

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 618, A BILL TO REQUIRE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT CERTAIN SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDIES.

JULY 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's testimony regarding S. 618, a bill to require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct certain special resource studies.

S. 618 requires that the Secretary conduct special resource studies at five Pacific island locations: the Ka'u Coast on the island of Hawaii, Hawaii; the northern coast of Maui, Hawaii; the southeastern coast of Kauai, Hawaii; historic sites on Midway Atoll; and the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The legislation also requires an update to a prior special resource study on World War II sites in the Republic of Palau.

The Department supports conducting the new studies with the exception of the study of historic sites on Midway Atoll. We also support updating the existing special resource study on World War II sites in the Republic of Palau. We recommend one technical amendment to the Rota study authorized in this legislation.

Section (3)(a)(A) of S. 618 requires the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the Ka'u Coast on the big island of Hawaii. The National Park Service (NPS) conducted a reconnaissance survey of the Ka'u Coast in 2006. The survey indicated that significant cultural features, geological forms and coastal-marine natural resources of the study area are each represented to some extent within other national parks in the state of Hawaii. However, in no other location do these features coexist in such a long and uninterrupted coastal landscape with continuous scenic, interpretive, and recreational integrity. Compared to existing coastal managed areas within the state, it is uniquely wild, yet accessible.

Based upon the significance of the resources in the Ka'u study area, and the current integrity and intact condition of these resources, the reconnaissance survey resulted in a preliminary finding of national significance and suitability. The Department supports a special resource study of the Ka'u coast.

Section (3)(a)(B) of S. 618 requires the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the north coast of the island of Maui. The NPS has not conducted a reconnaissance study of that area, and therefore, has a limited understanding of the resources. Clarification of the extent of the area to be examined would be helpful prior to undertaking this study. In order to better understand the resources of the area and their significance to our nation, the Department supports a special resource study of Maui's north coast.

Section (3)(a)(C) of S. 618 requires the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the southeastern coast of the island of Kauai. In 2006, the NPS conducted a reconnaissance survey of

Mahaulepu and nearby areas of Kauai. Mahaulepu is a historic Hawaiian land division and watershed stretching from Kauai's Haupu mountain range to the island's southeast shore. This preliminary survey indicates that there are nationally significant resources within the study area that are suitable for inclusion within the framework of the National Park System (System), and that are not otherwise adequately preserved elsewhere in the nation. Furthermore, the study area's significant natural and cultural resources are of a collective size and configuration that they could be feasibly managed for resource protection and public enjoyment, and could be potentially administered at a reasonable cost if managed under a partnership arrangement.

The Department supports conducting a special resource study of the Mahaulepu area, including Kauai's southeast coast, to determine feasibility for its inclusion in the System, and that focuses on non-traditional management alternatives that include options for continued farm and ranch operations on private agricultural lands.

Section (3)(a)(D) of S. 618 requires the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the historic sites on Midway Atoll. The cultural resources on Midway Atoll were previously evaluated for National Historic Landmark (NHL) designation. A portion of the islands associated with the battle of Midway was designated as the World War II - Military Facilities Midway Island NHL. Other protections are also in place for Midway Atoll. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and like all Federal agencies is subject to the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act. FWS has prepared an historic preservation plan that addresses the preservation of the islands' cultural resources. In addition, as a result of Presidential action in July 2007, the Refuge was included as part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Considering these designations already covering Midway Atoll, the Department does not support conducting a special resource study of the area for inclusion in the System.

Finally, Section (3)(a)(E) of S. 618 requires the Secretary to conduct a special resource study of the island of Rota in the Northern Mariana Islands. The NPS completed a reconnaissance survey of certain natural and cultural resources on Rota in September 2005. The reconnaissance survey found that certain natural and cultural resources of the island of Rota are significant to island residents, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and the entire nation, and merit protection. The survey also made a preliminary finding that these resources are likely to be suitable and feasible for inclusion in the System.

Rota was the only major island in the Mariana Archipelago to be spared the destruction and large-scale land use changes brought about by World War II and its aftermath. The best remaining examples of this island chain's native limestone forest are found on Rota. Rota is also regarded as the cultural home of the indigenous Chamorro people and contains the most striking and well-preserved examples of their three thousand-year old culture. The Department supports a special resource study to provide a public process to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating prehistoric, historic, and limestone forest sites on Rota, CNMI, as a unit of the System.

We recommend a technical amendment to Section 3(a)(E) to clarify the study would cover prehistoric, historic, and limestone forest sites instead of the entire island of Rota. Similar language is found in H.R. 674, which is also the subject of this hearing.

Section 3(b) of S. 618 also requires an update of the special resource study conducted on World War II sites in the Republic of Palau. In 2003, the NPS conducted a special resource study of sites related to the Battle of Peleliu, the major battle fought in the Palau Islands during World War II. The study found that the Peleliu battlefield met significance and suitability criteria for inclusion within the System, but there were other obstacles that made such inclusion infeasible at the time. Additionally, this study did not include public scoping or other essential components of the National Environmental Policy Act.

It is our understanding, based in part on communication from the Republic of Palau to the Department in 2012, that the obstacles to feasibility may no longer be present. Additionally, there has been a substantial shift in support by the local people for the site becoming a unit of the System and an updated study would allow for a reexamination of the findings of the previous study. In light of these changes, the Department supports conducting a revised and more thorough special resource study of World War II sites in the Republic of Palau to include public scoping and an environmental assessment.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer questions that you or other members of the committee might have.