

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREST AND FOREST HEALTH, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

REGARDING H.R. 2875, A BILL TO AMEND THE PUBLIC LAND CORPS ACT OF 1993 TO PROVIDE FOR THE
CONDUCT OF PROJECTS THAT PROTECT FORESTS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

JULY 14, 2005

Thank you for the opportunity to present for the record the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 2875, a bill to amend the Public Lands Corps Act of 1993 to provide for the conduct of projects that protect forests and for other purposes.

The National Park Service (NPS) has successfully implemented the Public Land Corps Act of 1993, to expand our youth service opportunities to carry out needed repairs and restoration projects within the National Park System. With the passage of the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program in 1996 (P.L. 104-134; U.S.C 4601-6a), funding was available to implement the NPS Public Land Corps program in 1997.

As required in the recreation fee demonstration legislation and in the recently passed Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (P.L. 108-447), funds acquired through the recreation fee program may be used only for specific purposes. For that reason, NPS Public Land Corps projects must focus on repair, maintenance and facility enhancement related directly to visitor enjoyment, education, access, services and health and safety or on habitat restoration related directly to wildlife dependent recreation.

The NPS regards the Public Lands Corps Program as an important and successful example of civic engagement and conservation. The program is unique because nonprofit agencies such as the Student Conservation Association and the National Association for Service and Conservation Corps serve as the primary partners in administering the Public Land Corps program. In addition, any nonprofit youth organization may participate such as the Boy and Girl Scouts, local high schools and job training youth organizations. Each year over 300 parks apply for work grants of up to \$25,000. The nonprofit youth organizations assist the NPS in its efforts to attract diverse audiences to the parks by recruiting youth 16 to 25 years of age from all socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Since 1997, the Public Land Corps has funded more than 2,000 work projects with more than 100 parks participating on an annual basis.

H.R. 2875 would allow the National Park Service to expand the current work it accomplishes with the Public Land Corps by creating an additional type of project to promote healthy forests and authorize appropriations for these projects. The legislation would not adversely affect the National Park Service's ability to continue its practice of funding other Public Land Corps projects through the use of proceeds from the recreation fee program. In addition, we would still be able to prioritize projects according to the needs of the parks. Therefore, the Department of the Interior has no objection to this legislation. However, funding for projects authorized by this legislation would be subject to current and future budgetary constraints and the Administration's priority-setting process.