

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 2016, National Landscape Conservation System Act
June 7, 2007**

Thank you for inviting me to testify on H.R. 2016, the National Landscape Conservation System Act. The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) is a significant part of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) conservation efforts and is integral to the BLM's overall multiple-use mission. The BLM is proud to oversee this system which includes areas nationally recognized for their outstanding values. These lands are not simply places to visit; they help define who we are as a Nation and tell the story of our nation as it unfolded in the unforgettable natural landscapes of the West.

The Department supports H.R. 2016, a bill that would legislatively establish the NLCS in order to conserve, protect, and restore nationally significant landscapes. The bill would provide for the inclusion in the NLCS of Congressionally and Presidentially designated special places administered by the BLM. H.R. 2016 would provide legislative support to the NLCS and its conservation mission within the BLM.

Background

In June 2000, the Department of the Interior administratively established the NLCS within the BLM bringing into a single organized system many of the BLM's outstanding ecological, cultural and scientific landscapes. The BLM is charged with managing the public lands for a wide range of uses. This multiple-use mission directs the balanced management of public lands for many uses, including conservation, recreation, livestock grazing, energy development, and timber production. The NLCS is an integral part of that mission and includes National Monuments, National Conservation Areas (NCAs), National Scenic and Historic Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The BLM, under the authority of section 603 of FLPMA, manages WSAs so as not to impair their wilderness character. The establishment of the NLCS would not change the status of the WSAs or the authority of Congress, at some future time, to designate them as units of the National Wilderness Preservation System or to release them for non-wilderness multiple use.

The NLCS currently includes 27 million acres of archaeological and historic treasures such as Canyons of the Ancients National Monument in Colorado and the Oregon National Historic Trail, wildlife havens such as Snake River Birds of Prey NCA in Idaho and Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness in Arizona, and hiking challenges such as King Range National Conservation Area along the lost coast of northern California and significant sections of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail as it winds its way through New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana.

Over the last six years, since its inception, the NLCS has established successful, collaborative relationships with local communities, States, tribes, friends groups, and private citizens. These partnerships are critical to the on-the-ground success of NLCS units.

In an increasingly crowded and fast-changing West, NLCS units provide some of the best examples of open space. For the most part, NLCS units are not highly developed. Rather, they provide visitors a different kind of outdoor experience—an opportunity to explore, discover and relax. These are places to get lost and find oneself.

Many NLCS units were designated specifically for their scientific values. Recent discoveries at some NLCS units include cave-dwelling millipedes previously unknown to science and numerous new species of dinosaurs. In 2006, at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the discovery of one of the largest known oviraptor in the world (a giant 7-foot tall, 14-foot long flesh-eating, feathered dinosaur) was revealed. The diverse opportunities for scientific inquiry allow NLCS units to be used as outdoor laboratories by a wide range of universities, colleges, and high schools including Brigham Young University, Montana State University, Colorado State University, Northern Arizona University, Universidad de Sonora (Mexico), Stanford University, Boise State University, University of New South Wales (Australia), Oregon State University, University of Utah, and the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa). Their efforts also directly benefit local communities. For example, studies of lava flows at Craters of the Moon National Monument in collaboration with Idaho State University contribute to hands-on science curriculum for local elementary students.

Much of the support for NLCS units comes from local communities that work with the BLM to engage in cooperative conservation that enhance local economies, cultures, and resources. At New Mexico's Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, an inter-governmental cooperative agreement between the BLM and the Pueblo de Cochiti has successfully provided for enhanced visitor services while improving the health of the land at this spectacular geologic wonder. In southern Arizona, Las Cienegas NCA is collaborating with local ranchers, water districts, the State and county to develop innovative solutions to managing this precious watershed in a desert environment - all in the context of a historic ranching community.

Many NLCS units are adjacent to growing urban centers and provide respite from the city as well as recreational opportunities. Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument adjoins the burgeoning Palm Springs area of California; McGinnis Canyons NCA lies near Grand Junction, Colorado; and Red Rock Canyon NCA is located just outside of Las Vegas, Nevada. Red Rock Canyon NCA has some of the highest visitation of any BLM-administered site and serves as an adventurous alternative for locals and visitors from Las Vegas' other attractions. The many communities in California's Coachella Valley welcome the undeveloped open spaces of the Congressionally designated Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. Partnerships with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the Friends of the Desert Mountains, and the cities of Palm Desert, Palm Springs, La Quinta, Cathedral City, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage and Indio have enhanced BLM's ability to improve recreational opportunities while also providing for improved habitat for the endangered Peninsular bighorn sheep. Colorado's growing recreation industry promotes McInnis Canyon as a place for outdoor activity including wilderness hiking, rafting and mountain biking.

From the remote, wild Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area in the eastern part of the State, to coastal Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area's lighthouse and tidal pools, the diversity of NLCS units can be viewed across the breadth of Oregon. The Oregon National Historic Trail and the interpretive center in Baker City provide a window into our pioneer past and the 300,000 emigrants who used this pathway to the Pacific. Three ecosystems collide in Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in southwestern Oregon forming a unique assemblage of rare plants and animals. Oregon's 802 miles of wild and scenic rivers provide unparalleled opportunities for fishing, hunting and boating which contribute to economic diversity in local communities.

H.R. 2016

H.R. 2016 proposes to establish in statute the current administrative structure of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System. We understand that the bill is intended to maintain the current management of the NLCS' individual units. However, since we testified before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests, it has come to our attention that the language in section 3(c)(2) could inadvertently create ambiguity or confusion. As each unit is unique, we strongly support the recognition of their individual management frameworks and we would like the opportunity to work with the Chairman to clarify the legislation in regards to section 3(c)(2).

By formalizing the NLCS, H.R. 2016 would give Congressional support and direction, strengthening this special system of lands within the context of the BLM's multiple-use mission. This will assure that these landscapes of the American spirit would be conserved, protected, and restored for the benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 2016. I will be happy to answer any questions.