

**STATEMENT OF DR. STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
NATIONAL PARKS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES ON  
S. 311, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE  
SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF DESIGNATING SITES IN THE LOWER  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER AREA IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA AS A UNIT OF THE  
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**July 29, 2014**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 311, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating sites in the Lower Mississippi River Area in the State of Louisiana as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes. The Senate passed this bill on July 9, 2014.

The Department supports this legislation with an amendment described later in this statement. However, we feel that priority should be given to the 24 previously authorized studies for potential units of the National Park System, potential new National Heritage Areas, and potential additions to the National Trails System and National Wild and Scenic Rivers System that have not yet been transmitted to Congress.

S. 311 would authorize a study of natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources in Plaquemines Parish, located south of the City of New Orleans, for potential designation as a unit of the National Park System. The study area would include Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson, located on opposite sides of a bend in the Mississippi River about eight miles upstream from the town of Venice, Louisiana, and approximately 73 river miles downstream from New Orleans at an ancient "Head of Passes" site. The term "Head of Passes" refers to the site where the main stem of the Mississippi River branches off to the east, the south, and the southwest at its mouth in the Gulf of Mexico. The present day Head of Passes is just south of the town of Venice. The study is estimated to cost between \$200,000 and \$400,000 based on similar studies.

As passed by the Senate, S. 311 requires that the study either be conducted and be paid for from non-federal sources, or that non-federal funds be donated to the National Park Service to pay for the study. We believe that this funding requirement should not set a precedent for other study bills. There are many valuable natural, cultural, and historic resources in our country that may be good candidates for a National Park Service special resource study. We would not like to see a trend develop where those resources are not studied for their potential as national park units because of a lack of community or interest-group funding available to pay for a study. Further, if the study authorized by this bill is conducted by a non-federal entity, the National Park Service still would be required to expend a modest amount of federal funds to review the study to ensure that it complies with the requirements of section 3 of S. 311. We recommend an amendment to fund this study consistent with other studies.

Fort St. Philip was originally built in 1749, and the construction of Fort Jackson, named for Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, began in 1822. Fort St. Philip played an important defensive role in the Battle of New Orleans and both forts were employed unsuccessfully to defend New Orleans and the Confederacy from Admiral Farragut's union fleet during the Civil War. Both Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson have been designated as National Historic Landmarks, which attests to their national significance. Fort St. Philip, privately owned at the present time, is in ruins and overgrown with vegetation. Fort Jackson was operated by Plaquemines Parish as a historical museum until Hurricane Katrina caused extensive damage, and it has been closed to the public ever since.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.