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Testimony before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 5132 (The River Raisin National Battlefield Study Act)

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I would first like to thank Chairman Pearce and Ranking Member Christensen for inviting me here today, and for giving me an opportunity to share my community's enthusiasm for this very timely opportunity to preserve an important piece of American history.

We're a mere six-years away from commemorating the bicentennial of our nation's second War for Independence – The War of 1812. The Battle of the River Raisin at Frenchtown – in what is now the City of Monroe, Michigan, of which I am Mayor – were fought over a key strategic military and communications crossroads. The outcome of the Battle, and the ensuing massacre of unarmed soldiers and civilians, lent to the Americans a devastating blow to a promising winter campaign; but it also inspired in them the eventual rallying cry that would later spur our young nation onto victory.

Let me set the scene for you on what took place during a frigid January in 1813 along the banks of the River Raisin. By 1810, a small settlement known as Frenchtown had grown along the north bank of the River Raisin. The residents of that small settlement found themselves geographically between forces that were trying to shape the destinies of two nations. To the north, the British Army was based in Detroit, and to the south U.S. forces, led by General William Henry Harrison, were garrisoned at Fort Meigs, outside present day Toledo, Ohio. On January 18th, 1813 American forces crossed the frozen River Raisin and attacked the British encampment that controlled tiny Frenchtown, briefly retaking the settlement and sending the British soldiers retreating. Four-days later the British Army counterattacked, routing the American regulars and Kentucky militia, and recaptured Frenchtown. The British withdrew across Lake Erie to Fort Malden in Amherstburg, Canada and took prisoner any soldier who could travel. The rest were left in at Frenchtown. The next day, Native Americans allied with the British returned to Frenchtown and massacred the remaining soldiers and burned the settlement to the ground. Of the 900-strong American force that participated in the two battles, only 33-eventually escaped death or capture, making the Battles of the River Raisin the most deadly of the War, and the worst battle ever fought on Michigan soil.

Later during the summer of 1813, the U.S. Army fought hard to push back British forces from Southeast Michigan and Northwest Ohio. Along with the decisive U.S. Naval victory led by Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry at the Battle of Lake Erie, British forces were pushed back to the Thames River near present day London, Ontario. There, the U.S. won a decisive victory at the Battle of the Thames, spurred on by the rallying cry "Remember the Raisin!" This victory ended the Northwest campaign of the War and helped secure the present day borders of Michigan and the United States at the 1814 Treaty of Ghent.

While the burning of Washington and the Battle of New Orleans are more well known aspects of the War of 1812, and by and large well recognized events in our nation's history, the Battle of the River Raisin is no less important for its role in securing the Northern border and for creating the momentum that led American forces to final victory and helped put an exclamation point to a young nation's sovereignty.

Fast forward to present day, in 1982 the National Park Service (NPS) officially recognized the significance of the River Raisin Battlefield by placing it on the National Register of Historic Places. In June of this year, the City of Monroe acquired title to the Battlefield Site and is working closely with all the City's partners to see that this preservation opportunity is considered for study by the National Park Service. Presently, the State of Michigan has invested \$1-million through a Brownfield Redevelopment Grant to restore the 35.5-acre property to more natural conditions by razing remnants of a former pulp mill that was abandoned in 1995. The City of Monroe has obligated \$35,000, with the Monroe County Historical Society matching an additional \$35,000, to fund the development of a Master Plan for the entire Battlefield.

To plan for the future of this site, the River Raisin Battlefield National Foundation {a 501 (C) (3) organization} has been formed as a steward of the site and to take local responsibility for its long-term care and maintenance. Achieving National Park Service recognition, would add historical legitimacy to this prominent site and would better position this non-profit group's ability to attract grants and other funding sources for Battlefield's ongoing financial solvency.

We are confident that if studied, the site will qualify for National Park Service recognition through meeting objective standards

and other criteria established by the NPS. But at the same time the River Raisin Battlefield National Foundation is contractually obligated to play the preeminent role in taking financial responsibility for the long-term care and maintenance of the site.

While preservation and study of this site is obvious for reasons of remembering a significant struggle in our nation's history, a less apparent benefit would be its place as an economic development tool in an economy of Southeast Michigan that is ailing. Eastern Michigan University History Professor Ted Ligibel has said that the River Raisin Battlefield Site is at the geographic center of War of 1812 sites in the region. State of Michigan Department of History, Arts, and Libraries Director Doctor William Anderson has cited studies that show that people who take cultural/heritage vacations spend an average amount of \$627.00 --- compared to an average of \$400.00 that people spend on all other types of vacations. And a study conducted by the Michigan Historic Network found that 25-jobs are created for every \$1-million dollars that is invested in developing cultural/heritage tourism sites. And with a Michigan unemployment rate of six-percent, the economic value of studying and developing a heritage site cannot be discounted.

Studying this site would be the first step toward possibly uniting the region and marketing it as an international heritage area with Monroe's neighbors across Lake Erie in Canada. The Battlefield Site would be the latest addition to War of 1812 historic sites in the region that include Fort Meigs State Memorial near Toledo, Ohio, the National Park Service's Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial on South Bass Island in Lake Erie, and Fort Malden National Historic Site in Amherstburg, Canada.

Mr. Chairman thank you for working hard to help the National Park Service achieve efficiencies in management so our national treasures will have the necessary resources so that they will be preserved for future generations. While we are a long way off from the site being declared a National Park or a National Historic Landmark, authorizing the study contained in H. R. 5132 would be a major step forward in our community's efforts to reclaim valuable land that merits some form of formal historical recognition.

In conclusion, I am compelled to add that we are very cognizant that budgetary liabilities are always of concern in matters of acquisition and when planning future investment in our Park System. I would like this Committee to know that the local municipalities involved in this project, along with the River Raisin Battlefield National Foundation, are committed to seeing Federal involvement go forward through revenue neutral means, and we have no desire to see this Battlefield become a budgetary burden on the Park System. We are blessed with a tremendous amount of local support, and we only desire from the Federal government the endorsement and legitimacy that this nationally significant site for so long has deserved. Hopefully Mr. Chairman and Committee members, the endorsement letters that I bring with me today reflect enthusiasm of broad support from Monroe County residents who recognize that they have a unique opportunity to protect a site that was significant in America's Second War of Independence.

On behalf of myself, the Monroe City Council, and the support of those who have written passionate letters of endorsement for this opportunity, I thank you for your thoughtful consideration of supporting H.R. 5132.