

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Witness Statement

TESTIMONY

Presented June 27, 2000 during Hearing
Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands,
Committee on Resources,
U. S. House of Representatives
Regarding H. R. 3190,
The Oil Region National Heritage Area Act
Presented by
Marilyn Ann Wolfe Black, Manager,
Oil Heritage Region, Inc.

Chairman Hansen, Members of Congress, Committee Staff, Media, and Guests --

My name is Marilyn Ann Wolfe Black. I reside at 190 Ridgeway Hill in rural Crawford County, in Cochranon, Pennsylvania. I'm addressing you today in the capacity as full-time Manager of the Oil Heritage Region, Inc., a post which I've been honored to hold since 1995.

You have just heard remarks by the Vice-President of the Oil Heritage Region, Inc. Ms. Judith Downs provided an overview of the history of oil and how oil in its many forms continues to influence and shape daily life and international affairs worldwide today. Ms. Downs gave particular emphasis to the birthplace of the oil industry, in Titusville, Pennsylvania within the Oil Heritage Region. In 1994 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated the area encompassing all of Venango County plus the City of Titusville and Oil Creek Township in eastern Crawford County as a Pennsylvania Heritage Park. Today we're here to encourage you to similarly designate this area as the Oil Region National Heritage Area, as per H. R. 3190, which was introduced by your committee member, the Honorable Congressman John Peterson whose hometown of Pleasantville is within the Oil Heritage Region. On the easel and in your packets you'll see a geographical map of this area in northwestern Pennsylvania.

The story of oil's discovery, extraction, distribution, many uses, byproducts, cultural impacts, and environmental challenges is a fascinating and powerful example of industrial transitions, problems, and lessons learned. This story is ripe to be told through a National Heritage Area, in order to utilize the assistance of the National Park Service and the higher profile of national designation to assist in the telling and promoting of this story. None of the current 18 national heritage areas in the United States address this story. The Automobile National Heritage Area in Michigan concentrates on the automotive production and technology; their interpretive materials barely mention the role of oil and gasoline as the fuel supply on which automobiles today are so dependent.

Is the Oil Heritage Region willing to become a National Heritage Area? Most certainly, YES. This resounding positive response comes not only from the Board of Directors for the Oil Heritage Region, Inc., but also from the municipalities, counties, interpretive partners, community organizations, businesses, and individual residents of Crawford and Venango Counties. As a demonstration of the area's willingness, I draw your attention to the set of letters of endorsement and encouragement provided in your packet. These letters attest to broad-based agreement that the currently configured Pa. Heritage Area boundaries should also be adopted for the Oil Region National Heritage Area. Letters have been provided by the following: City of Franklin; City of Titusville; Clarion/Venango Educational Resources Alliance; County of Crawford; County of Venango; Cultural and Educational Committee; The Derrick Newspaper; Northwest Pa. Regional Planning & Development Commission; Oil Creek Railway Historical Society; Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Oil Creek State Park; Robinson's Wallpaper & Interiors; Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce; Titusville Historical Society; Venango County Historical Society; Venango County Planning Commission; Dillon Wescoat; and Pennsylvania Senator Mary Jo White.

Is the Oil Heritage Region able to become a National Heritage Area? Again, the answer is absolutely YES. The OHR, Inc. is an existing 501(c)(3) corporation with a mission statement that reads: "The Oil Heritage Region unites and revitalizes the area by emphasizing our unique legacy as the birthplace of the oil industry. We do this through developing, preserving and promoting the region's cultural, recreational, historic and natural resources." As you can tell, this mission and these methods are precisely in alignment with the purposes and programs of a National Heritage Area. Your packet contains an assortment of photos illustrating existing sites and materials.

Recently the Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources commissioned an economic impact study on heritage tourism across the Commonwealth. In your packet you'll find a goldenrod-colored sheet with key excerpts from the May, 1999 report prepared by D. K. Shifflet & Associates. I'll just touch on a few highlights. Of all 1997 leisure trip expenditures in Pennsylvania, 25% were attributed to heritage tourism, with heritage travelers spending on average \$102 per person per day, which is substantially higher than the \$73 average daily expenditure for all Pa. leisure travelers that year. Of the heritage travelers who came to our state in 1997, one third (35%) were aware of the Oil Heritage Region as a destination, and 14% of the travelers visited our area that year. We're pleased to note that a High Degree of Visitor Satisfaction was expressed by 85% of those actual 1997 visitors to the Oil Heritage Region. We have a strong mix of educational and interpretive sites and facilities, plus widely varied outdoor recreational opportunities and facilities, and we cross-market to both audiences. This experience will enhance the ability of our area to function well among the family of National Heritage Areas and the National Park Service.

While we have not received to date any direct funding from federal agencies, our area has benefited from and utilized technical assistance and reports, such as the National Park Service 1993 Feasibility Study and Development Plan prepared by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, for the Allegheny Valley Rail-Trails, which has been the basis for paving and construction by the Allegheny Valley Trails Association of many miles of linked multi-purpose trails on former rail lines in the Oil Heritage Region. Another federal partner is the U. S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture; within Venango County and the Oil Region, the Allegheny River has been designated as a National Wild and Scenic River; OHR is a member of the project group to implement the recommendations of that federally approved plan.

Is the Oil Heritage Region ready to become a National Heritage Area? You bet we are! The anticipated infusion of federal technical assistance and financial assistance will be used to more rapidly implement the already prepared consensus-based plans which adhered to the public input and participation requirements of

any Pennsylvania Heritage Park. Planning for this heritage region began in 1988. On the easel you'll see the covers of several of those plans, including an approved Feasibility Study from 1991, Management Action Plan from 1994, the Oil Region Interpretive Prospectus/Plan from 1998, and as contained in your packet the Executive Summary of the 1998 Interpretive Plan. Your packet also contains an Overview of the detailed development of the Oil Heritage Region; please let me know if you wish to see any of the specific plan documents, and we'll furnish them to you via mail. Currently being prepared is a Strategic Marketing Plan for the Oil Heritage Region; we expect that five-year plan to become available this year; a draft of a regional Fun Map we're considering is in your packet.

To summarize, the Oil Heritage Region (comprised of Venango County and portions of eastern Crawford County in northwestern Pennsylvania) is very willing, able, and ready to be designated as the Oil Region National Heritage Area, in order to better portray, preserve, and promote the vital universal lessons of oil history. Other items in your packet further illustrate the importance of oil history and the assets of this region. Please review the Oil Heritage Region Driving Tour Booklet, Northwest Pennsylvania Outdoors Discovery Map (notice that the Oil Region is shaded in yellow; yes, that's printed into every one of those maps, it's not shading we've added just for today), Pennsylvania History and Heritage, and the Pennsylvania Trail of History publications.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions or hear comments now or through contact after the hearing. Kindly direct such inquiries to the office for the Oil Heritage Region, Inc., 206 Seneca Street, Fourth Floor, P. O. Box 128, Oil City, PA 16301; (814) 677-3152, Extension 17; toll-free (800) 483-6264, Extension 17; Fax (814) 677-5206; or E-mail: oilheritage@usachoice.net.

Testimony Enclosures:

- ** Geographic Map of Oil Heritage Region
- ** Excerpts from Pennsylvania Heritage Tourism Study
- ** Letters of Endorsement and Encouragement for Oil Region National Heritage Area
- ** Overview of the Oil Heritage Region
- ** Fun Map of Oil Heritage Region
- ** Disclosure Form -- Marilyn Ann Wolfe Black
- ** Resume -- Marilyn Ann Wolfe Black

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