

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 482, TO REDESIGNATE OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA AND REVISE ITS BOUNDARY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

June 16, 2015

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding H.R. 482, a bill to redesignate Ocmulgee National Monument in the State of Georgia and revise its boundary, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 482 with a technical amendment. This legislation has three components: it would redesignate the national monument, expand the monument's boundaries, and authorize a special resource study of the Ocmulgee River corridor in Georgia from Macon to Hawkinsville. With respect to the special resource study, the Department feels that priority should be given to the 33 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic River System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

Ocmulgee National Monument, authorized by Congress in 1934 and established by Presidential proclamation in 1936 after the purchase of lands by local citizens, encompasses 701 acres in two separate units. The Main Unit (656 acres), includes seven prehistoric mounds, a funeral mound, a reconstructed earth lodge, prehistoric trenches, and numerous archeological features. This unit also includes the site of a British colonial trading post dating to 1690 (which the Creek Indians frequented), the historic Dunlap House, an Art Moderne visitor center, Civil War earthworks, substantial urban green space, six miles of hiking trails, and a picnic area. The smaller Lamar Mounds Unit (45 acres), named for a Late Mississippian agricultural society, is located about two and one-half miles southeast of the Main Unit. Both sites are part of a larger archeological area known as the Ocmulgee Old Fields.

In 1999, the Ocmulgee Old Fields was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "traditional cultural property," the first location in the eastern United States to receive this designation. The monument and surrounding area is the site of one of the largest archeological investigations in North American history. The investigation and recovery of artifacts and information in this area was instrumental in the development of scientific archeology. The traditional cultural property extends well beyond the current boundaries of the monument to encompass areas traditionally associated with the cultural beliefs and practices of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and related tribes.

REDESIGNATION

H.R. 482 would redesignate Ocmulgee National Monument as "Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park", a more appropriate name for the site. For generations, Middle Georgians have known Ocmulgee National Monument simply as "the Indian mounds." The addition of the word "mounds" to the name would not only clarify the identity of the site for residents of the region, it would also give all potential visitors a better idea of the principal resource of the site. In addition,

the title “National Historical Park” recognizes the complexity of the site and the fact that it is much more than a collection of Indian mounds. The proposed title also provides better identification of the site as a unit of the National Park System.

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

H.R. 482 would also expand the boundary of the Ocmulgee National Monument consistent with the preferred alternative of a boundary study the National Park Service completed in 2014. The study evaluated lands that were part of the Ocmulgee Old Fields and found that approximately 2,100 acres of these lands were suitable and feasible for inclusion in the monument. These additional lands would link Ocmulgee’s Main Unit and the Lamar Unit and create a contiguous park unit of approximately 2,800 acres.

Of the 2,100 acres proposed for inclusion in the monument, approximately 707 acres (34% of expansion area) would likely be acquired by donation. The remaining lands, approximately 1,350 acres (66% of expansion area) would likely be acquired through purchase from willing sellers. Based on tax assessments, the value of the private tracts that would be purchased is just under \$2 million, but actual acquisition costs could be higher. Costs would eventually be incurred to demolish non-historic structures. Some relatively low-cost improvements for recreational enhancement are anticipated, such as trailhead kiosks, maintenance of old roadbeds for biking/hiking trails, and installation of canoe launching facilities. Funding for these activities would be subject to the availability of appropriations.

The proposed boundary expansion enjoys strong community support. Resolutions in favor of the expansion have been passed by the Board of Commissioners of Wilkinson County, the Macon-Bibb County Commission, the Historic Macon Foundation, Inc., the Georgia Small Business Lender Board of Directors, and the Hawkinsville-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce. Other organizations and governmental entities have also expressed support for the expansion, including Altamaha River Keeper, the Georgia Conservancy, Main Street Macon, NewTown Macon, the Macon Chamber of Commerce, the Middle Georgia Regional Commission Council, the Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mayor and City Council for the City of Perry, the Georgia River Network, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Save our Rivers INC. and the Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority.

SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

H.R. 482 would also authorize the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the Ocmulgee River corridor between Macon and Hawkinsville, a distance of about 50 miles and an area encompassing approximately 70,000 acres. Although the study area would be contiguous with Ocmulgee National Monument, the size of the area and the complexity of resources warrant the authorization of a special resource study, rather than another boundary study. The study area would encompass a patchwork of privately and publicly owned land, including the Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and two State of Georgia wildlife management areas. It would also include much of the Ocmulgee Old Fields Traditional Cultural Property not already included in the national monument or the proposed expansion of the monument. We estimate that this study would cost approximately \$350,000 to \$500,000. Funding for this proposed study would need to be allocated from the set amount of funding that Congress appropriates for all special resource studies.

Finally, we note that H.R. 482 as introduced has blank lines for references for a map that would depict the boundaries of the expanded and redesignated Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical

Park. The National Park Service is developing a map to accompany this bill and we will be happy to submit the map to the bill's sponsor and the committee.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer questions that you or other members of the committee might have.