

Statement for the Record
Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks
S. 404, Modification of Patent for Whitefish Point Light Station (Michigan)
May 11, 2011

Thank you for the invitation to present testimony on S. 404, legislation to modify a land patent pertaining to the Whitefish Point Light Station (Michigan). Although the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) role under the legislation is ministerial, preservation of historic lighthouses such as the Whitefish Point Light Station is a priority for the Department of the Interior. The BLM supports S. 404.

Background

In the late 18th and 19th centuries, the United States built a series of lighthouses in and around Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, and Lake Superior to aid in navigation of the Great Lakes. The role played by these lighthouses in the westward expansion and economic growth of the United States is part of our national heritage, with ships and shipwrecks recalled in story and song. The Great Lakes lighthouses—including the Whitefish Point Light Station at issue in S. 404—are listed on the National Register of Historic Properties.

The U.S. Coast Guard retains responsibility for aid to navigation in the Great Lakes, as it (or its predecessor, the Revenue Marine) has since 1790. In the mid-1990s, concerns reached the Congress that the Coast Guard, in carrying out its mission in the Great Lakes, was unable to assure preservation of the historic lighthouses. Interest in preserving the Whitefish Point Light Station led the Congress, in 1996, to convey land adjacent to the Light Station to two non-profit organizations dedicated to conservation and historic preservation—an 8.27 acre parcel to the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society (Historical Society) and a 2.69 acre parcel to the Michigan Audubon Society (Audubon Society) of Chippewa County—and a 33 acre parcel to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) (Public Law 104-208, Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 1997, Section 5505).

This law contains limitations on development at the historic lighthouse, and explicitly requires compliance with the "Whitefish Point Comprehensive Plan of October 1992." The patents the BLM issued under this authority (including the most recent, number 61-2000-0007, issued March 10, 2000, to the Historical Society) contain this reference.

In 1999, the Audubon Society brought suit against the Historical Society and the FWS over plans to develop a museum at the site. The parties reached a settlement agreement under which the three groups developed the "Human Use/Natural Resource Plan for Whitefish Point, December 2002," to supersede the Whitefish Point Comprehensive Plan of 1992.

S. 404

S. 404 directs the Secretary of the Interior to modify patent number 61-2000-0007 by striking reference to the Whitefish Point Comprehensive Plan of October 1992 and inserting the "Human

Use/Natural Resource Plan for Whitefish Point, dated December 2002.” S. 404 affirms the applicability of the National Historic Preservation Act to the Whitefish Point Light Station. S. 404 requires that the property be used in a manner that does not impair or interfere with its conservation values. The BLM supports this legislation.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of S. 404.