

Thank you, Chairman Joe Neguse, Ranking Member Russ Fulcher, and Subcommittee Members, for taking the time today to hear my testimony.

I am thankful the Committee is considering my legislation, H.R. 2107, the Nation's Oldest Port National Heritage Area Act.

This bill would establish a National Heritage Area in Northeast Florida running down the Atlantic Coast from the Florida-Georgia line to Flagler County.

Referred to by many as the "First Coast" – this stretch of Florida is home to our nation's oldest city, beautiful landscapes, and thousands of years of history.

Establishing a national heritage area would help preserve and celebrate the diverse groups that have called the First Coast home, from the Native American tribes of Northeast Florida, to the settlers in St. Augustine, the Nation's Oldest City.

This area is a mosaic of cultures that has been shaped by its maritime heritage.

This bill would support public-private partnerships that promote conservation, historic preservation, recreation, and heritage tourism.

It is a culmination of years of grassroots work.

Later today you will hear from Kathy Fleming, the Executive Director for the St. Augustine Lighthouse and Maritime Museum, who has spearheaded this effort.

She has worked tirelessly since 2007 with other members of the Nation's Oldest Port National Heritage Area Alliance to get local buy in for this heritage area.

The Alliance's efforts have been successful, the heritage area is supported by mayors, city councils, county commissions, local chambers of commerce, and many other organizations.

These grassroots groups have collaborated and worked with the National Park Service to complete an impressive feasibility study that outlines the history of the area and its many historic sites.

This bill has extensive support in the areas encompassed in the NHA, and last Congress it received bipartisan support from most of the Florida delegation.

It is my hope that this Committee will take up this important bipartisan bill that will create jobs, support the local economy, and preserve the stories of those that have inhabited and built Florida's First Coast.

I'm happy to take any questions and yield back the rest of my time.