

S. 1961 - A BILL FOR BOUNDARY EXPANSION LITTLE RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PRESERVE

SIGNIFICANCE

Senate Bill 1961 will authorize the National Park Service (NPS) to better fulfill its mission to protect and conserve Little River Canyon National Preserve (LRCNP) for the use and enjoyment of future generations. In many places, the current boundary extends only to the Canyon rim or does not include the scenic drive. As a result, incompatible development on the Canyon's eastern rim or the inability for large recreational vehicles to use the scenic drive negatively impacts the visitor experience to the LRCNP.

S. 1961 will expand the boundaries to add approximately 1,656 acres that will be acquired by purchase from willing sellers or through donations. LRCNP currently includes 13,797 acres and the NPS roughly estimates acquisitions costs to be between \$9 million and \$12 million. While no federal funding has yet been identified, over \$700,000 in private funding has already been applied in the area. Federal funding for any new acquisitions will be subject to the budget prioritization process of the NPS.

BACKGROUND

LRCNP was established as a unit in the NPS by PL 102-427 to protect and preserve the natural, scenic, recreational and cultural resources of the area and to provide for public enjoyment of those resources. The LRCNP is located in northeast Alabama within 110 miles of Atlanta, Birmingham and Chattanooga.

The Preserve lies at the southern limits of the Cumberland Plateau and the Canyon in Alabama and one of the deepest in the eastern United States. As such, the significant biological diversity including habitat for a unique assemblage of plants and animals contributes to an area of some of the most rugged scenery in the southeast. In addition, the LRCNP includes a wide assortment of archeological resources and historic sites.

NEED

The current western boundary of the LRCNP meanders across state and county roads which make up the Preserve's scenic drive. The proposed boundary expansion will move the boundary to the western edge of the road rights-of-way. In addition to including important lands this will also allow the NPS to apply for federal highway funds in order to improve the roads to meet Federal Highway Administration safety standards. The present condition does not allow motor homes and large recreational vehicles to travel much of the scenic drive. The additional land will also expand opportunities to the public for hunting and improve NPS management of one of our country's outstanding natural areas.

Expanding the boundary as proposed in S. 1961 will allow the NPS to purchase lands from willing sellers and enhance recreational resources and protect scenery for Preserve visitors by ensuring trails no longer cross private property and the east rim is not developed thus destroying a major scenic area.