

Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

H.R. 3534, Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station ONA Act
H.R. 5016, Las Cienegas Enhancement Act
April 5, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 3534, the Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station Outstanding Natural Area Act and H.R. 5016, the Las Cienegas Enhancement Act.

H.R. 3534, Piedras Blancas Historic Light Station Outstanding Natural Area Act

H.R. 3534 would designate the Piedra Blancas Light Station as an Outstanding Natural Area (ONA) within the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The Department supports H.R. 3534.

The 18-acre Piedras Blancas Light Station sits on the coastal side of California scenic route 1 (California Coastal Highway) near Hearst Castle halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It is an active lighthouse which began continuous operation in 1875 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Formerly run by the Coast Guard, it has been managed by the BLM since 2001. Today, in addition to its safety role, the Light Station is a beacon of community support and activism.

The proposed Piedras Blancas Historical Light Station ONA is adjacent to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, administered by NOAA. The designation of the Piedras Blancas Light Station would provide a compatible and valuable shore-based presence for this important national treasure and promote historical and educational opportunities consistent with the NLCS.

Community partnerships and an active volunteer force have allowed the BLM to begin the important work of restoration of the light station. Over 80 volunteers are actively involved in Piedras Blancas projects contributing 8,000 hours of service over each of the last three years. With strong local community support, our partners include: The Friends of the Piedras Blancas Light Station, Hearst San Simeon Historic Monument, California State Parks, the Central Coast Maritime Museum, the Cambria Historical Society, and a wide-range of other Federal, state and local governmental agencies. In addition, monthly tours of the light station are being conducted in conjunction with Hearst Castle.

H.R. 3534 recognizes both the historical significance of the Piedras Blancas Light Station and the community support for its preservation. By designating the light station as an Outstanding Natural Area, the bill follows in the footsteps of the Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area along the Oregon coast established by Congress in 1980. In order to safeguard the buildings and public lands immediately surrounding them, the bill provides protections for the area while encouraging and enabling active community support and involvement. In addition, the bill recognizes the importance of administering this area for educational, scientific uses as well as for use by Indians and Indian Tribes.

H.R. 5016, Las Cienegas Enhancement Act

H.R. 5016 provides for the exchange of land between the BLM and a private developer in southern Arizona. The Department supports legislation to bring land with important resources into Federal protection, but we would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on provisions of H.R. 5016 needing modification.

Section three of the legislation authorizes an exchange between the BLM and Las Cienegas LLC. The land to be transferred out of Federal ownership is approximately 1,280 acres referred to in the bill as the "Sahuarita property." This property is BLM-managed land south of Tucson near Corona de Tucson. The land is low-lying Sonoran desert and has been preliminarily identified for disposal by the BLM through its land use planning process.

The land to be brought into Federal ownership under the bill is approximately 2,490 acres of land referred to in the bill as the "Empirita-Simonson property." This property lies north of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA) managed by the BLM in southern Arizona. The lands are currently private property but lie within the "Sonoita Valley Acquisition Planning District" established by Public Law 106-538, which designated the Las Cienegas NCA. The Act directed the Department of the Interior to acquire lands from willing sellers within the planning district for inclusion within the NCA to further protect the important resource values for which the NCA was designated. In addition, acquisition of these lands

will provide important access to the Whetstone Mountains which are managed by the Forest Service.

We recommend some modifications and technical improvements to the land exchange provisions. First, we believe that standard language on equalization payments should be included in the legislation. Specifically, language allowing the modification of acreage to equalize values should be included. In addition, under current law, equalization payments from a land exchange are deposited in the "Federal Land Disposal Account" established under Public Law 106-248, the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Account (FLTFA). We believe that depositing the funds from this exchange in Federal Land Disposal Account is appropriate. As currently draft, H.R. 5016 directs those funds to be deposited in an account managed by the Forest Service, but allows for their use by the Secretary of the Interior. We find this provision confusing, and we recommend that any funds be deposited in the Federal Land Disposal Account as currently provided by law.

Second, Sections 2(4) and 3(d)(2) are somewhat confusing and unclear. It is our understanding that the intent of these provisions is to transfer approximately 98 acres of the 2,490 acres of the Simonson property to Pima County rather than the Federal government. Pima County would then administer a water right connected with those 98 acres (approximately 550 acre feet of ground water).

We recommend that the legislation be amended to make this clear. The appraisals required by the bill should only be on the parcel of land that is being transferred to the Federal government. In addition, we suggest that the legislation reference a map, rather than legal descriptions and quitclaim deeds, to delineate exactly which lands would be transferred to whom under the bill.

We support section four of the bill to remove the Elgin Landfill from the boundaries of the Las Cienegas NCA; its inclusion within the boundaries of the NCA was an error in need of correction and this provision will address that problem.

Finally, we are advised that the Department of Agriculture would like to work with the Committee and the bill sponsors to modify section 3(f) related to access to National Forest System lands through the Empirita-Simonson property.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I will be happy to answer any questions.