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Congress Enacts Landmark Legislation to Ensure Long Term Stability for National Heritage Areas

WHEELING, W.Va. – Jan. 10, 2023 – On Thursday, December 22, 2022, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved the National Heritage Area Act (S. 1942) on a bi-partisan vote of 326-95. This action followed the unusual vote of “unanimous consent” by the Senate requiring no objections from any of the 100 Senators.

This legislation was championed by Congressmen Paul Tonko (D-NY) and David McKinley (R-WV) in the House and Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI.) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) in the Senate.

The 55 National Heritage Areas around the country are cost-effective, grass roots organizations which promote economic development through historic preservation and natural resource conservation. The small annual investment of \$29 million through the National Park Service yields an additional \$5.50 of local, state and private funding for every federal dollar.

This legislation will replace a patchwork of individual authorizations with a program that creates clear criteria for designation and accountability, fiscal stability through a 15-year renewal of the program, and a commitment to protect private property rights. Reflecting the popularity of the concept, an additional seven National Heritage Areas were designated.

“The National Heritage Area Act is a testament to the tremendous work National Heritage Areas do within communities across America,” said Sara Capen, Chairperson of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas and Executive Director of Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. “It is a direct reflection of the determination and resilience that is not only the bedrock of National Heritage Areas, but also the history of the places and people National Heritage Areas represent. The Alliance of National Heritage Areas is profoundly grateful for the tireless leadership and support we have received on a bipartisan basis within Congress today and look forward to serving our communities for an additional 15 years.”

“Establishing a system for National Heritage Areas will help breathe new life into the historic preservation movement in America. Our history, complicated as it may be, serves as a rallying point for Americans of different backgrounds and ideologies,” said Alan Spears, Senior Director for Cultural Resources for National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). “This piece of legislation exemplifies what our country can do when we stand together to protect our shared legacy.”



In recognition as the birthplace of West Virginia along with the rich history, Wheeling was designated by Congress as a National Heritage Area in 1994. Upon its inception, Wheeling Heritage became the managing entity of the National Heritage Area and works to tell the stories of Wheeling’s rich cultural past and conserve the natural and historic resources still present today. Wheeling Heritage has also played an integral role in shaping the city’s redevelopment by partnering in city investments such as Wheeling Stamping Co. building, Heritage Port, the Capitol Theatre, and more.

“This vote is great news for the Wheeling National Heritage Area, along with all of the National Heritage Areas,” said Scott Schenerlein, Wheeling Heritage’s Executive Director. “It is so nice to have our reauthorization solidified for another 14 years. Throughout West Virginia, National Coal Heritage Area was also reauthorized while Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area’s management plan was extended. It recognized and added new heritage areas. It allows us to continue working to preserve Wheeling’s history and tell its story. A huge thank you to Senator Manchin, Senator Capito, and Congressman McKinley for being advocates on the importance of this bill, along with Sara Capen from the Alliance of National Heritage Area and Niagara Falls National Heritage Area.”

The legislation became law with the signature of President Biden on Jan. 5, 2023. With this signature, the National Heritage Area count grew to 61 National Heritage Areas in 35 states and 1 territory for a total of 7 new National Heritage Areas.

With this signature, Wheeling National Heritage Area now becomes one of 61 National Heritage Areas in 35 states and 1

About Wheeling Heritage:

[Wheeling Heritage](#) is a catalyst for the revitalization of Wheeling. Through historic preservation, community development, and the arts, we help to tell Wheeling’s story and shape its future. We seek to improve the quality of life in Wheeling by preserving and investing in our city, collaborating with others, and engaging the citizens of Wheeling in our work.