

Atomic Heritage Foundation
Testimony for Manhattan Project National Historical Park
Senate Bill (S. 3300)

The Atomic Heritage Foundation thanks Chairman Jeff Bingaman and co-sponsors Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Tom Udall (D-NM) and Patty Murray (D-WA) for joining in introducing S. 3300 to create a Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The Atomic Heritage Foundation has long advocated the creation of a Manhattan Project National Historical Park and is extremely grateful for your invaluable leadership and support.

The proposed park would preserve Manhattan Project properties at the three major sites at Los Alamos, Oak Ridge and Hanford. This is the first recognition of the Manhattan Project, the top-secret effort to make an atomic bomb in World War II, in the national park system. As Secretary Salazar said in support of the new park, “The development of the atomic bomb in multiple locations across the United States is an important story and one of the most transformative events in our nation's history.”

National Park Service is America’s Storyteller

The National Park Service will tell the Manhattan Project story and give voice to the creators and eyewitnesses to the project that irreversibly changed the history of the world. With 130,000 people working in secret locations, the Manhattan Project was a great work of human collaboration.

A culturally diverse group, the workforce included recent immigrants who fled anti-Semitism in Europe as well as numerous Hispanics, Native Americans, and African-Americans. Young women who had just graduated from high school were recruited to operate the controls of uranium enrichment facilities while young men who joined the Army's Special Engineer Detachment found themselves working on explosive lenses and detonation devices. The contributions of each of these diverse groups and the communities surrounding the sites will be part of the interpretation.

While some anti-nuclear groups fear that the new park will glorify the bomb, the National Park Service’s presentation will be balanced, recognizing diverse perspectives on the atomic bomb project and its legacy. Many other controversial chapters of our history such as the Civil War and Japanese-American internment camps are interpreted in an unbiased and professional manner by the National Park Service. The Manhattan Project history and its legacy should be no different. As America’s storyteller, the National Park Service has honed its skills for nearly a century.

Model for Second Century Park

On the eve of the National Park Service's centennial in 2016, the Second Century Commission recommended creating new parks that will strengthen education and reflect the diversity of the American experience. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park could be a model for a Second Century Park.

The park could improve the American public's understanding of nuclear science and the history of nuclear weapons development. Given the significance of nuclear weapons issues in world affairs today, the public should have a better grasp of these issues.

The park could also help revive American youth's interest in science and engineering by celebrating innovators who harnessed atomic energy for the first time. Tracing this history to the present, students will learn about the new fields that emerged from the Manhattan Project, including nuclear energy and medicine, high-speed scientific computing and outer space exploration.

The Manhattan Project demonstrated that scientific discoveries and technological advances can become key drivers of economic growth. On July 15, 2011, MIT President Susan Hockfield called for reinvigorating "America's innovation system," a "direct descendant" from the Manhattan Project, as a means to stimulate the economy today.

Economic Impact of the New Park

One of the greatest economic benefits of the new park will be to increase heritage tourism to the former Manhattan Project sites. For much of the past seventy years, the economies of the local communities have been dominated by the Department of Energy and its contractors. The new park will help diversify the local and regional economies.

Studies in the travel industry have shown that people want to see something authentic. With an increasing number of stores and restaurants now part of national chains, travelers are hard pressed to find something unique. The fascinating story of the "Secret Cities" and resources such as the B Reactor at Hanford and the V Site at Los Alamos will be a great draw for visitors.

On average, for every dollar that is invested in a national park, there are four dollars generated in the local economy. Many parks have ratios that are far greater, such as Acadia National Park in Maine. Considering the ten thousand people from all 50 states and 39 countries who have signed up to tour the B Reactor alone, we are confident that the new Manhattan Project National Historical Park will exceed expectations and be an engine for the economies of the three sites and their regions.

Legislative Recommendations

We have watched the draft legislation emerge over the past several months and are very pleased that the Senate and House bills are now in close harmony. There are a few differences that will no doubt be resolved in conference. We would like to highlight a few issues as the Committee considers amendments to the current bill.

1. Allow Inclusion of Nationally Significant Sites.

We suggest that the Committee consider providing the Secretary of Interior authority to add sites that are nationally significant and suitable for inclusion in the Historic Park. Currently, only those properties listed in Section 5(b) and those properties that are under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Energy can be added under Section 5(d). The authority to add Manhattan Project resources that are not under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Energy, such as Jackson Square

in Oak Ridge, would be very valuable as the park is created and takes shape over the next several years.

2. Secretary of Energy Responsibility for Maintenance.

The House version adds Section 6(c)(4) that the Secretary of Energy “shall retain authority and legal obligations for historic preservation and general maintenance, including to ensure safe access, in connection with the Department’s Manhattan Project resources.” This reinforces the agreement between the Departments of Interior and Energy that led to their joint recommendation of the park in July 2011. Having this provision in the legislation would be helpful.

3. Purchase from Willing Sellers.

Section 8(d) in the House bill does not provide authority for the Secretary of the Interior to “purchase from willing sellers,” but only to acquire properties through donation or exchange. We believe that the Senate bill is preferable so that owners will be able to be compensated for their land or properties where donation and exchange are not reasonable alternatives.

4. Acquisition for Visitor and Administrative Facilities

The Senate bill’s Section 8(d)(2) provides that “The Secretary may acquire land or interests in land in the vicinity of the Historical Park for visitor and administrative facilities.” The House bill in Section 8(e)(1)(B) provides authority for the Secretary to accept donations and enter into cooperative agreements with governments and others for visitor services and administrative facilities. We prefer the Senate approach that provides the authority for acquiring the land or interests in land. This opens up more possibilities for the future park’s visitor and administrative facilities.

Conclusion

For ten years, the Atomic Heritage Foundation has worked closely with colleagues from the Manhattan Project sites, Manhattan Project veterans, historians and scholars, Federal, State and local government officials and others to preserve and interpret the Manhattan Project. We would be pleased to assist you and your staff in whatever way we can to see the legislation creating a park enacted by the 112th Congress.

Thank you and all of the members of the Committee and its staff for your dedication and hard work to make the Manhattan Project National Historical Park a reality.