

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1678, THE UINTAH RESEARCH AND CURATORIAL CENTER ACT.

JUNE 8, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1678, a bill to establish the Uintah Research and Curatorial Center in the city of Vernal, Utah. We thank Senator Bennett and the other members of the Utah delegation for their interest and support in protecting the resources of Dinosaur National Monument, the site for which the Center is intended.

The Department of the Interior supports this bill with a technical amendment, to accurately reflect the correct spelling of the name of the center – Uinta. The partners have chosen to spell the name of the center in the same way the Uinta Mountains are spelled and not the County of Uintah. We also have a current version of the map that more accurately shows the location of the center in its relationship to other partner structures on the site.

S. 1678 would authorize the National Park Service to establish the Uinta Research and Curatorial Center on land outside the boundary of Dinosaur National Monument. The land would be acquired by donation from the city of Vernal, Utah and be no more than five acres. S. 1678 would authorize the center to be used for the curation, storage, and research of the museum collection of Dinosaur National Monument and provide for curation of other

collections held by other federal agencies, tribes, and universities under the guidelines of cooperative agreements with the Secretary. The State of Utah, local agencies, academic institutions, and appropriate private nonprofit entities may also enter into agreements to manage and use the site. The bill requires that the land not become part of the Monument or be subject to laws and regulations applicable to the Monument. This language is common when Congress has authorized NPS administrative sites in the past.

Dinosaur National Monument was established on October 9, 1915 to protect an extraordinary deposit of dinosaur remains of the Jurassic period. While the park contains many other significant resources, the centerpiece continues to be the paleontological specimens for which the park was originally established. They are considered by the scientific community as internationally significant and represent the single best window into the life of Jurassic dinosaurs. The collection contains type specimens from which specific dinosaurs are named, as well as many one-of-a-kind specimens. The collection is heavily used by outside researchers as well as the NPS. The collection also contains significant archeological, biological, archival, and historic objects that preserve the cultural and natural history of the park.

The 1986 General Management Plan identified a need for a collections building and upgraded lab facilities under the preferred alternative. In the late 1990's Utah State Parks began planning for the construction/reconstruction of the Utah Field House Museum in Vernal. The park began working with the State to develop a partnership to provide collections space for the state as well as the park. The Field House Museum received \$5.5

million from the State of Utah for the reconstruction, to be co-located with the collections building on property acquired by the City of Vernal and Uintah County. The portion of the property for the Uinta Research and Curatorial Center is being donated to the National Park Service (approximately one-fourth of the lot, estimated value of approximately \$375,000).

The 2001 Collection Management Report identified 609,000 items in the collection. The collections are currently stored in 11 different facilities throughout the park, including garages, most of which meet few NPS museum standards. Maintenance and curation has been deferred due to lack of space or proper facility to prepare for storage. Of the 957 museum standards currently applicable to the park, the park barely meets 50% of them.

This new facility would allow the park to meet nearly 98% of those standards. Of particular importance are the health and safety concerns from radon gas production in the enclosed areas where radioactive specimens are currently stored. Due to lack of space, park staff must conduct their duties in the aisles of the old paleo lab at the Quarry Visitor Center. This lab, as well as the entire Center, is in serious need of rehabilitation, having suffered extensive structural distress since its construction in the 1950's. As such, the Quarry Visitor provides neither adequate storage space nor a suitable environment for staff to work in. The NPS has a project planned to stabilize and rehabilitate the historic Quarry Visitor Center in FY 2007 as part of the five-year line-item construction program.

The Uinta Center will provide for approximately 22,500 square feet of work and storage space and cost approximately \$8.8 million, which covers only the construction of the

building. Funding for the construction is currently programmed for FY 2007. In addition, one-time costs for moving the collection, equipping the laboratory, furnishing offices, and meeting IT needs are estimated to be approximately \$400,000. Additional recurring costs for the operation of the center – either through direct additional NPS funding, or partnerships with other agencies that have expressed an interest in using the facility, are estimated to be approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000 per year. This includes additional staffing to perform administrative and maintenance functions as well as basic operational costs (utilities, necessary supplies, materials and equipment).

A decision was made early in the process not to include the site as part of the monument. The site is not contiguous with the present park boundary and is nearly fourteen miles from the closest park entrance. However, it is in the City of Vernal, Utah and is the site for the newly constructed Utah Field House of Natural History Museum. The State will be the primary partner with the NPS. The Field House will provide visitors and residents access to the museum and programs on the natural history of the area, while the Uinta Center will provide the storage and research function of a world-class museum. Other partners in the project include the City of Vernal, Utah and Uintah County who have donated the land for the project. Both communities see this venture as an economic benefit and an enhancement to the surrounding region's tourism efforts. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Ashley National Forest will also work with us and store their collections here.

The Uinta Research and Curatorial Center is another example of the goal of the Department

and the National Park Service to meet the needs of the agency while working with partners.

The Center will provide proper storage for irreplaceable artifacts, improve working conditions for staff and visiting scientists, partner with the state to provide educational opportunities, and give visitors the chance to discover the many wonders of eastern Utah.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to respond to any questions you and the committee may have.