

**STATEMENT OF DR. HERBERT C. FROST, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION, OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 163, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE SLEEPING BEAR DUNES WILDERNESS AT SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN.**

**July 23, 2013**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 163, a bill to designate the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in the State of Michigan.

The Department strongly supports enactment of this legislation. H.R. 163 would designate 32,557 acres, or 46 percent, of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan's Lower Peninsula as federally protected wilderness. Management of the wilderness area would be in accordance with the 1964 Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131 et seq.). H.R. 163 is substantially identical to S. 23, which passed the Senate on June 19<sup>th</sup>, and is also pending before this committee.

P.L. 91-479 established Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore on October 21, 1970, in order "...that certain outstanding natural features including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient (glacial) phenomena...be preserved in their natural setting and protected from developments and uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area...for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public." This legislation clearly supports the intent of that law.

The park extends nearly 30 miles along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. It also includes two large Lake Michigan islands with an additional 35 miles of shoreline. The park protects and preserves superlative scenic and recreational resources including towering perched sand dunes that rise as high as 450 feet above Lake Michigan. The park contains several federally threatened and endangered species, including the Piping Plover, Pitcher's Thistle and Michigan Monkeyflower. The park also includes many historic features, including a lighthouse and three U.S. life-saving service stations, coastal villages, and picturesque farmsteads. Permanent wilderness designation will ensure protection of these significant natural, cultural and historical resources.

The park averages 1.2 million visitors each year who enjoy the beaches, over 100 miles of backcountry trails and eight campgrounds. The region surrounding the park is a popular vacation and summer home destination as visitors and residents take advantage of a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, backpacking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, boating, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The National Park Service estimates that the presence of the National Lakeshore brings nearly \$132 million of economic benefit to

the local community each year.\* Designation of the wilderness area will not limit public access or change the way the area is currently being managed for public use and enjoyment.

Native American use of the area extends some 3,000 years into the past and is represented today primarily by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Nothing in H.R. 163 would modify, alter, or affect any treaty rights.

The park encompasses a total of 71,291 acres; about 58,571 acres of land and 12,720 acres of water. Over 30,000 acres of the proposed 32,557-acre wilderness area have been managed as wilderness since 1981, when a wilderness proposal produced under the park's first comprehensive General Management Plan (GMP) was published. Since that time, the five areas of the park proposed as wilderness have provided outstanding recreational opportunities for hikers, backpackers, anglers, paddlers, and hunters with hunting being allowed in accordance with State regulations. A network of hiking trails and numerous camping opportunities will continue to be maintained in this portion of the park, even with the wilderness designation. The additional acres in the current proposal arise from the inclusion of the Sleeping Bear Plateau, an area only suitable for foot travel that continues to offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Since formal wilderness designation would not change the way in which visitor use is currently managed in the area proposed as wilderness, there is no reason to believe it would have any detrimental impact on visitation or the local economy, and formal designation may actually have a beneficial impact.

The proposed wilderness area does not include any existing county roads or areas managed primarily for historic resources. This is to ensure the continued availability of the county roads for visitors accessing remote trailheads, beaches, backcountry areas and historic areas. Although the park's boundary extends one-quarter mile out into Lake Michigan, none of the waters of Lake Michigan are proposed as wilderness. H.R. 163 would not prohibit the use of boat motors on the surface water of Lake Michigan adjacent to the wilderness as the waters are not proposed as part of the wilderness. The beaching of those boats will continue to be subject to applicable laws. This is to ensure continued access by boaters to the shoreline beach adjacent to the wilderness area. These have been issues of significant public concern.

Between 2006 and 2009, the NPS developed an updated GMP for the park. Because of public concern over the 1981 wilderness proposal, and its inclusion of county roads and historic sites, a formal Wilderness Study was conducted as part of this comprehensive planning effort. After extensive public involvement, review, and comment, including overwhelming public support for wilderness designation, the preferred alternative in the final GMP/Wilderness Study was approved by the Midwest Regional Director on January 6, 2009. The area of proposed wilderness was mapped at 32,557 acres, with a portion in all five eligible areas, and is the same as the proposed wilderness designation in H.R. 163. The final GMP/Wilderness Study does not propose wilderness in several eligible areas, including those areas fragmented by the road corridors near the Otter Creek area of the Lakeshore; the land within the Port Oneida Rural Historic District; the lands in the historic "Cottage Row" on North Manitou Island; the area in the South Manitou Island historic farm loop; an area near the historic Bufka Farm identified for a bicycle trail; and the congested area at the top of the Dune Climb.

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\* Stynes, Daniel J. "National Park Visitor Spending and Payroll Impacts: 2011." National Park Service, 2013.

Passage of H.R. 163 would support the vision in the new GMP. The legislation has very strong, broad-based public support. The overwhelming majority of local officials, the conservation community, and the Michigan delegation are united in their support for this bill as a winning resolution to an issue that has been debated since the park's establishment in 1970. Parties that had been bitterly polarized over earlier proposals have reached consensus that this bill strikes an appropriate balance between preserving access and guaranteeing outstanding primitive recreational opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.

**STATEMENT OF DR. HERBERT C. FROST, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 930, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF THE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE AND SURROUNDING LAND OF THE NEW PHILADELPHIA TOWN SITE IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**July 23, 2013**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 930, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the archeological site and surrounding land of the New Philadelphia town site in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of H.R. 930. However, we believe that priority should be given to the 30 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to the Congress.

