

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 290, TO AMEND TITLE 36, UNITED STATES CODE, TO ENSURE THAT MEMORIALS COMMEMORATING THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES MAY CONTAIN RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

MAY 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 290, to amend title 36, United States Code, to ensure that memorials commemorating the service of the United States Armed Forces may contain religious symbols, and for other purposes.

H.R. 290 would amend chapter 21 of title 36, United States Code, to allow religious symbols to be included as part of either a military memorial that is established or acquired by the United States Government, or a military memorial not established by the United States Government, but for which the American Battle Monuments Commission (Commission) cooperated in the establishment of the memorial. H.R. 290 also defines a military memorial as a memorial or monument commemorating the service of the United States Armed Forces, including works of architecture and art.

The National Park Service administers military memorials in the District of Columbia, which are subject to the Commemorative Works Act, and in other parts of the country. However, the Department would defer to the Commission for a position on H.R. 290 to the extent it involves memorials administered by the Commission or for which the Commission cooperated in the establishment. H.R. 290 may also affect memorials administered by the Department of Defense who should have the opportunity to offer their views. Additionally, the Department defers to the Department of Justice as to any potential First Amendment questions raised by H.R. 290.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you or any other members of the subcommittee may have.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 320, TO DESIGNATE A DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS NATIONAL MEMORIAL AT THE MARCH FIELD AIR MUSEUM IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA.

MAY 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 320, a bill to designate a Distinguished Flying Cross National Memorial at the March Field Air Museum in Riverside, California.

The Department would defer to the Department of Defense for a position on H.R. 320 since the purpose of the legislation is to further honor military personnel who have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at a site that is not under the jurisdiction of the Department.

The Distinguished Flying Cross is awarded to a member of the United States armed forces who distinguishes himself or herself in support of operations by “heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.” We applaud the effort of the March Field Air Museum to create a suitable memorial to the honor, bravery, and sacrifice of members of our Armed Forces who have earned this medal.

This legislation explicitly states that this memorial is not a unit of the National Park System. As this language makes clear, the use of the title “national memorial” creates a reasonable expectation among the general public that it must have an affiliation with the National Park Service, which currently administers 27 national memorials across the country. This is not the first time this issue has arisen, nor is it likely to be the last, and the Department respectfully encourages only the most thoughtful and judicious designation of any future “national” memorials or other similar sites.

That concludes my testimony Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions from you and members of the committee.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 1022, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE A STUDY OF ALTERNATIVES FOR COMMEMORATING AND INTERPRETING THE ROLE OF THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS.

May 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1022, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of alternatives for commemorating and interpreting the role of the Buffalo Soldiers in the early years of the national parks, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 1022. However, we feel that priority should be given to the 40 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. 1022 would authorize a study to determine the most effective ways to increase understanding and public awareness of the critical role that the Buffalo Soldiers, segregated units composed of African-American cavalymen, played in the early years of the National Parks. It would evaluate the suitability and feasibility of a National Historic Trail along the routes between their post at the Presidio of San Francisco and the parks they protected, notably Yosemite and Sequoia. The study would also identify properties that could meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as National Historic Landmarks. We estimate that this study will cost approximately \$400,000.

African-American 19th and 20th century Buffalo Soldiers were an important, yet little known, part of the history of some of our first National Parks. These cavalry troops rode more than 320 miles from their post at the Presidio to Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks in order to patrol and protect them. The journey across the state took sixteen days of serious horseback riding averaging over twenty miles a day. Once in the parks, they were assigned to patrol the backcountry, build roads and trails, put a halt to poaching, suppress fires, halt trespass grazing by large herds of unregulated cattle and sheep, and otherwise establish roles later assumed by National Park rangers.

The U.S. Army administered Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks from 1891 to 1914, when it was replaced by civilian management. The National Park Service was not created until 1916, 25 years after these parks were established. Commanding officers became acting military superintendents for these national parks with two troops of approximately 60 cavalry men assigned to each. The troops essentially created a roving economy—infusing money into parks and local businesses—and thus their presence was generally welcomed. The presence of these

soldiers as official stewards of park lands prior to the National Park Service's establishment brought a sense of law and order to the mountain wilderness.

