

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.1277, A BILL TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF MAMMOTH CAVE NATIONAL PARK IN THE STATE OF KENTUCKY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 21, 2023

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1277, a bill to modify the boundary of the Mammoth Cave National Park in the State of Kentucky, and for other purposes.

The Department supports this legislation.

S. 1277 would authorize an expansion of the boundary of Mammoth Cave National Park by 980 acres and remove the statutory ceiling on appropriations for land acquisition for the park which was set at \$350,000 in 1942. The legislation would facilitate the addition of critical cave resources to the park.

Mammoth Cave National Park was established by Congress in 1926 to preserve the cave system, including Mammoth Cave, and the scenic river valleys of the Green and Nolin rivers of south-central Kentucky. This is the longest recorded cave system in the world, with over 426 miles explored and mapped. In 1981, Mammoth Cave National Park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in recognition of its place as the most extensive cave system in the world and for its unique examples of cave and karst landscape geology. In addition, Mammoth Cave National Park preserves the habitat of several threatened and endangered species, including multiple bat species.

Two caves outside the southern boundary of Mammoth Cave National Park each have 150,000 – 200,000 hibernating federally endangered gray bats. One of the caves is federally designated as Critical Habitat for the endangered Indiana bat. In 2019, The Nature Conservancy acquired the two caves and approximately 550 acres of forested land on the surface. In 2020, Mammoth Cave National Park and The Nature Conservancy began conversations on the long-term management and ownership of the property. Both parties agreed that bringing the property under the protection of the National Park Service would be the best outcome for the preservation of the caves and bat habitat, and The Nature Conservancy expressed a willingness to sell the lands to the National Park Service. However, the land owned by The Nature Conservancy is outside of the legislatively authorized boundary of Mammoth Cave National Park and would need to be included within the park boundary before the National Park Service could acquire the lands. In addition, the existing statutory ceiling on appropriations would need to be amended to ensure that the statutory ceiling would not impede the purchase of the property by the National Park Service.

S. 1277 would expand the boundary of Mammoth Cave National Park to include the approximately 550 acres of land currently owned by The Nature Conservancy, as well as an

additional 430 acres adjoining the park's existing boundary. The additional 430 acres included within the boundary under this bill would enable the National Park Service to acquire land that would facilitate access to, and management of, the 550 acres at some point in the future should the opportunity arise.

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