

TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN PAUL E. KANJORSKI
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
HEARING ON H. R. 3809, LEGISLATION TO REAUTHORIZE THE DELAWARE
AND LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

JUNE 5, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop for convening this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to offer my views on H.R. 3809, legislation I introduced to reauthorize the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. I am pleased that Congressman Charlie Dent, who co-authored this legislation, will offer his thoughts, as well.

In 1988, I had the privilege of supporting legislation to create the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, the nation's third national heritage area. This legislation established a national heritage area in Eastern Pennsylvania, encompassing five counties, including two in my Congressional District. The legislation also created the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission to manage the area.

The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor runs between Wilkes-Barre and Bristol and includes 165 miles of canals, railroads, and rivers. The Corridor works to preserve these areas and to educate the public about the importance these systems had to the transport of anthracite coal, which fueled our nation's industrial revolution. The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor also works to recognize the industries that sprung up along this route, including iron and steel, textiles, and others.

Since its creation, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission has completed many projects in my Congressional District. These projects include restoring an abandoned engine repair structure for use as a library in White Haven, managing the acquisition and development of the 17-mile Black Diamond Trail, and designing and installing 77 interpretive signs on the Wyoming Valley Levee Trail System, to name a few. It also has a number of new projects underway that deserve the continued support of the federal government.

Additionally, the Delaware and Lehigh Heritage Corridor has successfully leveraged the funds it has received from the National Park Service throughout its existence. From fiscal years 1989 to 2005, the Corridor received \$8 million from the National Park Service and used those funds to leverage nearly twelve times as much from other federal and non-federal sources.

In 2005, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission requested a report by the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute to evaluate the implementation of its management plan. From the findings of this report, the leaders of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission determined that shifting the responsibility for the management of the Corridor from the Commission established in 1988 to a non-profit organization would provide for additional administrative flexibility and the ability to apply for additional funding.

Consistent with this recommendation, the legislation I introduced would restructure the managing partner for the Corridor. Specifically, H.R. 3809 would designate the non-profit organization, Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Inc., as the managing partner for the Corridor.

Because funding for the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor expired in 2007, H.R. 3809 would also reauthorize financial support for the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor through fiscal year 2012. This additional federal funding would serve as seed money for the Corridor to continue to leverage into better and greater projects.

In my view, the transfer of the managing partner function and five years of additional federal funding through the National Park Service will allow the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to continue to carry out its management plan effectively and to transition to a long-term sustainable, independent entity. I also believe that we should work in Washington to support local communities that have successfully completed prior projects and which help future generations to learn about American history. Our legislation achieves those objectives.

Before closing, I would like to address the concerns raised by some individuals about continuing authorization for this heritage area. They argue that national heritage areas were only intended to be authorized for 20 years and at the end of that time period, authorization for the Corridor should sunset. While I, too, often support proposals to sunset programs, we should not treat the 20-year lifecycle as a firm deadline and an absolute rule.

Instead we should treat it as a guideline and consider the unique circumstances of each situation. As one of the first heritage areas, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor needs more time to make an effective transition out of the program. Providing a little more time for the Corridor to plan for its future will help establish a best practice for other heritage areas to follow and implement when they, too, eventually “graduate” from the program. In other words, the experiences of the Corridor in making this change – although a bit longer than desired – should help to expedite the transition of others in the future.

Additionally, if the community and the federal government will continue to mutually benefit from the partnership of the national heritage area or if the community needs a limited period of time to transition from a short-term program to a long-term sustainable entity, then we should extend the lifespan of the heritage area. The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor meets these tests, as well.

The report by the Conservation Study Institute noted several options for ensuring the continued management of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. When looking at continuing without a federally-authorized partner, the Institute noted that it would be a setback for the Corridor. In addition, the Conservation Study Institute report noted that transferring the management of the Corridor to the non-profit organization would allow for additional flexibility and would allow for additional funding opportunities going forward. We therefore need to give the Corridor the time and support that it needs to make this transition.

In sum, I strongly believe that passing H.R. 3809 will give the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor the time and funding it needs to carry out its management plan, complete its transition to a non-profit organization, and serve the public good. I hope the Members of the subcommittee will view this bill similarly and join me in supporting this important legislation by moving it forward in the coming weeks.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to express my thoughts on these matters. I am happy to answer any questions.
