

Durbin asks President Obama to make Cahokia Mounds a unit of the National Park

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today sent a letter to President Obama asking him to declare the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site as a National Monument. At the request of Durbin in 2014, the National Park Service began undertaking a survey of the suitability of Cahokia Mounds in the St. Louis Metro region to a unit of the National Park Service.

“I support protecting and sharing this important natural, archeological, and cultural resource that runs through Collinsville, Illinois, and represents the indigenous peoples and landscapes that once made up one of America’s first cities in the Western Hemisphere,” wrote Durbin.

“There was overwhelming support to create a collaborative partnership between the state of Illinois and the National Park Service and to seek an elevated national designation that recognizes this cultural asset as an international treasure to be protected, enhanced and interpreted as well as to further enhance linkages between Cahokia Mounds and thematically—connected non-contiguous mound sites and link the cultural sites within the region. Given this great potential and the tremendous public support demonstrated, I support declaring the Cahokia Mounds as a unit of the National Park Service.”

Text of today’s letter is below

April 28, 2016

The Honorable Barack H. Obama

President

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

I encourage you to use your authority under the Antiquities Act to designate a portion of the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site a unit of the National Park System. I support protecting and sharing this important natural, archeological, and cultural resource that runs through Collinsville, Illinois, and represents the indigenous peoples and landscapes that once made up one of America’s first cities in the Western Hemisphere.

At over 4,000 acres, Cahokia Mounds was the central hub of the large Mississippian Culture that ruled and traded over half of North America, more than 1.25 million square miles. This area was the first known organized urbanization and government

north of Mexico that also used mass production agriculture and commerce. Some of the mounds built between AD 900-1400 still stand as earthen monuments and remnants of Mississippian Culture - North America's greatest prehistoric ancient culture and ancestors to many of today's great Indian nations.

The current National Historic Landmark designation affords some limited protection around Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site proper, and the Illinois Burial Act has provided some protection. But, many other mound sites—privately and publicly owned—are threatened as new roads are built and development further encroaches on the remaining cultural resources of the region.

Heartlands Conservancy, in collaboration with Illinois and Missouri state agencies, the federal government, and local communities with the guidance of Native American Tribes and Nations, has assembled a multidisciplinary project team and advisory committee to compile data for “The Mounds America’s First Cities: A Feasibility Study.” This is an intensive work plan to gather input for elevating the Mississippian Mounds in the St. Louis Metro region to a unit of the National Park Service.

This premier example of the Mississippian Culture, Cahokia Mounds, has been recognized as a National Historic Landmark, an Illinois State Historic Site, and a World Heritage Site by the United Nations (UNESCO). There was overwhelming support to create a collaborative partnership between the state of Illinois and the National Park Service and to seek an elevated national designation that recognizes this cultural asset as an international treasure to be protected, enhanced and interpreted as well as to further enhance linkages between Cahokia Mounds and thematically—connected non-contiguous mound sites and link the cultural sites within the region.

Given this great potential and the tremendous public support demonstrated, I support declaring the Cahokia Mounds as a unit of the National Park Service.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin

United States Senator