Less well known, however, is the participation of African-American troops of the 24th Infantry and 9th Cavalry, the Buffalo Soldiers, who protected both Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks in 1899, 1903, and 1904. These troops and their contributions should be recognized and honored, and this bill does just that.

When the new military superintendent for the summer of 1903 arrived in Sequoia National Park he had already faced many challenges. Born in Kentucky during the Civil War, Charles Young had already set himself a course that took him to places where a black man was not often welcome. He was the first black to graduate from the white high school in Ripley, Ohio, and through competitive examination he won an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1884. He went on to graduate with his commission, only the third black man to do so.

In 1903, Young was serving as a captain in the cavalry commanding a segregated black company at the Presidio of San Francisco when he received orders to take his troops to Sequoia National Park for the summer. Young and his troopers arrived in Sequoia after a 16-day ride to find that one of their major assignments would be the extension of the wagon road. Hoping to break the sluggish pattern of previous military administrations, Young poured his considerable energies into the project. During the summer of 1903, Young and his troops built as much road as the combined results of the three previous summers, as well as building a trail to the top of Mt. Whitney—the highest point in the contiguous United States.

The soldiers also protected the giant sequoias from illegal logging, wildlife from poaching, and the watershed and wilderness from unauthorized grazing by livestock. A difficult task under any circumstances, the intensity was undoubtedly compounded by societal prejudice common at the turn of the century.

Although Colonel Charles Young only served one season as Acting Superintendent of a National Park, he and his men have not been forgotten. The energy and dignity they brought to this national park assignment left a strong imprint. The roads they built are still in use today, having served millions of park visitors for more than eighty years. The legacy they left extends far beyond Sequoia National Park, as they helped lay the foundation for the National Park System, which continues to inspire and connect people of all backgrounds to public lands and natural treasures to this day.

In recent years the National Park Service has made an effort to chronicle the achievements of these men in San Francisco and in Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks. In the Presidio of San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Presidio Trust have developed an education program using the historic stables that the Buffalo Soldiers actually used to house their horses. In Yosemite National Park, Ranger Shelton Johnson portrays one of the U.S. Army's Buffalo Soldiers as part of his interpretation of Yosemite's history. Sequoia National Park has a giant sequoia named for Colonel Young in honor of his lasting legacy in that park. These

isolated, but important efforts to educate the public on the important role of the Buffalo Soldiers could be heightened by this consolidated study.

There is a growing concern that youth are becoming increasingly disconnected with wild places and our national heritage. Additionally, many people of color are not necessarily aware of national parks and the role their ancestors may have played in shaping the national park system. NPS can help foster a stronger sense of awareness and knowledge about the natural and cultural history preserved in our natural parks by connecting people, especially these audiences, to the critical roles of African-American Buffalo Soldiers in the protection and development of natural treasures like Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks. By amplifying the story of the Buffalo Soldiers, this bill could help bridge cultural divides and expand opportunities to appeal to an all-inclusive audience. As the 2016 centennial of the National Park Service approaches, it is an especially appropriate time to conduct research and increase public awareness of the stewardship role the Buffalo Soldiers played in the early years of the National Parks.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or other members if the subcommittee may have.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1141, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING PREHISTORIC, HISTORIC, AND LIMESTONE FOREST SITES ON THE ISLAND OF ROTA, COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS, AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

MAY 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding H.R. 1141, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating prehistoric, historic, and limestone forest sites on Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as a unit of the National Park System.

The Department supports H.R. 1141. Priority should be given, however, to the 40 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. 1141 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to complete a Special Resource Study of sites on the Island of Rota for potential inclusion in the National Park System. We estimate that this study will cost approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000.

Rota, where the indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian people have retained their cultural heritage in its natural environment, is the southernmost island of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Spared the population displacement of other colonial islands and largely bypassed during World War II, Rota preserves striking examples of the three thousand-year-old Chamorro culture surrounded by the best remaining expanse of this island chain's native limestone forest.

The Mochon Latte Village, the Chugai Pictograph Cave, the Taga Latte Stone Quarry, and the Alaguan Bay Ancient Village prehistoric sites include architectural features unique to the ancient Chamorro culture and represent outstanding examples of the territory's cultural resources. These sites possess a high degree of integrity in location, materials, workmanship and association.

