111TH CONGRESS 1ST SESSION

H. R. 2729

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 22, 2009

Received; read twice and referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

AN ACT

To authorize the designation of National Environmental Research Parks by the Secretary of Energy, and for other purposes.

1    Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2    tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) The National Environmental Research Parks are unique outdoor laboratories that provide opportunities for environmental studies on protected lands around Department of Energy facilities.

(2) In 1972, the Atomic Energy Commission established its first official environmental research park at the Savannah River site in South Carolina.

(3) In 1976, the Department of Energy defined the mission for the research parks in accordance with the recommendations of the multiagency review team for environmental research activities at the Savannah River site.

(4) The mission of the research parks is to—

(A) conduct research and education activities to assess and document environmental effects associated with energy and weapons use;

(B) explore methods for eliminating or minimizing adverse effects of energy development and nuclear materials on the environment;

(C) train people in ecological and environmental sciences; and

(D) educate the public.

(5) The National Environmental Research Parks are located within six major ecological regions
of the United States, covering more than half of the
Nation.

(6) The parks are especially valuable research
sites because within their borders they provide se-
cure settings for scientists to conduct long-term re-
search on a broad range of subjects including—

(A) plant succession;

(B) biomass production;

(C) population ecology;

(D) radioecology;

(E) ecological restoration; and

(F) thermal effects on freshwater eco-
systems.

(7) The parks maintain several long-term data
sets that are available nowhere else in the United
States or in the world on amphibian populations,
bird populations, and soil moisture and plant water
stress. These data sets are uniquely valuable for the
detection of long-term shifts in climate.

(8) The maintenance of these parks by the De-
partment of Energy is consistent with statutory obli-
gations to promote sound environmental stewardship
of Federal lands and to safeguard sites containing
cultural and archeological resources.
(9) Public education and outreach activities carried out on these sites provide unique learning opportunities, promote a stronger connection between these Federal facilities and the surrounding communities, and enhance public confidence that the Department of Energy is fulfilling its environmental stewardship responsibilities.

SEC. 2. NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH PARKS.

(a) DESIGNATION.—The Secretary of Energy shall designate the six National Environmental Research Parks located on Department of Energy sites as protected outdoor research reserves for the purposes of conducting long-term environmental research on the impacts of human activities on the natural environment. The six National Environmental Research Parks shall include—

   (1) the Savannah River National Environmental Research Park;
   (2) the Idaho National Environmental Research Park;
   (3) the Los Alamos National Environmental Research Park;
   (4) the Fermi Lab National Environmental Research Park;
   (5) the Oak Ridge National Environmental Research Park; and
(6) the Nevada National Environmental Research Park.

(b) PURPOSES.—Each site shall support—

(1) environmental research and monitoring activities to characterize and monitor present and future site conditions, and serve as control areas for comparison with environmental impacts of Department of Energy land management, energy technology development, remediation, and other site activities outside the National Environmental Research Park areas. Areas of research and monitoring on the sites may include—

(A) ecology of the site and the region;

(B) population biology and ecology;

(C) radioecology;

(D) effects of climate variability and change on ecosystems;

(E) ecosystem science;

(F) pollution fate and transport research;

(G) surface and groundwater modeling;

and

(H) environmental impacts of development and use of energy generation technologies, including renewable energy technologies; and
(2) public education and outreach activities consistent with subsection (d).

(c) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT.—To ensure the independence of the research, monitoring, public education, and outreach activities conducted on each site, the Secretary shall enter into a cooperative agreement with a university, community college, or consortium of institutions of higher education with expertise in ecology and environmental science of the region in which the National Environmental Research Park is located.

(d) ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH.—Each site shall support an outreach program to inform the public of the diverse ecological activities conducted at the park and to educate students at various levels in environmental science. Program activities may include—

(1) on-site and in-classroom education programs for elementary and secondary students;

(2) presentations to school, civic, and professional groups;

(3) exhibits at local and regional events;

(4) development of educational projects and materials for students at all levels;

(5) undergraduate and community college internships and graduate research opportunities; and
(6) regularly scheduled public tours.

(e) COORDINATION.—The Secretary of Energy shall designate a National Environmental Research Park Coordinator within the Department of Energy Office of Science. The Coordinator shall—

(1) coordinate research activities among the National Environmental Research Parks as appropriate;

(2) ensure that information on best practices for research, education, and outreach activities is shared among the sites; and

(3) serve as liaison to other Federal agencies to facilitate collaborative work at the Parks.

(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Energy, acting through the Director of the Office of Science, for carrying out this section $30,000,000, including $5,000,000 for each National Environmental Research Park, for each of the fiscal years 2010 through 2014.

SEC. 3. SAVINGS.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to limit the activities that the Federal Government may carry out or authorize on a site on which a National Environmental Research Park is located.
SEC. 4. SUMMER INSTITUTES PROGRAM.

The National Environmental Research Parks may be utilized to provide educational opportunities through the Summer Institutes program authorized in section 3185 of the Department of Energy Science Education Enhancement Act (42 U.S.C. 7381n).


Attest: LORRAINE C. MILLER,

Clerk.