H.R. 930 authorizes a special resource study to evaluate the national significance of the New Philadelphia, Illinois site and to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the archaeological site and the surrounding land as a unit of the National Park System. The bill directs the Secretary, in the course of the resource study, to also consider other alternatives for the preservation, protection and interpretation of the archeological site of New Philadelphia, Illinois and the surrounding land by Federal, State or local government entities, private nonprofit organizations or any other interested individuals. We estimate the cost of the resource study to range from \$200,000 to \$300,000, based on similar types of studies conducted in recent years.

The New Philadelphia town site, located near Barry, Illinois, was founded in 1836 by Frank McWhorter, an enslaved man from Kentucky, who bought his own freedom and the freedom of 15 family members. New Philadelphia is the first known town platted and officially registered by an African-American before the Civil War. The rural community situated near the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers flourished at first, but later fell into decline when the railroad bypassed the community in 1869; it was eventually dissolved in 1885. The New Philadelphia town site is a 42-acre archeological site with no visible above-ground evidence. It was designated a National Historic Landmark on January 16, 2009.

In 2012, the National Park Service completed a reconnaissance survey of the New Philadelphia town site. The survey found that the site is nationally significant and would likely meet the criteria for suitability to be added to the National Park System. The survey also found, however, that the New Philadelphia town site is not likely to be feasible for addition to the National Park System due to the challenges of providing for public enjoyment, including associated operation

and staffing costs. However, a special resource study also would examine alternatives to National Park Service management for the preservation and interpretation of the New Philadelphia town site.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other committee members may have regarding this bill.

**STATEMENT OF DR. HERBERT C. FROST, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION, OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 706, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, TO DEDICATE THE PARK TO JOHN H. CHAFEE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**July 23, 2013**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 706, a bill to establish the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, to dedicate the Park to John H. Chafee, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 706.

H.R. 706 would establish a new unit of the National Park System, the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park (Park) within the existing, bi-state, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (Corridor) that extends from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Providence, Rhode Island. The bill directs the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to establish a park boundary after acquiring a sufficient amount of land or interests in land containing the historic resources to constitute a manageable park unit. The bill allows the Secretary to include in the boundary resources that are subject to a cooperative agreement with either of the two states or their political subdivisions. It authorizes the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with nonprofit organizations, including the coordinating entity for the Corridor, as well as state and local governments, for the purpose of collaborating on programs, projects, and activities that further the purposes of the Park. It also permits the acquisition of up to 10 acres in Woonsocket, Rhode Island for the development of facilities for the Park.

The bill directs the Secretary to complete a General Management Plan for the Park within three years after funds are made available. Among other things, the plan must seek to make maximum practicable use of certain named visitor facilities in the Corridor that are operated by Corridor partners, many of which were developed with significant investment of federal funds. The bill also allows the Secretary to provide technical assistance, visitor services, interpretive tours and educational programs to sites outside the boundary of the Park that are within the Corridor. And, the bill dedicates the Park to former Senator John H. Chafee and requires the Secretary to display an appropriate memorial to him.

Finally, the bill amends the authorization for the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor to provide for a non-profit organization, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc., to be the local coordinating entity for the Corridor. This entity would assume the responsibility for coordinating activities for the Corridor that have rested with the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission since the National Heritage Area was first established. The new coordinating entity would be eligible to receive National Heritage Area funding for through the end of fiscal 2016.

H.R. 706 reflects the findings of the special resource study that the National Park Service (NPS) completed in accordance with Public Law 109-338, which directed the NPS to conduct the study to “evaluate the possibility of (A) designating one or more sites or landscape features as a unit of the National Park System; and (B) coordinating and complementing actions by the [Corridor] Commission, local governments, and State and Federal agencies, in the preservation and interpretation of significant resources within the Corridor.” The NPS consulted with Native American tribes associated with the Blackstone River Valley in the preparation of the study.

The study evaluated a broad range of sites, features and resources throughout the Blackstone River Valley and concluded that the following meet the criteria for designation as a unit of the National Park System: Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark district in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the historic mill villages of Ashton and Slatersville in Rhode Island, and Hopedale and Whitinsville in Massachusetts; the Blackstone River and its tributaries; and the Blackstone Canal. The study also evaluated various management alternatives with different scopes and levels of NPS involvement. The preferred alternative was a new unit of the National Park System that consists of these sites and features, and that would partner with the coordinating entity for the Corridor and others to undertake the protection and interpretation of these resources.

If established based upon the management alternative recommended in the study, we estimate that the cost to create the Park would be \$6.1 million in one-time expenditures on research, planning, construction and/or rehabilitation, and exhibits, and \$4.8 million for land acquisition, including preservation easements. When the Park is fully established, operational costs are estimated to be \$2.6 million annually for salaries, supplies and equipment. All funds would be subject to NPS priorities and the availability of appropriations.

Several important provisions appear in this legislation that reflect changes to last Congress’ version of this legislation. We appreciate that this legislation now includes a matching requirement for the expenditure of Federal funds under cooperative agreements, authority to acquire land for administrative purposes in Woonsocket, where the NPS currently has office space, and an appropriate recognition for Senator John H. Chafee’s role in preserving the resources of the Blackstone River Valley that does not set a precedent in naming the park for a congressional sponsor, as the previous version would have done.

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