

House Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands**Testimony by****Bob Warren****Chairman, National Alliance of Gateway Communities
Tourism Development Manager, City of Redding, California****Regarding****H.R. 4622****The Gateway Communities Cooperation Act of 2002****May 7, 2002**

Thank you Chairman Radanovich and other subcommittee members for the opportunity to testify on behalf of HR4622. I am here representing the City of Redding, California, as the Tourism Development Manager and as Chairman of the National Alliance of Gateway Communities. Redding is the perfect example of a gateway community. Within a ten mile radius, there are the boundaries of a National Park Service Unit, Bureau of Land Management lands, and a National Forest. The City benefits from this close proximity in the form of significant tourism dollars, and of course beautiful natural attractions. I am also here as the Chairman of the National Alliance of Gateway Communities (NAGC). The NAGC was formed at the encouragement of many Federal land use managers, who felt there was a role for an organization to help small gateway communities become more skilled at interacting with Federal agencies. This organization is the only national organization solely dedicated to representing the interests of gateway communities.

On behalf of the NAGC and gateway communities everywhere, we thank you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing this historic bill. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first bill ever to recognize the importance of gateway communities and focus exclusively on several of their major needs and concerns.

Gateway communities, by their very nature, are close to public lands. This symbiotic relationship creates an arrangement where the public land units need the communities for their services, while the communities need the public lands as attractions. In California and in the West, many communities are transitioning to more diversified economies, less based on resource extraction. We know in the future, visitors to public lands will play an increasingly more important role in the economies of our gateway communities. In rural California, every \$63,000 spent by travelers creates one new job. Also, many of those visiting public lands are international visitors who often make their visit to America a visit to rural America. Germans alone account for hundreds of thousands of visits to public lands in California annually. One national park in Northern California surveyed visitors during a one-month period several years ago, and 11 percent of all visitors were German. Obviously, the dollars spent by these foreign visitors and others are important to both the economies of gateway communities as well as to the national balance of trade. In light of the impact on tourism of the events of last September, we know luring back many of these visitors to America will be difficult. Those of us in the West also know that public lands will continue to be the “magnets” that draw both domestic visitors and internationals back to our rural communities.

Many of the supervisors, superintendents, and managers of public land management units are keenly aware

of the importance of working with their gateway communities. I know in my area, many of them make daily efforts to interact with community leaders. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. There are too many examples where relationships are inconsistent and unreliable and are often too dependent on the personalities involved. What we want to do by enacting this legislation is to take a major step towards institutionalizing those relationships by putting them on a firmer statutory base.

There are also examples of public land management unit managers showing little concern for the economics of gateway communities and purposefully attempting to affect development outside their management units. In one instance in the Northwest, a new national park superintendent was interviewed for an article in a major newspaper in which he indicated opposition to a planned destination resort more than 11 miles from the park that he managed. In his zeal to develop a strong relationship with the environmental community, he neglected to communicate with the developer who had, for the previous nine years, worked in concert with the park superintendent's predecessor and staff on the planning of this resort. Although H.R. 4622 would certainly not have affected his ability to speak out on this issue, he would have at least known that he also would need to develop a relationship with the adjacent communities, so when issues related to important park management decisions came up, the community would be part of his planning process.

Many of the management plans for significant public land devote hundreds of pages to natural resource preservation, while devoting just a paragraph or two to the people who live in or adjacent to that unit. Their frustration is exacerbated when their communities do not have a "seat at the table".

For example, although economic and social impacts are supposed to be considered in national forest management plans, the plan for the Kaibab National Forest in Utah has about one paragraph that addresses these issues with more than 100 pages addressing various habitat scenarios. Careful consideration is given to the goshawk, but little is given to the gateway communities and the people who live there. Now we want to be clear. We do not object to thorough consideration of environmental and wildlife issues; indeed we strongly support such examination. But surely the interests and concerns of gateways and the families and businesses that make their homes there should also get serious consideration.

In another Utah example, at Escalante, we have seen a situation where a multi-state, Federal, county, local joint visitor campus and science education facility is being built in conjunction with the new Grand Staircase National Monument that is under BLM management. Unfortunately, Federal managers in this case are NOT engaged with the local community. Quite the opposite, to the point that, against the wishes of Congressional appropriators, there will be two competing visitor facilities in Escalante – a serious case of waste and lost opportunity.

In the mid-1990s, the five communities that are gateways to Yellowstone National Park decided to form the Yellowstone Gateway Alliance to speak with one voice on issues of common concern to all of them. The superintendent of the park at that time flatly refused to talk with the gateways as a group. H.R. 4622 would not compel any superintendent to talk to coalitions of gateway communities, but it would clearly declare that the intent of Congress is to support much greater cooperation, coordination and communication between gateway communities and Federal land managers.

In Alaska, two recent examples can be cited of failed relationships between gateway communities and the National Park Service. One arose when the NPS, contrary to its early promises, persisted in denying local "traditional" use of the Dyea Valley (e.g. firewood cutting, Christmas tree gathering and beach access)

which the State of Alaska allowed it to manage, and resulted in the State finally, in frustration, agreeing to let the City of Skagway annex the valley. In the other example, the McCarthy Area Council, a non-profit, quasi-governmental organization representing residents of the McCarthy-Kennecott area has encountered stiff NPS resistance to efforts to develop interpretive sources that are locally derived. According to Thea Agnew, the President of the McCarthy Area Council:

We feel strongly that local people need to be empowered to tell the stories of the place. The problem is, however, that such a small community lacks resources – particularly financial resources – to compete (and it does feel like competition) with the Park. They have an interpretive staff, a budget, visitors centers, contracts with graphic artists to develop signs and activities, the list goes on. We have a lot of volunteers, a lot of interested people, and tiny, occasional pots of money to do small projects with.

