

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. 3534, TO AUTHORIZE THE PINES FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH THE FIRE ISLAND AIDS MEMORIAL, 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. 3534, to authorize the Pines Foundation to establish the Fire Island AIDS Memorial, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 3534 with amendments.

S. 3534 would authorize the Pines Foundation to establish and maintain a memorial at Fire Island National Seashore to honor residents of Fire Island who died of AIDS. The legislation would allow the memorial to be located along the walkway between the Fire Island Pines and Cherry Grove and adjacent to the Carrington House. The bill would prohibit the use of Federal funds for the memorial and allow the Director of the National Park Service to accept non-Federal contributions for that purpose. The Pines Foundation is a Section 501(c)(3) affiliate of the Fire Island Pines Property Owners' Association.

The Department supports allowing this proposed memorial to be established within the boundaries of Fire Island National Seashore as an appropriate tribute to the many lives lost to AIDS and the impact that these losses have had on Fire Island, the state of New York, and the nation. We recommend that S. 3534 be amended to be consistent with most other laws that authorize the establishment of commemorative works on National Park Service (NPS) lands, including requiring that the location of the memorial be subject to the approval of the Director of the NPS. Fire Island National Seashore is a low-lying coastal site with most of its resources located on a dynamic barrier island that is currently facing serious issues related to erosion and extreme weather events which will likely increase in the coming decades due to climate change. These vulnerabilities make it particularly important that the NPS have a role in the site selection for a permanent monument on federal lands within the park.

In addition, the Department recommends deleting the provision authorizing the Director of the NPS to accept and expend donations for the purposes of designing, procuring, preparing, installing, or maintaining the memorial, as establishing and maintaining the memorial should be the role of the Foundation, as provided for in Section 4(a).

We would be happy to work with the sponsor and the Committee to develop these amendments.

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