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Forest Service Partnership Enhancement Act of 2005
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of the House of Representatives Committee on Resources
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Mr. Chairman and honorable committee members, thank you for the invitation to testify today about the important role partnerships play in our national forests, and the importance of the pending bill HR 3818: the Forest Service Partnership Enhancement Act of 2005. I am Harry Hafer, Executive Director of the Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association, a nonprofit membership organization headquartered in Brevard, North Carolina. This Association is currently partnered with national forests in ten states in the Southern and Eastern Regions to support education and interpretive services, publications and exhibits, and provide management and support service to visitor centers and recreation areas. At the Cradle of Forestry Historic Site, we work together with Forest Service staff to enhance the experiences of forest visitors and to engage community members in conserving the forests for today and for the future. The Interpretive Association was established in 1972, and since then it has provided the USDA Forest Service with well over \$25 million in support for forest educational and recreational projects and programs. Funding has come from the collection of fees, sale of interpretive materials, grants, gifts and other sources. CFAIA has presented educational programs in campgrounds and recreation areas to over 150,000 people since 1991.

Benefits to the USDA Forest Service

The Partnership Act will provide much needed authority and guidance to the Forest Service for working with partners. The USDA Forest Service has a workforce of roughly 30,000 and a land base of 192 million acres, and it hosts over 200 million recreation minded visitors per year. It would be virtually impossible for the USDA Forest Service to meet the needs of these visitors without partnerships. Partners work with the Forest Service on everything from research to picking up litter, providing educational experiences to trail maintenance. Over the years, the American people have benefited from the efforts of hundreds of organizations working in partnership with the USDA Forest Service to improve our nation's forests.

At the Forest Service Centennial Celebration, Chief Bosworth and others on the Forest Leadership Team talked of the historic contribution of partners and emphasized the need for partners in the second century. Repeatedly the need for collaboration and partnerships across all facets of operations was stated along with the recognition of new policies and authorities to better work with partners. This legislation is a major step in this process.

Benefit to Interpretive Associations

Across the National Forest System, over 60 Interpretive Associations work closely with the USDA Forest Service providing over \$6 million annually to assist in developing and disseminating educational interpretive products and providing visitor services. Interpretive Associations have been working with the USDA Forest Service for over 30 years, providing support of interpretive and education services, and in many locations providing programs, publications, and exhibits to help forest visitors better understand the many sciences of forestry and the influences of forests on America's culture. In the simplest of services, interpretive associations make available maps and trail guides for sale to forest visitors at Forest Service facilities. Instead of being a sale of federal property, the transaction becomes one of great convenience for the visitor.

This legislation allows interpretive associations to function and gives them authority to perform their mission. Over the years, the Forest Service has more than once questioned its authority to work with interpretive associations. Much time and energy has been spent re-investigating this issue and each time the authority has been confirmed. Usually "the letter" states that the authority is not as clear as it should be, but assures the field staff that it is OK to work with interpretive associations. This bill would retire this issue once and for all. The Association of Partners for Public Lands has asked me to express their support of this legislation.

Benefits to the Cradle of Forestry

The Cradle of Forestry in America is one of 40 major visitor centers in the National Forest System. Since 1972, the Cradle of Forestry Interpretive Association has worked with the Forest Service to capture the mission and vision of congress expressed in the Cradle of Forestry in America Act of 1968. The Cradle of Forestry Interpretive Association has played a variety of roles in the development of the Cradle of Forestry. Originally, the Association ran the bookshop with volunteers and later added paid staff. In 1988 the Association hired tour guides to supplement the Forest Service education staff. The Association ran a capital campaign to raise funds for the Forest Discovery Center and served on the planning team for

the facility and the interpretive design. Association staff has contributed time and talents to help train Forest Service staff and volunteers, and Forest Service staff regularly assists in training Association staff.

Today the Association provides marketing and special event planning, education staff support, maintenance staff and food service and gift shop management. In addition, the Cradle of Forestry Foundation has been established to raise funds for education programs. An endowment fund has been established to provide long term permanent funding for education and outreach programs.

A new strategic plan combines the strengths of the Association and the Forest Service has been developed. Eight goals are identified including: the Cradle will facilitate the development and dissemination of science-based forest conservation education curricula at a regional and national scale using the best technology and gain a regional and national reputation as a “must see” attraction.

The Cradle of Forestry Interpretive Association has expanded its role in education in several major programs:

1) At the Cradle of Forestry

- a. assisting in the establishment of the Pisgah Forest Institute,
- b. assisting in the expansion of the K-12 program for on site visits.
- c. developing a Junior Forest Ranger Program in North Carolina

2) National Programs – developed by Forest Service or through Forest Service Funding

- a. supporting the Natural Inquirer, USDA FS publication on science (grades 5-8)
- b. supporting development of a Forest Landscape Modeling Program (grades 9-12)
- c. supporting USDA FS efforts to reintroduce the Junior Forest Ranger Program nationally

These programs will help bring forests into classrooms and/or students to the forests, giving them a greater knowledge of the many sciences that go into forest management. The expanded authority addressed in this bill removes some bureaucratic obstacles, allowing these partnerships greater efficiencies and more focus on delivering products and services.

Benefits to the American People

Americans love their National Forests. Millions of Americans visit their forests every week to recreate, relax, hike, fish, hunt, climb, explore, camp, swim, ski, float, bike or sightsee. But, most importantly they come to enjoy themselves, to create memories, and perhaps to learn a little bit more about our forests and grasslands.

This legislation will enable the Forest Service to develop and maintain strong partnerships with organizations that want to share in the Forest Service mission of “Caring for the land and serving the people.” Working together, these partnerships can create a more informed user of our forests and grasslands.