

Statement by the Honorable Jeff Fortenberry

House Subcommittee on National Parks,

Forests and Public Lands

June 14, 2007

Hearing on H.R. 761

Chairman Grijalva and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 761, which would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to convey a Lewis and Clark visitor center in my district from the National Park Service to a well-respected non-profit organization. As the sponsor of this bill, I encourage your prompt and favorable consideration. It is important to note that the House passed this legislation by voice vote last year.

The bill is very straightforward and hopefully will be favorably considered. It would simply convey certain federal land near Nebraska City associated with the Missouri River Basin Lewis and Clark Interpretive Trail and Visitor Center to the related non-profit group, the Missouri River Basin Lewis and Clark Interpretive Trail and Visitor Center Foundation, Inc. The bill also authorizes \$150,000 annually for ten years to operate the facility. This legislation would actually save the federal government about \$50,000 a year since the National Park Service currently provides about \$200,000 for the center.

It is important to note that I worked with the National Park Service in drafting the language for the bill and this proposed conveyance fits with the long-range plans for the

center. I also believe that it would be the most cost-effective option for the Park Service.

H.R. 761 is cosponsored by both of my colleagues from Nebraska, Representatives Lee Terry and Adrian Smith. A companion bill in the Senate, S. 471, has the support of both Nebraska senators, Chuck Hagel and Ben Nelson.

The Interpretive Trail and Visitor Center is an outstanding resource and impressive facility. The non-profit organization associated with it includes a committed group of individuals who have spent many years making the center a reality and ensuring that it provides a meaningful and educational experience for those who visit.

This legislative action is needed to fulfill the original plan for operating the visitor center.

The Missouri River Basin Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center is truly unique. It is the only visitor center or museum in the U.S. to focus on the flora and fauna and scientific discoveries recorded by Lewis and Clark.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition was a watershed mark in American history. Two centuries later, the courageous story of these two outstanding explorers and the Corps of Discovery continues to inspire Americans of all ages. This legislation will help ensure that future

generations will have the opportunity to learn about this remarkable journey.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Nancy Hoch from Nebraska City, who has played such a key role in the construction of the visitor center and its ongoing operation. Her vision and leadership have been instrumental in making the center such an outstanding success.

Again, I would like to express my strong support for H.R. 761. Thank you for holding this hearing and considering my comments.