

**STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 434, TO DESIGNATE THE EMANCIPATION NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**APRIL 2, 2019**

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Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 434, a bill to designate the Emancipation National Historic Trail, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes that the subject of this bill, a trail followed by a group of freed people in Texas whose emancipation was delayed for two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, represents a significant story in American history. However, we do not support enactment of H.R. 434 for the reasons explained in this statement. If the committee decides to act on this legislation, we would like to work with the committee and the sponsor to address the aspects of this bill that are inconsistent with other National Trails System legislation that Congress has approved in the past.

The trail that is the subject of H.R. 434 is a series of routes extending approximately 51 miles that follow the migration route taken in 1865 by newly freed enslaved people and other persons of African descent from the 19<sup>th</sup> century seaport of Galveston to the community of Freedman's Town, now a part of Houston.

Although President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, the proclamation was not enforced in Texas until the Union Army, under Major General Gordon Granger, arrived in Galveston. The General immediately issued General Order No. 3, which stated: *"The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, 'all slaves are free.'"*

The date of this order was June 19, 1865, two and a half years after the initial proclamation, and it has been celebrated since, becoming a Texas state holiday known as "Juneteenth" in 1979. The place of this announcement was the Osterman Building, Union Headquarters, in Galveston, where the proposed trail would start. As newly freed African Americans left the plantations, many began to make their way north and east to Houston, where on the western edge of town, they settled and formed Freedmen's Town on the meandering Buffalo Bayou. In Freedmen's Town, in 1872, the community's Colored People's Festival and Emancipation Park Association pooled funds and set aside 10 acres of land to be known as Emancipation Park to honor their freedom. The proposed trail would run to this park, now in the Fourth Ward of Houston.

H.R. 434 would authorize the National Park Service to study the proposed Emancipation National Historic Trail and provide for the designation of the trail when the study is submitted to Congress, regardless of the findings of the study. In reviewing previous National Historic Trail designation acts, it appears to be unprecedented for Congress to authorize a trail study and designation in the same bill. The National Trails System Act provides for studies to be conducted to determine whether a proposed trail meets the three criteria for designation as a national historic trail, whether it is physically possible to develop a trail along a route being studied, and whether the trail is financially feasible. These study requirements are premised on the idea that it is critical for Congress to have the information provided by a study before making a decision about whether a trail should be included in the National Trails System. To approve a trail designation bill before first seeing the results of an authorized trail study would undermine the longstanding process supported by both Congress and the Executive Branch for adding new trails to the National Trails System.

However, even if H.R. 434 were amended to provide only for a study, the Department would not support this bill at this time. Congress has previously authorized 30 studies to determine if certain areas or resources meet the appropriate criteria for designation as new park units, national heritage areas, national trails, or wild and scenic rivers that the National Park Service has not yet completed. Only a few weeks ago, nine of those studies were authorized as part of Public Law 116-9. At a time that the Administration needs to use resources to reduce the National Park Service's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog and address other critical national park needs, the Department is not in a position to spend additional funds on conducting more studies at this time.

Should the committee move forward with this legislation, we would recommend that the bill be amended to remove the trail designation language, thereby limiting the bill to the authorization of a trail study. Along with that change, we would urge the adoption of amendments to change the one-year period for conducting the study to the three-year period that is provided for under the National Trails System Act. We would also recommend removing the \$5 million authorization of funding for the bill. If the bill is amended to authorize a study only, based on the characteristics of this proposed trail, the study would likely cost \$200,000 to \$400,000. But the authorization of funding at any level is not necessary unless it is to be used as a funding limitation.

Finally, we would suggest considering making the trail title more specific to its location, such as the Juneteenth Emancipation National Historic Trail. This would help distinguish the story of the delayed emancipation in Texas from a term that describes the broader story of the freeing of enslaved people throughout the South.

We would be happy to provide the committee and sponsor with suggested language for these changes.

