

STATEMENT OF

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS

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REGARDING

HR 4823 THE SEDONA-RED ROCK NATIONAL SCENIC AREA ACT OF 2010

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of Agriculture's view on H.R. 4823, the Sedona-Red Rock National Scenic Area Act of 2010. The Department supports establishing the Sedona-Red Rock National Scenic Area (NSA) and would offer some minor modifications to H.R. 4823.

The spectacular Red Rock landscape of the Coconino National Forest is now enjoyed by nearly 4 million visitors each year. This popularity is easy to explain. Red Rock country is a truly distinct landscape with astonishing red rock spires, mesas, and lush canyons presenting a landscape that has long been celebrated nationally and internationally.

Visitor use must be balanced with protection of the area's unusually diverse wildlife, waters, fragile soils and extraordinary archaeological resources. Coconino National Forest managers are working with the local community to ensure access and provide interpretation and basic services that must be in place to support visitors and to protect and conserve this fragile landscape. The designation of a National Scenic Area would strongly support the goals of visitor access, use and interpretation.

The “Coconino Forest Plan and Amendment 12”, released in 1998, ensures that the 160,000-acre Sedona-Red Rock area is managed in a way that has overwhelming support. This Plan includes goals and objectives related to recreation opportunities, land exchanges, commercial tours, off-road travel, wildlife habitat, and Wilderness. The proposed Scenic Area boundary was developed within the “Coconino Forest Plan and Amendment 12”.

Under provisions of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004, the Coconino National Forest has implemented a recreation fee area for the 160,000 acres of Red Rock National Forest landscape. The Red Rock Pass now generates about \$1 million annually. This helps maintain the facilities and sites that provide visitor access, services and information.

Within the proposed NSA there are 13 developed campgrounds/picnic areas, 3 visitor centers, 2 Research Natural Areas, portions of 3 wilderness areas, 2 developed archaeological sites, miles of popular hiking trails, and scenic roads including the Red Rock All American Road and the Oak Creek Canyon State Scenic Highway. Thirty commercial tour companies operate in the area providing visitor services and economic development for the area. The area supports the largest volunteer program in the National Forest System with over 50,000 volunteer hours annually from individuals and civic groups. Forest Service efforts are augmented by a trails partnership with the City of Sedona, federal scenic byway funds, state water protection funds, and revenue from the Red Rock Pass program. National Scenic Area designation offers a framework to broaden relationships, enhance resource protection, and recognize the importance of consistent development within the area.

Since January of 1999, much of the local community has favored a special designation. The Sedona City Council has passed a resolution in support of Congressional special designation of the National Forest lands in the Sedona area. There is grass-root support by many local organizations as well as petitions signed by more than 5,000 citizens.

We would like to work with the Committee on three amendments/modifications to the bill to address several concerns. Section 2(d) would require that the NSA be administered in accordance with the Act, the land and resource management plan of the Coconino National Forest, and laws and regulations generally applicable to National Forest System lands. We recommend that the provision be amended to expressly state that the land and natural resource management plan to which the language refers is not limited to that plan in effect at the time of enactment but, rather includes any subsequent amendments or revisions to the plan.

Subsection 2(e) would limit land exchanges that dispose of National Forest System lands within the NSA. A land exchange would be authorized only if it results in the acquisition of in-holdings within the NSA and if the land acquired is from a willing seller. For land exchanges that meet these conditions, the agency would have to complete an environmental analysis and provide opportunity to comment in accordance with the forest plan. We recommend that subsection (e)(2) be amended to clarify that the environmental analysis must be carried out in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), as opposed to the forest plan, and that the exchange must be consistent with the forest plan. We also recommend adding language providing that any land acquired within the boundaries of the NSA be administered in accordance with subsection 2(d) of this legislation. We are concerned that Section 2(f) (1) (A) would require that the receipts from the sale or exchange of land on the Coconino

National Forest be used for the acquisition of lands within the NSA, or for the operation, maintenance, or enhancement of the NSA. The Administration does not support an exemption to the law for this location. Consistent with the Sisk Act, (PL 90-171), we recommend amending the bill to authorize the use of the funds received from the sale of National Forest Systems land and deposited into the Special Fund for the subsequent purchase/acquisition of other National Forest System lands within the same state, namely Arizona.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.