

STATEMENT OF SUE MASICA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 774, TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK IN THE STATE OF COLORADO.

MAY 12, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 774, a bill to adjust the boundary of Rocky Mountain National Park in the State of Colorado.

The Department supports H.R. 774. On July 15, 2004, the Department testified in support of S. 2181, an identical bill, with a technical amendment to correct the map reference. S. 2181 was amended, incorporating the Department's suggestion, and passed the Senate. H.R. 744 is identical to S. 2181 as passed by the Senate in the 108th Congress.

H.R. 774 would direct the Secretary of the Interior to proceed with a land exchange involving Federal land within Rocky Mountain National Park (park) and private lands owned by the MacGregor Ranch, located near Estes Park, Colorado. This exchange would allow the park to improve public access while protecting the private property rights of landowners. The Secretary would receive title to three parcels of vacant land encompassing approximately 6 acres with two of the parcels located within the authorized boundary of the park. This legislation would authorize a boundary adjustment to include the third parcel within the park boundary. In exchange for the three parcels, the Secretary would convey up to 70 acres of Federal land to the MacGregor Ranch. As a condition of the land exchange, the Secretary would reserve a perpetual easement on the Federal parcel for the purposes of protecting, preserving and enhancing the

conservation values of the Federal parcel. The parcel conveyed to the MacGregor Ranch will remain within the authorized boundary of the park, and will be used as an irrigated hay meadow and for grazing cattle.

Rocky Mountain National Park was established by Congress on January 26, 1915, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States and to protect the natural conditions and scenic beauties of this portion of the Rocky Mountains. The park currently encompasses approximately 266,000 acres and each year draws more than 3 million visitors.

The MacGregor Ranch was homesteaded in 1873, which predates the establishment of the park. In 1917, shortly after the establishment of the park, the National Park Service (NPS) built a residence for park employees just inside the park boundary, with access via a one-lane dirt road, which crosses the MacGregor Ranch for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. This access was provided with the permission of the MacGregor family, but no easement, right-of-way, or other legal document was ever recorded.

The MacGregor Ranch is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is owned by the Muriel MacGregor Charitable Trust. The mission of the Trust is to support youth education through the preservation and interpretation of the historic buildings and educational tours of this working high mountain cattle ranch. In 1980, the boundary of the park was amended to include much of the MacGregor Ranch, and in 1983 the NPS purchased a conservation easement covering 1,221 acres of the ranch. While much of the ranch is located within the authorized boundary of the park, it remains private property.

In the early 1970's, hikers and rock climbers began using the access road through the MacGregor Ranch to reach a small parking lot located just inside the park boundary. Known as the Twin Owls trailhead, the popularity of the area has grown steadily. In recent years, overflow parking has negatively impacted the ranch, and traffic on the one-lane access road has negatively affected the character of the historic homestead and has diminished the quality of the historic scene that visitors to the ranch come to experience.

For several years, the NPS and the MacGregor Ranch have been working to find a solution to the traffic and parking problems. In 2003, based on public input and an Environmental Assessment, the NPS decided to relocate the Twin Owls parking lot to the east end of the MacGregor Ranch, some distance away from the historic homestead. A new access road and a larger trailhead parking lot that can accommodate 80 to 100 cars will be built at the new location.

So that the rules and regulations governing Rocky Mountain National Park can be enforced at the new trailhead and along the access road, the land needs to be incorporated into the park. To accomplish this, the MacGregor Trust and the NPS have agreed to a land exchange. The three parcels acquired by the NPS will be used for the development of the new parking lot and access road. The conveyance of up to 70-acres of Federal land to the MacGregor Ranch with a conservation easement will ensure that the property is used solely for ranching.

No appraisals have been done on the properties to be included in the land exchange; however, the NPS believes that the lands are of comparable value. It is estimated that the cost of the

exchange could be approximately \$13,000, which includes an environmental site assessment and other closing costs.

The estimated development cost for the parking lot, access road, vault toilet, connector trail and related improvements is \$800,000. Rocky Mountain National Park has already programmed the funds for this development from 80% Fee Demonstration and National Parks Pass revenues.

Annual operating costs are not expected to increase as the new development is replacing existing facilities and employs sustainable design principles.

That concludes my prepared statement Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or members of the committee may have.