



**Sen. Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks
Legislative Hearing**

**OPENING STATEMENT
June 15, 2016**

The Subcommittee will come to order.

The 23 bills we are examining this afternoon cover a wide range of issues relating to the Federal land administered by the Department of the Interior, primarily by the National Parks Service.

Today we will hear legislation that includes the establishment of National Heritage Areas, new historical sites, boundary adjustments, grants related to memorials, and other related issues.

I would like to take a moment to discuss S. 2807, the “Preserving Public Access to Public Waters Act,” which I introduced.

In the Gulf of Mexico, commercial and recreational fishing represent a large part of the economy, as spending on recreational fishing (including multiplier effects) generated \$70.3 billion in economic output in 2011 alone.

According to NOAA, in 2014 across all economic sectors of the marine economy, 21 million full and part-time jobs were filled in the Gulf States. Because commercial and recreational fishing are so important to our economy and jobs in the Gulf, it is vitally important that we retain access to all public waters.

In the Biscayne Bay National Park, a general management plan took over fifteen years to update. Once it was finally released last June, local communities and anglers were distraught to find that the National Park Service chose to include a 10,502 acre Marine Reserve Zone, which will severely restrict access to commercial and recreational fishermen.

According to NOAA, about 23 million fishing trips are taken each year in the Gulf of Mexico. The same report showed that in 2014, the economic impact of recreational fishing in the Gulf of Mexico region exceeded \$12 billion in just that year. This is a substantial portion of the regional GDP.

When we restrict access, we aren't just impacting sportsmen and women enjoying a day at sea. We are talking about the moms and dads who want to take their kids fishing for the day, and commercial fishermen who make a living on the Gulf supplying our restaurants and grocery stores.

We are talking about all of those associated businesses, like bait shops, charter boats, and motels along the Gulf, that are also impacted by closures. Restricted access has real life consequences to the economy of our region.

Although the Park is part of a federal agency, fishing and other harvesting activities are largely governed by state law. This management arrangement is grandfathered in the Park's enabling law, and the State of Florida opposes the Park Services' plan to implement the Marine Zone.

That is why I introduced legislation which would prevent the Park Service from moving forward with restricting recreational or commercial fishing access in state or territorial waters controlled by the Park Service, without first coordinating and getting the approval of the State.

I look forward to discussing S. 2807, and a number of other bills today. Many on our list have passed the House of Representatives. A few of these bills have been heard before in this subcommittee. Others have been considered in previous Congresses.

We have several bills that include potential national heritage areas. Over more than 30 years, Congress has established 49 national heritage areas, and the FY16 appropriation for these areas was nearly \$20 million. As the Congressional interest in these areas grows, it is important that we continue to ensure that proper oversight is conducted over existing and potential heritage areas.

While a few of these bills may spark conversation, I am hopeful we can move through the list fairly quickly.

The purpose of this hearing is to consider the administration's views on these bills and allow committee members an opportunity to ask questions.

We will also include written statements that have been sent to the subcommittee in the official hearing record.

Because of the large number of bills on today's agenda, I will not read through the list, but at this time, I will include the complete agenda in the hearing record.

We have one witness today, Dr. Stephanie Toothman, Associate Director of Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science, for the National Park Service.

I want to thank Dr. Toothman for being with us.

First let me turn to the ranking member, Senator Heinrich, for his remarks.