

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF DENIS GALVIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 3190, TO ESTABLISH THE OIL REGION NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

JUNE 27, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3190, a bill to establish the Oil Region National Heritage Area.

The Department opposes enactment of H.R. 3190 because a study has not yet been conducted to determine the suitability and feasibility of establishing the national heritage area that would be designated by this bill. However, we would support this legislation if it were amended to provide for such a study rather than designation.

H.R. 3190 would establish a national heritage area in the northwestern Pennsylvania region where the world's first successful oil well was drilled in 1859. This area is one of nine formally designated state heritage parks under the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks program, anchored by the state-operated Drake Well Museum and Oil Creek State Park. The legislation would designate Oil Heritage Region, Inc., a locally based, private nonprofit corporation as the management entity for the national heritage area.

H.R. 3190 provides that the goals and objectives of the heritage area, its boundaries, and a proposed approach to conservation would be established through a compact between the Secretary of the Interior and the management entity. The bill also requires the development of a management plan, subject to the approval of the Secretary, that includes an inventory and assessment of resources, recommendations for resource protection and interpretation, and an implementation plan. The bill authorizes a total of \$10 million for the area, with an annual limit of \$1 million and a 50% non-Federal match requirement, over a ten-year period that begins after the Secretary of the Interior approves the management plan for the heritage area.

Mr. Chairman, there is certainly no question about the significance of the discovery of oil in northwestern Pennsylvania by Colonel Edwin Drake in the mid-nineteenth century. This event led to the development of a major industry in that region, accelerated the industrial revolution, and revolutionized methods of transportation. Indeed, it transformed the daily life of our nation.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has appropriately recognized the significance of the events that occurred in this location, making the area part of its state heritage parks system. Many sites related to the oil industry--including oil leases that have operated continuously since first established, the remains of historic buildings and oil rigs, collections of artifacts, and some of the settlements and farms of the oil boom era--are still in existence. They are the subject of an Oil Region Heritage Park Plan published in 1994 and an Oil Heritage Region Interpretive Prospectus published in 1998. The region itself contains six national historic

districts and a number of sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

However, the National Park Service has not yet determined whether *national* heritage area designation for this region is appropriate.

As we have testified previously before this subcommittee, there are several steps we believe should be taken prior to Congress designating a national heritage area to help ensure that the heritage area is successful. Those steps are:

1. completion of a suitability/feasibility study;
2. public involvement in the suitability/feasibility study;
3. demonstration of widespread public support among heritage area residents for the proposed designation; and
4. commitment to the proposal from the appropriate players which may include governments, industry, and private, non-profit organizations, in addition to the local citizenry.

H.R. 3190 would determine the boundaries and the goals and objectives of the heritage area through a compact between the management entity and the Secretary of the Interior. Our experience with national heritage areas indicates that it is better to make those determinations before, rather than after, Congress designates a national heritage area, using the public involvement process that the suitability/feasibility study process affords.

In addition, we believe it is necessary to evaluate the integrity of the resources and the nationally distinctive character of the region before recommending national heritage area designation.

Furthermore, since we have had little contact with the proposed management entity, we do not know how capable it is of financing its operation or creating partnerships, or whether relevant community interests are represented on its governing body, or whether the citizenry of the region supports that entity. Those are factors that need to be explored and analyzed before we will be in a position to offer our support for national heritage area designation for the area.

We would be happy to work with the subcommittee and the bill's sponsor, Representative Peterson, to amend the legislation to provide for a study rather than designation. We would recommend modeling the amendment on H.R. 4312, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing a national heritage area in the Upper Housatonic River Valley in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

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