

Testimony of Congressman Zack Space
Regarding HR 2197, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park Boundary
Adjustment Act
Submitted to the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
of the Committee on Natural Resources
June 14, 2007

Good morning, Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop. I want to extend my thanks to you both for holding this hearing today and giving me the opportunity to offer testimony on H.R. 2197, legislation I introduced to expand the boundaries of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park.

H.R. 2197 contains two boundary adjustments for the Park. The most significant adjustment and the primary reason for the introduction of this legislation is the inclusion of an area of land known as Spruce Hill. The other adjustment modifies existing boundaries to reflect changes in surrounding boundaries in the Seip Earthworks site.

It is my pleasure to announce that a consortium of local and national conservation groups were able to reach an agreement to purchase this land. This group will maintain and preserve this land until such time as the federal government is able to purchase it.

It is my sincere hope that Congress can do its part to honor and support this noble effort by paving the way for an official expansion of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park. It would be a shame to turn our backs on such a benevolent and selfless effort from our own citizens.

Spruce Hill is home to remains of the Hopewell Culture, which thrived in the Northeastern United States between 200 BC and 500 AD. This culture was known for the creation of large enclosures characterized by earthen walls. Many of them still stand today in the Ohio River Valley and offer a unique glimpse into the workings of a strong and significant culture that held influence across the continental United States.

The federal government first took steps to protect the remains of the Hopewell Culture in 1923 when President Warren Harding created the "Mound City Group National Monument" by proclamation. In 1992, Congress expanded the boundaries of the Park and granted the land its present name. This legislation also ordered the Secretary of the Interior to investigate the desirability of including Spruce Hill in the boundaries of the Park. At the time, the scientific and archeological community lacked consensus as to the origins of the remains found on Spruce Hill. Congress was interested in including Spruce Hill in the Park if it was relevant to the Hopewell Culture, but it was clear that more research was necessary to justify an expansion.

The subsequent report from the National Park Service, released in 1998, cited clear evidence that Spruce Hill is an "outstanding example of a particular class of Hopewellian monumental architecture." Citing cultural, scientific, and natural factors, the report recommended that Congress move to include Spruce Hill in the National Park.

This report is what brings us here today, Mr. Chairman. Congress has been provided with the information to justify an expansion of the park. It is simply time to move forward.

Spruce Hill offers a virtual gold mine for archeologists. Despite centuries of interest, the Spruce Hill earthworks remain largely unexplored by American archeologists. It is critical that the remains of the Hopewell Culture be protected from potential intrusion so that our nation's archeologists can have the opportunity to find what answers Spruce Hill can yield into the mystery of the Hopewell Culture.

This potential for archeological advances has significant cultural implications for our nation. The Hopewell Culture is a significant chapter in the history of this country. All too often, American history textbooks begin with the original English settlements on the East Coast of this nation, ignoring the civilization that thrived here for centuries prior to that point. We have an obligation to support efforts to explore the traditions of these early people and share this knowledge with coming generations so the Hopewell Culture is not lost forever.

It is this cultural relevance that makes this expansion a national issue rather than a local one. The Hopewell Culture constitutes a significant chapter in the history of this country, not just Ohio. The location of its most significant remnants does not constitute a rationale to place the burden for protection of this area to the state or local level. Just as we protect the birthplaces of famous Americans or the sites of historic battles that shaped our history, so too do we have the obligation to offer federal protection to the remains of the Hopewell Culture.

While the archeological and cultural ramifications are the largest impetus for this legislation, I would be negligent if I did not mention the ecological benefits. Spruce Hill is home to a diverse array of ecosystems which, to this point, remain largely intact, and is home to breeding populations for two rare bird species. Protecting this land would ensure the preservation of this area's natural beauty and scientific value to biologists.

I was disappointed to learn that this land already suffers from abuse at the hands of ignorant parties. Reports of looting, vandalism, and other transgressions have caused localized destruction of some areas of the remains. It would truly be a travesty if this land were to be destroyed before we ever had the opportunity to explore its offerings.

I understand that Members of this Subcommittee and the House have concerns about continuing to expand the amount of land under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, given the current maintenance backlog. However, it would be a missed opportunity to pass on an opportunity to protect an area so significant to our nation's heritage. If ever there was a time when a land deserved federal protection for its cultural relevance, it is now.

Once again, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. I am hopeful that I might share good news from Washington, DC with my constituents working hard to protect Spruce Hill.