

**Subcommittee Chair Debra Haaland
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
April 30, 2019**

- **Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on four National Heritage Area bills.**
- **The Subcommittee will review a bill that standardizes the designation and management process for current and future NHAs, along with three bills that reauthorize successful National Heritage Areas.**
- **I want to thank the bill sponsors for their tireless work on behalf of these important sites, and I want to thank the witnesses, many of whom have travelled a long way to share their stories about the importance of heritage areas.**
- **Since 1984, Congress has established 55 National Heritage Areas across the country, combining heritage conservation, recreation and economic development.**
- **National Heritage Areas are grassroots initiatives that engage communities in heritage preservation by combining natural, cultural and historical resources into landscapes that tell important stories of our nation's past.**

- **These are community-driven initiatives that receive strong, bipartisan support.**
- **They provide opportunities for the Federal government to invest in communities and develop public-private partnerships, which preserve community resources and leverage federal funds with private dollars.**
- **The National Park Service manages the National Heritage Area program and is a partner and advisor to the managing entities of the NHAs.**
- **To be clear, NHAs do not acquire land or restrict the rights of property owners.**
- **They are not units of the National Park Service, but landscapes that the public live, work and recreate in.**
- **Although the Park Service has requested that we zero-out funding for heritage areas during this administration, Congress has continued to fund this successful program – allowing NHAs to remain beneficial to our local communities and their economies.**
- **These sites promote cultural heritage tourism, injecting \$192 billion into the U.S. economy each year.**

- **They create opportunities for sustainable economic development, matching \$5.50 of private and public funds for every \$1 of federal funds.**
- **And they provide 148,000 jobs annually.**
- **Despite what some detractors might suggest, the National Heritage Area program is working. Heritage Areas like the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area in New Mexico are benefitting local communities by sustaining communities, cultures, and heritage in ways that promote economic development and tourism.**
- **Opponents of the system latch onto inconsistencies in management and treat exceptions as the rule when it comes to heritage areas.**
- **That is why I particularly applaud Representative Tonko's efforts, through H.R. 1049, to standardize Heritage Areas into a land use system.**
- **By providing consistency in designation and management, and helping to ensure accountability across the board, this programmatic legislation will help preserve the benefits of heritage areas for decades to come.**
- **Consistency, accountability, and opportunities for oversight are key to good governance, and I**

appreciate this attempt to bring those values into the heritage area system.

- **We will also consider Representative Tonko's H.R. 2288, which will provide funding to continue the preservation and interpretation of the New York State Canal System.**
- **The 524-mile navigable waterway of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor helps us recall the importance of canals in the development of the United States.**
- **Representative Turner's H.R. 1990 will reauthorize the National Aviation Heritage Area and extend the sunset date, allowing this important site to continue telling the story of the Wright brothers and our country's history of flight.**
- **Representative Thompson's H.R. 642, the Oil Region National Heritage Area Reauthorization Act, will allow Pennsylvania to preserve the story of Colonel Edwin Drake's drilling of the first successful commercial oil well in 1859 and the regional oil boom that followed.**
- **National Heritage Areas like these play an important role in educating the public about significant events in our nation's history and promoting preservation and stewardship.**

- **I look forward to learning more about the standardization of the National Heritage Area program and about each of the National Heritage Areas represented here today.**