

Committee on Resources

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H.R. 408

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands-it is my pleasure to testify before you today. I appreciate the opportunity.

First, let me say, as former Director of the National Park Service and as an interested citizen, I strongly support the authorization to expand the boundary of Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore to allow the purchase of the land along the Crystal River. This land epitomizes the beauty and natural character that makes Sleeping Bear Dunes and northern Michigan such a desirable tourist destination for people from all over the world.

The land to be acquired adjoins the Lakeshore, has an area of approximately 105 acres and lies along both sides of the Crystal River. There are approximately 6,300 feet of high quality river frontage and other land forms that have been classified as "globally rare" by federal resource agencies associated with this land.

Notably, the reach of the river running through this land. The river is the single most visible and beautiful section of the river. It is highly visible to those touring the area and is highly desirable for swimming, canoeing, sightseeing, hiking trails and other recreational activities. And, it is a highly logical addition to the Lakeshore as the NPS owns the upstream frontage from the river's headwaters to this land.

This issue of the best use of this land did not pop up overnight. The use for this land has been a highly debated and emotional issue for Michiganders and others for many years. I first became aware of the issues involving this land when I was Director of the NPS in the early 1990s.

The owners of this land – a corporation known as "Bayberry Mills" – purchased it in 1986 with the stated intent of building a championship quality golf course to serve the owners and developers of an adjoining destination resort, The Homestead. the adjacent Homestead Resort. Over the years, they have proposed various uses for this land including a championship golf course and additional home and condominium developments.

From day one, time to time, strong dissent from the environmental community has arisen over the owner/developer's plans. And through countless meetings, hearings, lawsuits, articles and hundreds of editorials and hundreds of letters to Congress and other governmental agencies followed. have clouded the waters as far as the developer moving ahead with his plans.

In the mid 1990s I was asked by a local citizens' group to see if I could help resolve this issue. Alternatives were considered. An exchange of land between the owner and the NPS was one. A purchase by the NPS was another. At that time, I did not find a consensus position that would respect the owner's private property rights allow the developer to claim his rights as a property owner while, satisfying the concerns of a variety of environmental groups and be acceptable to the National Park Service.

The difficulty in Although we were unable to successfully address the dealing with the issues and satisfy the personalities in the 1990's were too great to overcome, I felt then as I feel now –. Yet, this land is a highly valuable community and national asset. The use of this land has become much more than a local issue. Importance of Elected and appointed leaders of the State of Michigan have become involved as have soon become involved, as did the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. as well as the Environmental Protection Agency EPA and the National Park Service. So, too, have a large

number of entities—both local and national--which support various alternatives to the land use issue.

Early in 2001--again, at the request of the owner and a number of citizens-- and the developer I agreed to act as a consultant to the owners of The Homestead Resort and to again try to find a way to break this long standing impasse. in order to allow the National Park Service and the developer to get on with the management of their respective properties.

A dialogue ensued among between the owner, developer and the the National Park Service and representatives of various environmental groups as to what might be possible. The previously considered exchange concept was revisited. Draft boundaries were drawn; public meetings were held; but, strong opposition to the exchange concept erupted—both locally and nationally. Park support groups feared the precedent of giving up any NPS land. newspaper coverage was voluminous and the stirred pot got hotter and hotter.

Rightfully so, the owner deserves a final decision as to park expansion on this land. they development or get out of the developmental business on the specific areas deemed most sensitive by the environmental groups. The newspaper coverage on this issue has been voluminous; strong opinions have developed. However, there is an opinion that most all appear to share---that this land is a beautiful natural resource and there is great value in having it remain in open space for public enjoyment.

The developer/owner they have area has agreed to consider a purchase in order to get this long-standing issue off the table. Environmental groups believe this land have longed for this area to should be made a part of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Monument and t The NPS Regional Office in Omaha concurs and has made this land the number one candidate for acquisition in the Midwest Region. area a high priority for acquisition.

After years of studying this area and after years of interacting with citizen groups, environmental groups, the National Park Service and the owner, developer I have come to the conclusion that the best course of action – indeed, the only prudent course of action - is to expand the boundaries of the Monument Lakeshore and direct the NPS to purchase to allow the purchase of t this land for the benefit of the public. park purposes.

I am reasonably confident that most all of the engaged parties, including the state, the NPS, the citizen groups, the environmental groups and the owner/developer are in agreement with this conclusion/position and are anxious to draw this matter to an end. conclusion and I I ask you to approve H.R 408 so this matter might finally be resolved in the best interests of all.