

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, CONCERNING S. 3534, TO REDESIGNATE THE NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER IN THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA AS THE “NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL PARK”.

December 12, 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 S. 3534, to redesignate the New River Gorge National River in the State of West Virginia as “New River Gorge National Park”.

The Department would support S. 3534 if amended to redesignate New River Gorge National River with a title that is in keeping with standard National Park Service nomenclature. In customary usage, the title “national park” denotes a unit where hunting is not allowed, as it is at New River Gorge. We would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on a more appropriate redesignation of the unit before the Committee acts on this bill.

Established in 1978, New River Gorge National River encompasses over 70,000 acres of land along 53 miles of the New River in southern West Virginia. The rugged, whitewater river flowing northward through deep, spectacular canyons has carved the deepest and longest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains. The park contains forests with some of the oldest and most diverse ecosystems in the world. The park is renowned for its outstanding recreational opportunities: canoeing, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, bird watching, camping, picnicking, biking and perhaps most of all, whitewater rafting. The Lower Gorge of the New River is a premier whitewater rafting location with imposing rapids ranging in difficulty from Class III to Class V where outfitters conduct trips down the river from April through October.

While New River Gorge National River contains spectacular features that rival those in units designated as national parks, Congress, with the support of the Department, has long reserved the title of “national park” for units where hunting is not authorized. Units where hunting is allowed are typically designated as “preserves”, “national recreation areas”, or, depending on their location, “national seashores” or “national lakeshores”. Some areas of the National Park System have both a “national park” and a “national preserve” associated with them in order to separate the areas where hunting is, and is not, permitted. Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska is such an example. Thus, there are several alternatives that would be consistent with standard National Park Service naming conventions to consider. We look forward to further discussions about the appropriate one for New River Gorge National River.

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