

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT).

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3217 allows the Forest Service to convey without consideration 10.2 acres of the Apalachicola National Forest to the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida.

This parcel of land was purchased by the Mt. Trial church in the 1930s; but for a variety of reasons, the deed was never recorded. Unfortunately, the original landowner subsequently resold the land to the National Forest Service in the 1950s. While the Forest Service now technically owns the land, it is more than happy to return this cemetery to the church. This is a fair and equitable resolution to this unfortunate situation.

H.R. 3217 was marked up by the Committee on Agriculture on October 29, 2003. It was approved by the committee on a voice vote without amendment. The bill enjoys the support of the local community and the administration. I urge all Members to support this legislation and return this property to its rightful owner.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3217, legislation to convey several small parcels of National Forest System land in the Apalachicola National Forest in order to resolve boundary discrepancies involving the U.S. Forest Service and the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church of Wakulla County, Florida.

Briefly, H.R. 3217 would allow the Mt. Trial church to expand a cemetery that it maintains next to its church building. This legislation would correct boundary discrepancies that resulted from the church and the Forest Service claiming ownership to the same 10-acre tract of land.

By way of background, the Mt. Trial Primitive Baptist Church is a historically African American church that purchased 10 acres of land in the 1930s in anticipation of expanding its cemetery. The church, however, never recorded the deed for the land purchased at the local county courthouse.

In 1938, the U.S. Forest Service purchased the same 10 acres of land as part of a larger tract that was incorporated into the Apalachicola National Forest. In that instance, the Forest Service did record its deed; and while there is no dispute about the validity of the church's purchase, the Department of Agriculture's legal counsel has ruled that because the Federal Government did file its deed with the county, it is the rightful owner of the property. I would also note that two graves are already located on the Federal Government property and the church's existing cemetery is full.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3217 will solve the boundary discrepancies by giving the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to transfer the property to the Mt.

Trial Primitive Baptist Church. I encourage my colleagues to support this measure. This measure has been brought to our attention by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BOYD).

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This is a fair and equitable way to deal with this problem. All parties agree to it, and hopefully the Members of the House will join us in support of this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3217.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 3217, the bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

PROVIDING FOR DESIGNATION OF A DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE DISASTER LIAISON

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3157) to provide for the designation of a Department of Agriculture disaster liaison to assist State and local employees of the Department in coordination with other disaster agencies in response to a federally declared disaster area as a result of a disaster, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3157

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. LIAISON FOR DISASTER EMERGENCIES.

(a) DEPLOYMENT OF DISASTER LIAISON.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall deploy disaster liaisons to State and local Department of Agriculture Service Centers in a federally declared disaster area whenever Federal Emergency Management Agency Personnel are deployed in that area, to coordinate Department programs with the appropriate disaster agencies designated under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.).

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—Disaster liaisons shall be selected from among Department employees who have experience providing emergency disaster relief in federally declared disaster areas.

(c) DUTIES.—A disaster liaison shall—

(1) serve as a liaison to State and Federal Emergency Services;

(2) be deployed to a federally declared disaster area to coordinate Department inter-agency programs in assistance to agricultural producers in the declared disaster area;

(3) facilitate the claims and applications of agricultural producers who are victims of the disaster that are forwarded to the Department by the appropriate State Department of Agriculture agency director; and

(4) coordinate with the Director of the State office of the appropriate Department agency to assist with the application for and distribution of economic assistance.

(d) DURATION OF DEPLOYMENT.—The deployment of a disaster liaison under subsection (a) may not exceed 30 days.

(e) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term "federally declared disaster area" means—

(1) an area covered by a Presidential declaration of major disaster, including a disaster caused by a wildfire, issued under section 301 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5170); or

(2) determined to be a disaster area, including a disaster caused by a wildfire, by the Secretary under subpart A of part 1945 of title 7, Code of Federal Regulations.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT).

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3157, a bill to designate and deploy U.S. Department of Agriculture liaison teams to areas of the country declared disaster areas, was approved by the Committee on Agriculture on October 29 of this year.

The bill seeks to ensure prompt Federal assistance to agricultural producers in rural areas affected by natural disasters that have been declared by the President or the Secretary of Agriculture. The teams will coordinate the activities of USDA employees assisting agricultural producers within the disaster area. The teams will facilitate the making of claims and applications for economic assistance of affected producers and others as they deal with the agencies designated under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

During the business meeting to consider H.R. 3157, the committee considered and adopted as a substitute amendment four changes to the legislation as originally introduced by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT). These changes include directing the Secretary of Agriculture to use USDA Food and Agriculture Council as a point of contact for the liaison team, requiring the Secretary to make the deployment only when FEMA has been sent to the disaster area, providing that the team will conduct and conclude its business within 30 days of the deployment, and, finally, adding wildfire as a specific disaster under a secretarial disaster declaration.

The bill before the House this afternoon makes a minor amendment to the