

Testimony of

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and the
Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway

before the

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Daniel M. Rice. I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition, a regional private non-profit organization working on the development of the Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway from Cleveland to New Philadelphia, Ohio in northeast Ohio. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to offer testimony in support of H.R. 1483, a bill to amend the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 to extend the reauthorization for certain National Heritage Areas. While I will be providing some limited information about the work of some of the National Heritage Areas, I respectfully request that the Subcommittee keep the record open so that those National Heritage Areas can submit testimony themselves. I want to thank Congressman Ralph Regula and his staff for their leadership in drafting the legislation with the staff of the Subcommittee. For over 40 years, Congressman Ralph Regula has been the inspiration and leader of the Ohio & Erie Canalway in northeast Ohio, and we are extremely grateful to him for his outstanding leadership and support. I also want to thank the other 18 Members of Congress for co-sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

I am here today also to testify as a general witness on behalf of the eight other National Heritage Areas included within H.R. 1483. These National Heritage Areas, the class of 1996, were all authorized together in the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996. These National Heritage Areas have charted new territory in the way the federal government works to conserve America's great heritage. These nine National Heritage Areas have proven that the National Park Service conservation strategy is a partnership that involves state, local and private partners with each party's investment hinged to support the others. These nine National Heritage Areas have been reviewed by the Government Accountability Office and have successfully demonstrated that National Heritage Areas promote the National Park Service ethic of resource conservation, and cultivate stewardship for our national resources without impacting private property rights.

Over the past ten years, I have had the privilege and benefit of working with each of these Heritage Areas and experienced the unique heritage and resources of the eight other

National Heritage Areas. Collectively, these nine National Heritage Areas are successfully promoting resource conservation, celebrating cultural traditions and stimulating community and economic development. All of the National Heritage Areas included in H.R. 1483 were established with 10-year Management Plans to guide the work of the National Heritage Areas for the next 10 years. This was not meant to be a limitation on the life of the National Heritage Area, only a limitation on the timeframe of the plan. At the end, or near the conclusion of the Management Plan, the National Heritage Areas were charged with the responsibility to chart out its next 10-year strategy. National Heritage Areas were established as long-term conservation tools to protect America's heritage in places where sole federal government ownership, i.e., units of the National Park Service were not feasible or practicable. National Heritage Areas need to be reauthorized in order to fulfill their Management Plans. Selecting a pre-determined termination, as it has been suggested after 10 years, will cause more harm than good.

In 2006 the National Park System Advisory Board issued the report *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas*¹. The Advisory Board stated that "National Heritage Areas represent a significant advance in conservation and historic preservation" and made several recommendations. Upon examining the role and work of NHAs, the Advisory Board found that NHAs:

- involve the diverse people of this nation to tell their stories with integrity and authenticity;
- weave together nature and culture and provide an integrated approach to conserving resources;
- work beyond park boundaries by offering the National Park Service a new strategy to meet their stewardship mission;
- conserve landscapes and traditions and make them available for the enjoyment of future generations;
- engage youth and people of all ages in our future by providing them with opportunities for place-based education and a forum for public engagement; and,
- build new constituencies for the NPS and stay relevant by examining issues not just in the past, but in the present and in the future.

Each of the National Heritage Areas contained within H.R. 1483 have existed for at least 10 years. Each NHA has a remarkable track record of accomplishment, conserving historic and cultural resources. They have created partnerships with federal, state, local and private organizations, and raise funds to match the federal investment of the National Park Service money invested into the NHA. They create heritage development projects that help tell the story of America.

An example of this work of the National Heritage Areas contained in this bill include:

- the annual Heritage Area grants program of the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, that has invested in more than 290 projects, including folk arts,

¹ The report may be viewed at www.nps.gov/policy/NHAreport.htm.

educational and interpretive exhibits in seven counties in southwestern Pennsylvania.

- since 1999, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor has leveraged over \$35 million in the communities of the Heritage Area, with \$25 million of that being since January of 2004. To date, over \$2 million has been awarded directly to the rural destinations and organizations from the Heritage Area grants program in the categories of Product Development, Marketing and Visitor Services and Planning;
- an annual “Trails & Sails” event in the Essex National Heritage Area, featuring a weekend full of walking and water-based excursions attracting thousands of visitors to museums, trails, historic towns and sites;
- Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area established an interlocking statewide system of heritage corridors that allow for, and provide management guidance to, heritage interpretation and heritage tourism for Tennessee's comprehensive Civil War story;

National Heritage Areas build trails, protect historic buildings through restoration projects and National Register designations. They conserve cultural and living traditions, develop educational programs with schools and through interpretive exhibits at museums. NHAs contribute to a quality of life in communities where heritage becomes a building block for revitalization and tourism. In almost every instance, the NHA plays a role as the initiator, seeding projects that might never be funded in more traditional community or regional investment strategies. An NHA looks to use its unique heritage of a project as the foundation for its economic strategy. We often hear that historic preservation and economic development cannot coexist. I am here today to tell you that is not the case in National Heritage Areas. Some of our best partners are developers and property owners looking for ways to incorporate heritage resources into their plans.

