

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 2015, A BILL TO CLARIFY THE STATUS OF THE NORTH COUNTRY, ICE AGE, AND NEW ENGLAND NATIONAL SCENIC TRAILS AS UNITS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, AND S. 1644, A BILL TO CLARIFY THE STATUS OF THE CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH CHESAPEAKE NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

AUGUST 15, 2018

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on two bills that address the status of national trails: S. 2015, a bill to clarify the status of the North Country, Ice Age, and New England National Scenic Trails as units of the National Park System, and for other purposes; and S. 1644, a bill to clarify the status of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as a unit of the National Park System.

The Department does not object to enactment of S. 2015, which would result in making all six national scenic trails administered by the National Park Service units of the National Park System. We recommend an amendment to S. 2015 described in this statement. However, the Department opposes enactment of S. 1644, which would make a single national historic trail a unit of the National Park System, conferring a status that is different from all of the other 16 national historic trails.

S. 2015 would amend the National Trails System Act to require the Secretary of the Interior to administer the North Country, Ice Age, and New England National Scenic Trails as units of the National Park System. Similarly, S. 1644 would amend the National Trails System Act to require the Secretary to administer the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as a unit of the National Park System. Currently, the Act is silent regarding unit status for each of these trails and for all the other long-distance trails designated as national scenic or historic trails.

Of the 23 Congressionally designated long-distance trails administered or co-administered by the National Park Service, six are national scenic trails and 17 are national historic trails. Of the six national scenic trails, three are currently counted as units of the National Park System. The choice to count these trails as units was an administrative decision reflecting the extent of actual or potential Federal land ownership and the National Park Service's role in administering these trails.

In addition to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, which was authorized in 1968 and administratively listed as a unit of the National Park System in 1972, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail - both authorized in 1983 - were administratively listed as units in the mid-1980's. Amending the National Trails System

Act to provide that the North Country (authorized 1980), Ice Age (authorized 1980), and New England (authorized 2009) National Scenic Trails shall be administered as units of the National Park System would provide consistency in the status of all six national scenic trails. For legal consistency, we recommend that S. 2015 be amended to provide unit status statutorily for the three national scenic trails (the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, and the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail) that are currently counted as units administratively. We would be pleased to work with the Committee on appropriate language for that purpose.

The Department's opposition to S. 1644, which would designate the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as a unit of the National Park System, is not a judgement on the value or merit of national historic trails in comparison to national scenic trails, but rather is based on differences in the composition of the trails and how they are utilized by visitors.

National scenic trails are generally continuous, extended routes of outdoor recreation within protected corridors that follow geologic features. National historic trails follow as closely as possible the original routes of nationally significant historic and prehistoric travel, many of which today have become driving routes. A primary National Park Service management focus in the context of national historic trails is the identification and protection of high priority sites and segments, as well providing for recreation where possible, but a historic trail does not necessarily need to be a continuous, protected corridor. The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is primarily a water-based trail extending throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Its exact route cannot be precisely determined and the protection of such an imprecise, continuous route is not feasible.

Furthermore, unlike the situation with the scenic trails, conferring unit status on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake trail would make it the only national historic trail, out of all 17, that is a unit of the National Park System. That could raise new perceptions of unequal treatment among the historic trails.

Regardless of whether trails are counted as units or not, all of the long-distance trails administered by the National Park Service are, by law, part of the National Park System. Conferring unit status does not change the management of that trail or affect any existing agreements, easements, or other legal instruments in effect for the administration of the trail. The designation of a trail as a unit has no impact upon the cost of operating the trail. The National Park Service has taken steps to assure that trails have equal access to sources of funding and that the public is informed about national scenic and historic trails on the National Park Service website and in other forms of media. We have also worked with the National Park Foundation, our Congressionally authorized philanthropic partner, to allow the long-distance trails to be considered for grant funding.

We recognize that listing certain trails as units and not others may have led to the perception among our trail partners that the trails are receiving unequal treatment. So long as some national trails are units and others are not, that will likely continue to be the case. The National Park Service values the unique relationships and partnerships that have been developed with communities along national trails. We will continue to work with our trail partners to improve

communications and address any of the concerns that are raised regarding equal treatment for trails.

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