

**STATEMENT OF DR. STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL  
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
REGULATION, CONCERNING H.R. 445, TO AUTHORIZE A NATIONAL HERITAGE  
AREA PROGRAM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**July 29, 2014**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 445, to authorize a National Heritage Area Program, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 445 with amendments that are described later in this statement. We have long supported legislation to establish a National Heritage Area program within the National Park Service that standardizes timeframes and funding for designated national heritage areas and formally establishes criteria for establishing new heritage areas. We would like to thank Representatives Dent and Tonko, the principal sponsors of this legislation, for their leadership on this issue.

H.R. 445 would formally establish a system of National Heritage Areas to conserve, enhance, and interpret natural, historic, scenic, and cultural resources that together tell nationally significant stories representing our country's heritage. The bill provides uniform national standards for conducting feasibility studies, designating National Heritage Areas, approving management plans and conducting evaluations; it specifies the authorities and duties of the Secretary of the Interior and of the local coordinating entities in conducting these activities. It also authorizes appropriations for each individual national heritage area of up to \$700,000 annually, along with \$300,000 annually for the Secretary to conduct feasibility studies (with not more than \$100,000 for any individual study) and \$750,000 annually to conduct management plans (with not more than \$250,000 for any individual management plan). Finally, the bill sets a sunset date for the National Heritage Area system that is 25 years after the date of enactment.

National Heritage Areas further the mission of the National Park Service by fostering community stewardship of our nation's heritage, while not creating new national park units. Rather, the National Park Service partners with National Heritage Area local coordinating entities and provides technical assistance and matching federal funds from Congress. The National Park Service does not assume ownership of land inside heritage areas or impose land use controls.

National Heritage Areas expand on traditional approaches to resource stewardship by supporting large-scale, grassroots initiatives that connect local citizens through preservation, conservation, and planning processes. The areas represent a community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships and the facilitation of a local coordinating entity, National Heritage Areas support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Leveraging funds and long-term support for projects, these partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring

stewardship ethic. Because heritage areas are lived-in landscapes, local coordinating entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make their heritage relevant to local interests and needs. Through their resources, National Heritage Areas tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage.

The first National Heritage Area, the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, was designated 30 years ago. Since that time, Congress has authorized another 48 National Heritage Areas in 32 states across the country. Numerous bills to designate more National Heritage Areas are pending in Congress. While the earliest National Heritage Area bills had differing management and funding structures, National Heritage Areas created since 1996 have become more standardized in how they are studied, designated, managed, and funded. Regardless of when created, all designated National Heritage Areas strive for long-term sustainability.

The need for and value of National Heritage Area program legislation has been well-considered and is supported in numerous studies. In 2005, the Administration identified the need for program legislation as part of an overall review of the program. In 2006, the National Park System Advisory Board report *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas* recommended a legislative and policy foundation for the National Heritage Areas program. In 2009, the National Parks 2nd Century Committee reported on the value of National Heritage Areas as a collaborative model, recommending that they be recognized as long-term assets to the National Park System. Passage of legislation to authorize and define a nationwide system of National Heritage Areas was a key recommendation of the Committee's 2009 report *Advancing the National Park Idea*. In 2011, in *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*, the Department of the Interior included a recommendation to "...establish through legislation clearly defined standards and processes to support a system of regional and community-based national heritage areas that promote locally supported preservation work, promote heritage tourism, and create jobs." In 2012, National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis issued a Policy Memorandum on the National Heritage Areas Program stating that he endorses the recommendations of the National Parks Second Century Commission that "advocate creation of a clearly defined system of National Heritage Areas as well as funding at a level that will allow them to carry out their work." Just recently, the National Park Service's *Cultural Resource Challenge* (2014) expressed support for the passage of National Heritage Area program legislation and continued funding for National Heritage Areas.

While we support enactment of H.R. 445, we recommend amending the bill in several areas:

First, we recommend establishing the National Heritage Areas program as an ongoing responsibility of the National Park Service, reflecting the fact that the National Heritage Areas already designated by Congress do not sunset. As introduced, H.R. 445 provides a sunset of the National Heritage Area System established by the bill 25 years after the date of enactment.

Second, we recommend amending the bill to clarify that the requirement for local coordinating entities to complete a management plan for a National Heritage Area would occur after an area has been designated by Congress, rather than prior to designation. This would be consistent with

the requirements that are standard for the existing National Heritage Areas. The bill should include a process for the approval of management plans by the Secretary of the Interior, which is also a standard requirement for currently designated National Heritage Areas.

Third, we recommend including a requirement for evaluations of designated National Heritage Areas three years before their authorization of appropriations for heritage area program funding expires. These “three-year-out” reports, which have become a standard feature of National Heritage Area designation bills, are essential for helping the Department and Congress determine the future course of these areas.

Fourth, we recommend deleting the authorization of a specified amount of appropriations for conducting management plans. Under current practice, management plans are developed by local coordinating entities. They are reviewed by the National Park Service as part of its routine work in assisting National Heritage Areas. It is infeasible to separate out the cost to the National Park Service of performing this work among the other technical assistance and guidance it provides to the areas.

Fifth, we recommend changes to the authorization levels for individual National Heritage Areas and for studies of potential National Heritage Areas. We support including in the bill a total authorization for each individual heritage area of \$10,000,000, to be made available over a period of 15 years. We also support a higher authorization level for studies than the bill provides: \$750,000 as a total amount of funding, rather than \$300,000; and \$250,000 as a total amount for any single study, as opposed to \$100,000. And, we recommend including an authorization for a modest amount of funding on an ongoing basis to support long-term sustainability for designated National Heritage Areas that have reached the end of their eligibility period for receiving funds under the Heritage Partnership Program.

We would be happy to provide the committee and the bill’s sponsors with recommended language for these amendments, along with some other technical amendments which we believe are needed. We look forward to working with the committee toward enactment of this legislation this year.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions on this legislation.