

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING H.R. 801, A BILL TO AMEND THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT TO DESIGNATE THE ROUTE 66 NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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 H.R. 801, to amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Route 66 National Historic Trail, and for other purposes.

The Department supports this legislation.

H.R. 801 would establish the Route 66 National Historic Trail, to be administered by the National Park Service. The trail would extend along the approximately 2,400-mile length of Route 66 from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California. The bill authorizes land acquisition from willing sellers but includes language that limits acquisition to no more than an average of one-quarter of a mile on either side of the trail, consistent with land acquisition provisions in the National Trails System Act.

The National Park Service currently manages the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, established by Congress in 1999 to recognize the contributions of Route 66 to American history. However, that program is scheduled to sunset on September 30, 2019. The proposed national historic trail would support the continued preservation and commemoration goals of the existing program, but in a manner that is consistent with the goals and criteria of the National Trails System Act.

Route 66 was designated in 1926 as part of the first U.S. Federal Highway System and came to exemplify the role of the automobile in the technological, transportation, and commercial development of the United States in the 20th century. Route 66 has become a powerful symbol of America's social, political, and economic mobility and freedom. Every year, thousands of visitors, many from other countries, come to experience the mid-20th century American automobile-centered culture represented by Route 66. These visitors are vital to the economies of the numerous rural communities through which the route passes.

Public Law 101-400, enacted in 1990, authorized the National Park Service to study options for preserving and commemorating the nationally significant Route 66. As part of this broad review of options, the National Park Service also conducted a feasibility study that determined that Route 66 met the criteria for designation as a National Historic Trail. Congress, however, declined to designate Route 66 as National Historic Trail opting, instead, to create the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program.

Through the Route 66 program, authorized in 1999 by Public Law 106-45, the National Park Service supports the preservation efforts of the Route 66 corridor by providing technical assistance, participating in cost-sharing programs, and making grants in the eight states through which the corridor runs. The National Park Service also acts as a clearinghouse of communications among the various entities interested in the preservation of the Route 66 corridor, and assists these same entities in developing local preservation plans to guide efforts to protect the most important or representative resources of the corridor.

The National Park Service's FY18 budget included \$292,000 for the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. This funding has been relatively stable over the life of the program, and the National Park Service anticipates providing similar funding if the program were to be reconstituted as a national historic trail. In addition, designation would not change existing or ongoing maintenance practices of state and local Departments of Transportation.

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