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Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks  
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 413, to establish the  
Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom  
National Heritage Area, and for other purposes

November 10, 2005

Chairman Pearce and Members of the Committee,

My name is Judy Billings. I am Executive Vice President of the Lawrence, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce & Convention and Visitors Bureau, serving as Chair of a planning committee, made up of representation from 27 counties in eastern Kansas, to establish Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area. We appreciate the opportunity to make a presentation to you today.

We began the process toward establishing a national heritage area in 1999 with the formation of a 501C3 organization called Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance (TKHA). This grassroots group of historians and tourism agencies was successful in completing a series of activities and projects in commemoration of the 150th anniversary in 2004 of the Kansas Territory established as a result of events that took place after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.

After much research of the heritage area movement and consultation with representatives of the National Park Service as well as with existing heritage areas, a facilitated Heritage Summit was held in January 2003 with 75 people in attendance representing various organizations and communities in the area. As a result of the Summit, the group determined that the Bleeding Kansas story and all the underlying themes of an Enduring Struggle for Freedom have had a significant impact on the development of our nation and that we should bring these heretofore hidden stories forward in a more comprehensive and collaborative way. The current grassroots planning committee was launched with a goal to gain federal designation during the Sesquicentennial Year of the Kansas Territory, an ambitious goal! Activities undertaken by volunteers over the past four years have brought us here today.

We have conscientiously followed the critical steps and suggested criteria as defined by the National Park Service in a process that has fully informed key constituents including governments, industry, private and non-profit organizations in addition to interested citizens. There has been tremendous public involvement and support including from our Kansas Congressional delegation and staff and in particular, Congressman Jim Ryun and his staff.

All partners have been fully and equally engaged in contributing important information to be included in the required suitability/feasibility study compiled by a local historic preservation consultant and funded through the contributions by 52 entities ranging from \$25 to \$15,000 that was matched by the Kansas Department of Commerce. The study (show study) demonstrates the significance of our story and identifies major themes with national significance unique to this area. The study also demonstrates the widespread support of this effort.

There are many layers in our story of the struggle for freedom. With the route of Lewis and Clark along the eastern boundary of the Bleeding Kansas Heritage Area and the path of the California, Oregon and Santa Fe Trails through several counties in the defined area, stories reflect the significant impact of those who came, those who stayed and their struggles that endure even today in this sparsely populated part of the country.

From its creation Kansas found itself at the center of the storm brewing over Slavery. The original intent behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to continue the balance of power between the Free States and the Slave States. Popular Sovereignty gave the determining voice to the local voters. The determination that Kansas would enter the union as a free state was not without tremendous struggle. "The Kansas Question" became a focus of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and "Bleeding Kansas" was a moniker that was popularized by Eastern newspapers describing the activities in Kansas. The core question that led to the Civil War, which would ultimately redefine the identity of the nation, was played out on the western frontier in a series of heated and frequently deadly encounters. Kansas was an intersection of Northern and Southern expansion.

Native Americans, African Americans, Women, Free Staters, Proslavers, and the Government all had their own struggles in Kansas. For example, immigrant Native American tribes forcibly relocated from the Southeast and Eastern Woodlands experienced the challenge for survival in a move from well wooded lands with a decent supply of game to the drier areas of Kansas. African Americans were brought in as slaves by Missionaries, government employees and later purchased by some Native Americans. Each of these groups had some members who chose to seek freedom by escaping bondage while viewing Kansas as a "Promised Land" where they could live in freedom if they reached the right area through the Underground Railroad. Women saw the Kansas Territory as a fertile site to fight for their rights and Free-Staters were the first opposition group in Kansas to rebel against voter fraud and the attempt to force Kansas in as a Slave state.

Events in Kansas have been significant to the evolving story of American freedom. The Battle of Black Jack in southern Douglas County was the first time two forces, on opposing sides of the slavery issue, met in open battle. In much the same way that the Battles of Lexington and Concord sounded the opening shots of the Revolutionary War, John Brown's victory at the Battle of Black Jack was the first in the long Civil War over American slavery that would end nearly a decade later at Appomattox Courthouse.

Subsequent events echoed the early history of the area. Haskell Indian Nations University began as a boarding school dedicated to destroying Indian culture by removing children from their homes and families, and trying to force them to abandon their traditions. Ironically, the school developed into a focal point for the creation of an inter-tribal Native American identity. Haskell today is the country's only four year Indian university which accepts students from all the federally recognized tribes, and its mission includes the preservation of Indian traditions and their adaptation to modern needs.

The modern civil rights movement has been played out to a significant degree in our area as well. The landmark case Brown vs the Board of Education is commemorated in a national historic site recently dedicated in Topeka, our capital city.

We have found willing partners of all types in rural and urban areas and have discovered links among our communities in our quest to share our stories. There are at least 7 National Historic Landmarks, 32 National Register properties, 3 Kansas Register properties and 7 properties listed on the National underground Railroad Network to Freedom that contribute to our heritage area as well as other significant properties that have not been designated at this time.

We have a collective resolve to preserve, conserve and share our interconnected stories. We want to educate the youth of Kansas to generate a sense of place and pride in a shared heritage and to give them a reason to make Kansas their permanent home.

A heritage area designation for our state is compatible with our economic development initiatives and is needed in order to expand the existing cooperative framework to achieve key preservation, education and other significant goals. Federal designation will provide credibility in enhancing inherent strengths of small towns and rural communities based on our heritage. We have considered and protected the impact on private property rights as written into our legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today. I ask for your support of H.R. 413 to establish the Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area.