

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE
THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC
LANDS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R.
715, TO EXPAND THE BOUNDARY OF SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK, TO STUDY
ADDITIONAL LAND FOR FUTURE ADJUSTMENTS TO THE BOUNDARY OF THE
PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

MARCH 3, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 715, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to expand the boundary of Saguaro National Park, to study additional land for future adjustments to the boundary of the park, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 715.

H.R. 715 would amend Section 4 of the Saguaro National Park Establishment Act of 1994, Public Law 103-364, to authorize the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to acquire approximately 975 acres of land adjacent to Saguaro National Park (Park). These lands could be acquired by donation, purchased with donated or appropriated funds, or exchanged, as provided in the Park's enabling act. The bill also directs the Secretary to complete a boundary study to identify lands that would be part of any future boundary adjustments for the Park. Finally, H.R. 715 would allow the acquisition or management of State land within the Park with the consent of the State and in accordance with federal and State law. Currently, State lands comprise approximately 2,500 acres within the Park's boundary.

Saguaro National Park is located near Tucson, Arizona, an area of rapid growth and development. We estimate that \$220,000 would be required for closing costs for all of the properties. Acquisition is estimated to cost approximately \$29.25 million, if all of the 975 acres were purchased, and would be paid as purchases were made from eleven separate landowners. We believe that several of the properties might be donated to the National Park Service (NPS) and, if so, actual acquisition costs would be lower. Operational costs are estimated to be minimal and are not expected to exceed approximately \$20,000 per year. The acquisition of properties is subject to National Park Service priorities and the availability of appropriations.

Saguaro National Park was authorized as a National Monument in 1933 and currently includes 91,453 acres. The monument was established for its outstanding scientific values due to the exceptional stands of various species of cacti, including the iconic Saguaro Cactus.

A separate area west of Tucson was added to the original National Monument in 1961 and Congress redesignated the National Monument as a National Park in 1994. Upon establishment, the National Monument was 15 miles from the city of Tucson, Arizona. Rapid growth in Tucson has brought the city out to the Park boundaries and placed pressures on Park resources.

H.R. 715 would include and protect lands adjacent to the Park allowing for enhanced protection of resources within the Park and maintaining connections that are important for wildlife. The lands considered for addition include outstanding habitat for a variety of wildlife species including mountain lion, javelina, bobcat, and desert tortoise as well as rare species such as gray

hawks, yellow-bill cuckoos, and lowland leopard frogs. These parcels would also help to protect pristine viewsheds which are rapidly disappearing.

With development pressures near the Park increasing, H.R. 715 would also protect approximately two miles of the last remaining productive riparian areas near the Park. This riparian corridor along Rincon Creek supports one of the few remaining riparian gallery forests and perennial pools of water around Tucson. Other proposed additions would provide connectivity between the Park and lands protected under Pima County's conservation plans.

H.R. 715 is supported by local governmental and non-profit organizations. These include Pima County, which included these properties in their bond proposal to insure that they were conserved, the Rincon Institute and Tucson Mountains Association, which identified potential willing sellers, and many other organizations such as the Sonoran Institute, the Friends of Saguaro National Park, and the National Parks Conservation Association.

The saguaro cactus, from which the Park takes its name, and the many other plants and animals that inhabit the Sonoran Desert depend on undeveloped habitat, like that which is being proposed for inclusion in the Park, for their survival. The additions to the Park proposed by H.R. 715 are an opportunity to preserve a unique and irreplaceable part of our nation's natural resource heritage.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee have.