Ms. Chairwoman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 306, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF THE SITE OF THE KETTLE CREEK BATTLEFIELD IN WILKES COUNTY, GEORGIA, AND ADJACENT PROPERTY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**APRIL 2, 2019**

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Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 306, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the site of the Kettle Creek Battlefield in Wilkes County, Georgia, and adjacent property, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes that Kettle Creek Battlefield represents an important story in American history. However, we do not think that this battlefield site is a good candidate subject for a special resource study, and therefore we do not support enactment of H.R. 306. In addition, Congress has previously authorized 30 studies to determine if certain areas or resources meet the appropriate criteria for designation as new park units, national heritage areas, national trails, or wild and scenic rivers that the National Park Service has not yet completed. Only a few weeks ago, nine of those studies were authorized as part of Public Law 116-9. At a time that the Administration needs to use resources to reduce the National Park Service's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog and address other critical national park needs, the Department is not in a position to spend additional funds on conducting even more studies.

Kettle Creek Battlefield is the site of one of the few victories in Georgia by forces opposed to British rule during the American Revolutionary War. The battlefield marks the location of a February 14, 1779, engagement between 700-800 North and South Carolina Tories (British loyalists), under the direction of Col. James Boyd, and 400 Georgia patriots under the command of Col. Andrew Pickens, Col. John Dooly, and Lt. Col. Elijah Clarke. The patriots led a successful surprise attack, and the entire battle was concluded in less than two hours.

In 1975, Kettle Creek Battlefield, consisting of a 40-acre parcel, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2014, the National Historic Landmark Program received a request that the battlefield site be considered for designation as a National Historic Landmark. The National Historic Landmarks Program concluded that, despite its listing on the National Register for national significance, the battlefield site did not meet the criteria for designation as a National Historic Landmark. The program found that although the battle is important as one of many skirmishes in the South which collectively eroded British resistance, this particular battle was not a decisive one in the history of the American Revolution.

To establish the relative merit of this property for potential National Historic Landmark designation, other properties designated as National Historic Landmarks on the basis of their

association with the American Revolution would also have to be taken into consideration. Compared to other important military milestones of the American Revolution – such as the Battle of Kings Mountain, which marked the turning point of the war in the south, or the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, which marked the height of British Operations during the Southern Campaign – the Battle of Kettle Creek does not rise to a comparable level of national significance.

For a property to meet National Historic Landmark criteria, particularly within a military context where its significance is measured against all other battles and campaigns fought throughout that war, it must constitute a significant turning point or watershed moment. Although the Battle of Kettle Creek was one of many skirmishes that, collectively, contributed towards eroding British resistance, it does not on its own constitute a defining moment of the war. For this reason, we do not believe the Kettle Creek Battlefield is a good candidate subject for a special resource study.

Ms. Chairwoman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

**Statement for the Record  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, & Public Lands  
H.R. 823, Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act  
April 2, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 823, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act, which provides direction for the future management of certain Federal lands in southwestern Colorado. H.R. 823 designates the McKenna Peak Wilderness on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and releases the remainder of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA) from further wilderness study under section 603(c) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), thereby making these lands available for other multiple uses.

In addition, the bill withdraws approximately 244,500 acres of Federal lands near Carbondale and east of Paonia, Colorado – including Thompson Divide – from operation of the public land, mining, and mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights, and provides for the relinquishment of certain mineral leases within this area. The bill further requires the BLM to inventory coal mine methane emissions from coal mines, and creates a commercial coal mine methane emission capture program.

The bill also establishes a legislative boundary for the existing Curecanti National Recreation Area managed by the National Park Service (NPS), expands the area to encompass a total of approximately 50,700 acres, directs the transfer of certain lands currently managed by the BLM and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to the NPS for inclusion into this area, and adjusts the potential wilderness area boundary of the NPS-managed Rocky Mountain National Park.

Finally, the bill designates one new recreation area comprising approximately 17,000 acres, two new wildlife conservation areas comprising approximately 11,700 acres, two new special management areas comprising approximately 22,500 acres, and creates or expands seven wilderness areas by approximately 55,900 acres on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

The Department of the Interior (Department) has pledged to expand access to America's public lands, to increase hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities nationwide, and to enhance conservation stewardship through Secretarial Orders 3347, 3356, 3366, and 3373. To advance those goals, we are focusing on restoring full collaboration and coordination with local communities and making the Department a better neighbor.

