

Written Statement of
The Honorable County Judge Executive Scott Lindsey
Edmonson County, Kentucky

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Opening Statement

March 18, 2026

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of Congressman Brett Guthrie (KY-02) and his bill, H.R. 3286, the Mammoth Cave National Park Boundary Adjustment Act of 2025. I appreciate the subcommittee's willingness to hear about the importance of Mammoth Cave not only to my county but to the surrounding counties and the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Officially established as a National Park in 1941, Mammoth Cave National Park is home to the world's longest known cave system in the world with more than 400 miles of surveyed, interconnected underground passageways, with miles still unexplored throughout the Commonwealth. The Park's approximately 52,830 acres of forested landscape extends across my county, Edmonson, and both Barren and Hart counties. The park features ranger-led cave tours and surface walks, along with camping, hiking, horseback riding, biking, scenic drives, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, accessible trails, and picnicking. This wide range of activities is possible because Mammoth Cave National Park operates on two distinct levels: reclaimed hardwood forests and winding riverways above ground, and an intricate cave system below.

This historic cave network has offered visitors, scientists, students, and adventurers a remarkable record of geological data that has shaped the region throughout the years. The cave system also preserves important cultural history, including evidence of early exploration used by settlers and 19th-century miners. Today, it remains one of the most significant natural and historic underground landscapes in the United States providing opportunities for scientific study, education, and recreation.

Visitors from all across the world come to Kentucky not only for horse racing, bourbon, and to see Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, but to explore Mammoth Cave National Park. In fact, in 2024, 747,000 park visitors spent an estimated \$73.2 million in local regions while visiting the Park. These expenditures supported a total of 883 jobs, \$31.1 million in labor income, \$53.2 million in

value added, and \$97.3 million in economic output in local economies surrounding Mammoth Cave National Park.

The expansion of the park with the passage of H.R. 3286 will be crucial in bringing even more tourism opportunities to Kentucky communities. Over the years, the National Park has undertaken several rehabilitation projects, including the new visitor center, prioritizing the reopening of the essential river ferry, and creating new recreational opportunities for our visitors, all with the goal of expanding the National Park for future generations.

One of my missions as County Judge Executive is to support the businesses I represent and to bring economic growth to my county. I believe that Kentucky has an ambitiously bright future, and a big reason for our growth will come from your support for H.R. 3286.

H.R. 3286, the Mammoth Cave National Park Boundary Adjustment Act of 2025 would authorize the Secretary of Interior to acquire 551.14 acres of land and any interests in land generally depicted as ‘Proposed Addition’ on the map entitled ‘Mammoth Cave National Park Proposed Southern Boundary Expansion Edmonson and Barren Counties, Kentucky’, numbered 135/177,967 and dated May 2025, for inclusion in the Mammoth Cave National Park. This bill would also adjust for inflation in accordance with the Consumer Price Index published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor, authorizing appropriations of the sum for acquiring the land.

Current law, [Section 11 of the Act of June 5, 1942 \(56 Stat. 319, chapter 341; 16 U.S.C. 404c-11\)](#) restricts the authorization for the Secretary of Interior to acquire land for inclusion in Mammoth Cave National Park by purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, any lands, interests in lands, and other property within the maximum boundaries authorized in the above statute, and also limits the maximum amount of federal funding that can be authorized to be used on the park’s acquisition of the property to not exceed \$350,000. H.R. 3286 addresses those technical gaps so that Mammoth Cave can continue its mission to drive further economic and recreational opportunities for Kentucky.

These 551.14 acres of land were purchased by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) back in 2017 in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through the Imperiled Bat Conservation Fund (ICBF). This fund was established in 2009 through a partnership among the USFWS, the Kentucky Ecological Services Field Office, and the Kentucky Natural Land Trust (KNLT). The fund is administered by the KNLT, with assistance from USFWS.

