

Testimony for the record

C. Allen Sachse
Chair of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Allen Sachse and I serve as Chair of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA). The ANHA is a not-for-profit organization that serves the National Heritage Areas. Today 45 of the 49 National Heritage Areas are members of the ANHA. In 2012, I retired as President of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L) in eastern PA, but I continue to serve the D&L in an advisory capacity. I am here today on behalf of the ANHA to offer support to H. R. 445 – *National Heritage Area Act of 2013*. I thank Chairman Bishop for placing H. R. 445 on the hearing schedule. Last fall, I had the opportunity to visit Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area and very much enjoyed experiencing many of the great accomplishments in the state of Utah by Mormon Pioneer. I also want to thank Ranking Member Grijalva for your continued support of the National Heritage Area movement and I had the pleasure of visiting Yuma National Heritage Area some time ago. Finally, I want to thank Congressman Cartwright, who serves on this sub-Committee and represents part of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor for his support of the work of the corridor.

Before I address the merits of this legislation, on behalf of the ANHA, I want to extend our sincere appreciation to Congressman Dent and Congressman Tonko for their vision, support, and leadership in crafting a by-partisan bill (H. R. 445), which was introduced by Congressman Dent. Also, we want to acknowledge the 35 co-sponsors. We believe this legislation will address issues vital to the National Heritage Areas, but beyond that it will also establish an innovative partnership program so important to the future of the National Park Service (NPS).

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, we all understand the NPS has a daunting mission of interpreting the most significant American stories and preserving the key resources related to those stories. We also recognize and appreciate the challenges of managing the federal budget. No doubt, for the foreseeable future, the fiscal limitations will continue to affect all federal agencies including the NPS. However, the American public has shown no sign of tiring of their national parks or desiring reductions in park opportunities. To the contrary, there is a demand for more service and accessibility to our public lands, especially near urban centers. So as we approach the second century of the NPS, how do we address these seemingly incongruent realities? A major part of the answer is that the NPS, without owning everything that is nationally significant, will be required to expand its current level and use of public/private partnerships.

Jon Jarvis, Director of the NPS, recognized the contribution NHAs are capable of when he stated, *“National Heritage Areas are places where small investments pay huge dividends, providing demonstrable benefits in communities across the country and in partnership with our national Parks.”*

The Illinois & Michigan National Heritage Corridor, the first National Heritage Area, was designated by Congress and signed into law 30 years ago next month by President Reagan. Seen as an innovative approach to resource protection, it brought together the interests of preservation, conservation, recreation, and economic development for the first time to address a nationally significant story, which was woven throughout the living landscape.

Unfortunately, the process for designation has changed very little over the past three decades, despite the fact there are now 49 National Heritage Areas. The major flaw is that most often the National Heritage Area designation takes place before the actual planning is completed. This immediately sets a National Heritage Area in the awkward position of failing to achieve certain benchmarks with both NPS and Congress, not to mention the unfulfilled expectations of local partners. It is not uncommon for the time period from the initiation of planning process to actually receiving the Secretary’s approval to take as long as five years. But the authorization life of the National Heritage Area starts from the date the act is signed by the President. There have been cases where as much as one-half of the new area’s authorization period has been consumed with planning, leaving little time for successful implementation. The outcome is that many, if not all, of the newer National Heritage Areas are at a significant disadvantage and will need to spend valuable staff time seeking extensions to their authorizations and less time on actual execution of their plan.

Designation before planning creates a second major problem. Without the plans in hand, Congress has no verification of national theme, significance of resources are not documented, the boundary is often unclear, the action plan is unknown, the financial feasibility has not been measured, there is no business plan, and the local management entity may still be in question. However, H. R. 445 will change that by placing the responsibility of determining significance on the NPS and requiring the local management entity to demonstrating capacity before Congressional designation is sought. One can understand how some members of Congress may view the present designation with a great deal of skepticism.

The proposed bill provides a framework for Congressional designation of all future National Heritage Areas, which will be built on research, planning, capacity building, and public participation. Under H. R. 445 all appropriate documents related to Feasibility and Management Planning would be presented to Congress, along with the Secretary’s recommendation, prior to Congressional action on the designation. Also, under H. R. 445 Congress may appropriate sufficient funds to NPS initiate up to three study projects annually, thereby controlling the growth of new area designations.

