

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS B. WILLIAMS
FEDERAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR, THE CONSERVATION FUND
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE
RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON H.R.3693, THE CASTLE ROCK RANCH ACQUISITION ACT OF 2000
JUNE 13, 2000**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Tom Williams and on behalf of The Conservation Fund, I appreciate the invitation to appear here this morning to testify in favor of H.R.3693, the Castle Rock Ranch Acquisition Act of 2000.

The Conservation Fund is a non-profit conservation organization located in Arlington, Virginia, working to protect America's outdoor legacy utilizing a variety of tools and partners. The Conservation Fund is the nation's first national conservation organization whose charter includes economic development and conservation as primary goals.

Mr. Chairman, The Conservation Fund currently holds title to the 1,240 acre Castle Rock Ranch, which is the subject of the bill before you this morning. We acquired this important property from the Harmash Family in March of last year. Both the State of Idaho and the National Park Service sought the Fund's assistance in an effort to ensure that the property would remain essentially undeveloped and available for public use and access to other nearby State and Federal lands. H.R.3693, like its companion S.1705 which passed the Senate in April, would provide the statutory authority needed for the Park Service to acquire the Ranch, and we are hopeful that funds will be made available to the Park Service in this year's Interior Appropriations bill to complete the acquisition.

Mr. Chairman, the Castle Rock Ranch contains very significant natural and historic resources, as well as some prime pastureland. In particular, the Ranch contains a number of very unique and expansive rock formations, including the "Castle Rocks," which, like portions of the nearby City of Rocks National Reserve, provide some of the most challenging technical rock climbing terrain in the nation, if not the world. The Ranch also contains significant historic resources, most notably remnants of, and artifacts associated with, the California Trail. This National Historic Trail was utilized extensively by pioneers during the westward expansion beginning in the early 1840's.

Although the acquisition of the Castle Rock Ranch by the National Park Service will essentially end the Fund's direct involvement in this project, it is important to note that once acquired by the Park Service, the Ranch will be conveyed to the State of Idaho. In exchange, the State will convey approximately 493 acres of state-owned lands inside the boundaries of the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument to the Park

Service. The Monument is located approximately 100 miles west and slightly north of the City of Rocks.

This State inholding contains the largest concentration of Hagerman Horse fossils in North America. Acquisition of these lands by the National Park Service will complete the acquisition program at the Monument and ensure that the National Park Service owns the most significant paleontological resources in the park. The State of Idaho will then manage a large portion of the Castle Rock Ranch as a State park, providing high quality outdoor recreation opportunities and resource protection. Finally, a portion of the Ranch more suitable for ranching and livestock grazing will be available to exchange for private inholdings inside the boundary of the City of Rocks National Reserve.

When all of these transactions are completed, The Conservation Fund will have conveyed the Castle Rock Ranch to the National Park Service. Significant recreational and historic resources will be made available for public use and managed by the State of Idaho as a State park. The National Park Service will have acquired an important inholding in the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, and additional inholdings in the City of Rocks National Reserve will be acquired by exchange for portions of the Ranch more suitable for livestock grazing than recreation.

Mr. Chairman, The Conservation Fund appreciates the efforts of the National Park Service, the State of Idaho, and the Idaho Congressional Delegation in working together to protect the Castle Rock Ranch. In particular, we commend Congressman Simpson for introducing this innovative legislation in the House and actively working to get this important measure enacted this year. We urge the Subcommittee's expeditious approval of H.R.3693.

Thank you again for your invitation to appear before you this morning; I will be pleased to answer any questions the Subcommittee Members may have.

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