

Congresswoman Lois Capps
Testimony before the Subcommittee of Forests and Forest Health
H.R. 3534, Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station Outstanding Natural Area Act
April 5, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing.

And thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of H.R. 3534, legislation I introduced last year to designate the Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station as an Outstanding Natural Area within the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.

The Piedras Blancas Light Station is located on an 18 acre-parcel of BLM administered land along the Pacific Coast in San Luis Obispo County. The property is adjacent to Pacific Coast Highway and the Hearst Castle State Historic Monument, and it looks over a pristine coastal area that includes the southern portion of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and California Coastal National Monument.

The Light Station is nationally recognized as an important monitoring point for migrating whales, and is used by the U. S. Geological Survey, the National Marine Fisheries Service and a number of universities and colleges for marine wildlife and plant research.

Finally, the Light Station and the surrounding area are important for tourism. The national historic Light House – built in 1879 – is a main destination focal point on the Central Coast, and the peninsula is very popular for viewing sea otters, elephant seals, and sea lions from shore. For example, the elephant seal colony at Piedras Blancas attracts an estimated 400,000 visitors annually.

In 2001, BLM assumed ownership and management of the Light Station from the U.S. Coast Guard. Since then, BLM, state and local agencies, community stakeholders and conservation groups have developed a very successful partnership to preserve the Light Station.

Some of these partners include: the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association; California State Parks; San Luis Obispo County; the cities of Cambria and San Simeon; the California Coastal Conservancy and Coastal Commission; NOAA; and the Hearst Corporation.

As a result of their hard work, the site was re-opened to public tours in 2003 – for the first time in 128 years! These partners continue to work together on a series of environmental education, historical restoration and resource protection programs. And I'm confident they will each support and showcase this national designation if enacted.

Mr. Chairman, my legislation tracks the successful model of designating the Oregon Coast's Yaquina Head as an Outstanding Natural Area, which was signed into law in 1980. Yaquina Head was later included in the National Landscape Conservation System.

Like Yaquina Head, the addition of the Piedras Blancas Light Station to the NLCS would be an important step in protecting and preserving this valuable natural and historic resource. It will also focus attention on the restoration of the Light Station and surrounding area, specifically the three on-site National Register properties. And, it will serve as a means to increase public awareness of the Light Station's scientific, cultural and educational values.

Specifically, H.R. 3534 stresses long-term conservation of the Light Station by requiring timely completion of a management plan. The management plan would be developed through a public process and include guidelines for restoration of the National Register of Historic Places buildings, including the Light House; public access; ecological and cultural resource management; and, fostering scientific study and research opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, the Piedras Blancas Light Station is a wonderful resource. It has the potential to serve as a model for future resource management, and therefore would be an appropriate addition to the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.

Again, thank you for your interest in this legislation. I hope the Committee will approve it and designate Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station as an Outstanding Natural Area very soon.

Thank you.