Completing the management plan before designation allows for the NPS and local partners to truly study alternative types of technical services, program assistance, partnerships, management options, and designations. Perhaps the public planning process will reveal that the path to becoming a National Heritage Area is not the best choice for the local partners to pursue.

H. R. 445 also provides the NPS with ongoing authority to provide financial assistance to individual National Heritage Areas. However, there will always be other factors to determine the specific amount of funding the NPS would provide to each National Heritage Area in a given fiscal year. First and foremost, Congress will approve the total level of funding available for the *Heritage Partnership Program* with the approval of the Interior Appropriations bill each fiscal year. Next the NPS would then apply the criteria of funding formula, which it has developed with input from the National Heritage Areas. Also, the bill requires the NPS to evaluate the accomplishments of each National Heritage Area at least every ten years and report to Congress any appropriate changes to the level of NPS assistance in the future. However, the ongoing authorization provided by H. R.445 ensures much needed stability to the partnership and assures the NPS remains a stakeholder.

The approval of H. R. 445 will provide no special authorities or powers to the local managing entity of the National Heritage Area. Nothing in the act changes existing authorities or statute of any federal, state, or local government agency and nothing in the act interferes with the rights of private or public property owners. In addition, requiring the planning before Congressional designation provides the opportunity any private property concerns to be raised during the public participation process. Thus, if there are concerns they will be address before designation is made, or perhaps this could even be a reason for denial/no action.

The last point I would like to make is that the enactment will likely lead to standardized procedures and policies within the NPS related to National Heritage Areas. Presently, it is not uncommon for the NPS regional offices to provide different levels of technical assistance and guidance to the National Heritage Areas, making the work across the nation inconsistent and arbitrary.

We all know that change does not come quickly, particularly when it relates to governmental agencies. Similarly, new and innovative approaches will have both naysayers and advocates. The National Heritage Area movement has certainly faced its share of distractions. Approval of *National Heritage Area Act of 2013* would finally put structure to this shared (federal, state, and local agency) approach to resource preservation, conservation, interpretation, and management. It will recognize all existing and future National Heritage Areas as part of the National Park System. The new process will bring real merit and destination to the designation and stabilize other funding partners by eliminating the doubt and uncertainty the National Heritage Area faces with sunset. Going forward the NPS could expect the National Heritage Areas to become a viable component/partner in telling the American story.

Despite the major flaws of the existing program and processes, the model has withstood this test of time and the naysayers. The National Heritage Areas that have had the benefit of time and funding support have established a high level of accomplishments. There is no doubt that a structured and viable National Heritage Program within the NPS will add continued value and resources in support of the mission of the NPS. The following points are just a few of the accomplishment that demonstrate the possibilities.

There are many lessons to be learned about partnership management by studying the successes of the program as it has evolved over the past three decades. At the request of Congress, the NPS commissioned a series of evaluations of nine of the longstanding National Heritage Areas. The

work was completed by Westat, an external evaluation firm. The evaluations have verified the accomplishments of the nine National Heritage Area partnerships to address the purpose defined in the legislative language and the original designation: the National Heritage Areas' ability to leverage additional funds to meet program and infrastructure needs four to one (non-federal to federal) in most cases; the National Heritage Areas employed sound management and fiscal responsibility; the National Heritage Areas relied on public participation and created partnerships to carry out the work; the partners preserved nationally significant resources; and the NPS was an invaluable partner.

The National Heritage Area approach is particularly well suited to address a nationally significant story that is spread across a very complex and lived-in landscape. One example, more than any other initiative affiliated with the NPS, the National Heritage Area approach has become the most practical framework for addressing de-industrialized landscapes in urban areas. Local National Heritage Area partnerships have emphasized the preservation of sites associated with labor and working class history. Abandoned industrial sites with national significance as well as superfund sites have been re-purposed for a variety of uses including commercial, clean energy, housing, tourism, trails, and even environmental education.

