

Testimony of Jim Duke
President
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Given before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
of the U.S. House Committee on Resources
Representative Richard Pombo, Chairman
Given at the House Hearing held in Washington, D.C ., April 12, 2005

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Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
Testimony
Tuesday, April 12, 2005

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I am Jim Duke and I am the President of the American Council of Snowmobile Associations (ACSA), based in East Lansing, Michigan. ACSA provides leadership and guidance to the 25 state snowmobile associations, comprised of more than 2,500 local snowmobile clubs representing over 1,700,000 snowmobilers in the United States -- and these outdoor enthusiasts are frequent visitors to federal recreation sites, including our National Parks.

I happen to have the good fortune of living in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, not far from Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. My wife and I moved from Metro-Detroit in 1991 because it is truly beautiful – especially to snowmobilers in the winter.

Snowmobiling in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is a unique experience. As it's name implies, it is situated on the south shoreline of Lake Superior in the central Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The landmass designated as a National Park is 72,000 acres which includes the lakeshore protection and inland buffer zones.

There are thirteen (13) designated road within the Park open to snowmobilers during the winter months – which are the same roads used by motorized traffic during the other seasons. These 13 roads total approximately 20 miles and allow access to such historical attractions as Miners Castle, Miners Falls, the Log Slide, Grand Sable Dunes, and Grand Sable Lake.

Snowmobiling has been an activity allowed and promoted in some of the National Parks units for a number of years. It is any activity that allows all Americans to access their National Parks during times of the year that it would not otherwise be possible. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore traditionally has 450,000 visitors annually, of which 25,000 arrive on snowmobiles. Pictured Rocks is a unique experience in the summer, but unless you have actually been there in the winter, you cannot imagine how spectacular it is.

Snowmobiling is an important piece in the puzzle in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, just as it is in many rural areas of the United States. The community as a whole recognizes the importance of this recreation, from economics to jobs to tourism. The partnerships that have formed between the employees of the Park Service, the community and the recreation community benefit the entire community.

In fact, the Michigan Snowmobile Association has been working in cooperation with the Pictured Rocks management for a number of years. When there are projects that Pictured Rocks would like to accomplish, but they do not have enough people, they contact the Michigan Snowmobile Association who provides volunteers for the manpower. One example of this cooperation is the annual installation of snowfence to protect sensitive areas.

This type of working relationship is indicative of snowmobilers across the country. The snowmobile community is comprised of people from all walks of life, all of them always willing to lend a hand. Snowmobilers have always paid their own way, from building trails and parking lots to the maintenance. The necessary funding is generated from registration fees, gas taxes and volunteer efforts. We have also been very supportive of the Fee Demo program.

We have snowmobilers that travel across the country to snowmobile in new areas. Snowmobilers love new experiences and enjoy the incredible beauty of winter. Many snowmobilers will visit National Parks in different seasons, to experience the changes of the fall colors to the winter blankets of snow.

There are currently 384 National Park units across the country. Snowmobiling is "permitted" in 26 National Parks, plus

an additional 14 units in Alaska. Although, I think it is important to note that snowmobiling does not occur in each of these Parks. In fact, when you call some of the Parks that are listed as "permitting" snowmobiles, they will quickly tell you, without hesitation, that snowmobiling is not allowed there.

On behalf of the snowmobile community, I would like express our appreciation to this Committee and Subcommittee for the opportunities you have given us, here today and in the past.

I would also like to commend the National Park Service and the Department of Interior for allowing the continued use of snowmobiles in our National Parks. We greatly appreciate the cooperation we have received from them, and we greatly appreciate the access we have maintained to our public lands.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, we thank you for your interest and your willingness to address this issue. I would be happy to respond to any questions you might have.