

[H.R. 373, the Good Samaritan Search and Recovery Act, as amended](#)

FLOOR SITUATION

On Tuesday, April 28, 2015, the House will consider [H.R. 373](#), *the Good Samaritan Search and Recovery Act, as amended*, under a suspension of the rules. The bill was introduced on January 14, 2015 by Rep. Joseph Heck (R-NV) and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Agriculture. The Committee on Natural Resources ordered the bill reported by unanimous consent on March 25, 2015.¹

SUMMARY

H.R. 373 would require the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to expedite access to Federal lands for search and recovery missions conducted by certain individuals or organizations, defined as “Good Samaritan search and recovery missions”.² The bill requires that permits for accessing public lands be issued to groups within 48 hours of application, if certain requirements are met, and allows groups to obtain requisite permits without an insurance policy if the organizations agree to release the Federal government from all liability related to search and recovery activities. The bill also instructs the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture to develop search and recovery focused partnerships to better coordinate and expedite search and recovery operations on Federal lands. H.R. 373 requires the Secretaries to submit a joint report to Congress within 180 days of enactment describing plans to develop partnerships described under the bill and progress made toward expediting Good Samaritan search and recovery operations.

BACKGROUND

This legislation was introduced following the discovery of the bodies of Keith Goldberg and Air Force Staff Sergeant Antonio Tucker in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, which is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, by Good Samaritan search and recovery organizations. In both cases, volunteer search and recovery organizations were unable to conduct search and recovery operations in a timely manner due to bureaucratic restrictions and lengthy approval processes for requisite permits.

¹ See [House Report 114-75](#) at 2.

² The phrase “Good Samaritan search-and-recovery mission” means a search conducted by an organization or individual, acting in a not-for-profit capacity, for one or more missing individuals believed to be deceased at the time that the search is initiated.

On January 31, 2012, Las Vegas taxi driver Keith Goldberg went missing. Investigators believed that he was killed and his body disposed of in the desert in the vicinity of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Local law enforcement officers suspended their search in April after arrests were made, even though a body had not been recovered. Mr. Goldberg's family asked the Red Rock Search and Rescue, a nonprofit search and rescue team that conducts missing person searches, to search for his body in that area. Red Rock Search and Rescue is a trained group of volunteers with extensive experience, which conducts missing person searches at no cost to Federal taxpayers. The organization encountered bureaucratic road blocks, including requirements to obtain certain permits and liability insurance, which significantly delayed its search. It took over a year after Mr. Goldberg's disappearance before Red Rock Search and Rescue was able to obtain an insurance policy and the requisite permits to begin the search. Mr. Goldberg's body was found less than two hours after the search began.³

On June 23, 2012, Air Force Staff Sergeant Antonio Tucker was presumed drowned in Lake Mead. As the National Park Service searched for the body, the Earth Resource Group, which is a company specializing in underwater survey and recovery work, reached out to the National Park Service offering to help in the search.⁴ Ultimately, it took the company ten months after they initially reached out the National Park Service to obtain the requisite permits to search the lake. Soon after they began their search, they recovered Mr. Tucker's body.⁵

H.R. 373 would expedite access to public lands for Good Samaritan search and recovery organizations so that they may conduct searches for missing persons and help bring closure to the families of missing persons.

A similar version of this bill, H.R. 2166, passed the House [394 to 0](#) on January 27, 2014. The Senate did not act on the House-passed bill during the 113th Congress.

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) enacting H.R. 373 would have no significant effect on the federal budget. Enacting H.R. 373 would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [John Huston](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 6-5539.

³ Id at 2.

⁴ <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/fire-rescue/divers-searching-missing-airman-find-body-lake-mead>

⁵ See [House Report 114-75](#) at 2.