IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 4, 2009

Mr. LUJAN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Science and Technology

A BILL

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

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives 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 seven 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 secure settings for scientists to conduct long-term research 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 ecosystems.

(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 Department of Energy is consistent with statutory obligations 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 seven National Environmental Research Parks located on Department of Energy sites, including--

(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 Hanford National Environmental Research Park;

(6) the Oak Ridge National Environmental Research Park; and
(7) the Nevada National Environmental Research Park,

as permanent protected outdoor research reserves for the purposes of conducting long-term environmental research on the impacts of human activities on the natural environment.

(b) Purposes- Each site shall support environmental research and monitoring activities as well as public outreach and education 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 shall include--

(1) ecology of the site and the region;
(2) population biology and ecology;
(3) radioecology;
(4) ecosystem science;
(5) pollution fate and transport research;
(6) surface and groundwater modeling; and
(7) undergraduate and graduate student training.

(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 or consortium of universities 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 shall 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 internship and graduate research opportunities; and
(6) regularly scheduled public tours.

(e) Authorization of Appropriations- There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Energy for carrying out this section $35,000,000, including $5,000,000 for each National Environmental Research Park, for each of the fiscal years 2010 through 2014.