Lake Havasu and the lower Colorado River management team have recently been wrestling with environmental impact statements and the impacts of boating near one of the refuges. This environmental review process does not include the communities that will be economically impacted if boating regulations are modified in this area. There has been an effort by both Lake Havasu City and Yuma, Arizona, to become part of the planning process. Because there is no stipulation for including communities at the table, the land use managers have not had the opportunity to receive meaningful input from them.

A recent prominent instance reported in the news where communities were completely shut out of the planning process occurred at our first national park. The gateway communities around Yellowstone National Park count on winter access into Yellowstone as part of their economic viability. The 2000 winter use plan for Yellowstone called for a ban on snowmobile usage in the park. This would have devastated several communities adjacent to Yellowstone. Despite repeated attempts by local gateway towns to obtain cooperating agency status during the development of that winter use plan, they were never given the opportunity to be “at the table” with the neighboring states and adjacent counties during this process. Fortunately, a supplemental EIS is now under review that includes additional options for consideration.

Another example involves the Bureau of Land Management in California and Arizona. When the BLM was sued to close off-road vehicle access to the Imperial Sand Dunes in California, the City of Yuma, Arizona, located directly across the Yuma River from the Dunes was not informed by the BLM of the litigation until the day before the court hearing in San Francisco. The BLM said because they regarded the matter as a California issue, even though Yuma is the gateway community for the Dunes. The result was that 45,000 acres of the Dunes were closed to off-road vehicle use, with a sharp negative economic impact on Yuma, without the gateway community ever getting an opportunity to comment or respond prior to the decision. (At a recent Yuma community meeting about the issue, nearly 400 local citizens attended and more than a hundred testified against the ban. It should also be noted that the plants said to be endangered are now doing more poorly in the banned area than in the area not affected.)

Under NEPA regulations, the State is always considered a cooperating agency, and often counties are also included. In rural locations, this may not be enough. We have all heard the saying, “a sense of community” but who has ever heard “a sense of county or a sense of State?” This is because communities are the social structure of America. Those living in communities **always** have a vested interest in preserving adjacent public lands, as without them, the communities would suffer economically, and spiritually. Although there may be individual business operators looking for a “quick buck,” communities for the most part must be

into the conservation of our public lands for the long haul. Any short-sighted decisions would adversely affect their communities both socially and economically.

When communities are making significant planning changes, especially involving land use issues, they are required to comply with a host of Federal environmental mandates. Many agencies often comment on their proposed planning efforts. This makes for a one-way street, as the communities have far less opportunity to comment on proposed changes on adjacent Federal lands. Although H.R. 4622 does provide gateway communities a “seat at the table,” the bill does not give a gateway community a veto over agency programs, actions, or policies. The bill would promote cooperation and coordination and give local Federal land managers a greater understanding of the needs and perspectives of their adjacent communities. I might add that it will also give local leaders a greater understanding of the needs and perspectives of their local Federal land managers.

In closing, I don’t think we can any longer deny our gateway communities legal standing in the Federal decision-making process. Often, parks are the foundation of a community’s culture, commerce, and heritage. The EIS process is often highly politicized, charged with emotion – a veritable lawsuit waiting to happen. The politics and emotions dramatically play out in our communities. This wrenching drama is for naught if our communities cannot have a meaningful stake in the process. Often, this process is affected by the sparse rural population political representation in the West, pitted against well meaning, urban political agendas driven by well-financed and staffed special interest groups. This leads to many gateway communities feeling as if they are being treated like children, when told to “eat your vegetables, it’s what’s best for you”. H.R. 4622 will reform the process and level the playing field by appropriately including gateway communities.

Leaders in gateway communities are faced with the daily tension of attempting to balance commerce and conservation, of preserving enduring wildness while enhancing economic well-being. Our communities will survive only if we are constantly ensuring that the needs of nature are met while people are allowed to make a living. This tension is of course by choice, as those of us who live in rural, gateway locations most often would choose to be nowhere else. We feel that this important bill will help bridge the gap between today and tomorrow, while striving to preserve all that is natural, as well as maintaining the character of our communities. A consistent Federal process of inclusion of the leaders of gateway communities would improve the process, the politics, and the outcome. All we ask is some say in our future.

Let me conclude with a statement that another NAGC director has asked me to present to the subcommittee today. This statement is from Karen Alvey, former mayor of Kanab, Utah, who has tried hard to ensure that the Escalante National Monument is developed in accord with national and local values and goals.

After much thought, I have decided that the whole process of planning on public lands must be done with the communities at the table and early on. Most of the public officials have other jobs, cannot afford full time staff to attend and gather information, and lack the knowledge to make good decisions on management issues. If it is mandated to invite the community’s leaders in early so that they can become educated, then better decisions are made. Planning seems to go on forever, then decisions are made and announced to the communities.

H.R. 4622 would result in closer, more productive cooperative relationships between gateways and Federal land managers, benefiting both the communities and the Federal lands, responding to both national and local values. H.R. 4622 would enhance the capability of gateways to participate more effectively and more

meaningfully in agency planning processes for the betterment of all. It should become law.

Mr. Chairman, your bill, H.R. 4622, is landmark legislation. Its enactment will open a new day for gateway communities throughout the nation.