

STATEMENT OF VICTOR KNOX, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 4029, TO REQUIRE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO TRANSFER ALL FEDERAL LAND, FACILITIES AND ANY OTHER ASSETS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS TO THE STATE OF MISSOURI FOR THE PURPOSES OF MAINTAINING A STATE PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

June 10, 2014

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4029, a bill to require the Secretary of the Interior to transfer all federal land, facilities and any other assets associated with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways to the State of Missouri for the purpose of maintaining a state park, and for other purposes.

The Department strongly opposes the enactment of H.R. 4029.

H.R. 4029 would transfer all lands, facilities, and assets associated with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways to the State of Missouri to be operated as a State park in substantially the same fashion as it was operated as a unit of the National Park System. If the State of Missouri attempted to sell any portion of these lands, assets, or facilities, or did not operate them in the same fashion as the National Park Service, they would revert to the ownership of the Federal government. The bill would also require the Federal government to pay all of the costs of the transfer.

The Department has a number of concerns with H.R. 4029. Our fundamental concern is that the bill would erode the idea of a Federal system of public lands, and the system of laws, regulations, and policies that govern the management of those lands. The management of Federal lands involves the exercise of inherently Federal functions and decision making by land managers for the long-term benefit of all Americans. State governments have very different responsibilities for the management of State lands than the Federal government, and are accountable only to residents within their particular States. Accordingly, each State would be under strong pressure to manage according to local rather than national interests.

2014 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the designation of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways as a unit of the National Park Service. In 1964, Missouri's Congressional delegation united in support of a bill to set aside 134 miles of crystal clear spring-fed rivers in recognition of the inherent value of the unique scenic, natural and historic values of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers in the Ozark Highlands as a crucial part of our national heritage. Public Law 88-492 was the culmination of forty years of efforts by local businessmen, State officials and

conservationists and became the model for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, a landmark conservation act, signed into law by President Nixon.

The enabling legislation charged the National Park Service with conserving and interpreting unique scenic and other natural values and objects of historic interest, preserving portions of the Current River and the Jacks Fork River in Missouri as free-flowing streams, caring for a world class spring system unparalleled in North America, including the largest spring protected in the national park system, and over 400 caves situated in the valleys and narrow hollows that meander between steep ridges, and for providing for the use and enjoyment of these outstanding outdoor recreation resource for the people of the United States.

This mandate to conserve the park's resources while providing for access and recreational opportunities mirrors the mandate contained in the National Park Service Organic Act. The Riverways' 80,785 acres protect an important center of biodiversity, including three listed threatened and endangered species and numerous endemic species not found elsewhere in the world. The Riverways also contain many archeological sites and historic structures and landscapes that reflect more than 12,000 years of human habitation in the Ozark Highlands. Interpretation and education programs focus on the rich cultural heritage of the region. Tourism and recreation opportunities, such as boating, fishing, and horseback riding, are encouraged by the park and managed in balance with these resources and the diverse interests and desires of multiple user groups from across the nation.

In 2012, Ozarks National Scenic Riverways welcomed 1.4 million visitors and generated approximately \$56 million in economic benefits for the surrounding community. Enactment of H.R. 4029 would not only contravene the intent of the Missouri delegation when it initially established the Riverways as a unit of the National Park System, it would also diminish the stature of these nationally significant resources and could reduce the economic benefits that accrue to national park sites by alienating certain user groups.

The park is currently engaged in a planning process to update its 1984 General Management Plan. This public process ensures that all Americans, including all Missourians, have a voice in the management of their park. Over 2,800 people from across the nation have provided more than 16,000 comments and participated in public meetings, open houses, and stakeholder workshops since the planning process began in 2005. Ozark National Scenic Riverways has published a draft General Management Plan and collected public comments on this draft. The National Park Service is currently considering changes to the plan based on public comments, and anticipates releasing the final plan by early 2015.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am prepared to answer any questions from members of the Committee.