

STATEMENT OF P. LYNN SCARLETT
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Lynn Scarlett, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget at the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department). This is my first occasion to testify before you, and I thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on H.R. 4622, the "Gateway Communities Cooperation Act of 2002." The Department strongly supports H.R. 4622 and its goals of increasing communication, cooperation, and coordination between federal land managers and the local communities impacted by federal land management decisions. At this time, the Department would like to offer a few suggested enhancements; when the Administration completes its review of the bill, we will forward any other amendments that the Administration believes necessary to improve the legislation.

The Department's eight bureaus manage more than one out of every five acres of land in the United States, with most of these lands in the West. For example, the Department manages 72 percent of Nevada, almost 50 percent of Utah, and 62 percent of Alaska. Lands under our jurisdiction include vast multiple-use areas, and our bureaus host almost half a billion visitors a year, creating economic engines for communities across the country. However, population growth and economic expansion have increased pressures on our undeveloped land, water resources, and wildlife.

While countless species depend on the land to sustain life, families depend on the land for community and economic well-being. Given this, we realize that the resource management decisions we make can greatly

impact local communities and the people who live in them. Often these impacts are especially felt by “gateway” communities — including those on Indian Reservations — that are adjacent to our federal lands. As a result, we realize that we must work in partnership with the people who live on the private lands that border our National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and other federal lands, and work on those lands or have access to resources on those lands.

Recognizing this dynamic, the Administration has been promoting a new era of conservation — a “new environmentalism” — that will help build a healthier environment, dynamic economies, and sustainable communities. At the center of the Department’s plan to implement this new environmentalism are what Secretary Norton has termed the “Four C’s” — Communication, Consultation, and Cooperation, all in the service of Conservation. The focus of the Four C’s is the belief that enduring conservation springs from partnerships involving the people who live on, work on, and love the land.

The Department’s land managing bureaus are implementing this collaborative approach. And, as I mentioned earlier, they are working with gateway communities. These communities are often subject to unusual pressures and problems, including those brought about by their popularity as entry points for visitors onto federal lands. They may also incur costs for additional services such as law enforcement, search and rescue, and public works.

Mutual benefits flow from cooperating with these communities. Gateway communities often take on the additional infrastructure and environmental duties that come with visitors headed to nearby federal lands. This has the effect of reducing the pressure on federal resources while stimulating gateway economic growth and creating jobs in those communities.

If I may take a moment, I would like to relate several examples of how the Department has worked in the recent past with gateway communities to jointly address — and solve — a variety of issues. We view these as examples of real success and we look to build on this progress.

The town of Sonoita, Arizona, is the gateway to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Las Cienega National Conservation Area (NCA). Local citizens formed the Sonoita Planning Partnership, which produced a proposed land-use plan for the NCA that provides for partnerships between public land managers and the Sonoita community. The plan — which is the BLM's preferred alternative for NCA management — provides the community with the means to articulate and achieve its goals in the NCA's management. The plan is a performance-based plan that relies on incentives and flexibility to achieve common land-use goals.

Collaborative efforts between the community of Springdale, Utah, and Zion National Park arose out of necessity because of the impact of a steadily growing number of park visitors. To address the large numbers of tourists, the park and community engaged in a joint planning effort to establish a shuttle system between the city and the park, with multiple shuttle stations in Springdale. City residents ride the shuttle free of charge. The effect of the shuttle has been positive; the local economy has gained from more visitor dollars, which have been used to finance landscape and other improvements throughout the community. This, in turn, has attracted even more tourist business. The success of this initiative has led to further collaboration between the city and the park, including joint trail design and construction. Park staff have even volunteered to paint buildings in the town. More recently, the city and park began work on design guidelines to help protect the community's small town character.

Bluff, Utah, is the gateway community to a culturally rich and highly popular public recreation area at the confluence of the San Juan River and Cottonwood Wash. Faced with increasing numbers of visitors, the community formed a local non-profit organization to address the unique problems of being a gateway community. The Bluff City Historic Preservation Association was formed, which helped create a Bluff historic district, preserve an Anasazi Great House and pioneer cemetery, as well as establish a conservation easement on 25 acres of Calf Canyon to protect Anasazi relics. The Association has also worked on a 100-

acre community preserve and trail system connecting the town to key historic sites and open spaces, as well as BLM lands along the San Juan River. The effort has improved the economic well-being of the community from conservation activities linked to its gateway status.

