

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CONCERNING H.R. 4613, TO AMEND THE NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT FOR THE PURPOSES OF ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL HISTORIC LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM.

JULY 13, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the position of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4613, a bill to amend the National Historic Preservation Act for purposes of establishing a national historic lighthouse preservation program.

The department supports the goal of H.R. 4613, that is to provide a process to protect the historic lighthouses of this nation. The Department of the Interior has responsibility under the Historic Preservation Act to preserve the historic resources of the United States. This bill is intended to provide the Secretary with additional tools to carry out those responsibilities.

Lighthouses have long played an important role in the history of our nation. In 1789, one of the earliest acts of the United States Congress was the creation of the Lighthouse Establishment. The Lighthouse Establishment took over operation of the 12 colonial lighthouses in existence as well as the construction and operation of new lighthouses. Early lighthouses were established for their humanitarian purposes and to build confidence in ship captains as well as foreign governments by symbolically implying that the United States was a responsible world power worthy of recognition. Today the United States has the largest number and the most architecturally diverse collection of lighthouses of any country in the world.

As technology in the arena of navigational aids has improved and advanced, the role of lighthouses as aids to navigation has changed. The Federal government has been turning over many lighthouses by lease or license to recognized non-profit organizations, whose missions are, at least in part, to preserve the lighthouse.

The National Park Service has been playing an active role in preserving lighthouses around the country. Through the National Park Service Maritime Heritage Program we engaged in a partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of the Defense Legacy Program to inventory and assess historic lighthouses and to prepare a manual for the preservation of lighthouses, the Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook. The handbook is being distributed to the managers of every lighthouse in the United States. Through our Federal Lands to Parks Program and Historic Surplus Property Program we assist in the transfer of light stations to state and local governments for park and recreation purposes or for preservation as historic monuments, as currently authorized by the Federal Properties and Administrative Services Act of 1949. To date we have transferred 42 lighthouses for park and recreation uses with 5 additional lighthouses in the process of being transferred in 2000. Twenty-two other lighthouses have been transferred for preservation as historic monuments.

In the near future, the Federal government is expected to dispose of several hundred additional light stations. Current procedures for disposal of these sites do not allow for all potential stewards for historic light stations to be considered. This bill would provide a mechanism to allow various non-profit entities a chance to become stewards of these light stations.

H.R. 4613 would establish a new program to be administered jointly by the Secretary of the Interior and the

Administrator of the General Services Administration (GSA). The program would provide for the transfer of historic light stations, which have been determined by the agency with administrative jurisdiction to be excess property, to qualified entities for the purpose of preserving these historic resources for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The Secretary would review the applications, recommend the best steward, approve the sale of the light station, monitor the site use, and review and approve proposed changes to historic light stations after the transfer. The Administrator would provide for the legal description and conveyance of the property. The State Historic Preservation Officer and the Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, will be consulted during the process.

The Administration recently submitted to Congress a proposal to amend the Federal Property Administrative Services Act of 1949. Although this proposal would also allow non-profit entities to receive surplus historic lighthouses, it would not address some of the unique issues addressed by H.R. 4613. Unfortunately, H.R. 4613, unlike the Property Act, does not preserve the rights of other Federal agencies to obtain lighthouse properties that the Coast Guard no longer needs. We would like the opportunity to work with this committee and GSA to address this aspect of H.R. 4613, as well as potential changes to the proposed Property Act amendments that might address the unique aspects of lighthouse conveyances more specifically.

We understand that the Forest Service is also reviewing H.R. 4613 and wants to ensure that this proposed legislation not alter the similar existing authority in Public Law 105-383 to preserve historic lighthouses on National Forest System lands. We also understand that the Forest Service may submit a report to the Committee as soon as that review has been completed.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of your committee may have.

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