

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES, AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 5152, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE KENNESAW MOUNTAIN NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JUNE 10, 2010

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 5152, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to adjust the boundary of the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park in the State of Georgia to include the Wallis House and Harriston Hill, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 5152. This legislation would authorize the acquisition of key resources, the Wallis house and Harriston Hill, that would enable the National Park Service to better interpret the Union strategy at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, the last major battle leading to the fall of Atlanta during the Civil War.

The Wallis house is one of the few original structures remaining from the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. The house is in its original location, half a mile west of the park on Burnt Hickory Road. Built by Josiah Wallis in 1853 and occupied by his family until the Civil War, this house was used first as a Confederate hospital and then as the headquarters for Union General O.O. Howard during the battle. General Howard is an important historical figure because of his successful leadership on the battlefield and his post-Civil War support of former slaves as head of the Freedmen's Bureau and founder of Howard University. General William T. Sherman was stationed at the Wallis house during the Battle of Kolb's Farm that took place at the south end of the park and immediately preceded the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.

Adjacent to the Wallis house is Harriston Hill, which offers a sweeping vista of the valley leading to the Confederate line atop Kennesaw Mountain. From this position, it is clear why General Howard picked this site for his headquarters and signaling position. The majority of the park's auto tour and trails interpret Confederate positions. This proposed addition, at less than 8 acres, would be a relatively small addition to the nearly 2,884-acre park, but it would add critical Union-related resources that could significantly enhance visitor understanding of the events that occurred at this site in 1864.

The Wallis house was in imminent danger of being demolished by a developer in 2002. The developer had purchased about 27 acres, including the Wallis house and adjoining Harriston Hill, with plans to construct 43 homes on the property. In cooperation with the National Park Service, the Cobb Land Trust, and the Georgia Civil War Commission, Cobb County agreed to purchase the 1.25-acre Wallis house property and the 5.5 acres encompassing Harriston Hill with the intent of donating the properties to Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. Cobb Land Trust agreed to purchase a 1.13 acre-parcel at the foot of Harriston Hill that is essential for providing visitor access to these properties and to donate this property to the NPS. Neither Cobb County nor Cobb Land Trust has the funds to restore, maintain, or manage the site, and no other entity has indicated the interest or ability to do so.

The Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park's 1983 General Management Plan does not address future potential acquisitions of land. However, the most recent planning document for the park – the 2005 Land Protection Plan – includes the Wallis house and Harriston Hill as a high priority for acquisition. In addition, the National Park Service's Southeast Region conducted a site assessment of the Wallis house in 2003 and confirmed its historical significance and concluded that it retained sufficient historical integrity to warrant its inclusion in the park.

Acquisition costs for these properties would be nominal, since they would be donated. Development costs are estimated at \$607,000, and annual operating costs, \$197,000. All funds would be subject to the availability of appropriations and NPS priorities.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or any members of the subcommittee may have.