The limestone forests of Rota are the most intact and most extensive examples of primary, native limestone forest remaining on any island in the Mariana Archipelago. The forest provides and sustains habitat for endangered bird species, a threatened species of fruit bat, and numerous species of invertebrates that are proposed for listing as threatened or endangered. Several of these species are endemic to Rota. The significance of this unique biotic community cannot be overstated.

Rota's residents and legislative delegation have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the protection of the island's environment. In 2004, Senator Diego M. Songao, Chairman of the Rota Legislative Delegation of the Fourteenth Commonwealth Legislature, formally requested planning assistance from the National Park Service (NPS).

In response to this request, the NPS completed a reconnaissance survey of Rota's natural and cultural resources in September of 2005. The reconnaissance survey found that the natural and cultural resources of the island of Rota are significant to island residents, the CNMI, and the entire nation and merit protection. It also made a preliminary finding that these resources are likely to be suitable and feasible for inclusion in the park system.

At present, the people of Rota and their political leaders find themselves at a crossroads regarding the uses to which their lands are being put. Major land use changes are continuing to take place in the form of residential and agricultural lots being subdivided out of the island's public lands and transferred into private ownership.

At this time, none of Rota's resources are guaranteed protection for future generations. Congressional authorization to conduct a Special Resource Study will provide a public process to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating prehistoric, historic, and limestone forest sites on Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as a unit of the National Park System. The NPS would be pleased to actively engage organizations, residents and others in discussions of how best to preserve Rota's significant cultural and natural resources.

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

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE CONCERNING H.R. 441, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ISSUE PERMITS FOR A MICROHYDRO PROJECT IN NONWILDERNESS AREAS WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE, TO ACQUIRE LAND FOR DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE FROM DOYON TOURISM, INC., AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

May 4, 2011

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 441, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to issue permits for a micro-hydro project in non-wilderness areas within the boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve, and for other purposes.

The Department supports this legislation with amendments and recognizes improvements made from the similar bill introduced in the previous session of Congress. H.R. 441 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to issue permits for micro-hydro projects in a limited area of the Kantishna Hills in Denali National Park. The legislation would also authorize a land exchange between the National Park Service (NPS) and Doyon Tourism, Inc. (Doyon) involving lands near the historic mining community of Kantishna that would be mutually beneficial to the NPS and Doyon.

This legislation will reduce the use of fossil fuels in the park, and thus lessen the chance of fuel spills along the park road and at the Kantishna lodges. It will lower the number of non-visitor vehicle trips over the park road, lessen the noise and emissions from diesel generators in the Moose Creek valley, and support clean energy projects and sustainable practices while ensuring that appropriate review and environmental compliance protects all park resources.

Doyon Tourism, Inc., a subsidiary of Alaska Native Corporation Doyon, Ltd., has requested permits from the NPS to install a micro-hydroelectric project on Eureka Creek, near their Kantishna Roadhouse. The NPS supports the intent of this project, however, neither the Secretary nor the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has the statutory authority to issue permits for portions of hydroelectric projects within national parks or monuments. We believe that the authorization contained in this legislation is necessary to enable the NPS to allow this micro-hydroelectric project within the park.

The Kantishna Roadhouse, at the end of the 92-mile-long Denali park road, has been in business for 28 years, hosts approximately 10,000 guests per summer, and currently uses an on-site 100 kilowatt (KW) diesel generator to provide power for the facility. The proposed hydroelectric installation would reduce use of the diesel generator at the lodge. Currently, delivery of diesel fuel to the lodge requires a tanker truck and trailer to be driven the entire length of the Denali park road. Noted for its undeveloped character, the road is unpaved for 77 miles of its 92-mile length, crosses high mountain passes without guardrails, and is just one to 1½ lanes wide with pullouts. The road is justly famous for wildlife viewing opportunities and in order to protect wildlife as well as the road's scenic wilderness character, vehicle traffic is limited. Reducing the

amount of diesel fuel hauled over this road in tanker trucks protects park resources by reducing the risk of accident or spill, and simultaneously reduces overall vehicle use of the road.

Eureka Creek is a 4-mile-long stream that drains a 5 square-mile watershed and discharges about 15 cubic feet per second (cfs) during the summer. Most of the floodplain has been disturbed by past placer mining, but no mining claims exist on the creek now and no other landowners besides Doyon and the NPS own any property near this floodplain. The project would include an at-grade water intake, with no impoundment, about one mile upstream of where Eureka Creek crosses the park road.

