

Committee on Resources

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

My name is Roxanne Hitchcock. I own Oil Region Books and have, since 1999, served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Oil Heritage Region, Inc. I am pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony to you in favor of the proposed Oil Region National Heritage Area Act, H. R. 1862.

It began with a discovery in the wilderness of northwestern Pennsylvania. Little do we realize 144 years later the impact the discovery of oil has on the American people. Today the very structure of our society is dependent on petroleum.

What began, as a small enterprise on August 27, 1859 with the drilling of the first commercial well for oil, just outside Titusville, Pennsylvania in Venango County, would catapult American Industrialism into the spotlight. In the search for a better illuminate, these pioneer entrepreneurs began an industry that forever changed civilization.

The Oil Region became a catalyst luring people to try and make their fortune. Some did; others did not. Many stayed and started a life that has been passed down from generation to generation. With the end of the Civil War, there was an influx of soldiers looking for adventure and a higher wage. Immigrants came looking for a better way of life for their families.

Capitalism reigned with John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and others developing the largest industries and companies in the world, some of which still exist today. By 1900 Standard Oil supplied 95% of every petroleum product to the Railroad Industry, for example.

The Oil Industry evolved with the needs of the American people. As electric incandescent lighting became available, the need for kerosene declined. The advent of the automobile created a need that only the Oil Industry could supply. What was formally a by-product of petroleum became one of our precious commodities today.

The story of oil, its history, development, transition and cultural impact is important and must be shared. The National Heritage Area designation would accelerate a stream of development into the Oil Heritage Region. Many small business owners would benefit and others would start new related ventures. The Oil Heritage Region, Inc. is committed to and has the capability to fulfill the responsibilities as a National Heritage Area.

The information packets and the display boards before you illustrate the geography of the Oil Heritage Region, which encompasses Venango County and the City of Titusville and Oil Creek Township in eastern Crawford County in Pennsylvania. You also see the front covers of the series of carefully prepared, community-generated, consensus-based plans that have led us to the stage of seeking not only the Pennsylvania Heritage Park designation which we have held since 1994, but also National Heritage Area designation. Those include the approved Feasibility Study in 1991, Management Action Plan in 1994, Oil Region Interpretive Prospectus/Plan in 1998 (a summary of which is contained in your packets), and the Strategic Marketing Plan in 2000. We are currently updating the OHR Management Action Plan to address the anticipated role of the National Park Service, and our responsibilities as an active National Heritage Area.

Your packets also include letters of endorsement and encouragement for the Oil Region National Heritage Area Designation. In addition to a letter from Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, you'll find correspondence and resolutions from the following entities, which range from environmental groups to industry representatives to elected officials to service organizations and businesses: Allegheny Valley Trails Association; City of Franklin; City of Titusville; Clarion/Venango Educational Resources Alliance; County of Crawford; County of Venango; Cultural and Educational Committee for the Oil Heritage Region, Inc.; "The Derrick," newspapers; Joint Legislative Committee on Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee of the Pennsylvania Legislature; the Pa. Independent Petroleum Producers; Northwest Pa. Regional Planning & Development Commission; Oil Creek Railway Historical Society, Inc.; Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Oil Creek State Park; Pa. Department of Environmental Protection;

Pa. Environmental Council; Pa. Historical and Museum Commission; Senator Robert D. Robbins; Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce; Titusville Historical Society; Venango County Historical Society; Venango County Planning Commission; Venango Economic Development Corporation; Dillon Wescoat; Western Pennsylvania Conservancy; and Senator Mary Jo White.

These letters clearly illustrate the broad-based local and regional support for a federal designation as the Oil Region National Heritage Area.