



February 15, 2024

Honorable Senator Joe Manchin III

Chairman

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Senator Angus King, Jr.

Chairman

Subcommittee on National Parks
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Senator John Barrasso

Ranking Member

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Senator Steve Daines

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on National Parks
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Honorable Chairmen and Ranking

Chair, Government and Military Affairs, Greater Macon Chamber Board of Directors



Honorable Chairmen and Ranking Members,

February 15, 2024

The Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, the most significant, organized business community in Macon-Bibb County, Georgia, collaborates with other economic agencies to represent the vibrant community and economic interests of our Central Georgia region. On behalf of our 750 invested businesses and governing board, we are writing this letter to express our strong support for the swift passage of legislation to designate the Ocmulgee Mounds as a National Park and Preserve. This initiative, culminating from nearly a century of advocacy, presents a historic opportunity to boost economic development, preserve our nation's heritage, and protect our natural environment for future generations. We are committed to realizing the vision of this Park and Preserve and urge your support to make it a reality.

We encourage the swift passage of legislation to create the Ocmulgee Mounds National Park and Preserve in the 118th Congress, to express gratitude for the federal efforts to meet this moment after almost a century of civic advocacy, and to acknowledge that we are committed to continuing to fulfill the vision of this Park and Preserve.

The passage of this legislation will create instant economic impact to Central Georgia, stretching from its urban gateway in Macon-Bibb County, Georgia, through neighboring, rural Twiggs County, to the Houston County border of Robins Air Force Base, the largest single-site industrial complex in Georgia.

The economic impact of the park and preserve cannot be overstated. A study conducted by the National Parks Conservation Association estimates that the proposed National Park and Preserve will have a tremendous economic impact along the corridor, which includes these three Georgia counties. The study estimates that over the course of 15 years the region's municipalities can expect a collective increase in tax revenue annually of \$29.8 Million because of the projected \$206.7 Million of total economic activity generated from the Park and Preserve.



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The impact and resulting expenditures will spur entrepreneurship, create jobs and transform underserved areas of rural economies.

This legislation is diverse and inclusive. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation has been in consultation with the National Historical Park for years due to the significance of the ancestral sites inside the proposed boundary. The Nation remains landowners in the corridor, and we honor their long-standing commitment to the stewardship of the corridor. As common, inclusive practices of co-management at other units around the country, this Park and Preserve legislation would create a path toward co-management to be agreed upon by all land managers.

The Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, as well as other local economic development agencies have met and will continue meet with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's economic development team, including the Nation's Secretary of Commerce and director of supplier diversity initiatives, to generate business investment, bridge workforce gaps and collaborate on strategic economic initiatives catalyzed by National Park status.

Robins Air Force Base (RAFB) will benefit from this legislation. This Park and Preserve will potentially offer a quality of life increase for the communities housed on Robins Air Force Base, as well as a workforce of almost 24,000 civilians, contractors and military members who live in the region. It will also allow partners to put land along the Ocmulgee flood plain near the base into conservation, helping stave off encroachment into flight pattern areas. Future development in the areas east of the Base is important to protect against incompatible land use. Conserving undeveloped lands within the Ocmulgee River Corridor will help the Base continue to fulfill our national security missions, which is vital to the economic vitality of the entire Central Georgia region.



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Land abutting Robins AFB is vacant and mostly undeveloped. Legislation creating the National Park and Preserve will potentially allow RAFB and park partners to leverage the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program to protect the environs inside their REPI boundary and inside the expanded Preserve boundary. It is for this reason that the Sustainability Plan for RAFB formally recommends the creation of the National Park and Preserve.

The legislation to create the Park and Preserve unit is carefully tailored to the recommendations of the National Park Service's Special Resource Study and has broad local support across varying fields, interests, and political ideologies. It will serve as a robust form of long term and stable economic development for the Central Georgia region, enhance climate resilience for local ecosystems by preserving biodiversity hotspots, which are most effective in larger contiguous landscapes, offer an avenue for co-management between the tribal, state and federal land managers, and constitute one of the largest potential expansions of public hunting and fishing access in Georgia.

To continue the robust effort of creating full connectivity of the corridor, we fully support the passage of legislation during the 118th Congress to establish and create the first and only National Park and Preserve in Georgia. By protecting this landscape, working with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation as co-managers of their ancestral homeland, preserving the diverse wildlife habitat, protecting and increasing access to public hunting, fishing, and wildlife habitat, and increasing name recognition and thereby national and international prominence of this treasure, this legislation will finally allow Central Georgia, local and national conservationist, the hunting and angling, and Muscogee (Creek) communities to preserve the corridor for generations to come.



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The Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce supports the passage of federal legislation in the 118th Congress. Every year that goes by without action, we risk future development, lost cultural sites, and missed opportunities for significant economic development Central Georgia. As a region and partnership, we have been preparing for this moment and are ready to rise to the challenge and great privilege of being home to one of America's greatest treasures, our country's next National Park and Preserve.

In conclusion, the designation of the Ocmulgee Mounds as a National Park and Preserve represents a critical step toward sustainable economic development, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and the strengthening of our community's quality of life. We stand ready to support this transformative project and respectfully call on your leadership to ensure its passage during the 118th Congress. Together, we can safeguard this treasure for future generations while unlocking the potential for significant economic and environmental benefits.

Thank you for considering our perspective on this vital issue. We look forward to your support and to welcoming a new chapter of conservation and prosperity in Central Georgia.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jessica Walden'.

Jessica Walden

President & CEO, Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Chrissy Miner'.

Chrissy Miner

**Chair, Government and Military Affairs, Greater Macon Chamber
Board of Directors**