

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

Witness Statement

STATEMENT OF RICHARD G. RING, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK OPERATIONS AND EDUCATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H. R. 1491, TO ASSIST IN THE PRESERVATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL, PALEONTOLOGICAL, ZOOLOGICAL, GEOLOGICAL, AND BOTANICAL ARTIFACTS THROUGH CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW FACILITY FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH.

JUNE 7, 2001

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H. R. 1491, a bill to assist in the preservation of archeological, paleontological, zoological, geological, and botanical artifacts through construction of a new facility for the University of Utah Museum of Natural History, Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Department opposes the enactment of H. R. 1491. Our opposition does not detract from the significance and importance of the museum as a place of learning and as a keeper of important collections that showcase many features of America's past. We encourage the University and the State of Utah to continue to seek funding and other solutions for the preservation and protection of the collections, including working with existing programs managed by all of the federal agencies with collections stored at the museum.

We appreciate the interest the museum has in providing the highest level of care to the objects in its collection. However, we believe the use of limited National Park Service appropriations to fund the design, construction, and operation of projects of non-National Park Service projects of this type is inappropriate.

In the last Congress alone, legislation was passed and signed into law that authorized over \$80 million in grants to be passed through the National Park Service budget for non-Park System projects. Each time this is done, it reduces the availability of a limited amount of discretionary funds to address the needs of our national parks and other important national priorities.

The Department is committed to supporting the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog in our national parks. We believe funds are more appropriately directed at this time to reducing the long list of necessary but deferred construction projects, as well as those meeting curatorial needs, that have been identified in our national parks.

H. R. 1491 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior, subject to the availability of appropriations, to award a grant to the museum to pay for a federal share of the cost of construction of a new facility. The bill states that more than 75 percent of the museum's collection have come from federal lands and have been collected for a number of years. Items in the collection have come from land managed not only by the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Park Service, the United States Fish and

Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, but also the Department of Defense and the Bureau of Indian Affairs -- agencies not mentioned in the legislation. The Federal share of the cost for this project is not to exceed 25 percent. A total of \$15 million is authorized to be appropriated as a grant to the University of Utah. Federal funds are to be used for the design, planning, furnishing and equipping of the museum.

The University of Utah is in Salt Lake City and the Museum of Natural History has been designated by the state legislature as the State museum of natural history. Current exhibit and storage facilities are inadequate and place the collection in danger. We realize that museum facilities throughout the country, including the University of Utah Museum of Natural History, are in need of improved conditions to allow them to adequately protect and preserve the objects in their care.

Due to the financial implications of the bill on national parks and park programs, we must oppose H. R. 1491. However, the Department is willing to work with all of the involved agencies and the museum to thoroughly assess all possible alternatives for providing the highest level of care to the objects currently housed at the museum, including, if necessary, the transferring of collections to federal repositories.

This completes my statement. I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

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