

Committee on Resources

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TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Testimony before the
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION & PUBLIC LANDS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Hearing of July 15, 2004 at 10 a.m.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: On behalf of Governor Anoatubby and my fellow citizens of The Chickasaw Nation, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to convey our support for H.R. 4066 which provides for the conveyance of certain land to the United States to be held in trust for the Chickasaw Nation and to revise the boundary of Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Oklahoma.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced us, the Chickasaw Nation to sell all twenty two million plus acres of our tribal lands east of the Mississippi River beginning in 1837 and to remove its citizens to lands west of the Mississippi River in Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). The Tribe reestablished its government in 1856 by written constitution assuming sovereign jurisdiction over six million acres, the exterior boundaries of which now include all or parts of 13 counties in south-central Oklahoma. The subject land lies within the original exterior boundaries of the lands held in trust for the Chickasaw Nation by the federal government in Indian Territory.

The Chickasaw people are stewards of the land and have always religiously protected our natural environment. After the Removal to Indian Territory, Chickasaw leaders sought out special places in our new lands where culturally significant and other important Chickasaw ceremonies and rituals could be continued. Immediately, the water springs which now comprise the Chickasaw National Recreation Area and the surrounding environs were identified as a culturally significant place. Sulphur Springs, as it came to be called, was identified by the Chickasaw people and our tribal government as a culturally significant special place to be treated with reverence and deep respect.

In 1902, with fear of the commercialization of the Springs and with the pending dissolution of Indian Territory, of Chickasaw government regulation and control of tribal affairs and lands, the Chickasaw Nation government granted the land at Sulphur Springs to the United States government to hold, preserve and protect in perpetuity. It was then that the United States assumed trust responsibility from The Chickasaw Nation for the protection and preservation of Sulphur Springs. Soon the land and springs were designated as Platt National Park with free public access and use of the springs, which has continued to this day. Platt National Park was renamed the Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA) in 1976.

About 1987, the Chickasaw Nation first expressed interest in establishing a cultural center inside or adjacent to the Chickasaw National Recreation Area. With full understanding that the National Park Service could not give CNRA public land directly to the Chickasaw Nation but could, indeed, exchange for land of equal value and use, the National Park Service identified a piece of property owned by the City of Sulphur as potential exchangeable property. The City of Sulphur, being most supportive and interested in having the Chickasaw Nation Cultural Center located nearby, offered to donate the property to the Chickasaw Nation for the exchange. This cooperative effort demonstrates how mutual respect, mutual understanding and open, honest communication can produce mutually beneficial results between local governments, the Federal government and as American Indian Tribal government. I must note from direct observation, that Governor Anoatubby's vision and sustained leadership enhanced by hard work by Gerard Baker, former CNRA Superintendent (now at Mt. Rushmore), and Mr. Donald Day, former Sulphur City mayor, has made the Chickasaw Nation Cultural Center a reality.

Today, the Chickasaw Nation is joined not only by the National Park Service and the City of Sulphur, but

also by many other local communities and organizations with the mutual goal of creating a center for Chickasaw tribal culture and history for the three million annual visitors to the park thereby creating an attraction predicted to increase the visitors to 4.5 million in the first year of operation alone. It is this cooperative spirit and communal effort which has led us to the partnership which supports the exchange of the land to be used as a site for the Chickasaw Nation Cultural Center.

Quick consideration, and we hope approval by the House Resources Committee, of this land exchange is the first step in moving forward with this exciting and important project. This will allow the Chickasaw Nation to build a cultural center to recognize and commemorate its historic and cultural heritage as well as play an on-going role in the economic and cultural well-being of southern Oklahoma. Thank you for your consideration of H.R. 4066.