

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN NATHAN DEAL (R-GA)

BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS

AND PUBLIC LANDS

CONCERNING

H.R. 2140, A BILL TO IMPROVE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE

CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing today on an issue of importance to the State of Georgia and myself -- H.R. 2140, legislation I introduced earlier this year which improves the protection and management of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. I would also like to welcome Mr. John Sibley, President of the Georgia Conservancy, here today and appreciate his testimony on behalf of this legislation.

The Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area was established August 15, 1978, and boundary adjustments were made in October 1984. The recreation area is along a 48-mile stretch of the Chattahoochee River within four counties, north and northeast of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The area immediately adjacent to the park is being heavily developed, and Forsyth County (which I represent) is the fastest growing county in the United States. The park currently contains about 9,238 acres of which approximately 4,500 are Federally owned. Presently, the park includes thirteen separate land units. Popular recreational activities in the park include fishing, hiking, picnicking, canoeing, rafting, tubing, and boating. It also contains a number of natural habitats, 19th century historic sites and ruins, as well as Native American archaeological sites. Annual visitation is about 3.5 million visitors.

My legislation would modify the boundaries of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area and authorize the creation of a greenway buffer between the river and private development to prevent further pollution, provide flood and erosion control, and maintain water quality for safe drinking water and for the fish and wildlife dependent on the river system. In addition, this legislation promotes private-public partnerships by authorizing \$25 million in federal funds for land acquisition for the recreation area. The \$25 million will be matched by private funds. The State of Georgia, private foundations, corporate entities, private individuals, and others have already given or pledged tens of millions of dollars to protect and preserve the Chattahoochee River for future generations of Georgians to enjoy.

Last year, in anticipation of passage of this legislation, Congress made available \$25 million for land acquisition in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. That funding is serving to leverage state, local government, and private funding to further augment land purchases in the recreation area. However, legislative authority expanding the boundaries is needed before the additional land can be purchased. We can help preserve one of Georgia's most vital natural resources by enacting H.R. 2140.

Similar legislation was introduced in the House and Senate during the 105th Congress. As most of you know, this subcommittee held a hearing a year ago (July 1998) and approved an amended version in August 1998. Subsequently, the House passed the legislation in October 1998, however the Senate did not act on the measure.

During this Congress, Senator Coverdell introduced the companion bill to H.R. 2140 (S. 109), and the bill was reported on June 7, 1999 by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. I believe it is crucial for the House to act quickly on this legislation in order to protect the Chattahoochee River from further development and environmental damage.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and your staff for all the help you have provided with H.R. 2140. I would also like to thank Representative Isakson for his assistance in protecting one of Georgia's most vital, natural resources. I look forward to working with you on this important legislation and its speedy consideration.

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