United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

FEB 0 4 2016

The Honorable Bruce Poliquin
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Poliquin:

Thank you for your letter dated November 20, 2015, to President Obama regarding the continued interest in creating a new national park unit or national monument in the Katahdin Region of the State of Maine. The President asked that I respond to you on his behalf.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) appreciates the time and attention that you have given to considering the various proposals and listening to opinions from all perspectives. It is helpful to hear the contrasting views on the proposals. In particular, DOI appreciates your sharing the strong statewide support for a new park, as demonstrated by the recent poll showing 60 percent of Mainers support such an idea.

The DOI is also sensitive to the economic needs of the region, as well as the region's traditional land and forest practices. These are important factors to weigh while considering the potential land donation by Elliotsville Plantation Inc. We also appreciate you sharing local concerns and ideas to be considered in any designation and you relaying the important questions that many people in the local communities have asked about any impact Federal stewardship would have on the local economy and traditional uses. All this information will be valuable in any future decisions.

I traveled to the area in 2011 with then-Secretary Ken Salazar to attend a public meeting in Millinocket, where we heard many of these concerns firsthand. The people who call the region home are justifiably proud of their forests, community, and traditions. We also saw the results of the economic downturn and the loss of the mill. I returned again in 2014 to tour the lands under discussion that lie to the east of Baxter State Park. As a park professional with 40 years of experience, it was important for me to see if these lands had the potential to draw new visitors to the area, generate local economic benefits, and accommodate a range of recreational uses. I was pleasantly surprised by the beauty of the area and its recreational potential, and I was intrigued by the rich history of Native Americans, early conservationists, and the timber industry.

If any new unit of the National Park System (System) were to be established through the donation of these lands, it would mean a change to the area. I can completely understand the concerns the community has about these changes. National parks attract new visitors, often in great numbers. Last year, the National Park Service (NPS) recorded 305 million visitors to the System, which generated over $16 billion into the economies of communities within 60 miles of

parks. International tourism is also growing as a result of the marketing efforts of BrandUSA, and the new IMAX film featuring the national parks is premiering this month around the world.

The NPS experience has been that such influxes of new visitors result in the launching new businesses to start, such as food and beverage, lodging, guides and outfitters, and camping and outdoor supply. Often local entertainment and other attractions appear in neighboring areas. Land values often increase as well. These changes can have both positive and negative effects on local residents. New job opportunities often require new job skills. I understand that the local branch campus of the University College can assist in training local residents to meet these new business opportunities.

Having worked in parks adjacent to small rural communities in Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska, I can attest that NPS and its team of professionals who work in those parks are contributing members of those communities.

The DOI looks forward to the opportunity to better understand these and other issues as you continue to solicit public input and lead this open dialogue about how best to protect important resources within your communities, while recognizing the economic needs in the region. We also appreciate you sharing your thoughts on what you believe would be critically important considerations ranging from public access to private property rights, for your communities if the Federal Government received a land donation for a park or similar use.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. I look forward to your continued engagement.

A similar letter was sent to the cosigners of your letter.

Sincerely,

Jonathan B. Jarvis

Jonathan B. Jarvis
Director