As a matter of policy, the Department supports Congressional action to resolve issues of wilderness designation and release of WSAs on public lands across the West, and we welcome opportunities to further those efforts. However, there may be alternative approaches for managing the lands identified in H.R. 823. We would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to determine if wilderness, withdrawal, and special management

designations are the best mechanism for managing these important resources and uses in this part of Colorado. The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture regarding provisions in the bill concerning the lands and interests administered by the USFS.

Because of the complexity of this legislation and the importance of these issues to the Department, this statement will address each of the bill's provisions individually.

### **Background**

Southwestern Colorado is characterized by high mountain ranges, scenic valleys, and arid, slick rock canyon country. Energy development, agriculture, and recreation drive the local economy, as well as world-famous resort areas like Aspen and Telluride. The public lands managed by the BLM and NPS in this region serve as popular destinations for outdoor enthusiasts, including off-highway vehicle users, hikers, mountain bikers, rock climbers, hunters, and fishers. BLM-managed public lands in these areas also provide important opportunities for grazing, energy development and jobs, and other important commercial activities.

### ***McKenna Peak WSA***

The McKenna Peak WSA covers nearly 20,000 acres of BLM-managed public lands in San Miguel and Dolores Counties in southwestern Colorado. The Department notes that this area generally serves as habitat for a diversity of plant and animal life, including mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lions, and bald and golden eagles. The WSA also provides important opportunities for hunting, hiking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

### ***Thompson Divide***

Thompson Divide and the North Fork Valley connect the Elk Mountains and Grand Mesa. These rugged areas of Colorado are near the mountain resort communities of Aspen and Glenwood Springs. The North Fork Valley is also home to a more than century-old coal mining area, as well as an emerging organic farming movement centered in Paonia. This area of Colorado is characterized by steep, forested terrain and large areas of congressionally designated wilderness, including the Raggeds and West Elk wildernesses. Higher elevations include big game habitat, particularly mule deer and elk, while lower elevations are primarily used for agriculture, including vineyards, orchards, and ranching. Oil and gas development has occurred in the Thompson Divide and North Fork Valley for decades. In addition, the Thompson Divide includes a natural gas storage unit, where natural gas stored for later use in nearby communities.

### ***Curecanti National Recreation Area***

The NPS-managed Curecanti National Recreation Area includes a series of three BOR reservoirs along the Gunnison River. The reservoirs that make up Curecanti today are a destination for water-based recreation high in the Rocky Mountains. Best known for kokanee salmon and lake trout fishing, Curecanti also offers opportunities for hiking, boating, camping, and bird watching. BLM-managed public lands border Curecanti at lower elevations, with National Forest Lands in higher elevations.

## **H.R. 823**

### ***Title I – Continental Divide***

Section 109 would provide for the maintenance and use of the Trail River Ranch in Rocky Mountain National Park by excluding approximately a 15.5-acre area from the Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness. This area is currently part of the park and managed as potential wilderness in accordance with the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–11). By policy, areas listed as potential wilderness are managed as wilderness until a final determination can be made. This tract contains a historic ranch consisting of a home, guest cabin and outbuildings. The ranch is dedicated to unique environmental educational programs currently run by partner groups, The Friends of Trail River Ranch and Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

Stakeholders believe the area can be used as a more robust education center, accommodating year-round programs while expanding visitor opportunities on the west side of the Park. In order to accomplish this, several repairs and upgrades are needed to the existing facilities, as well as repairs to the bridge used to access the area. The necessary upgrades and improved educational uses for the Trail River Ranch are not feasible while the tract is being managed as wilderness. In 2015, the park conducted public scoping to gather input on the future vision of Trail River Ranch. The park received 119 pieces of correspondence which demonstrated overwhelming support for the outdoor education center and the requisite change to non-wilderness status. By removing the Trail River Ranch from the potential wilderness designation, the NPS can upgrade the facilities, and allow for year-round educational uses supported by the partner groups, community and local stakeholders. The Department supports this removal.

