

Testimony of
The Honorable Ralph S. Regula

before the

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives

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I want to thank Chairman Raúl Grijalva, Ranking Member Rob Bishop and members of the subcommittee for providing me this opportunity to discuss the importance of National Heritage Areas, their economic and cultural contributions and the remarkably successful public-private partnerships that support them. As you know, the bill I am sponsoring, H.R. 1483, would extend the authorization periods and increase authorized funding for certain Heritage Areas to ensure the long term sustainability of these areas.

Heritage Areas are designated by Congress for their distinctive role in the American experience. In cooperation with the National Park Service, Heritage Areas conserve not only the land, natural resources and historic buildings that make up the areas, but also preserve the unique histories behind them that are the pieces of our national identity.

The Ohio and Erie Canal, in my home state of Ohio, was the first inland waterway to connect the Great Lakes at Lake Erie with the Gulf of Mexico in 1832, a period in our history when canals were essential to the Nation's growth. The canalway took the State from economic stagnation to the third most prosperous State in the Union in only 20 years and positioned Ohio as a true center of commerce in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1993, the National Park Service deemed the corridor "a route to prosperity" and concluded it was eligible to receive support as a National Heritage Corridor.

Over the years, local governments, the State of Ohio and the private sector have welcomed the concept of the heritage corridor. They have looked to the Federal Government as a partner in the preservation, protection and development of these sites for the good of the public. The commitment of federal funding has helped to cement this essential partnership to allow Dan and the Ohio and Erie Canalway coalition to realize their near term goals for the area and keep an eye toward future growth.

The Ohio and Erie Canalway is a model of public - private partnership. The federal dollars we have invested have leveraged over \$270 million in state, local and private contribution. The funding has been used to develop a popular 101-mile towpath trail, restore historic buildings along the trail, provide educational programs, and promote

resource conservation. The Canalway's conservation accomplishments are impressive. The towpath trail alone has been a phenomenal success and recognized asset in the community with over 3 million users last year. These areas provide the people an educational and recreational treasure and have served local industry well by igniting real economic growth.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would like to add that by continuing the federal role in the development of the National Heritage Areas, this legislation helps ensure that the areas we have recognized as signature to our national landscape will continue to celebrate the American story. It promotes a wide range of economic opportunities enhancing the quality of life for present and future generations. The communities home to the National Heritage Areas listed in this bill have demonstrated their commitment to preservation of these sites. With the Federal government's stamp of approval and position at the table, this proven partnership will continue to provide a great benefit to the public. As the Committee considers this bill, I hope you will continue to support National Heritage Areas by extending the authorization and increasing this essential funding. Thank you.