In 1994 Grand County, Utah, signed the Sand Flats Agreement with the BLM. Sand Flats is a 7,000-acre BLM recreational area outside Moab, Utah. It is highly popular, particularly with mountain bikers. In the early 1990s, its popularity increased so much that the BLM was no longer able to manage and police the area. Under the 1994 agreement, fee collection was turned over to the county, and the receipts were made available to the county for use in managing and policing the highly popular recreational area. The program has proven very successful. The county has been able to control tourism in a way compatible with the wishes of its citizens; the BLM now has a signature recreation area; and the Sand Flats area is available to users with certain safety and enjoyment. The agreement has also resulted in a more vigorous tourist trade to benefit the local economy.

Finally, the town of Dubois, Wyoming, is the gateway to some of that State's most scenic and visited high country. The mountains around Dubois — all on federal land — are home to the largest bighorn sheep herd in the country. With this in mind, the town brought together federal and state agencies and economic development and conservation groups to create the National Bighorn Sheep Center. The Center operates a museum for visitors, provides educational programs for school children, and performs bighorn sheep research. The facility, located in downtown Dubois, helps attract thousands of visitors each year who, in turn, significantly boost the local economy.

These are just a few examples of the efforts in which the Department's bureaus have been engaged with gateway communities. As I previously noted, the Department is currently striving to ensure that all of its management and policy decisions are made using a collaborative approach. The Department believes, however, that H.R. 4622 will positively promote this goal across land management agencies by affirmatively

requiring agencies to more effectively communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with the communities that are affected by their management decisions. The Department also believes that this affirmative requirement could be strengthened by calling on the agencies to develop and use incentives, when possible, to encourage staff to more effectively communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with gateway communities. Moreover, the relationships created will stimulate the long-term stability needed for investment in these communities.

As an initial matter, the Department notes that the legislation does not address the status of Tribal governments and communities on reservation lands as potential gateway communities. Many of these communities would similarly benefit from the collaborative approach fostered by this legislation.

The Department believes that H.R. 4622 fosters more effective decision-making by requiring agencies to involve officials from impacted communities early in the development of federal plans, programs, regulations and decisions; by requiring federal agencies to provide local officials with plain-English summaries of the assumptions, purposes, goals, and objectives of decisions, as well as any anticipated impacts on the community; and by providing these communities, to the extent practicable, with early public notice of proposed decisions that may significantly impact them.

The bill also makes community input more potent by requiring that federal land agencies provide training to gateway community officials to ensure that they understand agency planning processes and opportunities for participation. Further, the legislation's requirement that agencies assist communities in reviewing plans and policies and, where practicable, provide technical assistance to help localities better develop data and analysis of agency plans will further strengthen this collaborative relationship.

The legislation provides a framework for increased cooperation by allowing, where possible, federal land management agencies to enter into cooperative agreements with gateway communities to coordinate planning and management between agencies and those communities, to facilitate cooperative conservation,

and to consolidate planning to facilitate the participation of local communities in the process. The legislation does not, however, address direct gateway community involvement in federal land management, such as indicated by the model of the Sand Flats Agreement. The success of this agreement is notable and its adoption elsewhere could help both small towns and federal land managers better serve the general public. The Administration shares your desire to increase local government participation as Cooperating Agencies under NEPA. The Council on Environmental Quality recently issued guidance to facilitate that result. We will work with you on bill language to address our concern with the provisions addressing Cooperating Agency status.

Finally, a discretionary grant program will ensure that small communities, which may not have the funds to carry out large-scale planning or analysis, are given the opportunity to fully and constructively participate in the process.

Looking back, one of the ideas behind the National Environmental Policy Act was that informed decision-making would result in the making of better decisions. The Department believes that this legislation, if enacted, will result in better land management decisions accruing to the benefit of private and public lands and the people who live and work on them. The path to the new environmentalism moves us away from conflict and toward peaceful problem-solving and partnership. H.R. 4622 begins to move us down that path by requiring better communication, coordination, and cooperation between federal land and gateway communities and their citizens.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.