

Statement of Kevin Dahlⁱ, Arizona Senior Program Manager, National Parks Conservation Association, before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, July 13, 2020

Madame Chair and members of the committee, I am Kevin Dahl, Arizona Senior Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). While my organization will provide written testimony for the record on additional bills before the committee, I am grateful for this opportunity to let you know of our strong support of H.R. 7098, the Saguaro National Park Boundary Expansion and Study Act of 2020.

H.R. 7098 would expand Saguaro National Park's boundary to encompass approximately 1150 acres of non-federal land adjacent to the current boundary, with parcels to be included in the new boundaries of both the Tucson Mountain District and the Rincon Mountain District.

As part of the effort to further protect this landscape, all landowners in this expansion package have been contacted about this effort, and none have expressed opposition. One landowner is a world-traveling professional outdoor photographer who has managed his property as a wildlife sanctuary hoping someday it would be included in the park.

Another is a native Arizonan who has always known that the piece of land he owns has outstanding natural resource values and belongs in the park.

Two parcels are owned by Pima County, which obtained this land under their open space program so they could turn it over to the Park Service once the boundary expansion has been approved.

Several parcels located along the southern boundary of the park's Rincon Mountain District include portions of Rincon Creek, a gallery riparian forest and superb wildlife habitat. This is the only riparian hardwood woodland in the park and is home to such rare species as gray hawk, yellow-billed cuckoo, giant spotted whiptail lizard, and lowland leopard frog.

Recreation will be well served by several of the additions. One parcel abuts the popular Camino de Oeste trailhead. Another is very close to the Sweetwater Trail, and when added to the park will protect the scenic view hikers enjoy when taking this route up to Wasson Peak.

Several of the parcels will link the popular Sweetwater Preserve, owned by Pima County, to the park. Their inclusion will protect view sheds, allow continued wildlife travel between the two areas, and eventually will allow hiking trails that link the preserve to the park.

When Saguaro National Park was established as a monument, both units were far from Tucson's city limits. Over time, the area has grown dramatically, and new developments have consumed natural areas, in many cases right up to the border of the park. With the support of local landowners and jurisdictions this legislation will go far toward preserving vital habitat, protecting recreational opportunities, and enhancing a wonderful national park.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in favor of H.R. 7098.

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