The investment strategy of NHAs is to pool money to make grants in heritage development projects that fit within the scope of the management plan. The initial, and most critical investment, comes from the appropriation that Congress provides each year to the NHAs. Without this investment from the National Park Service, the question that begs to be asked is: why would any other financial partner sit at the NHA table without the primary NHA partner? The Advisory Board recognized this as a part of its field visits to National Heritage Areas. It is the reason why the recommendation is made for a long-term commitment to NHAs.

The Ohio & Erie Canalway is a regional and national treasure that celebrates the unique natural, historical and recreational resources along the Ohio & Erie Canal from Cleveland to New Philadelphia in northeast Ohio. Working in partnership with our private, local, state and national partners, and with the full support of our seven Congressional districts, we are developing a 101-mile multi-use recreational trail, conserving hundreds of acres of natural areas, preserving historic structures and stimulating over \$270,000,000 of community and economic development activity. For every \$1 of federal seed funding, we are leveraging over \$12 of private, local, and state investment.

Some examples of our resource conservation accomplishments include:

- Development of 75 miles of the multi-use recreational Towpath Trail from Cleveland to New Philadelphia, Ohio. To date, over \$53,000,000 of private, local, state and federal resources have been invested in this regional greenway. Over 3 million users utilized the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail in 2006.
- Implementation of four county trail and green space plans with over 400 miles of connecting trails and 1,000 acres of green space.
- Over 160,000 volunteer hours on National Heritage Area related programs and projects, and over 250,000 participants in educational programs.
- Preservation and restoration of historic canal resources including, the Mustill House and Store, Henniger House, Zoar Hotel, Zoar Town Hall, Jackson Township School and the Richard Howe House.
- Local developer Frank Sinito invested over \$13 million dollars in the mixed-use development, Thornburg Station, along the banks of the Ohio & Erie Canal and Towpath Trail in Independence, Ohio in Cuyahoga County. Through a combination of upscale restaurants, offices and shops, Thornburg Station has generated over 50 jobs and is a destination Trailhead along the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.
- Designation of the Canalway Ohio Scenic Byway as a State and National Scenic Byway.
- Creation of a Communications Plan, including a comprehensive Interpretation Plan, Signage Plan and Marketing Plan. In April 2006, we introduced the first Visitors Guide for the Ohio & Erie Canalway, in partnership with our Convention & Visitors Bureaus.

All of these accomplishments would not have been possible without the designation, as a National Heritage Area, by Congress in 1996. The National Heritage Area designation provides an organized regional structure and forum for the promotion of resource conservation, interpretation and development of the natural, historical and recreational resources along the Ohio & Erie Canalway. With the development of the Corridor Management Plan, we obtained the investment, commitment and support of all of our private, local, state and federal partners for the Ohio & Erie Canalway. All of our private, local, state and federal partners, including the National Park Service, endorsed the Corridor Management Plan and committed their resources to the completion of the 20-year plan.

As you can see, Mr. Chairman, we are at a very critical crossroads in the development of the Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway, as well as the other eight National Heritage Areas and that is why we are requesting reauthorization of these nationally significant

projects. Just as much of the past accomplishments of the nine National Heritage Areas have been due to the participation and involvement of the National Park Service, much of our future success depends on the continued partnership and participation of the National Park Service. As the Corridor Management Plan for the Ohio & Erie Canalway states, “Alliances and regional coalitions are critical to the long-term success of the National Heritage Corridor as well as to the accomplishment of short-term projects.”

Without reauthorization of the Ohio & Erie Canalway, we will be unable to complete the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and fulfill the commitments and obligations outlined in the Corridor Management Plan, and it could undermine the successful public/private partnership strategy at the local level. I trust that without reauthorization, the other eight Heritage Areas contained within H.R. 1483, will not be able to fulfill their Management Plans and responsibilities.

If our federal partners abandon the partnership and their commitment to the Management Plans, the private, local and state partners may take the same approach and withdraw their commitment and support. Once this occurs, the public/private partnership is dissolved, the foundation for the regional resource conservation strategy is destroyed and the previous investment of private, local, state and other partners will be at risk. Continued federal investment is necessary to maintain the momentum and provide critical seed funding to important components of the Management Plans. Reauthorization of the Ohio & Erie Canalway, and the other eight National Heritage Areas, allows us to complete our Management Plans, fulfill our commitments to the communities and develop the necessary funding diversification strategies.

Mr. Chairman, now, more than ever, we need to maintain our partnership with the National Park Service and renew our shared commitment to the Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway, and the eight National Heritage Areas listed in H.R. 1483. National Heritage Areas successfully promote and export the National Park Service ethic of resource conservation without significant permanent investment. Through the National Heritage Area designation, we are building permanent community partnerships and developing funding diversification strategies for the conservation of nationally significant resources. Most importantly, National Heritage Areas expand the reach of the National Park Service and allows the Service to affect the lives of ordinary citizens, in urban areas and townships, across this country in extraordinary ways, without the burden and responsibility of ownership and long-term maintenance by the National Park Service.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I believe that National Heritage Areas are an innovative approach to resource conservation and they represent the future direction of the National Park Service in the 21st century. That is why I strongly urge your support for the passage of H.R. 1483 so we can continue our successful partnership for resource conservation and the celebration of our nationally significant resources. Working together, we are creating legacies for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding H.R. 1483 before your Committee, and I am happy to answer any questions that you, or other members of the Committee might have.