

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 305, TO AUTHORIZE
THE ACQUISITION OF CORE BATTLEFIELD LAND AT CHAMPION HILL, PORT
GIBSON, AND RAYMOND FOR ADDITION TO VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY
PARK.**

April 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 305, a bill to authorize the acquisition of core battlefield land at Champion Hill, Port Gibson, and Raymond for addition to Vicksburg National Military Park.

The Department supports S. 305 with a technical amendment, which is attached to this statement. This bill would enable the National Park Service to add three separate battlefield sites to Vicksburg National Military Park, which would each make significant contributions to telling the story of the remarkable campaign that resulted in the Union Army's capture of the city of Vicksburg during the Civil War.

The battlefields at Champion Hill, Port Gibson, and Raymond are sites of military engagement associated with the 1863 Vicksburg Campaign. The campaign was a major milestone on the road that led to the final success of the Union army in the war and the ultimate reunification of the nation. The strategies and tactics of Major General Ulysses S. Grant during the campaign continue to be studied by modern military leaders as examples of excellence in generalship.

The proposed addition of campaign battlefields to Vicksburg National Military Park is based on the study authorized by Public Law 106-487, the Vicksburg Campaign Trail Battlefields Preservation Act. That law directed the Secretary of the Interior to complete a study to determine what measures should be taken to preserve Civil War battlefields along the Vicksburg Campaign Trail. The Vicksburg Campaign Trail Feasibility Study, transmitted to Congress in 2006, identified Champion Hill, Port Gibson, and Raymond as "Tier 1" sites, placing them among the 19 highest-ranked resources out of the more than 500 Vicksburg Campaign-related resources evaluated by the study. The study recommended Champion Hill and Port Gibson for addition to the National Park System. Raymond was viewed as adequately protected by the Friends of Raymond, a local non-profit group.

All three battlefields continue to exhibit a very high degree of historical integrity. Most essential features remain intact, and modern intrusions are limited. Acquisition of the battlefields would allow the National Park Service to ensure long-term preservation of the cultural landscape and other cultural resources, and to better interpret the stories of the Vicksburg Campaign. The renewed public interest in the need to protect Civil War battlefields that is being generated by Civil War Sesquicentennial activities makes this legislation particularly timely. In addition, this legislation would advance the vision of safeguarding our historic and cultural heritage that the President committed to through the America's Great Outdoors Initiative.

The battlefield at Port Gibson marks the first engagement of Grant's operations against Vicksburg after his army landed on Mississippi soil. After a day of battle, the Confederate army left the field and Grant secured his beachhead. The proposed boundary at Port Gibson encompasses about 3,810 acres. The State of Mississippi owns 14 acres in fee, and holds a preservation easement on 609 acres. The historic Schaifer House, a Civil War-era home, is extant on the property owned by the state. Many roads within the battlefield remain very similar in appearance to the mid-19th century and provide a strong sense of how Civil War troops moved.

Eleven days after the battle at Port Gibson, the Union and Confederate armies met again on the field at Raymond. After a day of heavy fighting, Federal forces again prevailed and General Pemberton's troops withdrew to Jackson. The proposed boundary at Raymond encompasses about 1,520 acres. The Friends of Raymond owns 140 acres of this land in fee, and holds a preservation easement on an additional 6 acres. The battlefield remains largely pristine, and holds high potential for interpretation.

Following the battle at Raymond and the subsequent occupation of Jackson, General Grant turned his army towards the west. On May 16, Union and Confederate forces met again, this time at Champion Hill. The battle was the largest, bloodiest, and most decisive engagement of the Vicksburg Campaign. By the end of the day, the Confederates were in full retreat towards Vicksburg. The proposed boundary at Champion Hill includes approximately 6,350 acres. The State owns 836 acres in fee, and holds a preservation easement on an additional 558 acres. The Civil War Trust also owns 60 acres in fee. The historic Coker House, a Civil War-era home, is extant on the property owned by the State.

In total, S. 305 authorizes the addition of up to 11,680 acres to Vicksburg National Military Park. The State of Mississippi, Civil War Trust, and Friends of Raymond cumulatively own about 1,050 acres in fee, and hold preservation easements on about 1,172 acres of land. Each of these entities has expressed the desire to transfer its interests to the National Park Service. Acquisition costs for these properties would be nominal, since they would be donated. Based on current assessed property values, the acquisition costs for other lands in these areas are expected to average between \$1,700 and \$3,000 per acre (depending on the presence, if any, of marketable timber), totaling approximately \$16 million to \$28 million, for acquisition in fee. The National Park Service would also seek to protect land through less costly means, such as conservation easements. Additional management planning involving public participation would be necessary to best determine the level of facilities needed to serve the visiting public and to identify important battlefield protection strategies for these new lands. The capital investment needed to support infrastructure and recurring operational costs, consequently, have not been defined in detail. In gross terms, annual operational costs have been estimated at \$1 million to \$1.5 million.

Under S. 305, the properties identified for potential acquisition by the National Park Service would not be added to the boundary of, or managed as part of, Vicksburg National Military Park unless and until they are actually acquired.

S. 305 enjoys strong local and national support. Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant and leadership at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History are on record as supporting the transfer of

state lands to the National Park Service. The Civil War Trust and Friends of Raymond have expressed support for the legislation, as have elected officials and community leaders in Hinds and Claiborne Counties and the communities of Raymond and Port Gibson. This bill would help guarantee the preservation, protection, restoration, and interpretation of these important lands for current and future generations.

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

Proposed amendment to S. 305, Vicksburg National Military Park Battlefield Additions

On page 2, line 7: Strike “October 2010” and insert “July 2012”.

Explanation: This amendment substitutes a revised map of the three battlefield areas that would be eligible for acquisition by the National Park Service. The new map is substantively identical to the map referenced in the bill as introduced, but it shows more detail (i.e., more roads, public land survey lines) in order to provide more certainty about the lands that could potentially be acquired under this legislation.