

Statement of Mr. Charles McGrady, Member of Board of Commissioners, Henderson County, North Carolina, before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the House Committee on Natural Resources, concerning H.R. 1100, a Bill to revise the boundary of Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in the State of North Carolina

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your subcommittee today to support to H.R. 1100, a bill that would authorize the boundary expansion of Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park System. Later in my testimony I will recommend one change to the bill.

My name is Chuck McGrady, and I currently serve as a county commissioner in Henderson County, North Carolina, where Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site is located. Prior to becoming a county commissioner, I served on the Flat Rock Village Council; the Sandburg site is located within the Village of Flat Rock. I previously owned and operated a summer camp for boys in the area and serve on a variety of community and state-appointed boards. I share this informational background as a way to convey my engagement with the community and my understanding of the great community support for this bill which would authorize the Sandburg site to expand by up to 115 acres.

The determination of the need for up to 115 additional acres was a direct result of the recent public planning process which created the General Management Plan for Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site. The General Management Planning process began in 1999 and concluded in 2003. The four-year process

involved a broad spectrum of the community including attention to the wishes of the local government, the Village of Flat Rock, in regard to the boundary expansion. Park Superintendent Connie Backlund and the General Management Planning team were sensitive to the wishes of the community, and as a result the General Management Plan and this associated boundary expansion are widely supported. In particular, the Flat Rock Village Council, Henderson County Board of Commissioners, Henderson County Travel and Tourism, Henderson County Chamber of Commerce, the North Carolina National Park, Parkway and Forests Development Council have gone on record as supporting the proposed park expansion. In addition, our local newspaper, the Hendersonville *Times-News*, has written an extensive number of editorials supporting the additional acreage for the park.

The 115 additional acres will serve two important functions related to the site. First of all, one hundred and ten (110) acres are to protect the top and sides of Big Glassy Mountain, a popular hiking destination as well as protect the scenic backdrop to the park's pastureland, a primary historic feature of the site. Comments from park visitors and others place a very high value on the park's pastoral landscape and preserving the associated views across the pastureland. Much of the backdrop to the pastureland is the up slopes of Big Glassy Mountain and lie outside the park boundaries. If these lands were to be subdivided and developed all agree the historic values of the site and the visitor experience associated with the site would be greatly compromised.

The top of Big Glassy Mountain is the highest point in the park and the top consists of a large granite outcrop with the park boundary going directly across this rock face. Visitors to this popular mountaintop can frequently be outside the park. The immediate foreground of their views is located outside the park boundary. Development of this foreground property would have adverse affects on what is now a wonderful and expansive viewpoint enjoyed by many.

In addition to this 110 acres to protect the top of Big Glassy and associated scenic views, the remaining three to five (3-5) acres of the boundary authorization would be to provide additional visitor parking at the site as well as to provide land for a visitor center.

The current visitor parking is inadequate to accommodate the numbers of visitors to the site during much of the spring, summer and fall seasons. Frequently during the busy times of the year, visitors unable to find a parking space will park along Little River Road, the state road which provides access to the parking lot. This can result in safety hazards for park visitors and for vehicle traffic using this road. Other visitors, unable to find a parking place, will leave never having had an opportunity to visit the site. In addition, the park currently has no visitor center; however, the potential for exhibits and other educational opportunities are impressive. The National Park Service acquired the site directly from Mrs. Sandburg in 1968, a year after Carl Sandburg's death, and she donated all the family possessions to the National Park Service. This forms a museum collection

of over 300,000 items which reflect Sandburg's far-ranging interests including President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. The visitor center and interpretive exhibits would provide critically needed visitor orientation, interpretation of the Sandburg story and opportunities for the site's growing education program.

I wish to offer one recommended change to H.R. 1100, and that would be to delete the word "contiguous" as the way to describe lands that could be considered for purchase or donation. The General Management Planning process, in concert with the community, devised the description of lands that may be considered from willing sellers to be lands located west of the Greenville Highway (Highway 225) and south of Little River Road. This is the recommended best description to use, and gives the park the flexibility to see what may come up on the market from a willing seller to address the needs for a visitor center and additional parking.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciated the opportunity to present my testimony, and I welcome any questions you or members of the subcommittee may have.