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CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL PARK

HON. RICHARD H. STALLINGS

OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, November 20, 1989

Mr. STALLINGS. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing legislation which will designate Craters of the Moon National Monument in southeastern Idaho as our State's first national park. The bill also will create the Great Rift National Preserve. Currently, there are 50 parks and 14 preserves in the National Park System.

My proposal creates two new units of the National Park System. First, the bill designates 373,785 acres as Craters of the Moon National Park. Second, it designates 123,040 acres as the Great Rift National Preserve. The acreage figures in my bill are only estimates. The maps are being prepared and will be available for distribution shortly.

After many months of discussion and hard work, a legislative proposal has been put together. This bill represents a landmark day for the citizens of Idaho. The State of Idaho has been blessed with outstanding recreational areas, a rich outdoor heritage, and many scenic wonders. However, for all of the great public lands we enjoy, Idaho does not have a national park.

The public lands included in my proposal are currently administered by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. I believe most of the State lands have been exchanged. My proposal also represents an attempt to exclude most of the private land.

THE AREA IS NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT

This legislation will protect and preserve a unique landscape and ecosystem in Idaho which contains outstanding volcanic features and nationally significant resources. Designation of Craters of the Moon National Park and the Great Rift National Preserve would help safeguard one of the Nation's extraordinary places for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people and future generations.

To be eligible for favorable consideration as a unit of the National Park System, an area first must be nationally significant. Craters of the Moon and the Great Rift certainly meet this test. The two areas offer outstanding examples of a particular type of resource. Both the Craters and Great Rift possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our Nation's heritage.

The park and preserve further offer excellent opportunities for recreation, public enjoyment, and scientific study. And finally, it retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

GRAZING

My proposal provides that grazing is to continue in both the park and preserve subject to regulations imposed by the Secretary of the Interior to ensure proper rangeland management practices. The bill also provides for voluntary exchange of grazing privileges and for the maintenance of water improvements.

Since grazing is an integral part of the traditional land use and history of the area, I believe it should be allowed to continue to the same extent as it is today. This legislation recognizes the historical significance of livestock grazing in the development of the western United States.

Today, grazing is the major use of public land in the area. It is controlled by the allotment system. Livestock operations also represent one of the major economic activities in the area. According to the BLM, approximately 30,000 sheep are trailed through the sagebrush grassland between the Craters of the Moon and Wapi lava flows in the spring and fall.

OTHER MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS

Hunting will be permitted in the preserve in accordance with appropriate Federal and State laws and under regulations of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

The legislation also provides for acquisition of land within the boundaries of the park and preserve. It stipulates, however, that land may not be acquired without the consent of the owner. Boundaries have been drawn to exclude most private land.

SPECIAL THANKS TO CRATERS GROUP

This legislative proposal is the result of hard work and a dedicated effort from many Idahoans. I would like to express my personal appreciation to a special group called Craters of the Moon Development, Inc. This group played an instrumental role in putting together this proposal and building public support for the idea.

Without this group's strong support of and personal commitment to this concept, it would have been very difficult to draft a bill. This organization provided needed guidance and direction during our discussions, and they deserve special thanks.

THE PROPOSAL ENJOYS PUBLIC SUPPORT

Over the past 2 years, I have held several town meetings in Idaho to discuss the park proposal with concerned citizens and community leaders. The idea to designate a Craters of the Moon National Park has generated tremendous interest, enthusiasm, and support throughout Idaho. The proposal has a great

deal of merit, and the area is worthy of such designation. It is one of my top congressional priorities.

The Idaho State Legislature, Gov. Cecil Andrus, chamber of commerce organizations, community leaders, and many others all have endorsed the concept of a national park for this remarkable area.

UNDISCOVERED TREASURE

Virtually unknown until 1921, this extraordinary area was set aside as a national monument by President Calvin Coolidge on May 2, 1924. In 1970, 43,243 acres were set aside as the Craters of the Moon National Wilderness. Today, the national monument and wilderness embrace 53,545 acres.

