

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, REGARDING S. 1582, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE WHITE SANDS NATIONAL PARK IN THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 19, 2019

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1582, a bill to establish White Sands National Park in the State of New Mexico as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

The Department would like to work with the Committee on amendments to S. 1582.

S. 1582 would redesignate White Sands National Monument as White Sands National Park. In addition, the bill includes two provisions affecting the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to nominate the park to the World Heritage List: it would require the concurrence of each county in which the park is located before the Secretary submits a nomination for the Park to be included on the World Heritage List, and it would require that the Secretary notify the Secretary of the Army of any intent to nominate the park. The bill also includes language to protect existing rights, including water rights, existing permits or contracts, existing agreements, including those with the Department of Defense, and the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense regarding restricted airspace above the park. This bill also does not change the airshed classification of the park under the Clean Air Act.

White Sands National Monument was established on January 18, 1933, by presidential proclamation of Herbert Hoover under the Antiquities Act to preserve "the white sands and additional features of scenic, scientific, and educational interest". The monument is located in Otero and Doña Ana counties southwest of Alamogordo, New Mexico, at the northern end of the Chihuahuan Desert in the Tularosa Basin.

The redesignation of White Sands National Monument to White Sands National Park is consistent with the nomenclature patterns of National Park System areas. Units designated as national parks generally contain a variety of resources and encompass a large land or water area to help provide adequate protection of the resources. At over 143,000 acres, White Sands encompasses a large land area, and it protects a variety of distinctive resources, including a major portion of the world's largest gypsum dunefield. Among the most prominent features of the monument are the brilliant white dunes that rise up to 60 feet in some places and move as much as 30 feet per year. White Sands is home to more than 10,000 years of human history from which remain thousands of archeological sites, including gypsum hearthmounds found nowhere else on earth. The young gypsum dunefield, less than 10,000 years old, provides the ideal

conditions to study rapid adaption as observed in many white colored lizards, insects and rodents. In addition, White Sands is known as a mega-track site for its significant paleontological resources and the largest concentration of Ice Age megafauna fossilized footprints, including human footprints, in the Americas, and possibly the world.

In 2018, more than 600,000 people visited White Sands National Monument to enjoy a variety of recreational experiences and spent \$32.2 million. This spending supported 443 jobs with a cumulative benefit to the local economy of more than \$37.1 million.

The Department questions redesignating White Sands National Monument without also adjusting the boundary of the unit and putting into effect an exchange of lands between the monument and the White Sands Missile Range that has been under discussion for many years. We are also concerned about the bill's special requirements for nominating the site to the World Heritage List, as they would establish a unique process for this one potential site that would set a precedent for other potential sites. We would be pleased to work with the Committee to develop amendments that would address these issues.

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