### ***Title II – San Juan Mountains***

Section 203 of the bill designates approximately 8,900 acres of the existing BLM-managed McKenna Peak WSA as wilderness. Only Congress can determine whether to designate WSAs as wilderness or to release them for other multiple uses. The McKenna Peak WSA has been pending final resolution by Congress since October 1991. The Department supports Congressional action to settle the status of these lands, which would provide certainty to public land users in Colorado.

We note, however, that section 203 covers only those areas of the WSA in San Miguel County. The other almost 11,000 acres of the WSA in Dolores County are not addressed in the legislation. These acres would remain in WSA status, pending Congressional action. The Department recommends that the sponsor and the Subcommittee consider addressing this portion of the WSA as well. Based on the Department's 1991 Colorado Statewide Wilderness Study Report, we recommend that this area be released from WSA status. In addition, we would like to work with the sponsor on certain modifications to this section, including adjusting the boundary to follow existing natural resource and topographical features instead of the county line, which would enhance manageability.

Section 205 of H.R. 823 provides for the release from WSA status of those portions of the Dominguez Canyon WSA that were not designated as wilderness under Title II, Subtitle E of Public Law 111-11, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. Section 2403 of that Act designated the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Area. However, small portions of the

underlying WSA totaling approximately 3,035 acres were neither designated wilderness nor released from WSA status. This release would benefit the BLM's ongoing management by removing narrow strips and scattered tracts of remaining WSA. These areas remain within the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA), also designated by Public Law 111-11, and would be managed consistent with the rest of the NCA.

In addition to this needed WSA release, the Department recommends that the sponsor consider releasing other small WSAs and Instant Study Areas (ISAs) in Colorado that were not included in previous wilderness designations, including the Black Ridge Canyons, Bill Hare Gulch, North Sand Hills, Needle Rock, and High Mesa Grassland areas. Each of these areas are challenging for the BLM to manage because of their small size and proximity to existing development. Release of these areas would provide additional opportunities for multiple uses and recreational access, including hunting and fishing, hiking, camping, and horseback riding, among others.

### ***Title III – Thompson Divide***

Section 303 of the bill withdraws approximately 244,500 acres of Federal land near Carbondale and east of Paonia, Colorado, from operation of the public land, mining, mineral leasing, mineral materials, and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. This area is locally known as the Thompson Divide. The surface of these lands is managed by the USFS (approximately 187,900 acres) and the BLM (approximately 15,200 acres), with the remainder of the surface managed by the State of Colorado and the Bureau of Reclamation or in private ownership.

Under the current BLM and USFS land use plans, some of the lands proposed for withdrawal – which range from very low to very high oil and gas potential – are currently open to oil, gas, and coal development. The lands overlap with four existing BLM oil and gas units. The Thompson Divide proposed withdrawal largely avoids the historic North Fork Valley coal mine development area, although some coal reserves would be withdrawn.

Finally, under section 305 of the bill, the Department would be required to complete, within one year of enactment, a coal mine methane inventory. This inventory would include an assessment of methane emissions from active, inactive, and abandoned coal mines in the Lower North Fork Valley. Section 305 also requires the Department to develop a program to offer for lease Federal methane from active, inactive, and abandoned coal mines, subject to valid existing rights. In addition, section 305 requires the Department to establish a program to facilitate the sale and delivery of methane from such coal mines to a power provider within 100 miles of Paonia, Colorado, to generate electricity.

The Department would like the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee on the best mechanism for managing the resources within the Thompson Divide and the upper North Fork Valley. Alternative management approaches could protect recreational opportunities and conserve resources while still accommodating the full range of uses and activities permitted on other BLM-managed lands. Under FLPMA, for example, the BLM currently manages public lands within this area for a variety of uses, such as conservation, watershed protection, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation, livestock grazing, and oil and gas development. While much of the withdrawal area proposed by section 303 is open to development of oil, gas, and



coal resources, the BLM minimizes impacts through lease stipulations and conditions of approval that protect wildlife habitat, water quality, and visual impacts.

If Congress chooses to proceed with the proposed withdrawal, the Department would like to work with the sponsor on a number of modifications, including language clarifying the status of the Wolf Creek Storage Unit and the State of Colorado's share of all Federal revenue from the leasing process.

