

TESTIMONY
Representative Bud Cramer
H.R. 1145, Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee Hearing
July 12, 2007

Good morning Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Subcommittee.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.R. 1145, legislation to designate the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area.

I would like to welcome Nancy Gonce, Executive Director of the Muscle Shoals Regional Center, located at the University of North Alabama, and the local coordinating entity for the proposed Muscle Shoals National Heritage area.

I represent Alabama's 5th Congressional District, which is home to the Muscle Shoals – an area named for its strategic location along the Tennessee River and the abundance of mussels found along the riverbanks.

My bill, H.R. 1145, would designate 6 counties in Northwest Alabama including Colbert, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, and Morgan counties, as a National Heritage Area.

This designation would create additional opportunities to promote tourism, conserve natural, cultural and historical attributes, and preserve the customs and traditions inherent to the Muscle Shoals region.

Although my original legislation authorizing the feasibility study for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage area was passed in 2002, my involvement goes back years before.

Growing up in North Alabama, I have always known about the unique nature and history of the Shoals.

Once a member of Congress, I became more aware of what a national treasure the Shoals is and how we needed to take steps to preserve its contributions to American history for future generations.

Mr. Chairman, I am honored to have this opportunity to share this community's story with you today.

The people of Muscle Shoals have long-realized the area's significance in shaping western expansion and cultural development of the United States.

One of the best known symbols of this region is the Woodrow Wilson Dam.

Constructed from 1918 until 1927, this Dam is one of the largest mass concrete lock & dam structures ever built in the United States.

It was also the first federal hydroelectric project in the country and was the first successful attempt to manage and utilize the Tennessee River.

In 1933, the Dam's success helped inspire President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to establish the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

The Shoals was also home to the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains, which opened up the region to significant economic development.

In addition to our significant landmarks, the Muscle Shoals area is also the birthplace of many notable American icons.

Helen Keller, a celebrated symbol of inspiration for persons overcoming disabilities, was born and grew up in this area.

Her birthplace, Ivy Green, is the ten-acre Keller property in Tuscumbia that is toured by children and adults from all over the world who have an interest in Helen Keller.

In fact, it was at Ivy Green that Helen Keller, with the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan, overcame her blindness and deafness to utter her first word, "water." A miraculous event that the Northwest Alabama community proudly reenacts each year, using the very water pump that inspired Helen's first words.

The region is also notably the home of W.C. Handy, known as "The Father of the Blues," who has had a lasting influence on American music.

The W.C. Handy Music Festival is celebrated each summer in the City of Florence, Alabama.

Area-native Sam Phillips, with his discovery of Elvis Presley and numerous other legendary musicians, also laid the groundwork for the rock-n-roll sound that has defined America's musical tastes for more than a half-century.

This led the region to be recognized as the “recording capitol of the world” for its legendary studios and classic recordings throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Former Congressman and General, Joe Wheeler, the only man to hold the rank of General in both the Confederate and Union armies (Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars), also called the region home.

We are proud to have General Wheeler’s likeness represent the State of Alabama in Statuary Hall and I’m pleased that Helen Keller will soon join him.

It is for these and many other reasons that I believe the region’s unique contributions to American history and culture would be best preserved by designating the Muscle Shoals region as a national heritage area.

In a few minutes you will hear from Nancy Gonce, Executive Director of the Muscle Shoals Regional Center, located at the University of North Alabama.

The Muscle Shoals Regional Center is currently working with the National Park Service on the final details of our region’s feasibility study, as authorized under the "Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Study Act of 2001" (P.L. 107-348).

The feasibility study for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area includes plans for cultural heritage programs with themes related to the area of Northwest, Alabama including music and cultural heritage, archives, history, settlement, recreation and hospitality, Native American, African American, commerce, natural and human resources.

I thank you for your attention, and ask your support for the designation of the Muscle Shoals Region as a National Heritage Area.