

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Bishop: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on my bill, H.R. 6233, which would re-establish reasonable public access to Cape Hatteras Nation Seashore. The court's imposition of the Consent Decree – without input from the public – has unnecessarily restricted public access and significantly damaged the people and economy of Dare County.

The tragedy is that the toll in human suffering is totally unnecessary to protect the wildlife. Prior to the Consent Decree, the Park Service went through a public process and instituted the Interim Species Management Strategy. The Strategy was backed by a Park Service scientific study which found that it would not negatively impact wildlife in the Seashore. The access restrictions in that Strategy were significant, but reasonable.

By nullifying the Consent Decree and restoring the Interim Strategy, all H.R. 6233 would do is restore commonsense to management of the Seashore until the Park Service produces a Final Rule on beach access.

Mr. Chairman, this bill has broad support, and I'd like to ask unanimous consent that the following letters of support from elected officials, civic organizations and local newspapers be included in the record.

I would like to draw special attention to the letter from Marc Basnight, President Pro Tempore of the North Carolina State Senate. In his statement, Senator Basnight says the following, which I'd urge the Committee to keep in mind as it considers this issue:

“Back in the late 1930's, when the federal government was creating the recreational Seashore, Outer Banks residents and visitors were deeply concerned that government involvement would interfere with the public's enjoyment of and access to the beaches of Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands. It was an incredible relief that the Park Service and the Department of the Interior were willing to work so closely and cooperatively with the local community to address these concerns at that time – and ever since.

“And it is both ironic and disheartening that the concerns and fears expressed half a century ago now have come true because of intervention from the judicial branch. The federal Consent Decree issued on April 30, 2008, is effectively breaking the Park Service's 1952 promise that ‘...there will always be access to the beach for all people, whether they are local residents or visitors from the outside.’ This legislation will restore that promise and put the management of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore back in the hands of the Park Service, which has worked so diligently and judiciously over the years to protect sensitive species while preserving beach access. A balance between protecting our nation's treasures and ensuring access and enjoyment of unique places like Cape Hatteras National Seashore is, after all, the mission of the National Park Service.”