

Tonko Testimony

Thank you Madame Chairwoman for holding this important hearing. National Heritage Areas connect us, and perhaps more importantly future generations, with the voices and places that have shaped who we are as Americans.

These sites deliver more than just a significant economic return, they help us reveal the diverse and sometimes hidden gems of our cultural heritage and fill us with a sense of place that brings our complex history to life.

National Heritage Areas are special places that have played important roles in shaping our nation and that tell the stories of the people and communities whose pioneer spirit laid the foundations of our society.

The National Heritage Area (NHA) Program is one of the Department of the Interior's most cost-effective initiatives, relying on a public-private partnership in which every federal dollar is matched with an average of \$5.50 in other public and private funding.

I greatly appreciate the work that the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Corridor have done for my district and for Upstate New York.

The Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Corridor is doing fantastic work across our region.

A 2019 Economic Impact Study found that the heritage area generates \$975 million in economic impact per year, supports 9,888 jobs, generates \$112 million in local and state tax revenue, and attracted on average 6.1 million visitors a year to its designated heritage sites between 2014 and 2016. The return on investment to taxpayers is \$113 in tax revenue generated at the federal, state and local levels for each \$1 appropriated.

One example of how the heritage area connects the public to history and heritage is through the Hudson River Train Tour App which is a GPS enabled mobile app that connects riders on Hudson River Amtrak and Metro North trains to stories of the valley's resources and to serve as a jumping off point to the parks, trails, historic sites, cultural designations and historic downtowns of the National Heritage Area.

You will hear more from Bob Radliff today on the great work being done through the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. A 2018 economic impact study found a \$1.3 billion annual impact on tourism and a NPS study determined the economic impact of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor was \$307.7 million, supporting 3,240 jobs and generating \$34.9 million in tax revenue.

I want to commend them for the development of a 450-mile long New York State Canalway Water Trail, including the recent writing and printing of 3,000 280+ page guidebooks and navigational map sets for paddlers. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor also supports first rate field trips for students to visit and experience canal sites through their Ticket to Ride program supporting more than 45,000 students.

I also look forward to hearing more on the Canalway Challenge, where residents and visitors can reach one-of-a-kind personal mileage goals by cycling, paddling, running, hiking or walking along legendary canals.

The waters of the Capital Region are the ink that wrote our nation's history. That corridor became the birthplace of a necklace of communities dubbed "mill towns" with the development of the Erie Canal.

People tethered their American dream in these mill towns. They came, they worked their fingers to the bone, they came up with ideas and created great products, and that was the pulse of our community. We must preserve our history and heritage so that they can instruct, inspire and guide us.

Our history reminds us of the pride of developing community and neighborhood, the investments that those who came before us made in growing a family, developing a household, building a neighborhood in a strong and powerful and meaningful way.

When we highlight the tremendous cultural, historic and environmental assets of our local communities, we create a sense of place that builds local pride and attracts visitors into our region. Celebrating our heritage and preserving our history not only fosters job creation and economic development, it also strengthens that sense of place.

Heritage Areas bring value to local economies and to the nation.

They highlight the tremendous cultural, historic and environmental strength of our local communities, creating a sense of place that builds local pride and attracts visitors into our region.

The National Heritage Area Act will help establish and maintain the strong local partnerships necessary to restore and protect these sites for generations to come.

I am excited to be working with Congressman McKinley on advancing this legislation that would strengthen the heritage areas program and ensure the sustainability of the existing heritage areas. For the first time, the bill establishes a standardized set of criteria for the designation of new National Heritage Areas and a rigorous process for existing National Heritage Areas to ensure accountability.

H.R. 1049 has 100 cosponsors and strong bipartisan support with nearly 20 Republican cosponsors including Mr. Thompson and Mr. Turner. Chairman Grijalva, Chairwoman Haaland, and many other Members of this committee are also proud cosponsors of the legislation.

The legislation has strong bipartisan and wide geographic support that speaks to the value of this program locally and nationally. Similar proposals have been introduced and championed by both the Bush and Obama administrations.

I started working on this with my friend Charlie Dent and am proud of the strong bipartisan support we still see today.

I commend the Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA) and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) for their hard work on this critical legislation.

I am also proud to introduce the Erie Canalway Reauthorization Act. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is an unparalleled major asset for New York State and a symbol of our visionary heritage.

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor needs its statutory funding cap raised this year. More than 20 bipartisan members of the New York delegation have called for the cap to be raised. I urge the committee to move this critical legislation forward.

Sara Capen and Bob Radliff have traveled here today to help illustrate the unique role of National Heritage Areas and why both pieces of legislation should be voted forward and signed into law. More than 200 letters of support have been submitted urging the passage of the heritage area bills under consideration today! I am honored to add my voice in support of these special places and urge the committee to move forward all four bills under consideration.

Let me close by mentioning that the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor announced today the launch of the Canalway Challenge, a new initiative that invites people to trace history while tracking miles walking, running, cycling or paddling on the New York State Canal System and Canalway Trail. Let's take a look at the video! (*Show video*)