

STATEMENT OF JOHN G. PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS, RESOURCES, AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 1384, TO AMEND THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT TO DESIGNATE THE NAVAJO LONG WALK TO BOSQUE REDONDO AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

May 8, 2001

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department's views on H. R. 1384, a bill to amend the National Trails System Act to designate the Navajo Long Walk to Bosque Redondo as a national historic trail.

The Department cannot support this legislation as currently written. The National Trails System Act, P. L. 90-543, requires that a suitability and feasibility study be conducted and submitted to Congress before a trail can be established and a study has not been completed on the Navajo Long Walk Trail. It is our understanding from discussions with staff that language is being developed to amend H. R. 1384 in order to authorize a suitability and feasibility study. We would be happy to work with Representative Udall and the subcommittee on alternate language to study the proposed trail, but more importantly to determine the best manner in which to preserve and tell this important story.

While the Department could support H. R. 1384 in concept, if it were amended to authorize a suitability and feasibility study, we will not consider requesting funding for the study in this or the next fiscal year. Furthermore, in order to better plan for the future of our National Parks, we believe that such studies should carefully examine the full life cycle operation and maintenance costs that would result from each alternative considered. We caution that our support of H. R. 1384, if amended to authorize a study, does not mean that the Department, in the future, will support designations that may be recommended by the study.

H. R. 1384 would amend the National Trails System Act and designate the Navajo Long Walk National Historic Trail. The proposed trail would cover a series of routes approximately 350 to 400 miles long over which members of the Navajo Nation were marched by the U.S. Army beginning in 1863 after they were forced to leave their traditional homes in northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico.

The story of the Navajo Long Walk came at a time in U.S. history when the military was called upon to solve a problem of a clash between cultures. In the 1850's and 60's more and more Americans were moving west into New Mexico, the Navajo's home. Repeated clashes resulted in the decision to move the Navajo away from their ancient homeland to a reservation and teach them farming and self-sufficiency. The army destroyed crops and orchards, starving them into submission. There were several successive marches of the Navajo through the cold of winter to the heat of summer. The aged and infirm often died along the way even though wagons were

sometimes provided. Broken and dispirited after their defeat in their homeland, the Long Walk was particularly grueling and hard on all of the Navajo people, even those who survived.

The destination of the Long Walk was a reservation at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, called Bosque Redondo (Round Grove), which was shared with Mescalero Apache people. More than 7,000-8,000 Navajo people were eventually placed on the reservation. Although seeds were provided and the Navajo planted them immediately, there was never any success in growing crops. Due to a lack of timber for both shelter and firewood, living conditions were poor. Additionally, the Navajo and Mescalero Apache did not get along and by 1866 the Apache had deserted the reservation. By 1868 conditions were so bad that a government commission was appointed to investigate the conditions at Bosque Redondo. General W. T. Sherman, commanding the Military Division of the Missouri, ordered the Navajo back to their homelands in June of 1868, after a treaty granting them their old homelands had been signed.

The Long Walk Trail is located within a corridor that includes National Park System units at Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona and Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands in New Mexico including El Malpais National Conservation Area and Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. The route the army followed went from Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, to south of Albuquerque, New Mexico. From there several routes continued directly and indirectly to the Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner on the Pecos River.

The story of the Long Walk is being told in a number of ways through the efforts of the State of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation. For a number of years, the Navajo people have made pilgrimages to the Bosque Redondo. Plans are currently underway for a memorial and visitor center at Fort Sumner State Monument. Legislation that passed in the 106th Congress (Title II of P.L. 106-511) authorizes funding from the Defense Department to match state funds for the establishment and development of the memorial and visitor center. The legislation also authorizes the National Park Service to work with the Navajo Nation and the Mescalero Tribe to develop a symposium on the Long Walk and a curriculum for New Mexico schools.

Any further federal involvement should consider more than whether or not the Long Walk has sufficient resources and integrity to meet the standards set for establishing National Historic Trails. A study should identify other options that best tell the story as well as identify the critical resources to that story. But most importantly, any work has to consider the concerns, values and wishes of the Native Americans affected by these tragic events.

Therefore, while a study to determine the suitability of national historic trail designation may be an important part of preserving this story and sites, any authorized study should include sufficient latitude to determine if that is indeed the best way to accomplish the task.

To that end, we are ready to work with Representative Udall, the State of New Mexico and the Navajo and Mescalero to determine the most appropriate action.

That completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any of the members of the subcommittee may have.