

**STATEMENT OF TODD DAVIDSON
VICE CHAIRMAN, WESTERN STATES TOURISM POLICY COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OREGON TOURISM COMMISSION

TO

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC
LANDS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCERNING

H.R. 4622
THE GATEWAY COMMUNITIES COOPERATION ACT OF 2002

MAY 7, 2002**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. I am Todd Davidson and I am pleased and honored to speak to you this afternoon as vice chairman of the Western States Tourism Policy Council (WSTPC) to express our strong support for H.R. 4622, the "Gateway Communities Cooperation Act of 2002." I also serve as executive director of the Oregon Tourism Commission.

The WSTPC

Formed in 1996, the WSTPC is a consortium of thirteen western state tourism offices, including the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. The mission of the WSTPC is to advance understanding and support for public policies that enhance the positive impact of travel and tourism on the economy and the environment of its member states and their communities.

The WSTPC is proud of the close and productive partnership it has developed with eleven Federal agencies that have a significant impact on tourism and recreation in the West, including all the major Federal land management agencies. We meet with our Federal partners on a regular basis to exchange information and ideas and to develop joint projects, including several successful conferences on topics of mutual concern. Two memoranda of understanding, in 1997 and in 2001, have defined our partnership.

Tourism and Gateways in the West

Tourism is a vital component of the economy of the American West, a powerful economic engine that provides millions of jobs. Nature and history have combined to make the West immensely appealing to visitors from throughout the United States and the world. Eight of the states that comprise our Council are among the twelve most tourism dependent states in the nation in terms of per capita receipts.

In the West much, if not most, tourism is public lands tourism. In the West, more than half of the total area is Federal land, and eleven of the WSTPC member states are among the top twelve states in percentage of Federal land acreage.

Hundreds of communities in the West serve as “gateways” for millions of visitors to these Federal lands. For these communities, which are typically small and rural, the business generated by these visitors is a vital component of their local economies. The cumulative impact is significant for our state economies.

The thirteen individual state tourism offices that comprise the WSTPC each work closely with the gateway communities in their states, providing advice, counsel and marketing support to enable those communities to reach their tourism and recreation business goals.

Each WSTPC member state tourism office also strives to work closely with the Federal land agencies in their respective states. We understand that the policies, programs and activities of those agencies often have a direct and significant impact on nearby communities and, indeed, on the entire state.

In September, 1998, the WSTPC, with all its Federal partners, organized a major conference in Tacoma, Washington, on the subject of gateway communities. There were nearly 500 in attendance, evenly split between gateway leaders and agency staff. Nearly everyone agreed that it was an extremely worthwhile exercise as both gateways and agencies exchanged viewpoints, candidly talked about problems in their relationships and learned how they could work more closely together. That conference was so successful that we are currently working with our Federal partners, and with the National Alliance of Gateway Communities on a second Gateways Conference, that is scheduled later this year, on December 3-5, on the Santa Ana Pueblo in Bernalillo, New Mexico.

Mr. Chairman, please let me take this opportunity to invite you and the other members of the Subcommittee to participate in this second gateways conference in December.

It is because of our substantial experience working with both gateway communities and with the Federal land agencies that the WSTPC enthusiastically endorses and supports H.R. 4622. We commend you, Mr. Chairman, for having the vision to introduce it.

What This Bill Will *Not* Do

Let me first try and clarify some possible misimpressions about this legislation as we understand it.

First, we do not read H.R. 4622 as an invitation to “bash the agencies.” Many local Federal land managers understand the importance of good relations with their gateway communities and make an active, proactive attempt to cultivate those good relations. They are to be commended. At the national level, the Federal land agencies over the last decade have increasingly the importance of gateways and have organized seminars and training programs for their senior staff on gateway relationships. These programs should continue.

Second, we do not see that H.R. 4622 gives gateway communities any type of veto over policies, decisions,

programs or activities of any Federal land agency. It does not give gateways preference or priority over any other stakeholders. That has never been the intent of the bill and, if necessary, we would support amending language to clarify these points.

Third, we do not think that H.R. 4622 is, in any, contrary to the environmental values and goals of our nation. No one loves the natural beauty and wildlife of our magnificent national parks, forests and other Federal public lands more than those who have chosen to spend their lives in the communities next door to them.

