

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H. R. 4530, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THE BLUE RIDGE HERITAGE AND CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP STUDY AREA IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 4530. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Blue Ridge Heritage and Cultural Partnership Study Area in North Carolina.

The Department supports H.R. 4530, with minor amendments as described later in this testimony. However, we did not request additional funding for this study in Fiscal Year 2003. We believe that any funding requested should be directed towards completing previously authorized studies. Altogether, there are 37 studies pending, of which we hope to transmit at least 7 to Congress by the end of 2002. To meet the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog, we must continue to focus our resources on caring for existing areas in the National Park System. We have concerns about adding new funding requirements for new park units, national trails, wild and scenic rivers or heritage areas at the same time that we are trying to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog. To estimate these potential new funding requirements, the Administration will identify in each study all of the costs to establish, operate and maintain the proposed site. At this time those costs are unknown.

H.R. 4530 calls for studying an area comprised of 25 counties in the Southern Appalachian Region of Western North Carolina, along with any other areas adjacent to or in the vicinity of the area to be studied that have similar heritage aspects. The 25-county area described in the bill, which comprises 10,503 square miles, is bounded by the states of Virginia on the north, Tennessee on the west, and Georgia and South Carolina on the South. Asheville is the largest city in this region. The Blue Ridge Mountains and Great

Smoky Mountains, part of the Appalachian Mountain range, run through this area. Two units of the National Park System, the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, are partially located within the study area. It also contains two national forests, five state parks, four recreational areas and six wilderness areas.

The region's crafts and countryside, its traditional music, its Cherokee Indian history and traditions, and its agricultural heritage have helped shape a unique cultural identity for the Southern Appalachian Region. These resources have been incorporated into a variety of tourist, resource and nature-based programs throughout the area that have heightened awareness of the value of the cultural heritage of the region and earned national and international recognition for Western North Carolina.

The study area is home to about 4,000 craftspeople who contribute an estimated \$122 million annually to the region's economy. The region is considered the origin of both the traditional and contemporary craft movements in the United States. The area is known for a range of crafts including pottery, weaving, woodworking, ceramics, quilts, spinning, basketry, jewelry design, printmaking, glass making, photography, metal and ironwork.

The music of the Blue Ridge Mountains is a distinctive style that includes stringband, bluegrass, unaccompanied ballad singing, blues and sacred music. The wealth and vitality of the traditional music is recognized in the Blue Ridge Music Center which was developed on the Blue Ridge Parkway by the National Park Service. With roots in the British Isles, Europe and Africa, musicians in the region have contributed to many contemporary American musical forms.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is a strong and influential presence in the region. Two dialects of the Cherokee language continue to be spoken. Cherokee traditional artists have received recognition at state and national levels. The music and dance traditions are also maintained. These traditions are being shared with tourists through a series of Cherokee Heritage Trails. The trails' focus on traditional culture is

intended to be educational and provide economic sustainability.

The agricultural heritage of the region reflects the natural resources and the traditions of the people who worked the land to make a living and survive. The patterns of the Cherokee agricultural practices were combined with the European practice of raising livestock. The early small, self-sufficient farms still influence the region's present day agricultural heritage.

The study called for by H.R. 4530 would have a head start relative to other studies authorized by Congress because much work toward meeting the National Park Service's criteria for national heritage area studies has already been done for this area. A report entitled *Blue Ridge Heritage & Cultural Partnership* was prepared for an organization known as the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative, with the involvement of the National Park Service. The organization *HandMade in America, Inc.*, which is one of the organizations the bill specifically requires consultation with, was one of the key partners in this effort, along with many other state and regional organizations. Using the information that has already been compiled in that report will facilitate the National Park Service's study.

The Department supports H.R. 4530 with minor amendments to correct what appears to be an unintentional error in the language of the bill. As introduced, H.R. 4530 authorizes a study of the suitability and feasibility of "establishing a study area." Studies for determining whether an area should be a national heritage area typically authorize a study of the suitability and feasibility of "establishing a national heritage area." We would be happy to work with the subcommittee to develop amendments to reword H.R. 4530 accordingly.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.