

STATEMENT OF STEVE WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 2889, TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF THE OREGON CAVES NATIONAL MONUMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

NOVEMBER 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 2889, a bill to modify the boundary of Oregon Caves National Monument, and for other purposes.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 2889 as consistent with the National Park Service's 1998 General Management Plan (GMP) for the park, but recommends deferring action on the bill to give us the opportunity to continue exploring ways to maintain interagency coordination. In July, 2009, we testified before the Subcommittee on National Parks of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources concerning companion bill, S. 1270. At that time we requested an additional six months to discuss these issues within the Departments, and those discussions are ongoing.

H.R. 2889 would adjust the boundary of the Oregon Caves National Monument to include the addition of approximately 4,070 acres to enhance the protection of the resources associated with the monument and to increase quality recreation opportunities. The lands that would be added are currently managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest. This bill would also designate approximately 7.6 miles of these waterways as wild, scenic, or recreational under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

H.R. 2889 provides authority for the Secretary of the Interior to protect the water quality – in the caves and for public consumption – and to administer the lands in accordance with current National Park Service laws and regulations. The Secretary is also directed to carry out ecological forest restoration activities that would establish a fire regime, manage revegetation projects, and reduce the risk of losing key ecosystem components. The land that this bill would transfer is categorized by the U.S. Forest Service as condition class 3 – high risk of fire. Most of it is also designated as Late Successional Reserve under the Northwest Forest Plan. We understand that the Forest Service is currently working on a multi-year effort to reduce fuels under a comprehensive forest plan which is intended to help restore the appropriate role of fire in the entire ecosystem, which in turn would benefit monument resources that are at risk from fire and fire suppression damage.

The bill also requires the Secretary to accept any grazing lease or permit that is donated by a lessee or permittee and further requires that no new leases or permits be granted.

In 1907, the Secretary of the Interior withdrew approximately 2,560 acres for the purposes of establishing a national monument. The 1909 presidential proclamation establishing Oregon Caves National Monument included only 480 acres. The monument was managed by the U.S. Forest Service until its administration was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. The remaining withdrawal outside of the monument is administered by the USFS as part of the

Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest. This bill would restore these lands to the original monument boundary, and add some additional lands to conform the monument boundary to the watershed.

The explorer Joaquin Miller extolled “The Wondrous marble halls of Oregon!” when speaking about the newly proclaimed Oregon Caves National Monument in 1909. Oregon Caves is one of the few marble caves in the country that is accessible to the public. This park, tucked up in the winding roads of southern Oregon, is known for its remoteness, the cave majesty and unusual biota. The stream flowing from the cave entrance is a tributary to a watershed that empties into the Pacific Ocean. There are no human-made obstructions that would prevent salmon migration, which makes this the only cave in the National Park Service with an unobstructed link to the ocean.

The caves are nationally significant and a favorite visit for school kids and travelers alike. They remain alive and healthy because of the watershed above them. The park recognized this when developing the 1998 GMP and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement. The plan recommended the inclusion of the watershed into the park to provide for better cave protection and to protect the surface and subsurface hydrology and the public water supply.

If H.R. 2889 were enacted, there would be no acquisition costs associated with the boundary expansion and we estimate National Park Service’s management, administrative, interpretive, resource protection, and maintenance costs to be approximately \$300,000 to \$750,000 annually.

The Department has four major issues with the bill at this time:

1. Section 6 of the bill designates the River Styx as a recreational river. The recreational status does not afford any additional protection to the water or cave resources and may encumber the current management of the cave resources.
2. Section 7 of the bill requires the Secretary to ensure that forest attributes remain intact and functioning within a “historical range”. However, because of environmental uncertainties, it may be more prudent to use “normal range of ecosystem variability” rather than “historical range”.
3. Section 8 of the bill requires that if a grazing permittee or lessee chooses to voluntarily donate a grazing permit or lease within either the Big Grayback Grazing Allotment (managed by the U.S. Forest Service) or the Billy Mountain Grazing Allotment (managed by the Bureau of Land Management) the Secretary shall accept the donation, terminate those permits or leases and permanently retire those allotments. It is our understanding that the same individual runs livestock on both the Big Grayback and Billy Mountain Allotments. We note that the Billy Mountain Grazing Allotment is approximately 15 miles from the boundary of the proposed monument expansion. We would like the opportunity to work with the Committee and sponsor to further explore these grazing provisions.
4. Section 9 of the bill discusses hunting, fishing and trapping. We support the Administrative Exceptions under subsection (b) since it provides flexibility in managing the resources within the preserve. With respect to Section 9, we would like to terminate hunting within the preserve after five years with the acreage being converted to national monument status. We base this request on the information collected during the public participation process for the General Management

Plan. Of the 892 comments received on the plan, only 8, less than one percent, expressed concern about the loss of hunting should the added acres be designated as part of the national monument.

