

May 14, 2019

Dear Madame Chair Harland, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify last month on behalf of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas and in support of the National Heritage Area Act of 2019 (H.R. 1049). The following are responses to the questions submitted from Representative Bishop regarding H.R. 1049:

- A. Determinations on the suitability, feasibility and worthiness of individual National Heritage Area proposals is the purview of Congress and the National Park Service. As the Executive Director of Niagara Falls National Heritage Area and Chair of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas my field of expertise is the day-to-day management of a National Heritage Area and the body that helps to coordinate public outreach and engagement for all member National Heritage Areas. As such, I rely on the guidance of cultural resource professionals within the National Park Service to determine the viability of proposed National Heritage Areas and on the wisdom of Congress to determine political viability of any proposed National Heritage Area legislation.

However, the Alliance does agree that program legislation will create a more formalized approach to criteria for National Heritage Areas and we support that requirement. The Alliance also strongly believes that currently designated National Heritage Areas have met criteria “associated with nationally significant themes and events.”

While the limited nature of my response to the question prevents me from reviewing every one of the 55 National Heritage Areas, I would like to point out a few.

- *Motor Cities National Heritage Area* in Michigan recounts the story of how the automobile industry revolutionized transportation across the United States as well as the phenomenal productivity of the assembly line--making the United States the global industrial leader.
- *Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area* expands the story of Abraham Lincoln’s early legal career beyond the capitol of Springfield, Illinois to the many courthouses in which he learned his craft, as well as his early political career. The skills Lincoln learned in this National Heritage Area enabled him to become one of our nation’s most significant presidents.
- *Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area* tells the story of a critical location for western migration but also the history of the ever-changing landscape and 21st century challenges facing the Colorado River.
- *Great Basin National Heritage Area* expands access to the unique nature of this high desert landscape in Nevada and Utah and broadens its reach to tell the often overlooked and tragic story of Japanese internment camps in World War II.

- B. Once again, determinations on the suitability, feasibility and worthiness of individual National Heritage Area proposals is the purview of Congress and the National Park Service. The enactment of program legislation will, in my opinion, provide the National

Park Service with greater statutory authority in the development of more refined criteria in reviewing the question of a “nationally-significant landscape,” thereby tightening the designation process even further to avoid unwarranted designations.

- C. Designation of new NHAs under the bill criteria, and with Congress’s determination of each potential NHA’s national significance, would bring national benefits similar to those achieved by current NHAs through public-private partnerships: measurable increases in economic development, natural and cultural resources preservation, heritage tourism and education, and pride of place without infringement on private property rights or any addition of land, assets, or long-term maintenance obligations to the National Park Service.

Of course, NHAs do utilize federal funds as an integral piece of their public-private partnerships, and it is important for Congress to consider why NHAs should be prioritized as a recipient of federal funds and resources.

National Heritage Areas, through their partnerships, volunteer programs, and entrepreneurial approach, spend every federal dollar with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, with an average non-federal match of \$5.50 to \$1.00.

The following example is illustrative of just how much NHAs can do with a small but steady federal investment. There are five NHAs centered on nationally significant canal systems: Augusta Canal (Georgia), Ohio & Erie Canal (Ohio), Delaware & Lehigh Canal (Pennsylvania), Illinois & Michigan Canal (Illinois), and Erie Canalway (New York). Together, these five NHAs protect, preserve, interpret, and provide access to over 750 miles of canals, the economic superhighways of an earlier era. Each year, these NHAs operate numerous visitor centers and museums, promote health initiatives on tow paths, and introduce thousands of school children to river ecology and outdoor recreation through paddling programs. They do this for a total federal investment of \$2.6 million per year. Like the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, which is a unit of the National Park Service, National Heritage Areas expand interpretation of the transportation and infrastructure systems (in this case-canal ways) that powered American commerce, protects and preserve nationally significance resources but without taking on the full fiscal and regulatory burden of creating a national park. Whether it’s canals, labor history, Civil War or civil rights, National Heritage Areas carry the mission of national parks forward in an inclusive, diverse way that is leveraged by public-private partnerships.

As Congress considers the best way to allocate limited resources, NHAs are a prime example of the Administration’s push for public-private partnerships that produce more results for fewer dollars. We believe (and the numbers show) that National Heritage Areas should be prioritized, as they are a cost-effective federal investment that expands the ability of the National Park Service to preserve, share, and celebrate the stories and places of our great nation.

Once again, on behalf of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to questions pertaining to H.R. 1049 and thank you for your support of the National Heritage Area program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Capen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

Sara Capen

Chairwoman
Alliance of National Heritage Areas

Executive Director
Niagara Falls National Heritage Area