

**STATEMENT OF DR. EDWARD B. KNIPLING
ADMINISTRATOR, AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND FORESTS**

**ON S. 1832 – THE FORT RENO MINERAL LEASING ACT
A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO LEASE OIL AND GAS
RESOURCES
UNDERLYING FORT RENO, OKLAHOMA**

MARCH 29, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Edward B. Knipling, Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). We are the primary intramural science research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). ARS operates a network of over 100 research laboratories across the nation on all aspects of agricultural science.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to present the Department's views on S. 1832, the Fort Reno Mineral Leasing Act. We appreciate the intent of S. 1832 to continue the preservation of facilities within the Historic Fort Reno District. However, the Administration has serious concerns with the establishment of a mandatory fund from mineral revenues that would normally be deposited in the U.S. Treasury; therefore we recommend that section of the bill be removed. We look forward to working with the bill sponsor, Senator Inhofe, and the Committee to address our concerns as the process moves forward.

S. 1832 deals with the Grazinglands Research Laboratory administered by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at El Reno, Oklahoma. The Grazinglands Research Laboratory is at the forefront of providing new technologies and management strategies to increase the profitability of forage and livestock production while, at the same time, promoting sustainability and productivity of the nation's grazing land resources. ARS administered land comprises over 6,700 acres and more than 80 buildings, part of which are historic structures within the Fort Reno Historic District consisting of the former U.S. Cavalry installation dating from the late 1800s. USDA acquired the real property by transfer from the U.S. War Department in 1948, and has managed the land for grazing lands research ever since. The bill defines the entire area collectively as the Fort Reno Management Area.

The bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to lease oil and gas resources under the land, with some of the receipts from leasing being deposited into a Fort Reno Management Fund to be used for restoration and management of historic facilities as well as visitor and interpretive services. The bill would provide that the land comprising the Fort Reno Management Area would not be declared surplus or excess federal property without an Act of Congress. Finally, the bill would ratify and strengthen our ongoing cooperative research activities with the University of Oklahoma, and authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to lease land for research and related activities.

Concerning oil and gas leasing, all 6,700 acres of the Fort Reno Management Area is within the corporate boundaries of the town of El Reno, Oklahoma, and therefore cannot be leased under existing authorities without Congressional authorization. Under the authority of the Mineral

Leasing Act, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for leasing oil and gas resources on all onshore Federal lands, including those lands managed by other Federal agencies. BLM is responsible for review, approval, and issuance of permits and licenses to explore, develop, and produce oil and gas resources on Federal lands. BLM is also responsible for inspection and enforcement of onshore oil and gas wells and other development operations to ensure that lessees and operators comply with the lease requirements and BLM's regulations (43 CFR 3000 and 3100).

Sec. 3(b) of S.1832 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to provide for mineral leasing under the Mineral Leasing Act in the Fort Reno Management Area, subject to terms and conditions set by the Secretary of Agriculture to preserve and protect historic properties and ongoing and prospective research activities. Lands located within incorporated cities and towns are excluded from oil and gas leasing under the Mineral Leasing Act, and to overcome that exclusion, Sec. 3(b)(1) of S.1832 explicitly authorizes oil and gas leasing on the Federal land located within the incorporated city of El Reno, Oklahoma. Sec. 3(b)(2) of the bill provides that no further administrative or environmental analyses shall be required for the leasing and development of minerals at the Fort Reno Management Area.

Section 3 of the bill will require Congressional authorization to declare the Federal land at the Fort Reno Management Area surplus or excess or otherwise conveyed. This provision makes permanent the existing requirements of law already contained in section 10804 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, which expire at the end of 2007. Notwithstanding

any provision of law, ARS has no plans or intentions to curtail its research program at Fort Reno, or to declare any lands excess or surplus.

Sections 5 and 6 provide ARS with authorities to continue its very productive and mutually beneficial research relationship with the University of Oklahoma. The University has currently constructed facilities in the Fort Reno Management Area under easement arrangements with ARS, and there are plans for future cooperative ventures. We believe this cooperation can be furthered by granting ARS leasing authority.

In summary, ARS is justly proud of the contributions made by the Grazinglands Research Laboratory to improving American agriculture. We appreciate the interest in the Laboratory and the Fort Reno Historic District within the Fort Reno Management Area shown by S. 1832. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions.