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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

REGARDING H.R. 1096, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE THOMAS EDISON NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY AS THE SUCCESSOR TO THE EDISON NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.

June 9, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1096, a bill to establish the Thomas Edison National Historical Park as the successor to the Edison National Historic Site. The Department supports enactment of this bill.

Thomas Alva Edison was a prodigious inventor who revolutionized how the Nation communicated, harnessed and distributed power, and translated pure technology into commercial products. Edison National Historic Site, located in West Orange, New Jersey, was Thomas Edison's second research and development facility. After closing his first operation in Menlo Park, Edison established the West Orange laboratory in 1887. The hub of Edison's manufacturing operations until his death in 1931, the laboratory was the most productive of all in terms of sheer quantity of inventions. In fact, more than half of Edison's 1,093 U.S. patents were developed at this location including his improved phonograph, the nickel-iron-alkaline battery, and a fluoroscope used in the first x-ray operation in America. It was here, too, that Edison established his motion picture studio, the "Black Maria", in 1893.

In 1962, Congress designated the Edison Laboratory National Monument and Edison Home National Historic Site as the Edison National Historic Site. Glenmont, the home Edison purchased in 1886, and lived in with his second wife, Mina Miller Edison, is located in nearby Llewellyn Park. The 29-room mansion is built of wood, brick and stone and typifies the eclectic Queen Anne style popular in the 1880s and 1890s. Both Edison and his second wife are buried behind Glenmont.

H.R. 1096 would re-designate the Edison National Historic Site as the Thomas Edison National Historical Park. We believe this re-designation to be appropriate for two main reasons. First, the term "National Historical Park" generally applies to historic parks that extend beyond single properties or buildings. This unit of the National Park System includes both the laboratory in West Orange and the separate home established by Edison in nearby Llewellyn Park, one mile away. They are two distinct units with different interpretive themes, resource management issues, and operational challenges.

Second, with completion of the current rehabilitation project at the laboratory complex, the unit's complexity will increase and the term "National Historic Site" no longer adequately reflects the nature of the various themes that will be interpreted to serve the expected increase in visitation. Educational and interpretive programs linking the laboratory and the Edison home will become more sophisticated and are better represented by the term "National Historical Park" to reflect these non-continuous parcels with a shared link to Thomas Edison.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement and I will be happy to answer any questions that you or members of the Committee may have.