

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL D. SNYDER, ACTING REGIONAL DIRECTOR,
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INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
PARKS, REGARDING NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INVOLVEMENT IN BORDER
SECURITY: IS IT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY?**

July 9, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the National Park Service (NPS) regarding our responsibility to protect visitors and resources in our national parks along our borders.

The primary mission of the NPS is to conserve the resources of the parks and to promote the use of those parks for the enjoyment of its visitors and leave them unimpaired for future generations. This core mission of the NPS makes our participation helping to secure the international borders of our parks imperative and is our impetus for aggressively addressing border issues. Cross-border, illegal immigration and smuggling activities are impacting some of our parks on our international borders, threatening this mission as well as important natural and historic resources. These border activities directly impact the parks' resources, the safety of our visitors and employees, and even the security of the nation. Secretary Norton stated in her testimony before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on the 2005 Budget, “. . . while primary responsibility for border security rests with the Department of Homeland Security, Interior agencies have an obligation to protect employees, visitors, natural resources, and agency facilities.” Increased and focused border enforcement by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) law enforcement agencies in the urban border areas has increasingly driven cross-border violators onto the remote public lands of the NPS and other Federal agencies.

The Department of the Interior manages approximately 14 percent of the land on the Canadian border, 31 percent along the southeast border, and 40 percent of the southwest border. The NPS manages 810 miles of land along the borders of Canada, south Florida, and Mexico. This area includes 17 border parks, 6 along the United States-Canada border, 4 in south Florida, and 7 on the United States-Mexico border. In 2004, the U.S. Border Patrol documented that over 1 million illegal immigrants were apprehended while attempting to enter the United States with approximately 14,000 apprehended in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM) alone. The parks along the United States-Mexico border share approximately 365 miles of land and 72 miles of seashore with Mexico that are directly impacted by increased illegal border activity. Big Bend National Park shares 245 miles of border with Mexico, nearly 13 percent of the entire United States-Mexico border.

Parks in border areas were originally established to preserve some of this country's natural and cultural resources, irreplaceable treasures contained in unique environments. The unchecked movement of significant numbers of humans, vehicle traffic, and contraband across the borders negatively impacts natural and cultural resources, causing considerable resource degradation, soil compaction, and endangering sensitive or threatened wildlife and plant species. Drug and immigrant trafficking patterns impact parklands many miles from the actual borders. These parks continue to work to provide a safe and memorable experience for their visitors. However, because of these illegal activities, there have been times when we have had to close sections of parks to visitors out of concern for visitor safety.

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Congress has appropriated nearly \$87.6 million in one-time funding and over \$36.4 million in recurring funding to the NPS directly related to homeland security costs. The \$87.6 million includes \$53.1 million for construction projects related to homeland security, including \$17.8 million for the vehicle barrier at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The \$87.6 million also includes \$33.8 million in operational increases dedicated to security for icon and border parks, which includes \$5.1 million for border parks.

The DHS Customs and Border Protection has primary responsibility for securing our nations' borders, and we appreciate the efforts they put forth to help secure the nation's parklands and protect irreplaceable resources. Border patrol agents frequently call on the NPS rangers who willingly assist when illegal border activities occur on parklands, not only to back them up for officer safety reasons, but to address any resource and visitor protection issues. NPS law enforcement officers have local knowledge, unique skills, and the necessary capabilities to play an integral role in protecting resources, deterring illicit activity, and achieving the "seamless" protection of the borders. The NPS and the DHS have established good lines of communication and cooperation both at the field and headquarters level. Unfortunately, law enforcement operations can have tragic endings. In August 2002, Park Ranger Kris Eggle, working in concert with the U.S. Border Patrol, was shot to death by drug smugglers being pursued by Mexico Federal police across the border into Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

The international border with Canada has always had notoriety for its ease of access for smuggling organizations and fugitives fleeing both the United States and Canada. This land and water border is accessible by all modes of transportation including horseback, ATV,

snowmobile, boats, aircraft and foot traffic. The NPS manages diverse lands and waters in six units along the northern border including the Great Lakes region of the United States: Olympic National Park, North Cascades National Park, Glacier National Park, Voyageurs National Park, Isle Royale National Park and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. Due to the limited number of law enforcement officers working along the northern border, regular coordination and interagency cooperation with all the affected Federal, state, tribal, and local agencies is especially important. Increased sharing of intelligence and effective use of technology also serve as force multipliers enhancing this effort. Even though the number of undocumented immigrants and drug seizures are relatively small in comparison to the southwest border, the tightening of the ports of entry on both borders, as well as other security measures in place since September 11, 2001, makes it more likely that this traffic will increase from the north into the national parks.

