

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 781, A BILL TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the National Park Service on S. 781, a bill to modify the boundary of Yosemite National Park, and for other purposes.

The Department supports S. 781, with an amendment to update the map reference. S. 781 would adjust the boundary of Yosemite National Park (park) by 1,575 acres. The modification would help the National Park Service (NPS) protect the western boundary from potential development and also help to preserve the scenic and biological resources of these properties.

The proposed modification includes 793 acres of land owned by the Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) adjacent to the western boundary of the park and near the Yosemite West Subdivision. The 793 acres includes two tracts: the 713-acre Ransome Ranch and the 80-acre Sparling tract. In 2004, the PFT purchased the parcels with the intent to add them back into the park.

It also includes 782 acres of land, adjacent to the PFT properties, owned by Yosemite West Associates, the original developers of the Yosemite West Subdivision. The Yosemite West Associates have indicated to the PFT that they would also like to participate in the boundary adjustment, and eventually sell their property to the federal government for inclusion in the park.

The PFT and the Yosemite West Associates parcels were originally part of the park from 1890 until 1905, when the park's western boundary was adjusted eastward. The parcels remained in federal ownership as part of the Sierra National Forest until they were patented out to the Yosemite Lumber Company in 1916.

The acquisition of these parcels would allow for continuous protection of forests, meadows, and rocky ridges with the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests. The area is prime habitat for many rare species that include the Pacific Fisher, Sierra Nevada Red Fox, Goshawk, and Great Grey and Long-eared Owls as well as rare plant species such as Congdon's Woolly Sunflower, Congdon's Lewisia, and Yosemite Popcorn Flower. Acquisition of these properties would help to preserve the headwaters of Indian and Zip creeks, which flow into the main stem and the south fork of the Merced River, a National Wild and Scenic River. It would also help conserve key winter and spring migratory corridors used by large predatory species such as mountain lion and bear.

This acquisition would open up the area to recreational uses that are currently inaccessible to the public. Located midway between Yosemite Valley and Wawona, the area would provide an

alternative destination for those seeking to avoid highly congested areas in the park. The property could relieve some of the visitation in Yosemite Valley, Wawona, and Tuolumne Meadows by providing an alternative, high-quality, destination with recreational opportunities. The properties are in close proximity to existing infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.), which would reduce the cost of development of future campgrounds or other visitor service facilities.

Because an appraisal of these properties has not been completed, we do not have an estimate of acquisition costs. The costs of immediate improvements will be minimal as existing logging roads could be adapted for horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain biking and reestablished trails would connect visitors to the Sierra National Forest trail system and its recreational services. The properties could also provide rustic or dispersed camping opportunities by adding new areas for backpacking, horse camping, and group campsites that are currently in high demand in the park. The tracts have numerous outstanding viewpoints for sightseeing, photography and picnicking. Lastly, the unique habitat would provide visitors with bird-watching and other wildlife-viewing opportunities.

The PFT properties are adjacent to the Yosemite Environmental Education Campus (EEC), which is currently under construction at the intersection of Wawona Road and Hennes Ridge Road. The project is a partnership between the NPS and NatureBridge; NatureBridge is funding the construction with outside donors through a capital fundraising campaign. The EEC would benefit from the boundary expansion and land acquisition as it would allow increased accessibility to recreational resources that would greatly enhance the educational opportunities for students.

The boundary modification is supported by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, members of the California State Assembly, the California State Senate and the Governor.

The Department recommends that the map reference in Sec. 3(1) be updated to reference the map entitled "Yosemite National Park Proposed Addition," numbered 104/113,969A, and dated May 2013.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.