Since that time, millions of people from the world over have visited this fascinating area. Some come for just a single, short visit; others return time after time, never ceasing to be amazed by the geologic story to be told there.

The Craters of the Moon was designated a national monument at a time when not much distinction was made between a national park and a national monument. It is not unusual for a national monument to be later designated a national park. Recent examples of changes include Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, and Arches. All three of these Utah parks were first established as national monuments.

The Craters of the Moon area is relatively close to such national travel designation points as Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, and the Sun Valley ski resort. Many visitors pass through Idaho on their way to these areas and make up an important segment of the State's tourism.

Yet, Craters of the Moon remains one of Idaho's undiscovered places. Idaho has no national park of its own to attract travelers to the area. Designation of the Craters of the Moon as a national park would bring well-deserved recognition to this Idaho landmark and provide the American people with a quality and unique outdoor experience.

Recreation and tourism are a vital, growing part of our State economy. A national park and preserve could attract thousands of visitors each year and help stimulate the economy of many Idaho communities.

CRATERS OF THE MOON

The Craters of the Moon National Monument comprises the most diverse and geologically recent part of a vast lava field that covers hundreds of square miles on the Snake River plain. The dark lava flows and smooth cones dominate the landscape, relieved only by patches of grasslands and stands of limber pine.

The monument contains examples of most of the volcanic features found in the Great Rift area, and is noted for the variety of cinder crags, jagged and smooth lava flows, cones and domes, and lava tubes. The searing heat of the lava fields can be escaped in the lava caves, some containing permanent ice. The area is truly a study in contrasts.

BIG SOUTHERN BUTTE/CRYSTAL ICE CAVES

In addition to the current monument area, two special landmarks would be included as part of the national park. The Big Southern Butte and Crystal Ice Caves are interesting features of regional and local significance.

The 5,800-acre Big Southern Butte, a natural landmark, is the most prominent feature in the eastern Snake River Plain, rising over

2,000 feet above the surrounding plain. It is a rhyolitic dome about 300,000 years old and possesses an almost undisturbed area of native vegetation and offers spectacular views of the area.

Big Southern Butte is geologically intriguing because it represents a different type of volcanism and is much older than the nearby basaltic flows of the Great Rift system. The butte is significant as a natural and cultural resource serving as a landmark for pioneers following the Oregon Trail.

Crystal Ice Cave, southeast of the monument, is 150 feet below the surface within the Great Rift in the Kings Bowl lava field. The area also is nationally significant because it is a fissure cave rather than a tube cave.

GREAT RIFT NATIONAL PRESERVE

My legislation designates 123,040 acres as the Great Rift National Preserve. A national preserve is one of several titles given to a variety of units in the national park system. This category is established primarily for the protection of certain resources. Activities such as hunting, fishing, and grazing may be permitted if they do not jeopardize the natural values of the area.

The heart of the preserve is the Great Rift system. At 65 miles, this is the longest volcanic rift zone in the continental United States and the deepest known open volcanic rift zone on Earth. This portion of the Great Rift system is truly of national significance.

Major portions of the Great Rift system have been recommended by BLM for wilderness. Under my proposal, these wilderness study areas located within the park and preserve will continue to be managed by the National Park Service so as to maintain their potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

IDAHO'S STATEHOOD CENTENNIAL

Idaho's statehood centennial celebration will take place in 1990. I can think of no better way to honor the State's first 100 years than through creation of its first national park and protection of our rich natural heritage.

Many Idahoans live in our great State because of its special way of life. Designation of the Craters of the Moon National Park and Great Rift National Preserve would help safeguard one of the nation's extraordinary places for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, with the introduction of this bill, the debate and discussion over this proposal will begin. I recognize that there will be many comments regarding this legislation, and I certainly welcome the views of all Idahoans. Furthermore, a successful effort may require change and compromise.

I remain convinced, however, that this measure is a good proposal with solid citizen support. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this bill and I look forward to its early consideration by the House.