

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. 3543, TO ESTABLISH THE HISTORIC GREENWOOD DISTRICT—BLACK WALL STREET NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

MAY 15, 2024

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. 3543, a bill to establish the Historic Greenwood District—Black Wall Street National Monument in the State of Oklahoma, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 3543. The bill would establish a unit of the National Park System that commemorates the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, an extraordinarily important event in our nation's history. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss certain provisions of the bill with the sponsor and Committee to ensure successful implementation should it be enacted.

S. 3543 would establish the Historic Greenwood District—Black Wall Street National Monument as a unit of the National Park System to preserve, protect, and interpret resources associated with the Historic Greenwood District, Black Wall Street, and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and their roles in the history of the State of Oklahoma and the United States. S. 3543 would also establish an advisory commission to advise the Secretary with respect to the management and development of the National Monument. The bill includes authorities for land acquisition and administration that are commonly included in legislation establishing a new unit of the National Park System.

The Tulsa Massacre began May 31, 1921, and led to two consecutive days of widespread violence and devastation against the segregated Black community in Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood, one of the wealthiest Black communities in the nation at that time. Rioters destroyed approximately 70% of Greenwood's residential area and virtually the entire business district. An unknown number of people, somewhere between 36 and 300, lost their lives; more than 700 were injured; and nearly 9,000 African Americans were left homeless.

The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre is commemorated in Tulsa by the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park. In 2020, the Secretary of the Interior added this site to the National Park Service (NPS) African American Civil Rights Network in recognition of its significance in shaping our understanding of the history of race relations, racial violence, and the reparative work of reconciliation in the United States. The African American Civil Rights Network includes sites, facilities, and programs that commemorate, honor, and interpret the significant struggle for civil rights in the United States.

In 2005, the NPS conducted a reconnaissance survey of the Tulsa race riot. Despite the substantial loss of historic fabric and setting as a result of the massacre, key historic resources, including the Greenwood Cultural Center, the Mt. Zion Baptist Church (listed on the National Register of Historic Places), the Vernon Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Greenwood Avenue, the Frisco and Santa Fe Railroad tracks, and the site of the Royal Hotel survived. The reconnaissance survey concluded that the 1921 Tulsa race riot, along with its extant resources, is nationally significant.

Although the Tulsa site has not had the benefit of a full special resource study and the public engagement opportunities such a study would provide, discussions over how to memorialize the tragic but critical events that occurred in Tulsa in 1921 have been happening for decades. In addition to the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park, there are other existing resources associated with this story that could be preserved, protected, and interpreted by establishing a larger area as a national monument administered by the NPS. The Department believes that it would be appropriate for Congress to move forward to achieve that end.

The Department appreciates and supports the inclusion of 7 descendants as part of the membership of the proposed National Monument Advisory Commission. We note there is ambiguity in the bill as to who should adjudicate the veracity of documentation for lineal descent and the Department is likely not an appropriate adjudicator.

We also note that S.3543 would establish the monument of the National Park System upon enactment. Authorizing establishment of the monument subject to the NPS acquiring or leasing one or more parcels of land to constitute a manageable unit of the National Park System would allow time for the NPS to fund the site, hire staff, and establish a presence to administer the monument.

Finally, we recommend a non-substantive update to the legislative map referenced by S. 3543 to ensure proper formatting.

Again, the Department supports S. 3543, and Chairman King, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.