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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

October 17, 2014

Superintendent Pat Kenney
Cape Lookout National Seashore
131 Charles Street
Harkers Island, NC 28531

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to convey my strong opposition to the preferred alternative – Alternative C – selected by the National Park Service (NPS) in its Draft Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Cape Lookout National Seashore. Alternative C would institute unprecedented restrictions on public access to the seashore. These restrictions would impose significant economic hardship on the local economy and are totally unnecessary to protect species of concern. I urge the Park Service to reject this flawed approach and instead adopt the existing 2007 ORV plan (Alternative A).

By any objective measure, there is no justification for imposing the suite of additional public access restrictions included in Alternative C. In short, it is a “solution” in search of a problem that does not exist. Visitation to the seashore has already declined dramatically in recent years. As a result, the communities that support Cape Lookout are hurting economically. For example, in 2010 534,981 people visited the seashore, generating an economic impact of \$37.3 million and supporting 598 jobs. By 2013, visitation had fallen to 416,496 visitors, with an economic impact of only \$17.6 million and supporting only 204 jobs. Adding more restrictions on motorized access will undoubtedly exacerbate these trends – fewer people will visit the seashore, the local economy will suffer and more jobs will be lost.

This conclusion was supported by the Park Service’s own socioeconomic analysis, as flawed as it was without a visitor survey. That analysis found that a 30 percent reduction in visitation would result in economic losses to the local community of between \$1,464,000 to \$3,000,000. Many local business owners believe Alternative C would actually reduce visitors by much more than 30 percent, perhaps by as much as 50 to 75 percent, with the resulting economic losses becoming far more pronounced as well.

It is not hard to understand why business owners might think that. The proposed permits, fees and other access restrictions in Alternative C all but invite visitors to vacation elsewhere. For example, at a time when visitation is already falling and the American economy continues to struggle, it is astonishing to me that the Park Service would propose an \$80 fee for a new short term ORV permit. Americans’ hard-earned tax dollars already pay for the operation of the

seashore; they shouldn't be charged an additional fee to access it. That is especially true when considering that without the additional permit fee, the cost just to transport a vehicle and two passengers to the seashore is already at least \$112.

Regardless of the cost, there is simply no need for a permit. The number of ORVs on the seashore is already limited by the capacity of the three ferry services which serve the seashore.

There is also no need for a restriction on nighttime driving, nor is there any data to support it. There is little nighttime driving at Cape Lookout, although it is occasionally necessary for visitors to move to a new fishing or camping location, or to use the bath houses or facilities. Area closures to protect species of concern have been, and would continue to be, in effect day and night, and have served their purpose. In fact, **as I understand it, there have been no recorded deaths or injuries of sea turtles, shorebirds or other protected species at the Seashore as a result of ORVs, day or night.**

I am also concerned with the expansion of seasonal pedestrian-only areas under Alternative C. **There appears to be no scientific justification for such an action, and it is likely to result in crowding at the remaining ORV-accessible areas.** This, in turn, may be a disincentive for people to return to the seashore for future visits and may further damage the local economy.

For these reasons and more, I strongly urge the Park Service to reject Alternative C. Instead, it should continue the interim management strategy and adopt Alternative A. This alternative complies with all relevant laws and regulations, protects species of concern, provides reasonable access to visitors and preserves the local economy.

Furthermore, Alternative A is working. Over the past several years the number of sea turtle nests at the seashore have steadily increased, and the number of piping plovers, red knots, American oystercatchers and least terns have all improved as well.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress