

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Tom McClintock, Chairman
Hearing Memorandum

May 20, 2016

To: All Subcommittee on Federal Lands Members

From: Majority Staff – Terry Camp
Subcommittee on Federal Lands, x 6-7736

Hearing: Legislative hearing on H.R. 4202 (Rep. John Katko), To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario in the State of New York.
May 24, 2016 at 10:00 AM; 1324 Longworth HOB

H.R. 4202 (Rep. John Katko), “Fort Ontario Study Act”

Bill Summary

H.R. 4202, introduced by Rep. John Katko (R-NY), directs the Department of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario, a military installation in Oswego, New York, used during the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. In the study, the Department of the Interior will evaluate the site's national significance, and determine the suitability and feasibility of designating it as a unit of the National Park System.

Cosponsors:

Rep. Hanna, Richard L. [R-NY-22]

Invited Witnesses

PANEL I

The Honorable John Katko (R-NY-24)
Member of Congress

PANEL II

Mr. Bill Shaddox,
Acting Associate Director for Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.

Background

In 1755, the British built Fort Ontario to protect the area around the east end of Lake Ontario. Located at the mouth of the Oswego River in Oswego, New York, Fort Ontario directly overlooks the shores of Lake Ontario. In 1756, the French Army destroyed the fort, also known as “the Fort of the Six Nations.” In 1759, the British built a much stronger and larger fort.¹

During the American Revolution, the British abandoned Fort Ontario, and in 1778 American troops destroyed the fort. Despite the surrender at Yorktown in 1781, the British reoccupied Oswego in 1782 and rebuilt Fort Ontario for the third time. The British held it until 1796 before finally turning it over to the United States.²

During the War of 1812, British forces captured and destroyed the fort. After a period of abandonment, new construction started in part due to tensions with Great Britain as well as to check smuggling activities between Canada and the United States.³

Construction of a fourth Fort Ontario commenced in 1839, amidst tensions arising from Canada’s Patriot War. Later, amid fears of British intervention in the Civil War, the United States upgraded defenses of the fort in 1860.⁴

Fort Ontario later served as a training post from 1903 to 1905, a hospital camp during World War I, and a training installation for military police and anti-aircraft units in World War II.⁵ Additionally, from August 1944 to February 1946, Fort Ontario operated as the nation’s only emergency refugee shelter during World War II and housed approximately 982 refugees, predominantly of Jewish descent.⁶

After nearly two hundred years of active military use, the Army abandoned the fort in 1946 and transferred it to the State of New York. In 1953, Fort Ontario opened as a New York state historic site. The fort was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 and remains open to the public today.

H.R. 4202 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of Fort Ontario to evaluate the site’s national significance and determine the suitability of its designation as a unit of the National Park System.

Administration Position

The Administration position is unknown at this time.

¹ New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Cultural Resource Information System. Accessed May 09, 2016. <https://cris.parks.ny.gov/Uploads/ViewDoc.aspx?mode=A>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fort Ontario State Historic Site." New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Accessed May 09, 2016. <http://nysparks.com/historic-sites/20/details.aspx>.

Cost

A Congressional Budget Office cost estimate has not yet been completed for this bill.

