

**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN E. WHITESELL, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS,  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 854, A BILL  
TO AUTHORIZE THE PEACE CORPS COMMEMORATIVE FOUNDATION  
TO ESTABLISH A COMMEMORATIVE WORK IN THE DISTRICT OF  
COLUMBIA AND ITS ENVIRONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**OCTOBER 4, 2011**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 854, a bill to authorize the Peace Corps Commemorative Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and environs, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 854, which would authorize a memorial commemorating the formation of the Peace Corps and the ideals of world peace and friendship upon which the Peace Corps was founded. This proposal provides that no federal funds be used for establishing the memorial.

Although this proposal does not seek any exceptions to the Commemorative Works Act (CWA), it should be noted that this proposal to honor the ideals upon which the Peace Corps was founded does not fit the typical mold for commemoration. The concept of establishing a memorial to “ideals” is not explicitly described in the CWA. When testifying on H.R. 4195, a similar bill introduced in the 111th Congress, we identified our concerns that a bill such as this could set an unwelcome precedent for any and all future concepts identified only as “ideals,” resulting in an untenable influx of memorial proposals. However, there is precedent for such commemoration: specifically, the National Peace Garden, which Congress authorized in 1987, and the Memorial to Japanese American Patriotism in World War II, which was authorized in 1992.

Our support for this proposal is based upon our understanding that this memorial will recognize the establishment of the Peace Corps and the significance of the ideals it exemplifies, not the organization’s members. The CWA precludes a memorial to members of the Peace Corps as the commemoration of groups may not be authorized until after the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the last surviving member of a group.

The Department notes that H.R. 854 reflects suggestions made to strengthen the language in this proposal as recommended in our testimony on H.R. 4195 in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, and by the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission at its meeting on April 21, 2010. The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission reviewed H.R. 854 on June 23, 2011, and expressed support for the concept of a memorial to the ideals of the Peace Corps, finding that the provisions of H.R. 854 connects the ideals to the exceptional aspects of American character that are exhibited in the ideals of the Peace Corps. We

share the Commission's support for the idea of commemorating volunteerism and international cooperation as worthy ideals and practice of the Peace Corps.

Finally, H.R. 854 provides that unspent funds raised for the construction of the memorial be provided to the National Park Foundation for deposit in an interest-bearing account as stated in 40 U.S.C. Section 8906(b)(3), as recommended in our testimony on H.R. on H.R. 4195 in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. We appreciate the inclusion of this provision, and would like to work with the committee on an additional technical amendment to the language.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions from you and members of the committee