

CRS Issue Brief for Congress

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Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues

Updated March 24, 2005

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Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues

SUMMARY

Over the past 20 years, Congress has established 27 National Heritage Areas (NHAs) to commemorate, conserve, and promote important areas that include natural, scenic, historic, cultural, and recreational resources. NHAs are partnerships between the National Park Service (NPS), states, and local communities, where the NPS supports state and local conservation through federal recognition, seed money, and technical assistance. NHAs are not part of the National Park System, where lands are federally owned and managed. Rather, lands within heritage areas typically remain in state, local, or private ownership. In addition, other heritage areas have been designated by states and local governments and announcements. This issue brief focuses on heritage areas designated by Congress, and related issues and legislation.

There is no comprehensive statute that establishes criteria for designating NHAs or provides standards for their funding and management. Rather, particulars for each area are provided in its enabling legislation. Congress designates a management entity, usually non-federal, to coordinate the work of the partners. This entity typically develops and implements a plan for managing the NHA, in collaboration with other parties. Once approved by the Secretary of the Interior, the management plan becomes the blueprint for managing the area.

NHAs might receive funding from a wide variety of sources, and Congress and the NPS do not ordinarily expect to provide NHAs with permanent federal funding. Congress determines the total level of federal funding for NHAs under annual appropriations bills

and typically specifies in appropriations documents the funds for each area. NHAs can use federal funds for many purposes, including staffing, planning, and projects.

Heritage areas have been supported as protecting lands and traditions and promoting tourism and community revitalization, but opposed as potentially costly and possibly leading to federal control over nonfederal lands.

Measures to designate NHAs and study the suitability and feasibility of areas for heritage status have been introduced in the 109th Congress. Some of these have passed the House or been reported from committee. The 108th Congress considered about 60 such measures, some of which passed the House and/or Senate. Debate on private property rights provisions was contentious during consideration of some of these bills. The 108th Congress also created four new NHAs, and provided appropriations for NHA assistance for both FY2004 and FY2005.

The sizeable number of existing NHAs, together with the number of measures proposed in recent Congresses to study and designate new ones, has intensified interest by the Administration and some Members in enacting a law providing criteria for designating NHAs, standards for their management, and limits on federal funding support. Two such measures have been introduced in the 109th Congress, one of which has been reported by committee. They are essentially identical to a bill that passed the Senate in the 108th Congress, but no further action was taken.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Two heritage bills passed the House on March 14, 2005. H.R. 412 would authorize a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Western Reserve Heritage Area (OH). H.R. 694 would designate the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor (FL, GA, NC, SC). Another five measures to designate heritage areas have been reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: S. 63 would designate the Northern Rio Grande NHA (NM); S. 163 would designate the Mormon Pioneer NHA (UT); S. 200 would designate the Arabia Mountain NHA (GA); S. 204 would designate the Atchafalaya NHA (LA); and S. 249 would designate the Great Basin National Heritage Route (NV, UT). Other measures to designate heritage areas or study specific areas for potential heritage status also have been introduced.

Legislation to establish a heritage areas program and criteria and mechanisms for designating NHAs has been reintroduced in the 109th Congress. S. 243 was reported by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on March 9, 2005. A companion House bill, H.R. 760, was introduced on February 10, 2005.

For FY2006, the Administration requested \$5.0 million for the NPS for NHA activities, a decrease from the FY2005 level of \$14.6 million.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Background

Over the last two decades, Congress has designated 27 National Heritage Areas (NHAs) to recognize and assist efforts to protect, commemorate, and promote natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources that form distinctive landscapes. Congress has established heritage areas for lands that are regarded as distinctive because of their resources, their built environment, and the culture and history associated with their residents. A principal distinction of these areas is an emphasis on the interaction of people and their environment. Heritage areas seek to tell the story of the people, over time, where the landscape helped shape the traditions of the residents. In a majority of cases, NHAs now have, or have had, a fundamental economic activity as their foundation, such as agriculture, water transportation, or industrial development. Congress also has enacted measures authorizing the study of areas to determine their suitability and feasibility for heritage designation.