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

STATEMENT OF STEVE WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 3444, TO ESTABLISH PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

NOVEMBER 17, 2009

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. 3444, a bill to establish Pinnacles National Park in the State of California as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department supports Section 4 of H.R. 3444, which would designate and rename additional wilderness areas within Pinnacles National Park with technical amendments. However, we recommend deferring action on Section 3, which would redesignate Pinnacles National Monument as “Pinnacles National Park”.

Section 4 would add 2,905 acres to the designated wilderness at the monument and rename the Pinnacles Wilderness as “Hain Wilderness.” Congress has recognized wilderness characteristics at Pinnacles by previously designating more than one-half of the monument’s 24,000 acres as wilderness. The additional acreage is appropriate for wilderness designation.

Naming the wilderness as “Hain Wilderness” would commemorate the establishment of Pinnacles National Monument by immigrant homesteaders from Michigan who first arrived at the Pinnacles in 1886. The Hain families were farmers and community pioneers who established the first post office and county road. In 1893, Schuyler Hain conceived the idea of designating the Pinnacles a public park or even a national park. Mr. Hain successfully championed the establishment of the Pinnacles Forest Reserve in 1906 and Pinnacles National Monument in 1908. The National Park Service considers it a high honor to be permanently commemorated in a unit of the national park system and seeks to reserve this honor for cases where there is a compelling justification for such recognition. We believe that there is a compelling justification in this case.

Section 3 would reestablish Pinnacles National Monument as Pinnacles National Park. Pinnacles National Monument encompasses 60 million years of geological and plate tectonic history, 4,000 years of California heritage from prehistoric to historic, and the range of the condor dating from the Pleistocene Epoch. The monument has truly extraordinary natural resources and has played a crucial role in the reintroduction of the California condor to its traditional range in California. However, under longstanding practice, the term “national park” has generally been reserved for units that contain a variety of resources and encompasses large land or water areas to help provide adequate protection of the resources. Pinnacles National Monument does not include the full range of resources usually found in national parks.

Additionally, the Department has been reviewing the recommendations recently made by the National Parks Second Century Commission. One of the recommendations is to substantially reduce the more than two dozen different park titles currently used for units of the National Park

System. In response to this recommendation, a Departmental task force will be looking at a comprehensive plan for renaming many of our park units. This effort will be particularly important for determining which units are appropriate candidates for the title “national park,” which is sought by supporters of some other units throughout the country that are not currently designated as such. Under a nomenclature with fewer titles, it is possible that Pinnacles and other units with similar characteristics should have “national park” in their title. However, until the task force’s work has been completed, we request that the committee not act on legislation to rename any units as national parks.

If the committee decides to act on H.R. 3444, we suggested the following technical amendments:

- On page 4, line 16, strike “are” and insert “shall consist of those areas”.
- On page 6, lines 6 and 7, delete the map reference and substitute a new map reference to a map produced by the National Park Service (to be provided).

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

STATEMENT OF STEVE 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. 3726, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE CASTLE NUGENT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

NOVEMBER 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3726, a bill to establish the Castle Nugent National Historic Site, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3726 would establish as a unit of the National Park System the Castle Nugent National Historic Site, a historic agricultural site on the island of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Department could support H.R. 3726, with technical amendments. However, we would ask that the committee defer action on this legislation until the special resource study is completed, which is consistent with the Department's general policy on legislation establishing a new unit of the National Park System when a study is pending.

The proposed Castle Nugent National Historic Site is located along the arid southeastern shore of St. Croix, about three miles south of the island's principal town of Christiansted. The site would consist of approximately 11,500 acres, of which three quarters are submerged lands. The non-submerged lands would consist of approximately 2,900 acres. The terrain is mostly rolling and hilly with a mixture of dry forest, native vegetation, and rangeland that offers picturesque views to the Caribbean Sea and to distant parts of the island. A shoreline of cobble beaches and small crescent bays extends for approximately 4.5 miles. The marine areas included in the site would extend directly from the shore out to the three-mile territorial limit.

The National Park Service was directed to conduct a special resource study of the Castle Nugent site by Public Law 109-317. The study began in 2007 and is nearing completion. The NPS draft study has found that the site meets the NPS's criteria for addition to the National Park System,

and that the proposal to designate it as part of the National Park System enjoys strong local support.