This TNC-owned property lies within one of the most biodiverse aquatic ecosystems in the U.S., the Green River watershed. This watershed is home to 150 fish species, 73 mussel species, and 43 species found nowhere else in the world. The property also includes numerous cave passages, including Coach and James Cave, that help contribute to watershed protection of the Green River and Mammoth Cave National Park, and contain federally-designated Critical Habitat for Indiana and Gray Bats.

Cave and bat specialists with Mammoth Cave National Park have the ability to manage the property and the hibernating bat populations. Early protection of this critical habitat is essential for the recovery of these bats and will enable the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to begin discussions of delisting these species from the Endangered Species Act. No other entity is better equipped to manage these bat populations than Mammoth Cave National Park.

Coach Cave, and particularly James Cave, is also rich in cultural resources, including both prehistoric and historic artifacts, which are best managed by Mammoth Cave National Park. Prehistoric resources are found throughout certain areas of James Cave, including several detailed petroglyphs of a type found in very few caves in Kentucky. Other evidence has been found to substantiate the use of James Cave by prehistoric indigenous people: evidence of mineral collection using wooden tools and stoke marks, remnants of river cane used to make torches found in several passages, chert tools found just inside the James Cave entrance and numerous chert chips found just outside the entrance, and skeleton of a young female dated to between 2000 and 3000 years BC found in a burial pit not far from the cave entrance. The skeleton is catalogued at the University of Kentucky. Also of cultural significance, James Cave has a history of saltpeter mining during the War of 1812, and both James Cave and Coach Cave are rich in signatures left by Civil War soldiers who explored the caves in February of 1862.

I also want to emphasize an important point: this acquisition involves land already owned by The Nature Conservancy. No additional private property is included in the land exchange. In fact, this land is under a conservation easement, which completely restricts any future development.

In addition, when TNC entered into the land purchase agreement in 2017, the organization applied for a tax exemption based on its charitable status as a nonprofit. As a result, the County is not currently collecting property taxes on the land. Therefore, the proposed acquisition will not alter the existing tax base or result in any loss of tax revenue.

The purchase price of this land exchange will be just under \$1 million. The National Park Service will acquire this land from both the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which does not use any taxpayer funds, and from the annual allocations the NPS receives from Congress. As mentioned earlier, TNC bought this land with funds from the Imperiled Bat Conservation Fund, and it is my understanding that all sale proceeds TNC receives from this land exchange will be reimbursed back to the IBCF.

On behalf of Congressman Brett Guthrie, I want to say a thank you to the local officials and organizations, in addition to myself, that have submitted support letters in recognition of this bill: Barren County Judge Executive Jamie Bewley Byrd, City of Cave City Mayor Dwayne Hatcher, City of Park City Mayor Donna Scavo, Friends of Mammoth Cave, Mammoth Cave National Park Association, the Mammoth Cave Biosphere Region, and The Nature Conservancy. A thank you also goes out to the cosponsors of this legislation, Representatives Andy Barr (KY-06), James Comer (KY-01), Hal Rogers (KY-05), Morgan McGarvey (KY-03), and Cliff Bentz (OR-02). And a special gratitude to Senator Mitch McConnell for his introduction of the Mammoth

Cave National Park Boundary Adjustment Act in the Senate and for his perseverance in getting it Unanimously Consented to in the Senate last Congress and in working to get it across the finish line again this Congress.

Thank you for this Committee's work, its steadfast dedication to public service, and for its willingness to learn about the significance of Mammoth Cave National Park and the proposed acquisition of 551.14 acres from The Nature Conservancy. Enactment of this legislation would empower experts at the Mammoth Cave National Park with the ability to safeguard prehistoric and historic artifacts, preserve critical habitats in the Green River watershed and Coach and James Caves, and expand educational and recreational opportunities. This expansion represents a highly impactful investment, promoting future tourism, generating economic growth, and supporting good jobs for the people of Kentucky.

In closing, I want to thank you again, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.