

Committee on Resources

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Testimony of Representative Jo Ann Emerson House Committee on Resources Regarding H.R. 3433/S. 1814 May 13, 2004

I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee regarding S. 1814 and the companion legislation H.R. 3433. These bills would transfer the operations of the Mingo Job Corps Center from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Center to the U.S. Forest Service. I have worked very closely with the federal agencies with jurisdiction over this matter and I am pleased that we have reached this point. This legislation and the agreement we have reached regarding this matter is beneficial to all parties involved. In particular, the students and communities served by the Mingo Job Corp Center are grateful and looking forward to their very bright future.

The Mingo Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center was established in 1965 and is located on the southeastern corner of Mingo National Wildlife Refuge. Over 224 corps members participate in the program at Mingo at any one time. They can see daily what many people travel miles to observe on a National Wildlife Refuge. They are working to make a special effort to provide vocational work sites for training, as well as placement in permanent jobs, not just at Mingo, but on other Service facilities within the region.

In a residential setting, students are given the opportunity to complete their secondary education, round out their social skills, and acquire a vocational skill. Vocational training is offered in the following trades at Mingo: automotive repair, building maintenance, bricklaying, carpentry, heavy equipment operation, painting, welding, clerical, culinary arts, and health services.

With an audience of over 200 young people in residence for over a year on a National Wildlife Refuge, the Center is taking advantage of the opportunity to expose them to environmental awareness concepts in the education, vocational training, and residential living programs. The Center is a unique mix of human resources and natural resource management.

The Mingo Job Corps Center, located in Puxico, Missouri, has become a critical part of the economy in Southeast Missouri. I first want to brag on the work the Center has done and give a little background on the work they do to better the community and the lives of those they serve. The Center has been crucial in providing the young people in Southeast Missouri many opportunities that they would not otherwise have available to them. To give you a better idea of the economic situation in the Eighth Congressional District, the median household income is \$18,207. The lack of viable economic opportunities in the area is staggering, and, as a result, many people in the area have to rely on government assistance to make ends meet.

The Mingo Job Corps Center is the one place these people can go to develop the critical skills needed to enter the workforce. While some of the students at the Center are what we commonly refer to as being "at-risk," the Job Corps program has allowed these young men and women to make a life for themselves and succeed. Additionally, the surrounding community has benefitted from the work of the Center because, upon graduation, the students are able to give back to the community with the skills they have learned.

Currently, the Mingo Job Corps Center is one of two facilities operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – the other Center being the Treasure Lake facility located in Oklahoma. For the period of the last academic year, the Mingo Center was tied for 29th out of 116 Job Corps Centers throughout the country. The students and staff of the Center have always exceeded expectations.

Last year, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that they did not have the budget to adequately operation the Center. As a result, the Department of Labor recommended that the operations of both Centers be contracted out. I completely opposed the proposal to contract out the operations at the Mingo Job Corps Center.

In response to the announcement to contract out operations Senator Bond and I introduced legislation to

transfer the Mingo Center to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service. We believe that the Mingo Center is being unfairly judged because of the poor performance of the other U.S. Fish and Wildlife operated Center at Treasure Lake and we believe the community as well as the young people served by Mingo will suffer if the Center is contracted out. To date, the Department of Labor has only contracted out the operations for one other Job Corps Center. That Center is the Iroquois Job Corps Center in New York which is currently ranked 115th in the country. By adding the Mingo Job Corps Center to the list of U.S. Forest Service-run facilities, we will protect the livelihood of the students and employees served by the Center and ensure that the facility will continue to be operated by an experienced and dedicated staff. Most importantly, the skilled workers who graduate from the Center will continue to add to the dedicated workforce and contribute to the health of the rural economy. The operating costs of the Mingo Center are paid by the Department of Labor and the costs of administratively transferring the operations of the Center are minimal.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee this morning. I look forward to working with all of you as we work toward protecting and preserving the operations of the Mingo Job Corps Center. Thank you.