

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. CALDWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 3241, TO ESTABLISH THE GRAND VILLAGE OF THE NATCHEZ INDIANS AND JEFFERSON COLLEGE AS AFFILIATED AREAS OF THE NATCHEZ HISTORICAL PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

MAY 15, 2024

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 3241, a bill to establish the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Jefferson College as affiliated areas of the Natchez National Historical Park, and for other purposes.

The Department appreciates the sponsor's interest in designating the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Historic Jefferson College as affiliated areas of the National Historical Park. The National Park Service (NPS) is currently conducting reconnaissance surveys on both these areas that we believe will provide valuable information to the Committee as it considers this legislation. We anticipate these surveys will be completed in summer 2024.

S. 3241 would establish the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Historic Jefferson College as affiliated areas of Natchez National Historical Park upon the Secretary of the Interior determining that the sites meet the criteria for designation as affiliated areas. The bill would designate the Mississippi Department of Archives and History as the management entity for the affiliated areas and authorize the Secretary to provide technical assistance and enter into cooperative agreements with the management entity to provide financial assistance for the marketing, marking, interpretation, and preservation of the affiliated areas. As affiliated areas, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and Historic Jefferson College would continue under non-federal ownership and management, but the management entity would be required to administer the sites consistent with laws applicable to units of the National Park System.

The Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, located three miles from present-day downtown Natchez, Mississippi, functioned as a political and religious center for the Natchez people during the era of French exploration and colonization along the Mississippi River. The site's three platform mounds, alongside an adjacent ceremonial plaza, and associated habitation areas, signify its role as the political and religious capital of the Natchez Indian chiefdom from the late 17th to early 18th century. Acknowledged for its historical significance, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1964 and opened to the public as one of Mississippi's first state historic sites in 1975. Spanning 128 acres, the Grand Village site includes a museum and visitor center, a nature trail, and a large archeological site with the three prominent mounds.

Historic Jefferson College was the Mississippi Territory's first institution of higher learning. It commenced operations in 1811, serving as a preparatory school for young white men until the

Civil War. In 1865 and 1866, Jefferson College was briefly used as a part of the Freedmen's Bureau's Washington Home Colony, providing land, rations, medical care, education, and other services to recently emancipated people. The school resumed operations in 1866, following President Johnson's reinstatement of former Confederate landowner rights in the South. In 1893, it was reorganized into Jefferson Military College. It closed in 1964 and in 1971 was placed under the administrative control of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, which opened as Historic Jefferson College State Historic Site in July 1977. Currently closed, the state is planning for its future.

In July 2022, Senator Hyde-Smith requested that the NPS conduct a reconnaissance survey of the two sites to explore the suitability of designating them as affiliated areas. In two separate surveys, the NPS is examining whether the sites would likely meet the NPS's criteria for designation as affiliated areas, including whether they are nationally significant, demonstrate a need for special consideration by the NPS, and are managed by an entity that would agree to manage the site's resources according to the policies and standards of the NPS. The information from the surveys, when finalized, would help inform the Committee in its deliberations on S. 3241.

If the Committee decides to move forward with S. 3241 prior to receiving the results of the reconnaissance surveys, we recommend amending the bill to establish the boundaries of the affiliated areas before, rather than after, enactment of the bill, and to provide for the sites to be affiliated areas of the National Park System, rather than being tied to one specific park unit. We would be happy to provide the committee with legislative maps and recommended language for those purposes.

Chairman King, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.