

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. 1211, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE CAHOKIA MOUNDS MISSISSIPPIAN CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN COLLINSVILLE, ILLINOIS, MONROE, MADISON, AND ST. CLAIR COUNTIES, ILLINOIS, AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

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. 1211, a bill to establish the Cahokia Mounds Mississippian Culture National Historical Park in Collinsville, Illinois, Monroe, Madison, and St. Clair Counties, Illinois, and St. Louis County, Missouri, and for other purposes.

The Department recognizes the importance of the story that is represented by the resources related to Cahokia Mounds and other Mississippian mound sites in the greater St. Louis Area but recommends that the bill be amended to provide for a special resource study in place of a park designation at this time. If the Committee chooses to act on this bill as drafted, we would like to work with the committee on a number of revisions.

S. 1211 would authorize the establishment of the Cahokia Mounds Mississippian Culture National Historical Park. The bill would authorize a boundary for the National Historical Park as depicted on the legislative map referenced in the bill. The bill further authorizes the Secretary to acquire any land within the legislative boundary of the park by acquisition, donation, or exchange, with the exception that State-owned lands could only be acquired through donation. S. 1211 also authorizes the Secretary to enter into agreements with States and other entities to interpret and restore resources within the boundaries of the park, and directs the Secretary to prepare a management plan for the park in consultation with the State, Indian Tribes, and other entities.

The mounds at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site were a regional ceremonial and civic center for the Mississippian people, the name given by archeologists to the societies that lived after about AD 1000 in what is now the Southeastern and Midwestern United States. In addition to the core area of the mounds preserved by the state park, there were many related settlements and outlying sites. Earthen monuments, mounds, and the remnants of cities, towns, and villages built by the Mississippians are found across the southeastern and midwestern United States. Cahokia appears to be the centerpiece of one of the most densely settled regions in ancient North America, located at the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers.

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site is administered by the Illinois State Historic Preservation Agency. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site includes at least 51 extant mounds,

the most prominent of which is Monks Mound. Monks Mound and the central part of the site were purchased by the state of Illinois in 1923 and have been administered by the state ever since. The site gradually grew from the initial 144 acres to 2,200 acres. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site now includes mounds, public areas, and non-public residential areas.

The State of Illinois can acquire ownership of property within the boundaries of the Cahokia Mounds National Historic Landmark. Slightly more than half of the acreage within the National Historic Landmark boundaries is owned by the State Historic Site; the balance is held by nonprofit and private owners. Approximately 7,000-10,000 people live within the boundary of the National Historic Landmark.

In 2014, Senator Richard Durbin sent a letter to the National Park Service requesting a reconnaissance survey of the Cahokia Mounds and associated Mississippian mound groups in the greater St. Louis metro region. A reconnaissance survey provides a preliminary assessment of the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for National Park Service management of an area or site proposed for inclusion in the National Park System. The completed reconnaissance survey, transmitted to Congress in July 2019, found that Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site would likely meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System if further evaluated in a subsequent study, and identified two additional sites – Emerald and Pulcher Mounds – as warranting further study to make definitive findings. The reconnaissance survey recommended that a special resource study be authorized for these three sites to further evaluate criteria for inclusion, invite public involvement in the study process, and develop potential management alternatives. The remainder of the sites considered in the survey – including the St. Louis Mound Group, East St. Louis Mounds, Mitchell Mounds, and Sugar Loaf Mounds – were determined to be unlikely to meet the criteria for inclusion and were not recommended for additional study.

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