

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony

**Testimony of Rep. Dale E. Kildee on H.R. 468,
the St. Helena Island National Scenic Area Act of 1999
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
June 17, 1999**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee regarding my legislation, H.R. 468, the St. Helena Island National Scenic Area Act of 1999.

We have a wonderful opportunity to protect a beautiful island in the Straits of Mackinac in Lake Michigan. Owned by willing sellers, St. Helena Island is located approximately two miles from the northern shore of Lake Michigan with a beautiful view of the Mackinac Bridge. In addition, the Island contains a historic lighthouse which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The two acres on which the lighthouse sits, were recently conveyed via quitclaim from the Coast Guard to the Great Lakes Lighthouse keepers Association. This bill would authorize purchase of the remainder of the island.

My legislation is simple, it will authorize the purchase of St. Helena Island from the willing sellers of the Brown and Hammond families. The island would become part of the Hiawatha National Forest, whose boundary reaches the shoreline to the immediate north of the Island. The National Forest Service would then manage the island as a national scenic area, and the island would be open to the public for recreational use.

The legislation includes authority to use land on the island for administrative purposes. A pier and landing area will need to be built for access by the public. If necessary, I would endorse an adjustment in the language of the bill to specify the size of the parcel that can be used for this purpose.

The island is approximately one mile long and about one-half mile wide. Its geological characteristic is a lime stone mound with a split limestone covering. The north harbor is deep and serves as a recreational boat refuge. The east and west wings of the island have long, shallow shoals submerged beneath the water, making the lighthouse necessary. When water levels in the lake are low, these shoals also become exposed.

The habitat of the island is ecologically diverse. There are over three hundred species of plant life, almost a quarter of which are not native to Michigan. Wildlife species include red fox, coyote, snowshoe rabbits, and beavers. Furthermore, numerous species of birds can be found as well.

In the 1800's, the island was populated with over 200 people in a fishing community that also provisioned ship traffic passing through the Straits. However, the island currently has no population. Today, the island is used, with the permission of the owners, for several youth summer programs. For example, in 1994 NOAA invited Boy Scout Troop 4 to present the only fresh water paper at the Third International Conference on Marine Debris. This paper was based on the troop's effort in cleaning up the island shoreline.

The local forest service is willing to manage the land, and the local taxing authority, Moran Township, has

passed a resolution in support of the proposal. These entities, in conjunction with the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association, will work together to ensure the ultimate success of this project.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to offer this simple plan. It will provide wonderful recreational opportunities for many Michiganders, and it will allows us to preserve a small, yet beautiful island.

I would ask unanimous consent to have letters of support from the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association and a resolution of support from Moran Township inserted in the legislative record.

I am happy to answer any questions any of my colleagues may have.

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