

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 228, TO ESTABLISH THE
SACRAMENTO-SAN JOAQUIN DELTA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA.**

April 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 228, a bill to establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area.

The Department supports the objectives of S. 228. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) area has been found to meet the National Park Service's interim criteria for designation as a National Heritage Area. However, the Department recommends that Congress pass program legislation that establishes criteria to evaluate potentially qualified National Heritage Areas and a process for the designation, funding, and administration of these areas before designating any additional new National Heritage Areas.

There are currently 49 designated national heritage areas, yet there is no authority in law that guides the designation and administration of these areas. Program legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas.

S. 228 would establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area within the counties of Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo, in the State of California, with the Delta Protection Commission designated as the Heritage Area's management entity.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is a rare inland/inverse delta at the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, the largest estuary on the West Coast of the Americas. Its vast size, unique shape, and geographic location in the heart of California have produced a heritage of habitat and community diversity, industry, innovation, and unique infrastructure.

After the last ice age 10,000 years ago, a rapid rise in sea level inundated the alluvial valley of the Sacramento River and formed the Delta, an extensive system of freshwater and brackish marshes, grassland, oak woodland, savannah, chaparral, and riparian habitat rich with wildlife. Native Americans built villages and trading posts, and early fur traders such as Jedediah Smith trekked into the region in search of otter, mink and beaver.

Then, gold seekers on their way from San Francisco to the gold fields in the Sierra Nevada recognized the fertility of the Delta's soils. Beginning in the 1880s, with significant contributions from Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, East Indian, Portuguese and Italian immigrants, and the development of innovative equipment, one of the largest scale reclamation projects in the United States converted the vast marshes into the landscape that characterizes the Delta today.

The Delta is the lynchpin of a vast watershed, linking waterways originating in the Cascade, Coastal and Sierra Nevada mountain ranges with the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. While the Delta today is predominantly agricultural, it also encompasses diverse habitats – intertidal, non-tidal, and seasonal wetlands, rivers, sloughs, riparian woodland, scrub, grasslands, floodplains – that support hundreds of species of flora and fauna. The Delta is a key stopover on the Pacific Flyway and an important anadromous fish corridor.

The Delta’s heritage values are inextricably linked to its economic activities. As one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country, the Delta irrigates over seven million acres of the State’s farmland, contributes billions of dollars to the California economy, and exports crops throughout the world. The Delta also supplies two-thirds of California’s residents with drinking water.

Recreation and tourism are also important economic drivers, and a Delta National Heritage area has the potential to increase access to many resource-based recreational opportunities, such as boating and fishing, both for regional residents and large, nearby, urban populations in the San Francisco Bay area and Great Central Valley. Opportunities to watch wildlife are abundant on the Delta’s quiet waterways, and many influential artists reside in the Delta, attracted by the slower pace of life. Planning for the Great Delta Trail is underway, and agritourism projects and programs – local markets, farm stays, and wineries - are springing up to showcase and share the region’s agricultural traditions.

A Feasibility Study for a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area was completed and published by the Delta Protection Commission in July 2012. The National Park Service conducted a review of the Commission’s study for consistency with the interim *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines*, found that it meets these criteria, and informed the Delta Protection Commission of this finding in a letter dated July 11, 2012.

The mission for the Delta National Heritage Area would be to recognize, enhance and promote “Delta as Place” to help cultivate and retain appreciation and understanding of the Delta as an ecological, agricultural, recreational, historical and cultural treasure. According to the feasibility study, “The center of the Delta’s story is that of a young nation encouraging the reclamation of swampland to create some of the world’s most productive farmlands in the center of California, from which spawned innovations, technologies, and infrastructure unique to the development of the State, as well as other parts of the nation and world.”

The proposed National Heritage Area would promote a wide range of partnerships among governments, organizations and individuals to educate the public about “Delta as Place” and build more support for its preservation, protection and enhancement. It would support economic development by drawing visitors to designated partner sites and other recreation and visitor facilities. It would promote heritage tourism, ecotourism, and agri-tourism consistent with existing activities, infrastructure, and land uses in the Delta. As the proposed management entity for a Delta heritage area, the Delta Protection Commission is already working to establish partnerships and to further projects in the region compatible with a national heritage area, such as a historical resources and recreation inventories, development of the Great California Delta Trail, and a Delta narratives project. Through partnerships and community engagement it has the

potential to connect and unite citizens in the conservation and increased resilience of the natural, historic, scenic and cultural resources of the Delta, while sustaining the area's economic vitality.

If the committee decides to act on S. 228, we recommend that the bill be amended to address the following matters: 1) to change the bill's map reference to a map that is fully consistent with the feasibility study boundary recommendation; 2) to change "management entity" to "local coordinating entity" throughout the bill; and 3) to make the bill language more consistent with other National Heritage Area legislation enacted most recently.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or any other members of the subcommittee may have.