

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, REGARDING S. 641, A BILL TO UPDATE THE MAP OF, AND MODIFY THE MAXIMUM ACREAGE AVAILABLE FOR INCLUSION IN, YUCCA HOUSE NATIONAL MONUMENT.

JUNE 19, 2019

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 641, a bill to update the map of, and modify the maximum acreage available for inclusion in Yucca House National Monument.

The Department supports S. 641 with amendments described later in this statement.

S. 641 would include within the boundary of Yucca House National Monument a 160-acre parcel of land adjacent to the monument and authorize the National Park Service to acquire the parcel by donation. Yucca House, located in Montezuma County in southwestern Colorado, acted as an important community center for the Ancestral Puebloan people from AD 1150-1300. Due to its significance as an excellent example of a valley pueblo, Woodrow Wilson designated Yucca House a national monument by Presidential Proclamation on December 19, 1919. The monument is a largely unexcavated site that currently consists of approximately 34 acres. It is surrounded by private land and has limited access.

Currently, a county road that crosses private land is the only way for the public to access the monument. Visitor traffic and parking along this route interfere with the landowner's ranching operation, and the lack of signage to enter the park through this route causes confusion. The additional land that could be acquired under S. 641 would enable the National Park Service to provide an alternative route for public access. The Montezuma County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution in September, 2017, supporting the addition to facilitate access.

The expanded acreage would also provide access to several key archeological sites based on findings prepared by the Colorado Archeological Society. The National Park Service plans to continue archeological surveys of the area. It would allow the National Park Service to develop opportunities for the public to explore the social dynamics, ceremony spaces, and migrations of the Ancestral Pueblo community as well as the unique and unspoiled landscapes the site offers.

The Department recommends that S. 641 be amended to reference an updated map of the proposed boundary revision and to provide for the acquisition of the property prior to adding it to the boundary of the park. We would be pleased to provide recommended amendments for those purposes.

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