for the NAACP. His activities included recruiting new members, organizing voter-registration drives, and leading economic boycotts of companies that practiced discrimination.

Ultimately, these activities attracted the attention of those who opposed racial equality and desegregation, including those willing to resort to violence to maintain the status quo. These

enemies of equal rights began to subject Medgar Evers and his family to threats, intimidation, and other forms of violence. His house was firebombed in May 1963 and he was assassinated by a gunshot in the back in his driveway on June 12, 1963. Subsequently, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

Mrs. Evers and her children continued to live in the house for a year following the murder of her husband, but she decided that she could not remain there and moved her family to California. Subsequently, she donated the house to Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. The house had deteriorated over the years so the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Tougaloo College decided to restore it as a museum commemorating the life and tragic death of one of the icons of the Civil Rights movement in America. Guided tours of the house are available to the public by appointment.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer questions that you or other members of the committee might have.