

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF DONALD J. BARRY, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 4521, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO AUTHORIZE AND PROVIDE FUNDING FOR REHABILITATION OF THE GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, TO AUTHORIZE FUNDS FOR MAINTENANCE OF UTILITIES RELATED TO THE PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 27, 2000

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4521, a bill to authorize and provide funding for rehabilitation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road, to authorize funds for maintenance of utilities, and for other purposes relating to Glacier National Park.

The Department supports legislative efforts to rehabilitate the historic infrastructure found in Glacier National Park. However, we believe H.R. 4521 should be amended as outlined in this testimony to clarify the intent of the legislation and to address issues we believe require additional clarification.

We appreciate the recognition Congress has given to the significant historic infrastructure found in Glacier National Park and the critical role it plays in providing for the public to use and enjoy the park. Your congressional field hearing held in Glacier in the fall of 1999 looked at the condition of the park's infrastructure, as well as the state of the historic hotels and concessions program. I have personally inspected a number of these facilities, and share the urgency for their restoration. With the introduction and consideration of this bill, Congress has continued to demonstrate its keen interest and support in finding solutions to solving the challenges of how to achieve the rehabilitation and preservation of these facilities.

H.R. 4521 has three main components and I would like to address each one separately.

Going-to-the-Sun Road

H.R. 4521 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the previously authorized Going-to-the-Sun Road Citizens Advisory Committee, to complete a feasibility study for rehabilitation of the road. The study would include alternative plans for rehabilitation of the road, ranking the feasibility of each plan, estimating the length of time necessary to complete each plan, and describing the mitigation efforts necessary to preserve resources and minimize adverse impacts. The study would also estimate and analyze the costs and benefits of each plan, analyze maintenance needs, and complete an environmental analysis that fulfills the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other laws.

The bill directs the Secretary to continue the maintenance program in effect to preserve, maintain, and address safety concerns related to the road. Also, after completing the study and environmental analysis the Secretary shall consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, make a decision documented in the environmental analysis process, and begin implementation of the plan. The Secretary shall also seek funding for the long-term maintenance needs that the study identifies.

This portion of the bill also directs the Secretary to transmit to the House Committee on Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources a copy of the road study 30 days after it is completed. A total of \$200 million is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary for implementation of the road plan that is selected as well as necessary environmental or cultural documentation and monitoring.

We agree with the need to rehabilitate the Going-to-the-Sun Road. Those that dedicated themselves and at times risked their lives to the building of the road would be grateful today for your efforts to save this important piece of our nation's heritage. We appreciate the critical assistance Congress has provided to the park by starting this process by establishing a citizen's Advisory Committee to make specific recommendations to the Secretary on how the road should be rehabilitated.

We agree with the language in the bill directing the Secretary and the advisory committee to examine all alternatives for rehabilitating the road. The funding that is authorized should be a level that would allow the rehabilitation to take place in accordance with the recommendations in the road study. Funding sources currently available to Glacier National Park only allow a piecemeal approach to road rehabilitation. We would suggest that in addition to the committees mentioned in the bill that the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works also receive a copy of the road study. This could allow additional funding sources to be considered in the overall rehabilitation of the road.

The bill is not clear whether the funds authorized in this bill would include the required environmental analysis associated with the study or if the funding for environmental and cultural documentation and monitoring is only for those activities once construction has begun. We recommend that the ambiguity be resolved such that the funds appropriated may be expended for the required environmental analysis.

The environmental analysis must be completed in order to make the target date for the road study of June 30, 2001 achievable. We suggest that the bill be amended to authorize funding for the environmental analysis associated with the advisory committee study. Without the funding, we will be unable to meet the deadline.

We generally do not support providing mitigation assistance to businesses impacted by road repairs and associate closures. Usually the long-term benefits to business owners of road rehabilitation and improvements outweighs any short term inconvenience or adverse economic impacts. As currently drafted, the bill is overly broad and provides no details on how such a program would be formulated. We would like to discuss with you giving the advisory committee and the Secretary the authority to explore other alternatives for rehabilitation of the road with the minimum amount of impact to the surrounding communities.

Utility System Upgrades

H.R. 4521 authorizes the Secretary to begin the upgrade and continue the maintenance of utility systems that serve Glacier National Park and related facilities. A total of \$20 million is authorized to be appropriated to

carry out this section.

We agree with the need to upgrade and repair the utility systems and welcome the level of funding authorized in the bill. Glacier National Park staff have also been actively seeking funds through National Park Service funding sources for repair of the park utility systems. The park recently received funding that over the next two years will allow the upgrade of headquarters water and wastewater systems but this type of funding only completes one project at a time. The additional funding authorized in the bill would allow us to repair and upgrade all the remaining park utility systems bringing them up to industry standards. However, this amount of funding does not allow for any additions or expansions to the current level of utilities such as would be necessary to fully winterize the facilities of the park.

Hotel Rehabilitation

H.R. 4521 authorizes the Secretary to enter into competitive leases of property in Glacier, owned

by the United States, which allows the lessee to provide visitor services. The bill requires that only those facilities and services that are necessary and appropriate with the policies of the National Park Service Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998 be provided. The Secretary is directed to provide visitor services at adequate and reasonable rates, allowing the rates to be set high enough to allow investment in capital improvements for visitor services to be recovered. Leased property would be maintained by the lessee with historic property maintained in a manner consistent with its historic character as determined by the Secretary.

The bill also directs the Secretary to include in leases appropriate terms and conditions to assure the lessee of adequate protection against loss of investment in real property that the lessee may make to the property. The United States would be obligated to compensate the lessee for loss of their investment in property improvements in circumstances that the Secretary deems prudent.

The historic hotels at Glacier are an important part of the visitor experience. Just as Congress put into place a process to plan for the rehabilitation of the Going-to-the-Sun Road, the National Park Service has taken a systematic approach to determine and plan for the commercial service needs of the park through the initiation of a Commercial Services Plan as required in the new park General Management Plan. Work has begun on this plan and we anticipate a draft to be completed by August 2001.

The Commercial Services Plan tiers off from the recently approved General Management Plan and will determine the type and level of services provided to visitors at the park as well as addressing the rehabilitation of the historic structures. The plan will assist the park in determining the overall mix of commercial services and the operating parameters for these services. It is a standard and essential step before either a lease or new concession contract could be issued.

We are excited about the possibilities raised on H.R. 4521 to accomplish the rehabilitation of the hotels at Glacier. Much of the hotel rehabilitation section in the bill addresses authorities that already exist and we look forward to working with the Committee on ways to fully address the historic rehabilitation needs of Glacier's historic hotels.

We also offer two technical amendments to the bill. One is replacing "concessionaire" where it occurs with "concessioner" which will make the bill consistent with Public Law 105-391. We also suggest replacing throughout the bill references to "remodel" or "remodeling" with "rehabilitate" or "rehabilitation". This

wording change would make the bill consistent with the terminology used in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation for historic preservation and within the preservation community.

The historic structures and resources at Glacier are an important part and highlight of most visits to the park. The desire of the Department to effectively resolve these issues is sincere. We appreciate the interest and involvement of the entire Montana delegation in the historic resources at Glacier National Park and we look forward to working with you to use H.R. 4521 as a foundation to accomplish our common goals.

This concludes my formal remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you or member of the subcommittee might have.

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