



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

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The Honorable Joe Neguse
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed are responses to the Questions for the Record from the June 15, 2021, legislative hearing on a number of bills related to National Heritage Areas before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. These responses were prepared by the National Park Service.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Russ Fulcher
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
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Questions from Rep. Blake Moore

1. When the National Park Service conducts a National Heritage Area feasibility study, how exactly does it go about interacting with local stakeholders and taking account of their suggestions?

Response: The National Park Service (NPS) study team and the local sponsoring organization collaborate to create comprehensive stakeholder lists. The study team also develops a public involvement strategy based on the premise that a successful study can only be achieved with the active participation of affected interests in the region. Through multiple forms of engagement, such as public meetings and soliciting comments, the study team gathers public input on resources inventories, interpretive themes, and opportunities. The study team will document and take public comments into consideration when finalizing the study.

2. What exactly is it about National Heritage Area designations that help drive private investment?

Response: National Heritage Areas serve as catalysts for community and economic development through tourism and visitation, operational expenditures, grant making, support for local projects, job creation, and tax revenues. Private investors typically seek recognized entities, programs, and projects, and NHAs have recognition in the community, partially due to their partnerships with the NPS. NHAs help promote recognition through marketing. The locally managed NHAs are responsible for working with local networks, partners, and landowners to implement management plans that provide benefits to the local community.

3. What are some important steps to ensure that private property rights are not undermined by National Heritage Area designations?

Response: The NPS can continue to provide information on private property rights in connection with NHAs on its website and in publications for stakeholders and communities interested in NHA designation, which explains that the designation does not impose federal zoning, land controls, or restrict private property rights according to federal law or regulations.

The NPS can also continue to have open dialogue with existing NHA local coordinating entities to ensure that their questions on this topic are addressed.

In several recent acts designating new NHAs, Congress has included language intended to assure private property owners of their rights by specifying that designation of the NHA does not abridge the rights of any property owner; require any property owner to permit public access to the property; alter any land use regulation; or diminish the authority of the state to manage fish and wildlife, including the regulation of fishing and hunting within the NHA.

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4. What can communities do to help expedite the consideration process?

Response: Advocates of establishing a NHA for their communities or regions should work with the NPS's NHA program to understand what is involved in both a feasibility study and in formal designation. They should learn from the experiences of more established NHAs to understand how to operate successfully. They should work to understand how the strengths of their communities can be harnessed to promote the identity of an area.

In addition to the written questions submitted following the hearing, Associate Director Beasley offered to provide information to the following questions asked by Rep. Jay Obernolte during the May 15 hearing:

In response to the question about how often NHAs have become financially self-sufficient, all but one of the 55 designated NHAs have continuously received funding through the NHA program. The one NHA that is no longer receiving Federal funding is the Path of Progress NHA/Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission. Its funding authorization expired in 2008. The NHA designation continues in perpetuity, as would be the case for any designated NHA, but the NPS notes this NHA as inactive.

The NPS encourages NHAs to use their designation to facilitate sustainable funding from local and private sources. The NPS's evaluation process for existing NHAs includes answering the question, "How do the Heritage Area's management structure, partnership relationships, and current funding contribute to its sustainability?" Evaluators gather information to understand the local coordinating entity's contribution to the area's sustainability, as well as potential impacts if federal funding is reduced or discontinued. Sustainability is defined as "[...] the National Heritage Area coordinating entity's continuing ability to work collaboratively and reciprocally with federal, state, community, and private partners through changing circumstances to meet its mission for resource conservation and stewardship, interpretation, education, recreation and economic development of nationally significant resources." Evaluation results for 19 of the NHAs can be found here: <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas/evaluations.htm>.

In response to the question about whether the feasibility study process includes an analysis of the likelihood a potential NHA will become self-sufficient, the process does not include such information, but it does include an assessment of the potential NHA's likelihood of matching and leveraging federal funding. The NPS has ten criteria for evaluation of NHA candidate areas. Criterion number 6 is: "Residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governments within the proposed area are involved in the planning, have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles for all participants including the federal government, and have demonstrated support for designation of the area."

NPS guidance for applying Criterion 6 includes devising the conceptual financial plan, which, at a minimum, should demonstrate the ability of the proposed management entity to meet federal

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matching requirements that may become available upon NHA designation. The guidance states that the study team should also assess, informed by past activity and creativity, capabilities of leveraging federal funding with other potential sources, such as state or local contributions and funding by private interests (foundations, corporations, and other organizations).