

STATEMENT OF DR. HERBERT C. FROST, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION, OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 163, A BILL TO DESIGNATE THE SLEEPING BEAR DUNES WILDERNESS AT SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN.

July 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 163, a bill to designate the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in the State of Michigan.

The Department strongly supports enactment of this legislation. H.R. 163 would designate 32,557 acres, or 46 percent, of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan's Lower Peninsula as federally protected wilderness. Management of the wilderness area would be in accordance with the 1964 Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1131 et seq.). H.R. 163 is substantially identical to S. 23, which passed the Senate on June 19th, and is also pending before this committee.

P.L. 91-479 established Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore on October 21, 1970, in order "...that certain outstanding natural features including forests, beaches, dune formations, and ancient (glacial) phenomena...be preserved in their natural setting and protected from developments and uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area...for the benefit, inspiration, education, recreation, and enjoyment of the public." This legislation clearly supports the intent of that law.

The park extends nearly 30 miles along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. It also includes two large Lake Michigan islands with an additional 35 miles of shoreline. The park protects and preserves superlative scenic and recreational resources including towering perched sand dunes that rise as high as 450 feet above Lake Michigan. The park contains several federally threatened and endangered species, including the Piping Plover, Pitcher's Thistle and Michigan Monkeyflower. The park also includes many historic features, including a lighthouse and three U.S. life-saving service stations, coastal villages, and picturesque farmsteads. Permanent wilderness designation will ensure protection of these significant natural, cultural and historical resources.

The park averages 1.2 million visitors each year who enjoy the beaches, over 100 miles of backcountry trails and eight campgrounds. The region surrounding the park is a popular vacation and summer home destination as visitors and residents take advantage of a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, backpacking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, boating, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The National Park Service estimates that the presence of the National Lakeshore brings nearly \$132 million of economic benefit to

the local community each year.* Designation of the wilderness area will not limit public access or change the way the area is currently being managed for public use and enjoyment.

Native American use of the area extends some 3,000 years into the past and is represented today primarily by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Nothing in H.R. 163 would modify, alter, or affect any treaty rights.

The park encompasses a total of 71,291 acres; about 58,571 acres of land and 12,720 acres of water. Over 30,000 acres of the proposed 32,557-acre wilderness area have been managed as wilderness since 1981, when a wilderness proposal produced under the park's first comprehensive General Management Plan (GMP) was published. Since that time, the five areas of the park proposed as wilderness have provided outstanding recreational opportunities for hikers, backpackers, anglers, paddlers, and hunters with hunting being allowed in accordance with State regulations. A network of hiking trails and numerous camping opportunities will continue to be maintained in this portion of the park, even with the wilderness designation. The additional acres in the current proposal arise from the inclusion of the Sleeping Bear Plateau, an area only suitable for foot travel that continues to offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Since formal wilderness designation would not change the way in which visitor use is currently managed in the area proposed as wilderness, there is no reason to believe it would have any detrimental impact on visitation or the local economy, and formal designation may actually have a beneficial impact.

The proposed wilderness area does not include any existing county roads or areas managed primarily for historic resources. This is to ensure the continued availability of the county roads for visitors accessing remote trailheads, beaches, backcountry areas and historic areas. Although the park's boundary extends one-quarter mile out into Lake Michigan, none of the waters of Lake Michigan are proposed as wilderness. H.R. 163 would not prohibit the use of boat motors on the surface water of Lake Michigan adjacent to the wilderness as the waters are not proposed as part of the wilderness. The beaching of those boats will continue to be subject to applicable laws. This is to ensure continued access by boaters to the shoreline beach adjacent to the wilderness area. These have been issues of significant public concern.

Between 2006 and 2009, the NPS developed an updated GMP for the park. Because of public concern over the 1981 wilderness proposal, and its inclusion of county roads and historic sites, a formal Wilderness Study was conducted as part of this comprehensive planning effort. After extensive public involvement, review, and comment, including overwhelming public support for wilderness designation, the preferred alternative in the final GMP/Wilderness Study was approved by the Midwest Regional Director on January 6, 2009. The area of proposed wilderness was mapped at 32,557 acres, with a portion in all five eligible areas, and is the same as the proposed wilderness designation in H.R. 163. The final GMP/Wilderness Study does not propose wilderness in several eligible areas, including those areas fragmented by the road corridors near the Otter Creek area of the Lakeshore; the land within the Port Oneida Rural Historic District; the lands in the historic "Cottage Row" on North Manitou Island; the area in the South Manitou Island historic farm loop; an area near the historic Bufka Farm identified for a bicycle trail; and the congested area at the top of the Dune Climb.

* Stynes, Daniel J. "National Park Visitor Spending and Payroll Impacts: 2011." National Park Service, 2013.

Passage of H.R. 163 would support the vision in the new GMP. The legislation has very strong, broad-based public support. The overwhelming majority of local officials, the conservation community, and the Michigan delegation are united in their support for this bill as a winning resolution to an issue that has been debated since the park's establishment in 1970. Parties that had been bitterly polarized over earlier proposals have reached consensus that this bill strikes an appropriate balance between preserving access and guaranteeing outstanding primitive recreational opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.