Statement for the Record

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Member of Congress

House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
H.R. 482, the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park Boundary Revision Act of 2015

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Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Tsongas, thank you for holding this hearing today on H.R. 482, the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park Boundary Revision Act of 2015. Additionally, I would like to thank all members of this Committee for their participation and interest in this bill.

This bill will strengthen the current Ocmulgee National Monument and provide significant economic, educational, and cultural benefits to Middle Georgia. I am proud to represent this area of Georgia along with my colleague here, Congressman Bishop.

This legislation consists of three parts. The first is an expansion of the current National Monument area from 700 acres to just over 2,000 acres. The second seeks to change the re-designate the area as a National Historical Park, a name change that would effectively increase recognition and attract additional visitors. And the third part will authorize a resources study for future further expansions and include additional opportunities for hunting, fishing, camping, and other recreational activities.

Ocmulgee National Monument was originally authorized by Congress in 1934 to protect "the 'Old Ocmulgee Fields,' which includes a network of very well preserved Indian mounds of great historical importance. The history of the fields can be traced back to Native Americans who first came to the site during the Paleo-Indian period to hunt Ice Age mammals. The park is unique in that it vividly displays the story of many stages of prehistoric cultural

development, including the Mound Builder period, and highlights the important role of agriculture in the region. If this bill is enacted, the monument area would be expanded to protect additional archeological locations throughout the Ocmulgee Old Fields. Because of its significant historical and archaeological importance, the future Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park must be preserved.

The expanded park also will generate additional tourism in Middle Georgia while educating visitors on the fascinating history of the many civilizations that have thrived in the region. Ocmulgee National Monument has over 115,000 visitors annually, and with the expansion, it will become an even greater destination for visitors.

This legislation and the proposal to transition Ocmulgee National Monument to a National Historic Park have been carefully crafted with the involvement of a large coalition of regional stakeholder groups. It should be noted that property in the proposed expansion area would be acquired only from willing donors or sellers.

During the public comment period, the Park Service received well over three thousand comments from individuals and community groups in support of the expansion. It is important to point out, that at the same time the Macon-Bibb Community is rallying together in support of the Ocmulgee national park effort, community groups are also working on enhancing the Ocmulgee River Water Trail which will improve infrastructure for public landings, campsites, and picnic areas to increase river-related recreational opportunities. The two efforts really go hand in hand and will bolster tourism and recreation in the region.

Thank you Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Tsongas for holding this hearing and inviting me to speak on H.R. 482.