

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES / SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

Hearing on H.R. 2991 to Establish the Susquehanna National Heritage Area

Wednesday, April 11, 2018, 2:00 pm, Longworth 1324

TESTIMONY OF THE HON. LEO LUTZ, MAYOR OF THE BOROUGH OF COLUMBIA, PA

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Subcommittee members, thank you for inviting me to testify in support of H.R. 2991, the Susquehanna National Heritage Area Act. As Mayor of the proud and historic Susquehanna River town of Columbia, Pennsylvania, I am pleased to share my strong support for designation of our region, our community, and our river as the Susquehanna National Heritage Area.

Congressman Smucker, thank you for sponsoring this bill, along with thirteen members of the Pennsylvania delegation and three members from other states. Our community values this bi-partisan show of support for the nationally-significant heritage of our region and the Susquehanna River as it flows through Central Pennsylvania.

For the past fifteen years, we have benefitted greatly from state designation of Lancaster and York Counties as the Susquehanna Heritage Area, one of twelve official Pennsylvania Heritage Areas. I am joined today by Mark Platts, President of Susquehanna Heritage, the regional non-profit that manages our state Heritage Area and our town's riverfront visitor center, known as Columbia Crossing. H.R. 2991 will establish the Susquehanna National Heritage Area, elevating our state designation to national status and showcasing my town as the region's prime gateway to the river and its many attractions.

The Susquehanna and its surrounding landscape have played a starring role in American history. Our region's heritage reflects events and causes that exemplify the American experience, many flowing from the central historical role of the river. Recognizing this wealth of nationally important cultural and natural resources, in 2008 the National Park Service found our region worthy of National Heritage Area designation.

The Susquehanna has been a corridor of culture and commerce for thousands of years. Traces of American Indian life remain in its “rock art” petroglyphs and archaeological sites. This history was honored by Congress through inclusion of the river in the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. This 3000-mile water trail highlights the native Susquehannock Indians from our area, who met John Smith on the river in 1608.

The Zimmerman Center for Heritage, owned and managed by Susquehanna Heritage, is Pennsylvania’s official Visitor Contact Station for the trail. This riverfront site hosts hundreds of local school kids on annual field trips, as does Columbia Crossing. National Heritage Area designation will enhance this successful National Park Service partnership by sharing the full story of our region’s role in American history – and it is quite a story.

The Susquehanna River was a gateway to America’s early frontier and served colonists as a commercial highway. Our region produced the Conestoga wagon, the Pennsylvania Rifle, the first iron steamboat, and the first coal-burning locomotive. America’s earliest power dams were built on the river, providing energy for the nation while creating popular recreation areas for hiking, fishing, and boating.

Lancaster County’s Plain People, commonly known as the Amish, are internationally recognized. Their unique customs and the cultural landscape they have created are of a scale that is rare in America, and they attract millions of visitors each year.

Our region hosted the Continental Congress during a tumultuous period of the Revolutionary War, when Congress fled to York in 1777, using the Susquehanna as a natural barrier to the British Army. While in York, Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, America’s first constitution.

In the mid-18th century, local residents James Buchanan and Thaddeus Stevens emerged as national leaders in the debate over African American freedom and river towns like Columbia played a key role in the Underground Railroad.

During the Civil War, the world's longest covered bridge across the Susquehanna at Columbia was burned by local townspeople to stop General Lee's invading forces, turning them back to a decisive battle at Gettysburg.

Much history has passed since then, but our region remains a center for industry and agriculture. Along the Susquehanna, a tradition of public and private collaboration has helped our region prosper from heritage and outdoor tourism. My town has positioned itself as a gateway to this activity, for we believe the river is our future as well as our past.

A National Heritage Area will greatly boost this progress and promote the Susquehanna as a destination for heritage and outdoor travelers, especially kids and families. This helps my town and our region harness the economic power of visitors, grow business, and create jobs. If just 5% of our current visitors spend one more day, we can realize over \$100 million in economic benefits each and every year. I believe that a National Heritage Area will get us that one more day.

I'd like to leave you with the words of President Ronald Reagan when he designated the first National Heritage Area in 1984, calling it a new kind of national park focused on heritage conservation, recreation, and economic development. Thirty-four years later, National Heritage Areas continue to be low-cost and effective alternatives to new National Park units for special places like ours, just as the President envisioned.

Thank you for considering the national significance of our region, our river, and my river town. Our places and people have played a special role in America's story. We are now ready to better share and promote our rich history and natural wonders with the nation and the world as the Susquehanna National Heritage Area. I invite you to visit us soon!