Fourth, we do not believe that H.R. 4622 elevates local interests over the national interests. We recognize that we are talking about *national* parks and *national* forests, and they must always be responsive first and foremost to national priorities.

Fifth, H.R. 4622 does not place any additional mandates on gateway communities. It will be the voluntary choice of the gateway as to whether it seeks to utilize any of the provisions of the bill.

What This Bill Will Do

H.R. 4622 is a balanced, reasonable response to a widespread concern. As we have noted, in many instances, relationships between Federal land agencies and their gateway communities are harmonious and productive. Many Federal land managers and local leaders do indeed “get it” and work harmoniously together.

They understand that the community and the Federal land are inevitably interconnected. They understand that it is not a “zero sum game,” but that the health and vitality of one has a direct impact on the other. They understand the imperative of being “good neighbors” with their gateways. They understand that the Federal lands are poorly served by gateway communities that are weak and resentful,

But this is not always the case. At the 1998 WSTPC-Federal Agencies Gateway Conference, two common refrains were that the agencies too often ignored the interests of gateways without reason and that many gateways have insufficient staff and expertise to participate in a truly meaningful way in agency policy-making processes. At present, it is up to each Federal land manager to decide what relationships he or she wants to have with gateway communities. There has never been a statutory declaration that gateway communities are critical to the mission of the agencies and that cooperation and coordination should be fostered.

The first and greatest value of H.R. 4622, therefore, is to declare as a matter of national policy that Federal land managers are required “to support, and to communicate, and cooperate with designated gateway communities.” The bill provides historic recognition by Congress that gateway communities are integral to the mission of the public lands, the first points of contact for visitors and the providers of essential services to both visitors and the public lands.

In the closing days of the Clinton Administration, T. Destry Jarvis, then Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, wrote: “. . . no land-use decision around a national park is exclusively local *or* national, but always has implications on both. The National Park Service should realize its affirmative responsibility to actively participate in local land-use decisions, and should similarly be aware of the effects of its decisions on its neighbors, allowing them to be involved in the process of

arriving at those decisions.” H.R. 4622 would be an historic step towards that goal.

Too many times, small gateway communities – towns and counties – are expected to interpret and comment on complex agency draft planning documents without staff and expertise to interpret and evaluate the potential ramifications of those plans for the communities. H.R. 4622 would enable gateways to be much more meaningful participants in those agency planning processes by:

- (1) receiving early, non-technical summaries of such plans, their assumptions and objectives and the anticipated impact on gateway communities;
- (2) receiving the earliest practicable public notice of proposed decisions that may have a significant impact on gateway communities;
- (3) receiving training from the agencies about their planning processes and how they can best participate;
- (4) receiving technical assistance from the agency, including assigned agency staff or contractor to work with the gateway to understand and respond better to proposed agency plans;
- (5) receiving, on request, a review from the agency of its land use, management or transportation plans likely to affect the community;
- (6) entering into cooperative agreements to coordinate local land use plans with those of the Federal land agency, other Federal agencies, State governments and tribal governments;

What these provisions would do is to institutionalize gateway community involvement with their Federal land neighbors. It would systematize and set parameters on planning processes that have until now been inconsistent and unclear from the perspective of local communities. Plans do matter. The Federal land agencies are guided in future years by the assumptions and conclusions of their plans. They will be better plans – more effective and more accepted -- with greater community involvement.

It is also worthy of special note that H.R. 4622 will require interagency coordination and consolidation when the plans and planning processes of two or more Federal land agencies are anticipated to have an impact on a gateway community. This will go a long way towards reducing overlap, redundancy and confusion for gateways near multiple Federal lands with multiple plans.

With the support and assistance provided by these provisions, reinforced by the agency grants authorized by H.R. 4622, gateways will be prepared and qualified to participate as cooperating agencies under NEPA processes as allowed under this legislation.

Conclusions

Mr. Chairman, this seems to us fair and reasonable legislation. It is long overdue recognition of the importance of gateway communities and prescribes a carefully thought out strategy to make them stronger and more effective partners of their Federal land neighbors. Robert Frost told us that “Good fences make good neighbors.” We believe that H.R. 4622 also shows how good laws can also play a key role in helping make good neighbors of gateway communities and the Federal land agencies.

We urge that H.R. 4622 be enacted as early as possible.