

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 9165, THE PUBLIC LAND SEARCH AND RESCUE ACT.

November 19, 2024

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 9165, the Public Land Search and Rescue Act.

The Department supports the goal of alleviating the financial burden experienced by state and local entities assisting in search and rescue operations on Federal land. We would like to work with the sponsor and the subcommittee to explore different ways, outside the establishment of the new grant program proposed by H.R. 9165, through which Federal land management agencies could better support our state and local partners who assist in these operations. The Department defers to the Department of Agriculture for their views regarding the effect of H.R. 9165 on the U.S. Forest Service.

H.R. 9165 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish a grant program to help pay for remote search and rescue operations on Federal land under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture. The bill would award grants to state and local entities as reimbursement for operations they have conducted on Federal land, and to purchase and maintain equipment used for remote search and rescue activities. Grants could cover up to 75 percent of the cost of these activities. Priority in applications for the grants would be given to state and local entities (or their designees) in areas that serve a high ratio of visitors to residents.

It is unclear what the source of funding would be for this grant program or how it would be administered. The Department has three primary land management bureaus—the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—with which it would need to coordinate this program, but the Department would also need to coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service because the program would also be responsible for providing grants for activities on lands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Agriculture.

The Department's team of dedicated, highly trained search and rescue personnel provide invaluable assistance to hundreds of visitors every year, and we are committed to making that process as safe and effective as possible. We greatly value the help we receive from state and local governments in serving the public in that capacity. Before acting on this bill, we would like to explore alternative ways to address the challenges faced by state and local governments in providing assistance, without creating a new multi-bureau grant program.

If the Committee moves forward with this bill, the Department recommends amending Section 2(a) of the bill to read "In General. — Not later than one year *after funding has been made available*, the Secretary shall establish a program to provide grants and allocate resources for remote search and rescue activities conducted on Federal land under the jurisdiction of the

Secretary.” Currently, the bill requires establishing the program within one year of enactment. This proposed amendment would ensure funding would be in place to support the program. We would also appreciate the opportunity to provide additional recommended amendments as we further analyze the potential impacts of the bill.

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, this concludes our statement.