

STATEMENT OF CAM SHOLLY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, VISITOR AND RESOURCE PROTECTION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 664, TO ESTABLISH THE HARRIET TUBMAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN AUBURN, NEW YORK, AND THE HARRIET TUBMAN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN CAROLINE, DORCHESTER, AND TALBOT COUNTIES, MARYLAND, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

June 6, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H. R. 664, a bill to establish the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties, Maryland, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of this legislation with amendments that would tailor the bill to reflect the fact that a large portion of the proposed Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Maryland is now already a unit of the National Park System. The resources in Dorchester County that were proposed to be included in the park were designated the Harriet Tubman-Underground Railroad National Monument by presidential proclamation on March 25, 2013, after H.R. 664 had already been introduced.

Harriet Tubman is an American figure of lore and legend. Born circa 1822 as an enslaved person in Dorchester County, Maryland, she courageously escaped her bondage in 1849, returned on many occasions to Dorchester and Caroline Counties to free others including members of her family and remains known, popularly and appropriately, as “The Moses of her People.” She was a leading “conductor” along the Underground Railroad guiding the enslaved to freedom at great risk to her own life. Her accomplishments were admired and extolled by her contemporaries, including the abolitionist leader and former slave Frederick Douglass. She served honorably during this nation’s Civil War as a cook, nurse, scout, and spy for Union forces in Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida, always at personal risk and always advancing the quest for freedom by providing assistance to other enslaved people. In June 1863, she guided Union troops in South Carolina for an assault along the Combahee River resulting in the emancipation of hundreds of the enslaved.

At the invitation of then U.S. Senator and later Secretary of State William H. Seward, Harriet Tubman purchased land from him in Auburn, New York, where she lived and cared for members of her family and other former slaves seeking safe haven in the North. In later life, she became active in progressive causes including efforts for women’s suffrage. Working closely with activists such as Susan B. Anthony and Emily Howland, she traveled from Auburn to cities in the East advocating voting rights for women. Harriet Tubman gave the keynote speech at the first meeting of the National Federation of Afro-American Women upon its founding in 1896.

Harriet Tubman was an intensely spiritual person and active in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church. In 1903 she donated land to the Church in Auburn for the establishment of a home “for aged and indigent colored people.” She died on March 10, 1913, at this home for the aged and was buried with full military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn. Booker T. Washington, also born into slavery, journeyed from Alabama a year later to speak at the installation of a commemorative plaque for her at Auburn City Hall.

The resources associated with Harriet Tubman’s life in Maryland and New York were the subject of a National Park Service special resource study that was transmitted to Congress in 2009. The study concluded that the resources associated with Harriet Tubman in Auburn, New York, and in Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties, Maryland met the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for National Park Service management criteria for potential units of the National Park System. The study found that there was extensive public support, including support by affected private property owners within the boundaries proposed by H. R. 664 in New York and Maryland, for the establishment of the two units. Locally elected officials in both states also expressed their support.

H. R. 664 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish two units of the National Park System: the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn, New York, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Maryland. In each case, the unit would be established after sufficient land or interests in land has been acquired to constitute a manageable park unit. In Auburn, the potential resources are the Harriet Tubman Home, the Home for the Aged, and the Thompson Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, which is no longer used for religious services, and its parsonage. In Maryland, potential resources include nationally significant historic landscapes associated with Harriet Tubman in Dorchester, Caroline, and Talbot Counties, where the agricultural, forest, and riverine mosaic largely retains historic integrity from the time that Tubman was born enslaved, worked in the fields and forests, emancipated herself, and helped others there to escape to freedom.

The Harriet Tubman-Underground Railroad National Monument established by proclamation in March includes approximately 11,750 acres of federally owned or controlled land that protects some of the historic landscape of Dorchester County. Most of this area consists of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, which will continue to be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in cooperation with the National Park Service. Also included in the monument is the home site of Jacob Jackson, a free black man who used coded letters to help Tubman communicate with family and others, and the site of the State of Maryland’s Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park Visitor Center, which will open in 2015. The USFWS will continue to acquire and manage the parcels within the National Wildlife Refuge boundary in cooperation with NPS as identified on the July 2010 map referred to in the legislation and the National Historical Park will focus on the parcels identified on the same map. Although the proclamation provided protection for the full range of Tubman-related resources in Dorchester County that would be included in the Maryland park under H.R. 664 it did not protect the identified resources located in Caroline and Talbot Counties.

In light of this development, we recommend that H.R. 664 be amended to rename and enhance the newly designated national monument in Maryland. The amendments should revise the bill to provide for redesignation of an existing park unit, rather than establishment of a new unit, with authority to include in the park the resources in Caroline and Talbot Counties that would be authorized for inclusion under H.R. 664. We believe that the name for the park included in H.R. 664, “Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park,” is in keeping with the general trend in National Park Service nomenclature, since the term “national historical park” is the preferred designation for historical parks that include multiple sites, as would be the case with authority to include Tubman-related resources in Caroline and Talbot Counties.

If H.R. 664 is enacted, the estimated cost for the annual operations and maintenance for the Auburn, New York unit would be approximately \$500,000 to \$650,000. The estimated one-time cost of land acquisition and the federal share of capital improvements there would be approximately \$7.5 million, and cost of completing a general management plan, \$600,000 to \$700,000. Costs that were estimated previously for the Maryland unit are no longer relevant for this legislation due to the fact that a unit of the National Park System has already been established there. All funds are subject to NPS priorities and the availability of appropriations.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to respond to any questions from you and members of the committee.