

STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1341, LAS CIENEGAS ENHANCEMENT AND SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT ACT.

September 27, 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1341, the Las Cienegas Enhancement and Saguaro National Park Boundary Adjustment Act.

S. 1341 provides for the conveyance of Federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in southern Arizona to a private developer in exchange for environmentally significant lands to be included within the Saguaro National Park and the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA). During the 109th Congress, the BLM testified before the House Resources Committee on legislation that provided for the exchange of the Las Cienegas NCA parcel but that did not include the Saguaro National Park parcel, and, at that time, suggested a number of modifications to that legislation.

The Department appreciates that S. 1341 incorporates the vast majority of our recommendations. We support S. 1341 and would like to provide a few additional amendments to ensure that the bill is in keeping with our land exchange practices.

S. 1341 authorizes an exchange of land between the Department of the Interior and Las Cienegas LLC. The federal land to be conveyed totals approximately 1,200 acres and is referred to in the bill as the "Sahuarita parcel of land." This property is BLM-managed land south of Tucson near Corona de Tucson. The land is low-lying Sonoran desert and has been preliminarily identified for disposal by the BLM through its land use planning process.

The bill would bring two parcels of land into Federal ownership. The first is approximately 2,392 acres of land referred to in the bill as the "Empirita-Simonson parcel of land." This property lies north of the Las Cienegas NCA managed by the BLM in southern Arizona. The lands are currently private property but mostly lie within the "Sonoita Valley Acquisition Planning District" established by Public Law 106-538, which designated the Las Cienegas NCA. The Act directed the Department of the Interior to acquire lands from willing sellers within the planning district for inclusion within the NCA to further protect the important resource values for which the NCA was designated. In addition, these lands would provide important access to the Whetstone Mountains which are managed by the Forest Service. Upon acquisition, the bill provides that the parcel would be administered as part of the La Cienegas NCA.

The second parcel of land consists of 160 acres and is referred to as the Bloom property. This tract is undeveloped and is immediately adjacent to the boundary of the West District of Saguaro National Park. Park planning documents dating back to 1993 have identified this property for acquisition, if available. This tract contains important wildlife corridors and high resource values that would complement the resources already present in the park. The area surrounding the park has seen significant population increases during the last decade and protecting

remaining undeveloped areas is a priority for both the park and local communities. Upon acquisition, the bill provides that the parcel would be administered as part of Saguaro National Park.

We recommend three modifications to the bill. First, we would recommend striking section 3(b)(3)(B), which allows a waiver of section 206(b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1716(b)) with regard to limiting equalization payments to 25 percent of the value of the Federal land. The inclusion in the bill of section 3(b)(3)(A)(iii), which allows for the reduction of acreages to bring the exchange within the 25 percent ceiling, eliminates the need for section 3(b)(3)(B) and is consistent with BLM policy on equalization of payments. Second, we urge that the timeframes for completing the land exchanges in section 4(e) be extended from one year to 18 months to allow adequate time to complete all of the actions necessary for a land exchange. Third, we would suggest a technical correction to the acreage total for the Empirita-Simonson parcel of land.

We support section 4(b) of the bill to remove the Elgin Landfill from the boundaries of the Las Cienegas NCA; its inclusion within the boundaries of the NCA was an error in need of correction and this provision will address that problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1341, I will be happy to answer any questions.