

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE ENERGY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 476, A BILL TO AMEND
THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL DEVELOPMENT ACT TO EXTEND THE
AUTHORITY OF THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL
PARK COMMISSION.**

APRIL 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 476, a bill that would amend the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Development Act to extend the authority of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission.

The Department supports S. 476. The establishment of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission (Commission) on January 8, 1971, stemmed in part from the unique nature of the canal. It is unlike most areas administered by the National Park Service as it is a linear park running along a 185-mile stretch of river shoreline and is flanked by the nation's capital, suburban communities, and numerous small towns.

S. 476 would change the termination date of the Commission from 40 years to 50 years after the effective date of January 8, 1971. The Commission's authority to operate terminated on January 8, 2011. S. 476 would extend the authority to operate to January 8, 2021.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, begun in 1828 and completed in 1850, runs continuously 185 miles from Georgetown in the District of Columbia through Maryland and West Virginia to Cumberland in Maryland. Originally planned to link Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as part of this nation's canal-building era, the canal was constructed to be a major commercial route. While the canal operated until 1924 when it was abandoned, competition from the newly constructed railroad and the National Road resulted in much less commercial success than its builders had hoped. In 1938, the United States purchased the narrow canal right-of-way from Georgetown to Cumberland, Maryland, and partially restored the lower end of the canal.

In 1961, the C & O Canal Monument was created by Presidential Proclamation No. 3391 but no funding was provided to develop the area or acquire adjacent lands. A proposal to construct a highway along the canal's route met considerable public opposition led by U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. His support for preserving the canal ultimately led to the establishment of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, running the length of the original canal.

When the park was established in 1971, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Commission was created. The 19-member Commission served to link the various jurisdictions along the length of the park. Under the 1971 legislation, the Secretary of the Interior or designee

was directed to meet and consult with the Commission at least annually on general policies and specific matters related to the administration and development of the park.

The Commission performed a valuable service during its first 40 years in advising and assisting the National Park Service in the administration and development of the park. In the early years, the Commission served as the vehicle for public meetings in the development of the park's general plan and several site-specific development concept plans. In the years since, the Commission has served as the public forum for discussing implementation of plans along the 185 miles of the park.

The Commission represented not only the local park neighbors, but the national constituency as well. Many Commission members had a lifelong interest in the C & O Canal and the National Park Service. The Commission met quarterly and Commission members were only compensated for reimbursement of actual expenses for meetings. Individual members of the Commission served on various volunteer groups and participated in park-sponsored events throughout the year. The commissioners communicated directly with the park superintendent during meetings and individually throughout the year regarding park issues.

The need for the Commission continues because the park is spread across 19 political jurisdictions. The Commission assisted park staff in reaching out to these numerous constituencies and ensuring that all their views were heard. As the work of managing C & O Canal National Historical Park continues, the public connection to park management through the Commission should continue as well. We understand that the appointments for the existing commissioners have expired. If enacted, the Secretary would appoint or reappoint commissioners in accordance with the Act.

This completes my prepared comments concerning S. 476. I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.