

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

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 AND PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 1665, A BILL TO ALLOW THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TO ACQUIRE BY PURCHASE, EXCHANGE OR DONATION, LAND PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED FOR ADDITION TO THE WILDERNESS BATTLEFIELD OF FREDERICKSBURG AND SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY BATTLEFIELDS MEMORIAL NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 20, 1999

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 1665. H.R. 1665 would allow the National Park Service to acquire by purchase or exchange, in addition to donation, land previously authorized by P.L. 102-541 for addition to the Wilderness Battlefield of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park. The Department supports enactment of this bill.

On April 28 of this year, the Administration transmitted to Congress a similar proposal and recommended its enactment.

The Wilderness Battlefield is the scene of the pivotal Civil War engagement of May 5 and 6, 1864, which marked the beginning of the end of the Civil War. It was the first campaign in which General Ulysses S. Grant, newly promoted to overall commander of the Union army, faced General Robert E. Lee. Despite tremendous losses in the dense thickets of the Wilderness, many of which occurred in a mighty flank attack by Confederate General James Longstreet upon Union troops of the Second Corps commanded by General Winfield Scott Hancock, Grant doggedly clung to the offensive. The Battle of the Wilderness was the first of a long series of actions in which Grant ground down the Confederacy and made possible the reunification of the country.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's development in the vicinity of the Wilderness Battlefield, and the clear threat of further destruction of the battlefield, drew national media attention. The imperative need to preserve the battle scene prompted passage of Public Law 102-541 (106 Stat. 3565) on October 27, 1992. That act authorized the National Park Service to acquire the scene of Longstreet's flank attack at Wilderness Battlefield by donation only.

The bill before you, H.R. 1665, would expand that authority to allow the National Park Service to assist in the acquisition of the majority of those lands by means of purchase using appropriated funds or a land exchange in addition to donation. To date, a broad-based coalition of the National Park Service's private-sector partners has made significant progress toward preservation of the site, but some Federal assistance is also necessary. As proposed, H.R. 1665 would provide the National Park Service the authorities necessary to assist in the acquisition and protection of the Longstreet flank attack site at Wilderness Battlefield. Land acquisition would be subject to availability of funding for NPS priorities.

Broad-based support exists for this legislation. The national preservation community is deeply interested. The owners of the land, including the NTS Corporation of Louisville (which holds title to 80% of the acreage in question), support the proposal. A large and vocal Civil War audience across the country has voiced strong support. The National Park Service recognizes the vital importance of this land to the preservation, management, and interpretation of Wilderness Battlefield. H.R. 1665 would provide the National Park Service the authorities needed to preserve some of the most important, as-yet unprotected, historic ground on any Civil War battlefield.

A technical correction needs to be made in two places in the bill. The United States Code references on line 7 of page one and on line 11 of page 2 of the bill are incorrect. In the bill these read "16 U.S.C. 525k note". They should be revised to read "16 U.S.C. 425k note".

This concludes my statement. I am prepared to answer questions the Committee may have regarding this legislation.

#