Camp Denali, another lodge in the Kantishna Hills, is within the area addressed by this legislation. Camp Denali opened in 1952 and the owners installed a micro-hydro generator system prior to the 1978 Presidential proclamation that included Kantishna as a part of what is now Denali National Park. After 1978, Camp Denali became a private in-holding surrounded by the park, and found that parts of its micro-hydro power system were within the park, a situation that the NPS lacks the authority to permit or retain. This legislation, if amended, would allow the NPS and the owners of Camp Denali to work out permit conditions for those parts of the existing hydro project that are now on park land. Besides the Kantishna Roadhouse and Camp Denali, two other lodges in Kantishna may pursue similar projects in the future and thus would benefit from the authority granted in this legislation.

Doyon owns 18 acres on the patented Galena mining claim in the Kantishna Hills and would like to exchange that acreage for park land in Kantishna of equal value near its other properties. The NPS would also like to pursue this exchange to consolidate land holdings in the area. Existing land exchange authority under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and other legislation is sufficient to affect this exchange. Thus, while we believe that this provision is unnecessary, we support its intent.

Our concerns with the bill are as follows:

- 1) The bill as introduced requires the Secretary to complete National Environmental Policy Act compliance within 180 days of enactment. While the Department supports a speedy response to the applicant, we suggest the 180-day clock start upon submission of a complete application to the NPS.
- 2) The permitting authority provided by this bill would apply to several micro-hydroelectric projects in the Kantishna area, yet various elements of the bill as introduced appear to apply solely to a project by Doyon. Technical corrections to address this are identified in an attachment to this testimony.

We believe that the permitting authority granted in H.R. 441 would provide a tool that the Secretary could use to lower fossil fuel use in Denali National Park, while protecting park resources, and that a land exchange would be hastened through passage of this legislation. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and this committee to address our concerns and recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

ATTACHMENT

The NPS suggests the following technical corrections to H.R. 441

- 1) On p. 1, line 2 of the long title, strike “for a microhydro project in nonwilderness” and insert “for microhydro projects in nonwilderness”.
- 2) On p. 1, line 5, strike “2010” and insert “2011”.
- 3) On p. 3, line 1, strike “(i) the intake pipeline located on Eureka Creek, approximately ½ mile upstream from the Park Road, as depicted on the map;” and insert “(i) intake pipelines;”
- 4) On p. 3, line 8, strike “line” and insert “lines”.
- 5) On p. 3, line 14, strike “PROJECT” and insert “PROJECTS”.

Statement for the Record
Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 686, Utah National Guard Readiness Act
May 4, 2011

Thank you for inviting me to testify on H.R. 686, the Utah National Guard Readiness Act. The Department does not oppose the conveyance of the lands identified in H.R. 686 to the State of Utah for homeland security or national defense purposes. However, we would like the opportunity to work with the Committee on modifications to the reversionary clause and the map referenced by the legislation.

Background

Camp W. G. Williams is located approximately 25 miles south of Salt Lake City, Utah, in an area of expanding residential development. The 24,000-acre base is a National Guard training site administered by the Utah Army National Guard and includes training facilities for a variety of military purposes. Approximately 18,000 acres of the base are comprised of public land that has been withdrawn for the benefit of the United States Army as a training facility for the Utah Army National Guard under the provisions of Executive Order 1922 and Title IX of Public Law 101-628, the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990.

H.R. 686

H.R. 686 directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey to the State of Utah, at no cost, approximately 431 acres of the 18,000-acre withdrawal. Those 431 acres are to be used by the Utah Army National Guard. The legislation includes a reversionary clause to return the land to the ownership of the United States if attempt is made to sell the land or use the land for non-National Guard or non-national defense purposes.

Because the public lands proposed for conveyance are currently withdrawn for the benefit of the United States Army, a portion of the overall withdrawal to the Army is revoked by this legislation in order that the lands may be appropriately conveyed. We defer to the Department of Defense on the partial revocation of the underlying withdrawal.