In addition, the Department is concerned with some aspects of the technical feasibility posed by the methane inventory required by section 305, which could make it difficult to complete within one year. For example, methane emissions occur naturally in many areas like the North Fork Valley, making identifying coal mine emissions more challenging. As such, it may be difficult to determine whether a particular emission is associated with an active, inactive, or legacy coal mine. As a result, other State or Federal regulatory agencies may be more appropriate to inventory and evaluate coal mine methane emissions from abandoned coal mines since the BLM does not regulate air quality.

Finally, the Department's understanding is that methane from non-operating coal mines within the Lower North Fork Valley may not comprise a commercially viable energy source, largely because of its composition (less than 50 percent methane and greater than 30 percent nitrogen). As such, the Department recommends that the sponsor consider authorizing a study to determine the market viability of waste methane electricity generation in this area before establishing the leasing program proposed in section 305.

#### ***Title IV – Curecanti National Recreation Area***

Curecanti National Recreation Area is located in southwestern Colorado, stretching approximately 40 miles along the Gunnison River basin in Gunnison and Montrose counties. Curecanti is one of the few units of the National Park System that does not have a legislated boundary.

In cooperation with the BOR, the NPS manages Curecanti National Recreation Area under Section 8 of the Colorado River Storage Project Act of 1956 and a 1965 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the BOR and the NPS. At Curecanti, the BOR manages three reservoirs, including the dams, power plants, access roads, and other related facilities; while the NPS manages the natural and cultural resources, as well as visitor recreation and associated visitor facilities. Additionally, the NPS maintains cooperative agreements with the BLM and with USFS for various program areas at Curecanti. The Department notes that the BLM and the NPS currently have cooperative agreements in place for multiple program areas, including invasive species management, BLM management of NPS's remaining grazing leases, and Gunnison Sage-Grouse inventory and monitoring, among others.

P.L. 106-76, enacted in 1999, required the NPS to conduct a study and make recommendations to Congress for alternatives that would better conserve the natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resources within and surrounding Curecanti National Recreation Area. The NPS, with the BOR as a cooperating agency, conducted the study, which included preparing an Environmental Impact Statement.

The study, which was transmitted in 2009, recommended that Congress legislatively establish Curecanti as a National Recreation Area (NRA) unit within the National Park System with a legislated boundary, and that the 1965 MOA between the BOR and the NPS be revised accordingly. Title IV of H.R. 823 addresses the recommendations of the 2009 report in several ways. First, the bill transfers administrative jurisdiction of lands withdrawn or acquired by the BOR to the NPS within one year of the enactment of the bill, while allowing the BOR to retain lands and all necessary access required for reclamation purposes. The bill also requires that a Memorandum of Understanding governing this access be entered into between the NPS and BOR within one year of enactment. Additionally, the bill transfers approximately 2,560 acres of USFS land and approximately 5,040 acres of BLM land to the NPS, and provides authority to acquire additional land within the boundary by donation, purchase from willing sellers, transfer from a Federal agency, or exchange. The legislation requires that any existing grazing leases on BLM lands will be honored after transfer to NPS. Furthermore, hunting and fishing opportunities would be allowed on these lands after inclusion in the recreation area. Additionally, the bill transfers 800 acres currently managed by the BOR to the BLM. These Gunnison County parcels include the 6-site Gateview campground, which lies at the north end of recreation lands currently managed by the BLM's Gunnison Field Office.

The report further recommended that the NPS expand efforts to support conservation of the natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resources on lands, both within and surrounding Curecanti NRA. Specifically, the report recommended that Congress authorize the NPS to work in partnership with adjacent landowners to implement a variety of tools that would enhance the long-term conservation of natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources. These recommendations are addressed in Section 402, paragraph (3), (4), and (5); authorizing new or modified management agreements between Federal agencies and State agencies for management of the NRA, allowing recreation access including boating, hunting, and fishing within the NRA, and authorizing landowner assistance and partnership efforts with private landowners located within 3 miles of the NRA boundary.