Seizure data and intelligence information indicate that there have been increases in illegal activities on the Canadian border in recent years. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police estimates there are over 20,000 illegal marijuana gardens in the province of British Columbia. They estimate that nearly 90 percent of the high potency “BC Bud” marijuana produced in these garden operations is destined for the United States where it is sold for large sums of money; some of this marijuana also is traded for cocaine and firearms that are smuggled back into Canada.

The true extent of the number of illegal entries along the Great Lakes and the eastern prairie states of Wisconsin and Minnesota is unknown. We are working with DHS, DEA, and others to

determine what types of law enforcement operations are most effective to protect the public, employees, and the resources, and the extent to which the NPS will assist in this effort.

The NPS manages vast amounts of lands in south Florida that include Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, Dry Tortugas National Park, and Big Cypress National Preserve. Everglades National Park extends over 118 miles of coastal border in southern Florida. This marine border environment has unlimited open access to all types of boats and aircraft and has always been known for its ease of access for smuggling drugs, money, and humans both into and out of the country. South Florida is in close proximity to the major drug-producing and smuggling operations in the Caribbean and Central America. In most areas along the Florida marine coastal border, the true extent of the problem and the number of illegal entries is unknown. Cuban refugees are frequently encountered trying to reach United States soil. The variety of law enforcement agencies involved makes interagency cooperation important to securing these areas.

The NPS manages seven national parks along the United States-Mexico border, including Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM) and Coronado National Memorial in Arizona; Amistad National Recreation Area (NRA), Big Bend National Park (NP), Chamizal National Memorial, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site and Padre Island National Seashore (NS) in Texas. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River in Texas is also managed by the NPS. These seven units combined provided outstanding recreational opportunities to more than 3 million visitors in 2004.

Some of the units the NPS manages in southern Arizona include endangered and sensitive species habitat and wilderness areas, making damage to these scarce resources even more tragic. Yet, effects to the parks are not limited to endangered species or wilderness. At Padre Island NS, for example, visitors have encountered evidence of drug smuggling along park beaches. This kind of illegal activity affects parks significantly and can impact the quality of visitor experience.

The increased border crossing and crime problems in Arizona at Organ Pipe Cactus NM over the last few years are a direct result of DHS Customs and Border Protection's law enforcement successes at the traditional, urban border crossings, which have pushed illegal crossings and crime onto adjacent public land. In light of this situation, efforts on the ground to contend with the rising tide of undocumented immigrants and drug smugglers require ongoing coordination between the NPS and other Federal agencies, especially the DHS Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Without the cooperative intelligence and robust communication these Federal partners enjoy, we would be unable to shift our tactics as the situation dictates. Unfortunately, the impacts from human and vehicular activity already have caused serious damage to park cultural and natural resources in the border parks.

The NPS actively participates in three High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) partnerships in Texas. HIDTA facilitates coordination of equipment and information between Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to address illegal drug activity. Both Amistad NRA and Padre Island NS are participants in other HIDTA partnerships providing cooperative support to interdiction efforts in those parks. The NPS recently hired a law enforcement

specialist stationed in Tucson, Arizona, who is responsible for coordinating NPS border enforcement efforts with local, state, and Federal agencies on behalf of our southwest border parks. This provides a critical liaison between the NPS and other state and Federal agencies involved in narcotics interdiction in the southwestern United States.

In Amistad NRA, 12 NPS rangers work closely with U.S. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as local agencies, to address the escalating impact drug smuggling is having on the NPS mission. Rangers have direct access to HIDTA intelligence, which allows the NPS to better assist in the border drug interdiction efforts. One of Amistad's most popular recreational vehicle campgrounds has become a major drop-off site for the smuggling of drugs from Mexico. Increased use of popular campgrounds and boat ramps is causing significant concern as potentially violent smugglers interact more regularly with visitors and non-law enforcement employees. Multiple seizures of marijuana with arrests of smugglers have occurred in the last few months near the boat ramps and campgrounds.

At Coronado National Memorial, four NPS rangers conduct daily vehicle and foot patrols along the border. There have been two ranger-involved shootings at the park within the last year. Both cases involved suspected drug or alien smugglers who were threatening the rangers with deadly weapons. Each time, the suspects successfully escaped back to Mexico, and we have not yet apprehended them. All other border parks are experiencing increased violence involving NPS rangers.

To ensure that we continue to meet the core mission of the NPS, park rangers performing law enforcement in the border park areas meet all NPS and DOI training standards for law enforcement. Additionally, the NPS provides advanced tactical law enforcement training to rangers working in border parks facing high risks from illegal smuggling activities. Individual parks on the Canadian border also provide border-specific training.

The NPS has both the statutory and the fundamental responsibility to ensure that its 388 units are used and enjoyed by the visiting public, well managed, and left unimpaired for future generations. National park rangers are a critical element to this mission and they continue to ensure that a safe and enjoyable experience is provided for all visitors. Also, we want to thank again the Border Patrol and our other partners who assist us in achieving our mission.

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