AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Calendar No. 403

109TH CONGRESS, 2d Session | SENATE | REPORT 109–241

STUDYING CASTLE NUGENT FARMS FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

APRIL 20, 2006.—Ordered to be printed

Filed, under authority of the order of the Senate of April 7, 2006

Mr. DOMENICI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 318]

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to which was referred the Act (H.R. 318) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms located on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the Act do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE MEASURE

The purpose of H.R. 318 is to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms, located on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, as a unit of the National Park System.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

Castle Nugent Farms is located on the arid southeast coast of St. Croix. At 1,400-acres, the Farm is believed to be the largest remaining parcel of privately-held land on the island.

Historians believe that the buildings and historic objects at Castle Nugent tell much of the history of the island and of the Caribbean as a whole. The "great house" on the property is believed to have been built during the 1730s, when the farm was a thriving cotton plantation. Remains of slave quarters are thought to tell the story of forced labor. Remains of a sugar mill might tell the story

of 18th and 19th century sugar, molasses, and rum production and export. Potsherds at the site might be pre-Columbian in origin. The study proposed by this bill would determine the significance of these cultural resources.

Castle Nugent Farms continues today as a working farm and guest house. Since the 1950s, the farm has been known for the Senepol breed of cattle. The Senepol breed was developed on St. Croix and is adapted to the dry climate and poor forage that characterize the island. The "great house" is rented out to visitors interested in staying at the ranch.

Caroline Gaspari owns Castle Nugent Farms and is supportive of this study.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

H.R. 318 was introduced by Delegate Christensen on January 25, 2005. The bill passed the House of Representatives on November 15, 2005 on a voice vote. The Subcommittee on National Parks held a hearing on H.R. 318 on February 16, 2006. At its business meeting on March 8, 2006, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources ordered H.R. 318 favorably reported.

A similar bill, H.R. 2663, was introduced by Ms. Christensen in the 108th Congress.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in open business session on March 8, 2006, by unanimous voice vote of a quorum present, recommends that the Senate pass H.R. 318, as described herein.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1(a) contains congressional findings.

Subsection (b) directs the Secretary of the Interior to study the feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms as a unit of the National Park System.

Subsection (c) directs the Secretary to conduct the study in accordance with Public Law 91–383. This law defines criteria for additions to the National Park System and directs the Secretary to complete the study no later than 3 years after funds are made available.

COST AND BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

The following estimate of costs of this measure has been provided by the Congressional Budget Office.

H.R. 318—An act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms located on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes

H.R. 318 would direct the Department of the Interior to study the feasibility and suitability of designating the approximately 1,400-acre site of Castle Nugent Farms on St. Croix as a unit of the National Park System. The department would be required to report its findings and recommendations within three years of receiving funds for the study.

Assuming the availability of appropriated funds, CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 318 would cost the federal government about $300,000 over the next three years to complete the required study and report. Enacting the legislation would not affect direct spending or revenues.

H.R. 318 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Matthew Pickford. The estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

REGULATORY IMPACT EVALUATION

In compliance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee makes the following evaluation of the regulatory impact which would be incurred in carrying out H.R. 318. The bill is not a regulatory measure in the sense of imposing Government-established standards or significant economic responsibilities on private individuals and businesses.

No personal information would be collected in administering the program. Therefore, there would be no impact on personal privacy.

Little, if any, additional paperwork would result from the enactment of H.R. 318, as ordered reported.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

The views of the Administration on H.R. 318 were included in testimony received by the Committee at a hearing on the bill on February 16, 2006. This testimony follows:

STATEMENT OF JOHN PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 318, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to study the suitability and feasibility of designating Castle Nugent Farms on St. Croix, Virgin Islands, as a unit of the National Park System.

The Department does not oppose H.R. 318, if amended as described in this testimony. This study would provide an opportunity to determine the appropriate way to preserve and interpret resources associated with the plantation period in the Virgin Islands. The National Park Service (NPS) currently manages three units on the island of St. Croix—Christiansted National Historic Site, Buck Island Reef National Monument, and Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. In a time of tight budgets and a refocusing on the core mission of the National Park Service (NPS), we believe that funding should be directed first toward completing the 25 previously authorized studies.

In light of the President's commitment to devote more resources to maintaining existing units of the National Park System, we have made an effort to curtail taking on

new responsibilities. For this reason, we believe any study should evaluate all alternatives for preservation and interpretation, including what role, if any, might best be played by the NPS or other partners. We recommend that H.R. 318 be amended to specify that the study explore all options. Our proposed amendment is attached to this testimony.

The NPS is in various stages of progress on 25 studies previously authorized by Congress, 17 of which are being funded through the special resource study budget. We transmitted three studies in FY 2005, and there are seven studies in the transmittal process. Our highest priority is to complete these pending studies, though we expect to start newly authorized studies as soon as funds are made available. We estimate that the costs of completing this study will be approximately $250,000 to $350,000.

H.R. 318 would direct the Secretary to carry out a study of the Castle Nugent Farms, which consists of approximately 1,400-acres located on the arid southeastern shore of St. Croix. The property is believed to be the largest parcel of privately held land in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The farm's rolling terrain consists of a mixture of dry forest, native vegetation, and rangeland that slopes down from an elevation of 750 feet to the sea, fronting on a coastline that includes cobble beaches. One of the largest and healthiest fringing coral reef systems in the Virgin Islands extends only a few hundred feet offshore. The property also provides nesting areas for sea turtles, blackcrowned night herons, and a host of other migrating and resident birds.

Castle Nugent Farms has a long and diverse history of farming dating back to the 1730s when the property was first established as a cotton and sugar plantation after the Danish West Indies Company purchased St. Croix from France. For many years, sugar cane, indigo, and cotton were the main crops.

After Emancipation in 1848, the plantation began breeding N'Dama cattle, which had earlier been brought to St. Croix from Africa. This breed was a prominent part of the farm's operations until the 1960s when attention shifted towards raising an N'Dama cross breed of cattle known as Senepol. Introduced to Castle Nugent Farms in 1957 the Senepol breed has been able to flourish due to its tolerance to tropical, dry climates and its ability to survive in near-desert conditions, thus making the cattle an ideal match for St. Croix' climate. Today, the farm is well-known for its production of high quality Senepol beef, which is both consumed locally and exported to world markets.

Castle Nugent Farms contains a cluster of buildings from the colonial plantation era including a great house that dates from the plantation's establishment, a converted chapel, the remains of a sugar mill, slave quarters, and a converted cotton storage shed. The buildings are situated in close proximity to each other on a hill with views towards the Caribbean Sea. The current owner lives on-site

and also operates the buildings and grounds as a bed and breakfast. According to the owner, other cultural resources on the grounds include recent discoveries of pottery shards and other artifacts left over from either slave shanties or Arawak Indian campsites.

If authorized by Congress, and if funds are made available, a study would be able to determine if the resources present at Castle Nugent Farms are nationally significant, if the site would be a suitable and feasible addition to the National Park System, whether direct NPS management or alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector is appropriate for the site, and what management alternative would be most effective and efficient in protecting the resources and allowing for public enjoyment of the site.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS—H.R. 318, CASTLE NUGENT FARMS STUDY

Insert a new subsection (c) as follows and redesignate the existing subsection (c) as subsection (d).

"(c) MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES.—In completing the study authorized in subsection (b), the Secretary shall examine whether the National Park Service, the territorial government, or other public or private groups will be the most appropriate entity to provide for the management and preservation of Castle Nugent Farms."

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee notes that no changes in existing law are made by the Act H.R. 318, as ordered reported.

○