Section 402, paragraphs (7), (8), and (9) maintains existing grazing rights, existing water rights, and existing fishing easement access and programs, while Section 404 requires that the NPS prepare a General Management Plan for the NRA, in consultation with the Commissioner of Reclamation, within 3 years of funds being provided for the purpose.

Due to the complexity of Title IV, and the need for coordination between the three Bureaus (BLM, BOR, and NPS) as well as inter-Departmental cooperation between the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, due to U.S. Forest Service involvement, the Administration is continuing to review this Title.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. The Department looks forward to continuing to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee as this bill moves forward through the legislative process.

**STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 1708, A BILL TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA TO INCLUDE THE RIM OF THE VALLEY CORRIDOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**APRIL 2, 2019**

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Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1708, a bill to adjust the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA) to include the Rim of the Valley Corridor, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes that a special resource study has found that the expansion of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA proposed by H.R. 1708 meets the National Park Service's criteria for addition to the National Park System. However, because we are focusing resources on reducing the National Park Service's \$11.9 billion deferred maintenance backlog and addressing other critical national park needs, the Department does not support enacting this proposed expansion at this time.

H.R. 1708 would expand the boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA by approximately 191,000 acres of land within the area known as the Rim of the Valley Corridor, the mountainous areas that surround the San Fernando, Simi, and Conejo Valleys northwest of Los Angeles, partly contiguous with the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The proposed Rim of the Valley Unit would be administered as part of the Santa Monica Mountains NRA and an updated management plan for the park would be required within three years of enactment. Provisions are included in the bill to ensure that the inclusion of the Rim of the Valley lands in the Santa Monica Mountains NRA would not interfere with specified existing uses.

The Santa Monica Mountains NRA was established by Congress in 1978 to help preserve and protect the natural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains and the adjacent coastline and provide outdoor recreational opportunities within the vicinity of densely populated Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Within a boundary encompassing approximately 154,000 acres, the National Park Service (NPS) owns a relatively small proportion of the land—approximately 23,600 acres, or 15 percent. Altogether, 58 percent of the land within the boundary is in public ownership, including the NPS lands. The NPS coordinates actions with State and other public agencies that manage park lands through a cooperative management agreement, which allows all partners to realize cost savings and efficiencies. The NPS also partners with nongovernmental organizations to further the purposes of the NRA.

P.L. 110-229, enacted in 2008, directed the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of designating all or a portion of the Rim of the Valley Corridor as a unit of Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The study area consisted of approximately 650,000 acres of land

within the mountains encircling the San Fernando, La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi, and Conejo Valleys. The study's preferred alternative, among four alternatives evaluated, recommended an expansion of approximately 173,000 acres of lands judged to have the highest concentration of resource values and recreational opportunities. The preferred alternative also recognized a limited role for National Park Service land ownership, as is the case within the existing national recreation area, and a continuation of the existing collaborative partnership-based management model. The study team conducted extensive public outreach throughout the study process and throughout the region, receiving approximately 7,200 comment letters during the study period; more than 90 percent of comment letters preferred a much larger alternative than the recommendation transmitted to Congress. The study was transmitted to Congress on February 16, 2016.

H.R. 1708 differs in several ways from the study's preferred alternative transmitted to Congress. H.R. 1708 would include a greater number of acres of land within the boundary, approximately 191,000, than the approximately 173,000 acres the preferred alternative proposed. Additionally, the bill would remove all properties contained in the 2016 recommendation that are identified by the State of California as containing oil and gas operations, as well as the Santa Susana Field Laboratory. These changes would eliminate any unintentional regulatory burden to gas and oil development and prevent the transfer of Federal lands at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, and their associated facilities, including clean-up costs, to the National Park Service. Finally, H.R. 1708 would add lands to the east of the City of Santa Clarita and in the western Santa Susana mountains for the purpose of regional trail connections.

If the committee decides to act on this legislation, the Department would like to provide an updated legislative map to reference in the bill, and a corresponding amendment. This map would show the Rim of the Valley Unit as an addition to the NRA, not as a substitution of the original NRA boundary.

Ms. Chairwoman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.