

STATEMENT OF BRUCE SHEAFFER, COMPTROLLER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 2489, A BILL TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF THE OREGON CAVES NATIONAL MONUMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

May 20, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 2489, a bill to modify the boundary of the Oregon Caves National Monument, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 2489, which is consistent with the General Management Plan (GMP) for the park.

H.R. 2489 would adjust the boundary of Oregon Caves National Monument to include the addition of approximately 4,070 acres to enhance the protection of resources associated with the monument and to increase quality recreation opportunities. The lands that would be added are currently managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as part of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

H.R. 2489 directs the Secretary to revise the fire management plan for the Monument to include transferred lands and carry out hazardous fuel management activities under that plan. Existing Forest Service stewardship or service contracts would continue to completion under the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture.

The bill would authorize the Secretary to permit hunting and fishing within the Preserve. It also provides flexibility in managing the resources within the preserve by allowing the Secretary, in consultation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, to limit hunting and fishing in designated zones and over certain time periods. Based on information collected during the public participation process for the GMP, we would prefer to terminate hunting within the preserve after five years with the acreage being converted to national monument status. Of the 892 comments received on the plan, only 8, less than one percent, expressed concern about the loss of hunting should the added acres be designated as part of the national monument.

H.R. 2489 would authorize the Secretary to allow grazing to continue within the Preserve at a level not greater than authorized under existing permits or leases at enactment. It would also direct the Secretary to accept voluntary donation of a grazing lease or permit for the Big Grayback Grazing Allotment (managed by the USFS) and the Billy Mountain Grazing Allotment (managed by the Bureau of Land Management) and terminate the donated lease or permit and ensure a permanent end to grazing on the land covered by the permit or lease. Claim to any range improvements on those lands would be waived. It is our understanding that the same individual runs livestock on both the Big Grayback and Billy Mountain Allotments. We would like the opportunity to work with the Committee and sponsor on minor modifications to these grazing provisions.

This bill would also designate the subterranean segment of Cave Creek, known as the River Styx, as a scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Additionally, the bill would authorize a study of segments of Cave Creek, Lake Creek, No Name Creek, Panther Creek and Upper Cave Creek—all within the Monument and Preserve—under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

In 1907, the Secretary of the Interior withdrew approximately 2,560 acres for the purposes of establishing a national monument. The 1909 presidential proclamation establishing Oregon Caves National Monument included only 480 acres. The monument was managed by the USFS until its administration was transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1933. The remaining withdrawal outside of the monument is administered by the USFS as part of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. H.R. 2489 would mirror the 1907 withdrawal and add some additional lands to conform the monument boundary to the watershed.

The explorer Joaquin Miller extolled “The Wondrous marble halls of Oregon!” when speaking about the newly proclaimed Oregon Caves National Monument in 1909. Oregon Caves is one of the few marble caves in the country that is accessible to the public. This park, tucked up in the winding roads of southern Oregon, is known for its remoteness, the cave majesty and unusual biota. The stream flowing from the cave entrance is a tributary to a watershed that empties into the Pacific Ocean. This is the only cave in the national park system with an unobstructed link to the ocean.

The caves are nationally significant and a favorite visit for school kids and travelers alike. They remain alive and healthy because of the watershed above them. The park recognized this when developing the 1998 GMP and accompanying Environmental Impact Statement. The plan recommended the inclusion of the watershed into the park to provide for better cave protection and to protect the surface and subsurface hydrology and the public water supply.

If H.R. 2489 were enacted, there would be no acquisition costs associated with the boundary expansion and we estimate NPS’s management, administrative, interpretive, resource protection, and maintenance costs to be approximately \$400,000 to \$550,000 annually. The NPS has been coordinating with the USFS on new signage along the Caves Highway; on the operation of the Illinois Valley Visitor Center in Cave Junction; and on the annual agreement for wildland fire suppression and dispatch services at the Monument.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.