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**Ann Kirkpatrick Testimony on behalf of HR 6541, the Chiricahua National Park Act**

House Natural Resources Committee

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Land

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Good morning, everyone and thank you **Chairman Neguse** and **Ranking Member Fulcher** for hosting today's important legislative hearing to discuss these bills. I'm delighted to join my colleagues on this panel to speak on behalf of my bill, HR 6451, the Chiricahua National Park Act.

This bill simply designates the existing Chiricahua National Monument as a national park and does not change the boundary line around the park unit.

The Chiricahua mountains are located in southeastern Arizona, about a two-hour drive from Tucson, near the city of Wilcox. I was fortunate enough to visit Chiricahua National Monument just last week - and the views from the top are simply stunning. The mountains are full of remarkable rock formations that have eroded over time from wind and water to create extraordinary and unique balancing rock structures and pinnacle formations.

This is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world and is a critical habitat for threatened and endangered species. Geologists, birdwatchers, and wildlife enthusiasts travel from all over the world to explore the Chiricahuas. One of the most important and unique features of this park is its groundwater. The Park contains five major watersheds, grasslands, deciduous and evergreen forests, and deserts, all within its boundary. The possibilities for exploration and learning by experts, novices, adults, children, and everyone in between are endless.

This bill also aims to preserve and correctly interpret the rich cultural history of this area. Many people have called Chiricahua home for thousands of years. These mountains are the ancestral home to the Chiricahua Apaches and this bill aims to

recognize their historical presence and safeguard their deep spiritual connection to this land. The history of this area also includes fascinating legacies of Buffalo Soldiers, pioneers, ranchers and the 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps.

The designation of Chiricahua National Park is widely supported by our local community and surrounding towns. We have worked with our partners in Cochise County for years on this legislation. We also sought out and took direct feedback from San Carlos Apache Chairman Rambler, who's input to this bill I am most grateful for.

My husband and I have spent a lot of time out in the Chiricahuas hiking, exploring, and taking in the gorgeous views. I am proud to have the opportunity to introduce a bill that would designate the monument as a National Park. The ancient and fascinating rock structures, along with the incredible biodiversity and unique historical legacy makes Chiricahua National Monument quite worthy of the designation as a National Park.

To close, I would like to reiterate that the Chiricahua Mountains are truly special, and I would be happy to host any one of you on a trip to the park if you find yourself in Southern Arizona. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the members of this committee for generously allowing me time to speak on behalf of the Chiricahua National Park Act. I yield.