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Testimony in support of H. R. 2197

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Ohio Historical Society to affirm the cultural significance of the Spruce Hill Works and to support H.R. 2197, which will add this site to Hopewell Culture National Historical Park.

The Ohio Historical Society is a private, nonprofit organization incorporated in 1885 "...to promote a knowledge of archaeology and history, especially in Ohio." The society exists to interpret, preserve, collect, and make available evidence of the past, and to provide leadership on furthering knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the prehistory and history of Ohio and of the broader cultural and natural environments of which Ohio is a part. By statute, the State contracts with the Society to provide a variety of history-related services, including managing state archives, administering the state's historic preservation office, and operating a network of historic sites and museums. It is one of the largest state historical organizations in the United States with a membership of over 9,000.

The Ohio Historical Society currently owns a portion of the Seip Earthworks, located in the valley below Spruce Hill, and jointly manages this property with Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. The Spruce Hill Works, if acquired by the National Park Service, would be a separate and distinct component of the Park. The Ohio Historical Society would not be directly involved in its operation and management.

I am here today in the capacity of an interested party concerned about the preservation of an important landmark of Native American heritage and also as a recognized authority on the culture that built these wonders of the ancient world.

Spruce Hill is located in southern Ross County, Ohio, approximately 45 miles south of Columbus. Ross County has been described as "the most interesting archaeological area of its size in ...the United States" and it defines the center, or "heartland," of the prehistoric Hopewell culture.

"Hopewell culture" is an archaeological term of art that encompasses groups living in southern Ohio between about 100 BC and AD 400 that shared certain styles of artifacts and architecture. The people of the Hopewell culture were hunters, gatherers, fishers, and farmers who lived in small villages mostly along the major rivers that flowed southward into the Ohio River. They built monumental architecture of earth and stone, which served as their centers of religious and social life. They also created dazzling works of art crafted from exotic raw materials, such as

copper, mica, and obsidian, obtained from the ends of their world. The influence of their beliefs, as reflected in art and architecture, spread widely across eastern North America from the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains and from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Spruce Hill Works is a gigantic stone-walled enclosure that extends for more than two-and-a-quarter miles around the perimeter of a dramatic flat-topped plateau, or mesa, four hundred feet above the Paint Creek valley. According to the earliest estimates, the stone walls of the Spruce Hill Works originally may have been as high as eight feet and they enclose 140 acres. The site overlooks a remarkable viewscape that, 2,000-years-ago, included a series of monumental geometric earthworks, most of which, unfortunately, have been destroyed by decades of plowing. The enormous Seip Mound is one of the few visible remnants of this ceremonial landscape.

Our certain knowledge of the Spruce Hill Works is somewhat limited, because there have been only a very few archaeological explorations of the site in recent decades.

In 1934, Emerson Greenman, an archaeologist with the Ohio Historical Society, conducted excavations at the site and concluded that some sort of log structure had been a part of the wall. When it burned down, the fire was so hot it turned some of the nearby stones to "slag."

In 1995 and '96, National Park Service archaeologist Dr. Brett Ruby conducted test excavations at Spruce Hill. He uncovered a flint knife, or "bladelet," characteristic of the Hopewell culture, buried deeply within the stone wall. Finding such a diagnostic artifact in this context definitely establishes the age and cultural affiliation of the Spruce Hill Works.

The little that we have learned from the few archaeological investigations at Spruce Hill can be fleshed out by discoveries made at other Hopewell culture sites. For example, Dr. Robert Riordan, of Wright State University, has spent several years working at the Pollock Works, a much smaller hilltop enclosure in Greene County, Ohio, that is similar in some respects to the Spruce Hill Works. Dr. Riordan has determined that the Pollock Works first served as a ceremonial enclosure, which later was transformed into a fortification by the addition of a wooden stockade. At some point, the timber stockade was burned, pushed over, and buried beneath a layer of earth that seems to have returned the site to its original ritual purpose. Future investigations at Spruce Hill, if the site is preserved, ultimately may reveal a similarly rich history of construction and use.

In 1988, Spruce Hill would have been included in the sites that were added to Mound City to become Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, but the regional director concluded that there was insufficient evidence, at that time, to show that the Spruce Hill Works had been built by the Hopewell culture. The work of Dr. Ruby, in the following decade, definitively established a Hopewell affiliation, so that objection to the inclusion of the site has been eliminated.

The Spruce Hill Works represent a chapter of the Hopewellian saga that is not, but should be, part of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. Its uniqueness as a stone-walled hilltop enclosure complements the geometric earthworks and mounds already encompassed by the Park and, when combined with its exceptional degree of preservation, it would become one of the park's crown jewels.

The Spruce Hill Works is the most significant Hopewell enclosure not already protected by an agency or a private group dedicated to heritage preservation. It is significant because of what we have learned about it over the past two-hundred years, but perhaps even more crucial, it is important because of what secrets it still may hold.

For these reasons, the Ohio Historical Society offers its unequivocal support for H. R. 2197.

This concludes my formal statement. And, at this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee might have for me.