The fact that heritage tourism represents a significant portion of the industry is sometimes overlooked. Heritage travelers includes both domestic and foreign visitors, all desiring to explore and learn more about America. Although National Heritage Areas are lived-in landscapes, they are places of authenticity where the stories of America are told and visitors want to explore.

In February 2013, the Northeast Regional Office of the NPS (NER NPS) released a report titled *The Economic Impact of National Heritage Areas*. The NER NPS partnered with the ANHA and the Heritage Development Partnership, a non-profit 501(c)3 subsidiary of the ANHA, to measure the economic impact of the National Heritage Area partnership work of within the region. Tripp Umbach, a nationally recognized firm specializing in research, strategy planning and economic impact analysis, was commissioned to undertake the study. Among the 21 National Heritage Areas within the northeast region, six were used as case studies. Data collection occurred in these six National Heritage Areas. The subsequent estimates and projections were made using IMPLAN economic impact software. The analysis and projections demonstrated that –

- The 21 NHAs within the Northeast Region of the United States combine for a projected annual economic impact of \$5.4 billion. The National Heritage Areas in the Northeast Region support more than 66,880 jobs and generate \$602.7 million in local and state taxes.
- Additional analysis extrapolates the economic benefit of all National Heritage Areas sites in the United States. The projected annual economic benefit of all 49 NHA sites on the nation's economy is \$12.9 billion. The economic activity supports nearly 150,000 jobs, many of which are small businesses, and \$1.2 billion in Federal taxes from sources such as employee compensation, proprietor income, indirect business tax, households, and corporations.

Often it is said by critics of the program that funding appropriated to National Heritage Areas is funding lost to the mission of the NPS. Nothing is further from the truth, for the benefits of

leveraging funding and shared management will repaid many times over. The National Heritage Areas that have their essence from historic canals demonstrate this return to the NPS.

Early canals connected the major maritime cities to the Great Lakes and on to the Mississippi River. Canals provided water power for mills; canals moved massive amounts coal and other raw materials to manufacturers of industrial products; canals transported the manufactured products to the consumers, improving commerce and trade; canals became the means to grow and expand our young nation. Before railroads, the canals were the transportation backbone necessary to ignite the industrial revolution. There are seven National Heritage Areas whose stories emanate from canals – Augusta Canal, Blackstone River Valley, Delaware & Lehigh, Erie Canalway, Illinois & Michigan, Ohio and Erie Canalway, and Schuylkill River. Each is working in partnership with the NPS, state, and local agencies to preserve and tell this nationally significant story. Collectively, the seven National Heritage Areas received approximately \$3.7 million in NPS *Heritage Partnership* funding in fiscal year 2014, which is modest when one considers it is less than half of what it costs to own and operate a historic canal as part of the National Park System. Granted, one cannot accurately compare the cost of managing any given mile of a historic canal to another, for the resources vary greatly, as well as the level of care. However, one can easily see that local ownership and multiple partners sharing the management responsibility can pay significant dividends to the NPS. These National Heritage Areas partnerships are conserving approximately 1,000 miles of historic canal corridors and in the process, miles of watered canal have been saved. These historic corridors are becoming tomorrow's network of trails and blue ways connecting population centers to parks and historical sites of national, state, and local importance. The waterfront towns along the way are experiencing re-purposed buildings, preserved neighborhoods, and small business development. This is all accomplished by leveraging the collective resources and the partners' commitment to preserving their shared heritage and sense of place.

As catalysts for community and economic revitalization, National Heritage Areas implement projects through public/private partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, and collaborate with private businesses, foundations, non-profit organizations, state and local governments to ensure that the regional goals of cultural, historical, recreational and resource conservation are met. National Heritage Areas contribute to the quality of life in communities where heritage and resource conservation become building blocks for community revitalization, job creation and tourism. National Heritage Areas provide ability for a community to maintain a unique sense of place, enhancing development opportunities while teaching about America's history and culture.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the *National Heritage Area Act of 2013* – H. R. 445. I ask that the committee approve this bill. This is not only important to the 49 existing National Heritage Areas, but it is important to the future of the NPS in these challenging fiscal times. I am available to answer any questions you may have.