The Castle Nugent site represents a nationally significant cultural landscape that provides a glimpse into the historic development of St. Croix in the 18th and 19th centuries when cotton plantations dotted the south shore of the island. The site conveys a strong stepping-back-in-time quality to a period when cotton was an important export crop for the economic and social development of the new Danish colony. Although relatively brief, the era of cotton plantation agriculture on St. Croix, which depended on slave labor, was critical to the establishment of the Danish colonial system in the Caribbean. Many of the south shore plantations that produced cotton as their primary crop did not transition to the production of sugar cane as most other Virgin Islands estates did. In subsequent years, the lands continued to be used for agricultural purposes, including the raising of cattle that continues today. Largely because of this continuum, the agrarian landscape at Castle Nugent remains well intact from early colonial days. The fields, structures, ruins, and archeological resources provide an outstanding laboratory to study and interpret firsthand the cotton era on St. Croix, including the lifestyle of cotton plantation owners and their workers, both enslaved and free.

The centerpiece of the site is the historic Castle Nugent estate, which is an excellent example of an eighteenth century Danish cotton estate and the most intact plantation within the proposed boundary. This complex includes a large estate house dating to the 1730's, a rare cotton house that is believed to be the last of its kind standing on St. Croix, and the remains of two slave row houses, among other historic buildings. Cultural resources discovered on the grounds include pottery shards and other artifacts left over from either slave shanties or Arawak Indian campsites.

Enactment of H.R. 3726 would provide the opportunity to preserve and protect this outstanding Caribbean cultural landscape and interpret the cotton era and related agricultural themes that have been instrumental in the development of St. Croix and the Virgin Islands. It would also help protect five pre-Columbian archeological sites, two of which are among the oldest sites on St. Croix.

The Castle Nugent site also contains abundant natural resources which would be protected by establishing the proposed national historic site. The eastern end is dominated by Great Pond, which is the second largest salt pond in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the most important wetland on the island of St. Croix. Great Pond and its adjacent bay provide critical habitat for both resident and migratory birds, reef fish and sea turtles. The pond is also rimmed by extensive black mangrove stands, which are under increasing threat in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

One of the largest and healthiest fringing coral reef systems in the region lies just a few hundred feet offshore. The St. Croix coral reef system is one of the best developed systems in the Caribbean and the most extensive one on the Puerto Rican-Virgin Islands shelf. The offshore fringing reef at Castle Nugent is part of the southeastern St. Croix reef system that extends from Great Pond Bay eastward to the fringing reefs enveloping Point Udall on the easternmost side of the island. This system is part of a 4,000-5,000-year-old, 23-mile-long bank-barrier reef that rings virtually the entire east end of St. Croix. Inclusion of a large section of this reef within the boundary of the national historic site would provide additional protections to this fragile resource, which is under the jurisdiction of the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NPS would look forward to sharing expertise and working cooperatively with the U.S. Virgin Islands in order to continue to provide a high level of protection to the reef system.

The Castle Nugent site has a longstanding association with cattle ranching. Under an agreement between the property owners and the University of the Virgin Islands, large sections of the site are still used to raise and breed Senepol cattle, a special hybrid breed that was developed on St. Croix in the early 20th century to withstand its tropical climate. H.R. 3726 would allow for the continuation of Senepol cattle breeding through a provision allowing the lease of lands for the university's cattle operation. The NPS believes that this continued use would contribute to the cultural landscape of the proposed national historic site.

Public sentiment has been overwhelmingly in support of creating a national park unit at Castle Nugent. As part of the special resource study, the NPS conducted public meetings to present management alternatives in June, 2009. The NPS received over 300 comments in favor of establishing a national park unit and only one comment in opposition. A recurring point made in comments was the outstanding opportunity the Castle Nugent site offers to preserve an important remnant of the island's agricultural heritage. Other comments emphasized the site's unobstructed vistas from the hills to the sea as increasingly rare on St. Croix, the many potential

low-impact recreational opportunities, the need to continue the breeding of the Senepol cattle, and the importance of protecting the wide variety of habitats and species at Great Pond and at the undeveloped south shore and the offshore reef.

We estimate that the cost to acquire the 2,900 acres of land at Castle Nugent, which are in private ownership, would be \$40 to \$50 million. Over half of this acreage is owned by a single family whose members have been enthusiastic supporters for preservation of the site. The estimated cost for annual operations and maintenance would be approximately \$750,000; the NPS would benefit from administrative efficiencies due to the presence of a NPS operation at nearby Christiansted National Historic Site. Development needs and their costs have not yet been determined. The site's needs for resource protection, visitor services, and other operational needs would be determined through a general management plan, which would cost an estimated \$600,000 to \$700,000. All funds would be subject to NPS priorities and the availability of appropriations.

We recommend two technical amendments to H.R. 3726:

- On page 2, line 14, strike "consists" and insert "shall consist".
- On page 2, lines 19-20, strike "titled ' _____', numbered _____, and dated _____" and insert "titled 'Castle Nugent National Historic Site, Proposed Boundary Map', numbered T22/100,447, and dated October 2009".

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