The Department generally does not oppose this conveyance at no cost because the legislation provides that the land conveyed must continue to be used for important national security and defense purposes. However, we would note that these lands are already withdrawn for military uses to the U.S. Army for use by the Utah National Guard. It is unclear why it is necessary to convey these lands directly to the State of Utah for use by the National Guard.

We would like to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on modifications to the reversionary clause. Specifically, the reversionary clause language is complicated, nonstandard, and would be difficult for the Department of the Interior to oversee. We would like to discuss placing responsibility for the reversionary interest with the Department of Defense in order to ensure that the land is only used for national security or homeland defense purposes.

Additionally, we would like to provide a new map to be referenced in the legislation. The BLM in Utah completed work in 2008 that corrected past survey problems, and we would like to incorporate this up-to-date, accurate information in a new map. Furthermore, the Department of Justice advises us of a necessary modification to section 2(b) of the bill, which they want to address with the Sponsor and the Committee. Finally, we have some minor technical modifications we would like to address.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on H.R. 686.

**Statement for the Record of
Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 944, Orange County, California Rocks and Small Islands
May 4, 2011**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on H.R. 944, which would add certain rocks and small islands along the coast of Orange County, California, to the California Coastal National Monument managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM supports H.R. 944.

Background

The California Coastal National Monument, part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, was established by a Presidential Proclamation by President Clinton on January 11, 2000, to protect:

“all unappropriated or unreserved lands and interest in lands owned or controlled by the United States in the form of islands, rocks, exposed reefs, and pinnacles . . . within 12 nautical miles of the shoreline of the State of California.”

Covering more than 20,000 rocks and small islands spread along 1,100 miles of the California coastline, the Presidential Proclamation protects the Monument's overwhelming scenic quality and natural beauty. The Proclamation specifically calls for the protection of the geologic formations and the habitat that these rocks and small islands provide for seabirds, marine mammals, and other plant and animal life, both terrestrial and marine.

Some particularly significant public rocks and islands off the coast of Orange County in the Laguna Beach area provide important habitat for a wide variety of upper rocky intertidal species, as well as various shorebird species. Additionally, four rock locations – Bird Rock and Two Rocks off the City of Laguna Beach, San Juan Rocks off the City of Dana Point, and San Marcos Rocks off the southern portion of the City of San Clemente – provide important roosting habitat for seabirds (including cormorants and the Federally-listed brown pelican) and haul-out areas for seals and sea lions.

In the process of working with local communities on planning for the California Coastal National Monument, the BLM discovered that the rock features off the coastline of Orange County were under Congressional withdrawals dating from the 1930s and, therefore, were not included within the Monument. These withdrawals include more than 40 offshore rocks, small islands, exposed reefs, and pinnacles located within one mile of the coast of Orange County, California, totaling approximately two acres above mean high tide. More than 70 years old, the withdrawals were originally intended to temporarily reserve the Orange County offshore rocks and small islands for “park, scenic, or other public purposes” (1931 Act), and reserve three specific offshore rock clusters for the possibility of future lighthouses (1935 Act), which were never built. These withdrawals were ultimately never utilized and are no longer needed.

The Laguna Ocean Foundation has led a community-wide effort to include these significant areas within the California Coastal National Monument. The Foundation has worked with the City of Laguna Beach and other local groups, including the Audubon Society and the Surfrider Foundation, on a variety of city and area-wide coastal protection and monitoring projects, which resulted in H.R. 944.

H.R. 944

H.R. 944 would eliminate the existing withdrawals on these public lands off the coast of Orange County and place these features within the existing California Coastal National Monument. The BLM supports the revocation of the old withdrawals and the inclusion of these rocks, islands, and exposed reefs within the Monument.

The BLM has been working with partners along the 1,100 mile California coast to create a series of California Coastal National Monument Gateway community initiatives. These Gateway initiatives are a means to support organized local stewardship of various California coastal areas through the development of a consortium of the area's resource managers and advocates. The Laguna Beach community has expressed strong interest in developing a California Coastal National Monument Gateway initiative for the Orange County coastal area. Inclusion of these rocks and islands within the Monument will allow the BLM to work with the community to provide responsible, long-term stewardship of these valuable areas.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 944. We look forward to passage of this legislation which would place these significant features off the coast of Orange County within the California Coastal National Monument, thus ensuring their long-term protection and preservation, and paving the way for an important local community stewardship initiative.