

**STATEMENT OF JOHN PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS, RESOURCES, AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H. R. 4692, TO AMEND THE ACT ENTITLED "AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ANDERSONVILLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES", TO PROVIDE FOR THE ADDITION OF CERTAIN DONATED LANDS TO THE ANDERSONVILLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.**

**SEPTEMBER 5, 2002**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 4692. This bill would authorize an increase in the acreage ceiling of the Andersonville National Historic Site from 500 to 520 acres, thus allowing the National Park Service to accept the donation of a twenty-acre parcel of land contiguous to the Historic Site.

The Department supports H.R. 4692. The acquisition would allow the National Park Service to create a scenic and appropriate approach to this historic park, while enhancing the safety of our visitors and park neighbors. The inclusion of this land into the Historic Site would not entail additional expenses for the National Park Service because the management and operation of the land added to the boundary would not result in any additional facilities, increased operating costs, or additional staffing.

The story of Andersonville National Historic Site revolves around Camp Sumter, the largest Prisoner of War camp in the Civil War. The camp held 45,000 Union prisoners, of which 12,920 died from starvation or disease. The park's 1970 enabling legislation requires the park to share the larger story of Civil War POWs held in northern and southern camps, along with all POWs in American history. The park also operates the only active national cemetery in Georgia.

In 1998, during dedication ceremonies for the National Prisoner of War Museum, which is included within

the park, a new park entrance road was opened. In 2001, the *Friends of Andersonville* acquired a 20-acre parcel of land contiguous to the entrance road, with the specific intent of assisting the park in creating a more visually appealing and appropriate approach into Andersonville National Historic Site.

However, the Friends have been prevented from donating the land to the National Park Service, as they wish to do, because the park's land base, at 496 acres, has nearly reached its maximum authorized size of 500 acres. H.R. 4692 would increase the allowable size of the park to 520 acres, thereby enabling the National Park Service to accept this donation.

The *Friends of Andersonville*, started locally in 1985, has become a valued partner in the management of Andersonville National Historic Site. Their membership, from throughout this country, includes descendants of prisoners of Andersonville as well as former POWs from several of America's recent conflicts. This Friends group is active with local youth groups, participates in educational outreach programs and is integral to the management of the National Prisoner of War Museum.

The park's General Management Plan and Land Protection Plan recognize the need for a safer and statelier entrance to the park. Until recently, County Road 191, used by three land owners to access their residences, bisected the park entrance road in a manner that created a safety hazard for visitors and park neighbors. Macon County has corrected this safety issue by closing the county road and developing an improved alternative access for these three residences to Georgia Highway 49. The completion of the County's actions, coupled with this acquisition, sets the stage for establishing a landscaped entrance to the prison site, the museum, and the cemetery that is in keeping with the reverential and historical nature of the site.

Providing for National Park Service management of the additional 20 acres will also allow for improved security at the park. Repositioning the park entrance road gate will enhance the ability of the park to prevent vandalism and inappropriate use of the park and national cemetery lands during the night.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.