

**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 5110, TO MODIFY THE BOUNDARY OF THE CASA GRANDE RUINS NATIONAL MONUMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**JUNE 10, 2010**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 5110, to modify the boundary of the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 5110 with an amendment to address the length of time to complete the boundary study proposed in the bill.

H.R. 5110 would expand the boundary of Casa Grande Ruins National Monument (Monument) in Arizona to include 417 acres of culturally connected land. The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) would be authorized to transfer or acquire from willing sellers private or State lands, or interests in lands, by donation, exchange, or purchase with donated or appropriated funds. The bill would also authorize the transfer of administrative jurisdiction of federal lands from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to the National Park Service (NPS), and from the NPS to the BIA, and the Secretary would be authorized to enter into an agreement with the State to provide for cooperative management of approximately 200 acres of State trust lands. Finally, the bill authorizes the Secretary to conduct a study to identify additional lands that could be included in future boundary adjustments to the Monument.

The Casa Grande Ruins were set aside by President Benjamin Harrison on June 22, 1892, as the nation's first archeological reservation and the site was redesignated as Casa Grande Ruins National Monument on August 3, 1918. The Monument is named for the Casa Grande (Great House), a four-story prehistoric structure constructed by the ancient people of the Hohokam culture, who inhabited the area from 500 to 1400 A.D. Protecting the finest architectural example of 13<sup>th</sup> Century Hohokam culture and archeology in the American Southwest, the monument is the only unit in the National Park System that preserves and interprets the Hohokam culture for public education and enjoyment.

In 2003, the NPS completed a Resource Protection Study which determined that some of the lands included in H.R. 5110 and proposed for acquisition by the park are suitable and feasible for inclusion into the Monument's boundary. These lands and associated archeological sites emerged as especially important because of their relationship to the Casa Grande Ruins and their potential for acquisition on a willing seller basis. At the time of the study, some of the private and state lands included in H.R. 5110 were considered but not identified for inclusion due to cost of acquisition, including lack of a willing seller. However, since 2003, the state and private landowners have indicated a willingness allow the lands to be included as contemplated in H.R. 5110.

Approximately 405 acres proposed for addition by H.R. 5110 are private or State lands that have significant archeological resources, including prehistoric canals, aboveground ruins, and a prehistoric

ball court. Additionally, the State lands would provide exceptional opportunities for visitor use and interpretation. The private landowners and the State are either willing sellers or would be willing to accept an equal value land exchange.

H.R. 5110 also would authorize the transfer of administrative jurisdiction for several parcels of federally owned land. Approximately seven acres that are currently administered by the BIA and approximately four acres that are currently administered by the BLM would be transferred to NPS. These federal lands also have significant archeological resources that are directly tied to the Casa Grande Ruins and the land transfers would occur at virtually no cost to the federal government. The costs associated with managing the acquired land would be approximately \$250,000. In addition, administrative jurisdiction for 3.5 acres currently administered by NPS along the Monument's southern boundary would be transferred by H.R. 5110 to BIA as a boundary modification that will correct an unintentional trespass and allow for the improvement of the San Carlos Irrigation Project.

The bill would also authorize the Secretary to enter into an agreement with the State to provide for cooperative management of approximately 200 acres of State trust lands until NPS could acquire these lands. We estimate that the costs to manage the State lands would be included in the \$250,000 needed to manage all lands. Acquisition costs could vary depending on the method of acquisition. We estimate the costs of acquisition for all lands in H.R. 5110 to be between \$7-10 million. Funds would be subject to the availability of appropriations and NPS priorities.

In addition, the Secretary would be authorized to conduct a boundary study to identify additional lands that could be included in future boundary adjustments to the Monument. This study would explore management alternatives that would best ensure public access, preservation, protection, and interpretation of the Casa Grande Ruins. We estimate that this study will cost approximately \$300,000. Due to current funding and staffing capacities, we suggest that section 5(c) of the bill be amended to direct the Secretary to report to Congress on the results and recommendations of the study no later than three years after the funds for the study are made available. This would make the bill consistent with similar study provisions found in other bills.

H.R. 5110 has strong local and national support. The City of Coolidge, the Town of Florence, and the Pinal County Board of Supervisors have passed resolutions to support a boundary expansion. The Archeological Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Parks Conservation Association, and the Gila River and Ak Chin Indian Communities have all expressed strong support for potential legislation.

The Casa Grande Ruins site helps individuals step back in time and experience the Monument in a setting similar to its prehistoric timeframe. H.R. 5110 would help to protect not only the unique archeological resources of the area, but also the landscape in which visitors experience the Monument.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.