

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 637, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THE CHATTAHOOCHEE TRACE NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR IN THE STATES OF ALABAMA AND GEORGIA.**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 637, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of establishing the Chattahoochee Trace National Heritage Corridor in the states of Alabama and Georgia.

The Department supports enactment of S. 637. Last year, the Administration sent to Congress a legislative proposal to establish guidelines and a process for designation. Bills were introduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243, H.R. 760 and H.R. 6287) that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this very important issue.

With 37 national heritage areas designated across 27 states, and more heritage area legislative proposals in the pipeline, the Administration believes it is critical at this juncture for Congress to enact national heritage area program legislation. This legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles

and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas. Program legislation also would clarify the expectation that heritage areas would work toward self-sufficiency by outlining the necessary steps, including appropriate planning, to achieve that shared goal.

The study would focus on an area known as the Chattahoochee Trace, which lies in the lower Chattahoochee Valley in the states of Alabama and Georgia. This area includes eighteen counties, seven in Alabama and eleven in Georgia, which are located near or adjacent to the Chattahoochee River in the lower halves of the two states. The Chattahoochee Trace has an abundance of cultural, natural, recreational, and scenic resources. Much of the area's history revolves around the Chattahoochee River, which has long served as a food source, transportation route, and an engine for commerce. Centuries before the arrival of European settlers, the lower Chattahoochee Valley was inhabited by Native Americans that relied on the river for everyday life. The abundance of prehistoric archaeological sites indicates that humans lived along the banks of the river and its tributaries dating back thousands of years. From approximately 350 to 600 A.D., Kolomoki, near the present day town of Blakely, was one of the most populous settlements north of Mexico. Today, the seven mounds at Kolomoki are one of the impressive archeological sites that reflect upon the Chattahoochee Trace's ancient past.

The area is layered with many other facets of American history. In the late seventeenth century Spanish monks built the mission and fort of Apalachicola on the west bank of the Chattahoochee River, in present day Russell County, Alabama, about fifteen miles south of Columbus, Georgia. In the early eighteenth century, merchants from French Louisiana

began trading with the Native Americans in the lower Chattahoochee Valley, ushering in an era of great economic activity. In the years that followed, commercial enterprises flourished, including cotton plantations, textile mills, and riverboat companies. In the antebellum period, the river-borne cotton trade led to the emergence of a prosperous agricultural economy that was, regrettably, dependent on slave labor for its growth. During this era, the river served as the lower Chattahoochee Valley's outlet to the world, connecting the plantations in the region with the international cotton market via New Orleans and ultimately Liverpool, England.

Heading into the twentieth century, hydroelectric power, which was first used in Columbus in 1882, emerged as an important industry in the lower Chattahoochee Valley. By the 1920s, dams on the Chattahoochee River near Columbus were providing electricity to thousands of customers, and the area quickly came to be recognized for its role in power generation. Columbus was so well-known for its hydroelectricity industry that it was dubbed the "electric city" in the early 1900s. One turbine at the Eagle and Phenix Mills powerhouse, installed in 1898, still produces electricity today.

The scenic beauty of the river has been showcased in such places as Columbus and Phenix City, Alabama, where recent redevelopment projects have emphasized a re-orientation towards the river. A significant period of urban renewal and revitalization began in the mid 1990s and continues today. With these improvements, residents and businesses began moving back to formerly blighted areas. Examples of such municipal projects include the construction of the Columbus Riverwalk Park, the new Port

Columbus Civil War Naval Museum, and the initial implementation of Phenix City's riverfront revitalization plan.

Swimming, fishing, scenic drives, and strolls on the riverbank are just a few of the many recreational activities available to visitors to the Chattahoochee Trace. In the twentieth century, the creation of large lakes along the river further enhanced the Chattahoochee River's recreational opportunities. For example, Lake Eufaula, near Fort Gaines, Georgia, features 640 miles of shoreline. Last year, the lake attracted approximately 4.5 million visitors that engaged in such popular activities as camping, hunting, boating, and trophy fishing. The lake is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and features several adjacent protected lands, including the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Lakepoint State Park in Alabama, and Florence Marina and George T. Bagby State Parks in Georgia.

Since 1970, the Historic Chattahoochee Commission (Commission) has been responsible for administering a variety of programs throughout the Chattahoochee Trace. For the first eight years of its existence, the Commission operated as an agency of the State of Alabama. In 1978, the Georgia General Assembly and the Alabama Legislature passed identical legislation to establish an interstate compact for operation of the Commission. Among its many functions, the Commission is responsible for promoting tourism, historic preservation, and recreational development throughout the Chattahoochee Trace. Through the years the Commission has undertaken a number of important projects to further its goals, including a historical markers program, development of theme-based tours, a photographic folk life project, production of educational materials, historical architectural surveys, and the distribution of preservation grants.

The study that would be conducted under S. 637 is estimated to cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000. Mr. Chairman that concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.