

Opening Statement of
Ranking Member
Don Young (AK-At Large)
House Committee on
Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands

Legislative hearing on H.R. 642, H.R. 1049,
H.R. 1990, and HR. 2288
April 30, 2019

As the chair noted, today the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will consider four bills related to National Heritage Areas.

H.R. 642, the “Oil Region National Heritage Area Reauthorization Act,” authored by Representative G.T. Thompson would extend the authorization of the Oil Region National Heritage Area through fiscal year 2026. The bill also doubles the authorization of appropriations for the heritage area.

The Oil Region National Heritage Area was initially authorized in 2005 and highlights oil artifacts, scenic communities and farmland, and industrial landscapes to teach visitors about the world's first successful commercial oil well and our nation's proud petroleum legacy. Petroleum has been the lifeblood of the American economy.

Next, we will consider H.R. 1990, the National Aviation Heritage Area Reauthorization Act, authored by Representative Michael Turner of Ohio. This bill would extend the authorization for the National Aviation Heritage Area through Fiscal Year 2026. This heritage area was also initially established in 2005 and works to promote heritage tourism and the development of educational and cultural programs for the public related to our nation's and Ohio's rich aviation history.

Next, we will be considering H.R. 2288, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Reauthorization Act sponsored by Representative Paul Tonko of New York. This bill would increase the overall cap on appropriations for the heritage area from \$12 million to \$14 million. The Erie

Canalway National Heritage Corridor was established in the year 2000 to promote heritage tourism and educate the public about the instrumental role the canals played in the growth and development of the United States.

Finally, we will be hearing testimony on H.R. 1049, the National Heritage Area Act of 2019, also offered by Representative Tonko. This legislation formally establishes a National Heritage Area system with criteria for approval and funding. H.R. 1049 authorizes the National Heritage Area System for 20 years and authorizes appropriations of up to \$700,000 per National Heritage Area per fiscal year.

H.R. 1049 is effectively a blueprint for creating additional and continuing to appropriate precious federal dollars to National Heritage Areas.

This Committee needs to pump the brakes on creation of new National Heritage Areas. At a time when the National Park Service has a \$12 billion maintenance backlog, an expansion of the National Heritage Area program is lunacy.

When the first National Heritage Area was established in 1984, it was seen by some in Congress as an affordable alternative to full national park designation. National Heritage Areas, however, have evolved significantly since 1984. Contrary to initial salesmanship, many National Heritage Areas are now perpetual park units in waiting.

National Heritage Areas were originally intended to receive federal “seed money” and develop to a point where appropriations would no longer be required.

In fact, in 1994, during a debate for additional National Heritage Areas on the House floor, then National Parks Subcommittee Chairman, Bruce Vento (D-MN) claimed, **“the amount of support is limited... and there is a limit to the length of time or the amount of money the Federal Government can be in a heritage area. In 10 years, we are out of there. Then they are on their own and we all get the benefit of that conservation.”**

35 years later we now have 55 National Heritage Areas across 34 states and nearly every National Heritage Area established since 1984 continues to request and receive Federal financial support.

In recent years, both the Obama and Trump Administrations have supported reducing appropriations to National Heritage Areas and have urged Congress to return to the original concept of national heritage areas by promoting self-sufficiency.

Since 1984, National Heritage Areas have cumulatively received more than \$313 million in federal appropriations. Imagine the good that \$313 million could do for our National Park Service.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today and look forward to hearing their testimony. With that, I yield back.