

STATEMENT OF LENA MCDOWALL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 7615 TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ENTER INTO PARTNERSHIPS TO DEVELOP HOUSING

June 14, 2022

Chair Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 7615, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to enter into partnerships to develop housing.

The Department supports the goals of H.R. 7615 and would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee to refine the bill.

H.R. 7615 would amend chapter 1013 of title 54 United States Code, to provide additional authorities to the Secretary of the Interior to partner with other Federal agencies, Tribal, State, or local governments, housing entities, or other public or private organizations, for the purposes of developing, constructing, rehabilitating, or managing housing for federal employees and members of the public on and off public lands.

The National Park Service's existing housing partnership authorities were established by the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, which also directed the NPS to develop an adequate supply of quality housing units for field employees. Park housing is essential to meeting the mission of national parks in locations where local rental market housing is unavailable, unaffordable, or beyond a reasonable commute. Generally, NPS employees are expected to live in private market housing unless they perform duties that require living in the park or affordable housing is not available near the park. Some parks are in isolated areas where no adjacent community with available housing exists. Other parks may have gateway communities with housing, but the housing that is available is increasingly unaffordable, especially for seasonal employees.

The NPS employee housing program is the largest within the Department with 5,513 housing units in 214 parks. Approximately 13,000 employees, partners, and volunteers stay in housing annually, from a few days to year-long residencies. All NPS employees living in park housing pay rent and utilities. The average housing unit is 61 years-old and 938 housing locations are considered historic.

The NPS is actively engaged in efforts to improve the employee housing program. In fiscal year 2019, the NPS launched a 5-year, \$95 million initiative to rehabilitate or remove and replace approximately 130 housing units in obsolete condition. The fiscal year 2023 NPS budget proposes \$7.9 million for new construction or rehabilitation of existing employee housing where local market data showed limited availability of affordable housing for purchase or rent. The budget request also includes \$2.0 million to support leasing of seasonal housing in local

communities. The NPS is also updating its Director's Order on Housing, has developed data-driven tools for park managers to evaluate housing usage, and has updated its housing prototype catalog in 2020. Prototypes reduce design costs, shorten timeframes, ensure more accessible and energy-efficient units, and lower operations and maintenance costs over the life of the units. Even with these efforts, there is an unmet need for employee housing.

While the authority for the NPS to enter into public-private partnerships for employee housing has been available since 1996, it has never been successfully utilized. Housing partnerships have been attempted at several parks, however, statutory stipulations, funding, government and non-government occupancy percentages, and rent collection limitations, among other issues, impeded success. Additionally, an NPS-commissioned study that explored partnering with the private sector to construct housing indicated that partnering was not feasible due to similar factors.

The expansion of existing authorities for housing provided by H.R. 7615 would afford greater flexibilities and opportunities for public-public and public-private partnerships. The NPS recognizes that meeting its housing needs will require multiple approaches. However, we want to approach any changes thoughtfully to ensure all factors and future impacts are considered.

More detail is needed in some provisions of H.R. 7615 to ensure potential partnerships meet the needs of our national parks and the Nation's taxpayers. We would like to work with the bill's sponsor and the Subcommittee on the bill's language, including on those provisions related to the preference in occupancy of housing units for federal employees, the ownership of buildings on public lands and the impacts on the agency of such ownership during and at the expiration of term, and the terms and conditions for housing agreements to best protect park resources and taxpayer investments in partnership projects. Additional provisions may be helpful to ensure that permanent private property may not be established in national park units under this legislation.

Chair Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

STATEMENT OF LENA MCDOWALL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 7693, A BILL TO AMEND TITLE 54, UNITED STATES CODE, TO REAUTHORIZE THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

JUNE 14, 2022

Chair Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 7693, a bill to amend title 54, United States Code, to reauthorize the National Park Foundation.

The Department supports the extension of the authorization of appropriations to the National Park Foundation (NPF) and looks forward to working with Congress to ensure continued support for the National Park Service (NPS) in alignment with priorities set forth in the President's Budget.

H.R. 7693 would increase the annual authorization of appropriations to the NPF, enacted in 2016, from \$5,000,000 to \$15,000,000 and extend the authority for this funding from fiscal year 2024 through fiscal year 2030.

The NPF was established by Congress on December 18, 1967 (Public Law 90-209) as the official, nonprofit philanthropic partner of the NPS. Over the years, Congress has passed several bills expanding the authorities of the NPF. In 1998, Congress passed legislation directing the NPF to promote local fundraising support and in 2016, Congress passed the National Park Service Centennial Act (Public Law 114-289), which included several provisions related to the NPF. Among them, Section 402 authorized appropriations of \$5,000,000 a year, from fiscal year 2017 through fiscal year 2023, to match private contributions to the NPF, with the proviso that the funds not be used for administrative expenses or invested to earn interest. Congress has appropriated the full \$5,000,000 each year since 2020. The Administration continues to strongly support the NPF, and requested the full \$5,000,000 in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 in the President's Budget.

NPS philanthropic partners, including the NPF, provide ways for individuals, corporations and private foundations make contributions to help conserve and preserve the natural, cultural and historical values of the national parks for the enjoyment of future generations.

Chair Neguse, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.