

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. 305, A BILL TO ESTABLISH SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT NATIONAL MONUMENT IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 305, a bill to establish the Springfield Race Riot National Monument in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes.

The Department appreciates the opportunity provided by S. 305 to increase public awareness and engagement with this painful but important chapter in our nation's history and looks forward to working with the sponsor and the Committee to make progress in providing the public a better understanding of these tragic events. The National Park Service is in the process of completing a special resource study on this site.

The Springfield Race Riot site contains the foundations of five homes that were destroyed during the violent, multi-day riot that engulfed the city in August of 1908. Two African American men were lynched. Many others were assaulted. Ultimately, dozens of homes and businesses were destroyed. The riot, trials, and aftermath of the events in Springfield drew national attention to racial violence and sparked direct action by many civil rights leaders.

The events had occurred in Abraham Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, a few months before the centennial of his birth, and highlighted the lack of progress on race relations in America. In February, 1909, the National Negro Committee was formed, which would later become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Springfield Race Riot site is important for its association with the creation of the NAACP and contributes to our understanding of racial violence in America. The Department recognizes the important contribution to America's story that is represented by the resources related to the Springfield Race Riot of 1908.

As previous NPS studies and independent reports have noted, there are limited sites and resources specifically dedicated to preserving and interpreting themes of racial violence for public understanding. The NPS is committed to advancing racial equity and support for underserved stories and communities and will continue to support efforts to better tell the story of lynching and racial violence against Black communities.

The National Park Service (NPS) completed a reconnaissance survey of the site in September 2019. A reconnaissance survey provides a preliminary assessment of the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management of an area or site proposed for inclusion in the National Park System.

Based on the findings in the reconnaissance survey, it was determined that further analysis through a Congressionally authorized special resource study was warranted. The Springfield Race Riot Study Act of 2020 (Public Law No: 116-139) directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study. That study is currently underway and was open for public comment through September 3, 2022. The study will consider whether the site meets the Congressionally established criteria for inclusion in the National Park System, including national significance, suitability, feasibility, and the need for NPS Management. If the Committee decides to move forward on this bill before the study is completed, the Department would appreciate the opportunity to provide technical amendments to the bill.

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