



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

DEC 20 2024

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
Chairman
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the National Park Service to questions for the record submitted following the Subcommittee's June 27, 2024, legislative hearing on H.R. 390, H.R. 6826, H.R. 6843, H.R. 8206, and H.R. 8219.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Barkin
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Joe Neguse
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 390, H.R. 6826, H.R. 6843,
H.R. 8206, and H.R. 8219
June 27, 2024

Questions from Rep. Westerman

Question 1. Regarding H.R. 8219, how does the National Park Service plan to accommodate ongoing efforts to rebuild Lahaina as it conducts a study to determine whether this area should be designated as a National Heritage Area?

Response: The National Park Service (NPS) recognizes that local recovery efforts at Lahaina are paramount. When a potential local coordinating entity is identified, the NPS study team can work with that organization to ensure that the national heritage area study process is carried out in a manner that would not impede those efforts and activities.

Question 2. Will the National Park Service commit to not designating any portion of the Big Cypress National Preserve as a wilderness area or wilderness study area? If no, why not?

Response: While NPS is authorized to study lands for wilderness potential, only Congress can designate wilderness and wilderness study areas.

Question 3. Will the National Park Service commit to consulting with Tribes prior to managing any area in the Big Cypress National Preserve for potential inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System?

Response: The NPS has consulted formally with the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. The NPS has also engaged in informal conversations with Tribe staff and Tribal members throughout the Backcountry Access Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement (Plan/EIS) process and will continue to do so.

Question 4. How has the National Heritage Area Act impacted the administration of National Heritage Areas?

Response: The National Heritage Area Act established a System of National Heritage Areas (NHA), creating a unifying framework for all 62 NHAs and any NHAs that may be established in the future. The Act also standardized the processes for conducting, approving, and reporting feasibility studies and evaluations. The Act's extension of funding authority through FY 2037 for 45 NHAs reduces the need to continuously track individual NHA sunset funding authorities, allowing the NPS to focus on long-term planning for the new System and the relationship between the NHA System and the National Park System. In addition, the Act has facilitated NPS assistance to the seven NHAs created by the Act as they develop management plans.

Question 5. How many times has the National Park Service spoken to the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida to discuss the implications of turning portions of the Big Cypress National

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Preserve into a wilderness area?

Response: The NPS met with the Tribal Chairman and the Business Council in 2023 and 2024. The NPS has also formally consulted on this topic in writing at every appropriate step throughout the Plan/EIS process and has engaged in numerous informal conversations with members of the Tribe, their Business Council, and several staff members including their attorneys.

Question 6. How many times has the National Park Service spoken to the Seminole Tribe of Florida to discuss the implications of turning portions of the Big Cypress National Preserve into a wilderness area?

Response: The NPS has engaged in formal consultation with the Seminole Tribe at every appropriate step throughout the Plan/EIS process. We have also engaged numerous times with staff and Tribal members informally, including their attorneys. The Seminole Tribe signed the Programmatic Agreement for the Plan/EIS focusing on historic preservation concerns.

Question 7. In your testimony, you recommended that prior to expanding two existing National Heritage Areas in Louisiana and New York, the National Park Service first complete studies of these expansions. How long does the National Park Service expect these studies will take to complete?

Response: NHA boundary expansion study addenda are prepared by local coordinating entities and reviewed by the NPS. The local coordinating entity for the Atchafalaya NHA in Louisiana submitted its study addendum to the NPS for review on July 19, 2024. NPS completed a program-level review on August 28, 2024, with a favorable finding. The boundary expansion study addendum for the Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson Valley NHA in New York is ongoing; once the addendum is submitted to the NPS, we will endeavor to complete our review on a timely basis.

Question 8. What process is involved in putting together studies to expand existing National Heritage Areas, and how do they incorporate feedback from the local community?

Response: The process is similar to the study process for potential new NHAs. It focuses on describing the proposed expansion area, inventorying resources within the area, and connecting them to the established themes of the NHA, and identifying their recreational, interpretive, and educational potential. Because any effort to expand an NHA must have significant support from key stakeholders and the public, the study process also focuses on engagement with the local community and identifies the roles that any new partners will have with the NHA. The study incorporates feedback from the local community through public engagement that may include public listening sessions, stakeholder focus groups, open houses, and briefings with municipal leaders, partner organizations, and Tribes.

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Question 9. How would H.R. 390 improve ongoing planning efforts to commemorate America's upcoming 250th anniversary?

Response: The Hudson Valley region played an important role in the American Revolution. As we prepare for the upcoming semiquincentennial, the expansion of the Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson Valley National Heritage Area to include Saratoga and Washington Counties, as provided for by H.R. 390, has the potential to improve connections with state and local partner sites in these counties and help ensure that the Hudson Valley's important history and contributions to America's founding are better understood and shared.

Question 10. In your testimony, you stated that "The Department, the National Park Service, and Haleakalā National Park will continue to support the long-term recovery efforts of the Maui community." Can you please expand on DOI and NPS's involvement in efforts to remediate and rebuild Lahaina following the August 2023 wildfire?

Response: Staff from Haleakala National Park communicate regularly with the Maui Fire Department and the State of Hawaii on wildland fire response planning. Following the wildfires of August 2023, coordinating groups similar to the Big Island Wildfire Coordinating Group, which meets quarterly to discuss wildfire training, communications, prevention, preparedness, and response, have been established and or resurrected on Oahu and Maui. The NPS has been an active member in these coordinating groups.

During events that have potential to affect the park or strain local wildland fire management resources, Haleakala National Park staff provide park resources for mutual aid response. The NPS has also been one of the federal agencies working with state and local fire response agencies, meeting regularly to develop a Master Cooperative Agreement for Stafford Act Response. The Master Cooperative Agreement is intended to improve efficiency by facilitating the coordination and exchange of personnel, equipment, supplies, services, and funds in sustaining wildland fire management activities, such as prevention, preparedness, communication and education, fuels treatment and hazard mitigation, fire planning, response strategies, tactics and alternatives, suppression, and post-fire rehabilitation and restoration.

NPS staff have also been participating in discussions with FEMA that are focused on cultural resources and participating in consultation for FEMA undertakings that impact contributing properties of the Lahaina National Historic Landmark.