

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. 1059, A BILL TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK IN THE STATE OF TEXAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 21, 2023

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1059, a bill to adjust the boundary of Big Bend National Park in the State of Texas, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 1059 with an amendment.

S. 1059 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to acquire lands within an approximately 6,100-acre area along the western boundary of Big Bend National Park through donation, purchase from willing sellers, or exchange. After acquisition, the boundary of the park would be adjusted to include the acquired lands.

Big Bend National Park was established by Congress in 1935 to preserve and protect the largest and most representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert in the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The park's diverse habitats from the lowlands of the Rio Grande up to the high Chisos Mountains support an extraordinary range of biological resources. The park, which currently encompasses over 800,000 acres, also includes rich geological diversity, with remarkable paleontological resources spanning 130 million years,

The 6,100-acre area that would be authorized to be included in the park by S. 1059, known as the Terlingua Creek/Rattlesnake Mountain area, contains four miles of intact rare desert riparian habitat whose protection is vital to the water quality of the Rio Grande downstream, scientifically significant paleontological resources, and important cultural resources that complement the purpose and mission of Big Bend National Park.

Over half of the lands within the proposed addition area are under contract to be purchased by the Big Bend Conservancy, the park's philanthropic partner. Lands within boundary would be eligible for acquisition for the park if landowners chose to sell or donate them at any point in the future. Support for adding this area to the park is strong in the surrounding community and with local and state government.

While the Department supports S. 1059, we recommend deleting section 3(d), which would prohibit the use of eminent domain or condemnation. Section 3(a) provides the authority to acquire land *only* from "willing sellers", which is sufficient to protect against the use of condemnation, and therefore section 3(d) is unnecessary. We would be pleased to provide a recommended amendment for this purpose.

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