

Committee on Resources

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H.R. 4806

Pine Springs Camp Land Exchange Congressman Randy Neugebauer

Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Inslee and members of the Forest and Forest Health Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today regarding H.R. 4806.

This bill provides for a land exchange between the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico and Lubbock Christian University in my district in Texas. I believe this land exchange is fair and provides benefits for both parties.

Lubbock Christian University (LCU) owns and operates Pine Springs Camp, which is located on 40 acres in the Lincoln National Forest. LCU also owns an undeveloped 80-acre inholding a few miles northwest of the camp. This tract is fully surrounded by National Forest land.

LCU would like to expand Pine Springs Camp in order to accommodate the growth in the number of campers since 1994. At that time, about 650 youth attended summer camp at Pine Springs each summer. Today, more than 1250 youth attend the week long sessions.

In order for Pine Springs Camp to have room for additional campers and activities, LCU has proposed to exchange its undeveloped 80-acre inholding for 80 acres of National Forest land that borders the existing camp. The land LCU proposes to acquire from the Forest Service is composed of two 20-acre tracts and one 40-acre tract. Pine Spring Camp would use the land for athletic fields, an amphitheater and new housing.

LCU is a non-profit entity. Pine Springs Camp was deeded to the University in 1996, and has become an important part of LCU. Each summer, 10 one-week camp sessions are held at Pine Springs, and in the off-season, the camp is used for college, youth group and church retreats. Summer camp sessions are staffed by church and youth minister volunteers and LCU students. Camp fees cover operating costs, and camp improvements are made by volunteers and through donations. Just like the University, Pine Springs Camp is operated as a non-profit.

Without the land exchange with the Lincoln National Forest, Pine Spring Camp has no effective options for accommodating the increase in camper demand. The option of developing the 80-acre inholding as a new camp would be cost prohibitive. Selling the inholding and using the proceeds to purchase additional land near the camp would also be a difficult process.

LCU first met with the Forest Service regarding a possible land exchange in April of 2001. LCU worked with Forest Service on an initial proposal and resolved some outstanding issues with the camp deed. As LCU learned more about the land exchange process, the length of time involved and the possible expenses, they contacted my predecessor, Congressman Larry Combest, to further discuss the process.

Late last year, LCU asked me to work on a legislative exchange in order to expedite the process and help reduce expenses that would make the exchange infeasible for them. Through this proposal and preliminary feasibility process, LCU informs me that the Lincoln National Forest has remained interested in the exchange and supportive of the University's request.

H.R. 4806 moves this land exchange forward and helps reduce expenses for both parties. As I mentioned previously, as a non-profit, LCU has been concerned with the uncertainty in costs and time involved in a direct exchange with the Forest Service. The legislation helps move the process along yet still includes a full land appraisal and review of the exchange. H.R. 4806 also allows the National Forest Service to reduce the amount of land conveyed to LCU in order to equalize the value of the land exchange, if necessary.

By expanding Pine Springs Camp from its existing location through acquiring the federal lands, LCU will have space to allow for future growth. By acquiring LCU's inholding, the Lincoln National Forest will

increase the Forest Service's undeveloped land within the forest. Ownership of the inholding will facilitate the Forest Service's management of this area of the Lincoln National Forest and give the Forest Service full discretion over how this land is used in the future.

H.R. 4806 provides for the straightforward exchange of a small amount of land between the Forest Service and LCU. This legislation is non-controversial, and the exchange provides significant benefits to both parties. A lengthy and expensive exchange, however, reduces benefits and makes this exchange less appealing to both sides.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of my constituents at LCU and Pine Springs Camp, I ask that your Subcommittee help move this exchange through the legislative process during the remainder of this session of Congress.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.