Congress designated the first heritage area — the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor — in 1984. This area was located in one of the nation's most industrialized regions and sought to combine a diversity of land uses, management programs, and historical themes. A goal was to facilitate grassroots preservation of natural resources and economic development in areas containing industries and historic structures. The federal government would assist the effort (e.g., through technical assistance) but not lead it. The idea of linking and maintaining a balance between nature and industry, and encouraging economic regeneration, resonated with many states and communities, especially in the

eastern United States. Interest in establishing heritage areas was commensurate with growing public interest in cultural heritage tourism.

Since 1984, Congress has designated a total of 27 NHAs. The attributes of each NHA are set out in its establishing law. Because they are based on distinctive cultural attributes, NHAs vary in appearance and expression. They are at different stages of developing and implementing plans to protect and promote their attributes. **Table 1**, below, identifies the current NHAs.

Table 1. Existing National Heritage Areas, by Date of Authorization

National Heritage Area	State	Date of Authorization	Enabling Legislation
Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor	IL	August 24, 1984	P.L. 98-398
John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor	MA/RI	November 10, 1986	P.L. 99-647
Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor	PA	November 18, 1988	P.L. 100-692
Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission (Path of Progress)	PA	November 19, 1988	P.L. 100-698
Cane River National Heritage Area	LA	November 2, 1994	P.L. 103-449
Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor	CT/MA	November 2, 1994	P.L. 103-449
Cache La Poudre River Corridor	CO	October 19, 1996	P.L. 104-323
America's Agricultural Heritage Partnership (Silos and Smokestacks)	IA	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Augusta Canal National Heritage Area	GA	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Essex National Heritage Area	MA	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area	NY	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
National Coal Heritage Area	WV	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor	OH	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area	PA	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District	VA	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
South Carolina National Heritage Corridor	SC	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Tennessee Civil War Heritage Area	TN	November 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
(MotorCities-)Automobile National Heritage Area	MI	November 6, 1998	P.L. 105-355
Lackawanna Valley National Heritage Area	PA	October 6, 2000	P.L. 106-278
Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area	PA	October 6, 2000	P.L. 106-278
Wheeling National Heritage Area	WV	October 11, 2000	P.L. 106-291
Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area	AZ	October 19, 2000	P.L. 106-319
Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor	NY	December 21, 2000	P.L. 106-554

National Heritage Area	State	Date of Authorization	Enabling Legislation
Blue Ridge National Heritage Area	NC	November 10, 2003	P.L. 108-108
National Aviation Heritage Area	OH/IN	December 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447
Oil Region National Heritage Area	PA	December 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447
Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area	MS	December 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447

Sources: P.L. 108-447, and U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Heritage Areas: Legislative Citations*, at [<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/INFO/legisindex.HTM>], visited Dec. 1, 2003, and U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information, Fiscal Year 2004* (Washington, DC: 2003), page NR&P 83.

Heritage areas are not federally owned, and a designation generally is not intended to lead to federal acquisition of lands. They consist mainly of private properties, although some include publicly owned lands. In most cases, the laws establishing NHAs do not provide for acquisition of land, and once designated, heritage areas generally remain in private, state, or local government ownership. However, in a few cases Congress has authorized federal acquisition of land in heritage areas. For instance, Congress authorized creation of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park (LA) within the Cane River NHA. Such cases of federal acquisition/ownership have been challenged by property rights advocates, who generally oppose federal land ownership and possible resulting limitations on private land uses. (See “Support, Opposition, and Challenges,” below.)

Heritage areas are among the types of entities that use technical and financial aid from the National Park Service (NPS) but are not directly owned and managed by the agency. They also are not part of the National Park System, where lands are federally owned and managed. Congressional designation of heritage areas is commonly viewed as a less expensive alternative to acquiring and operating new units of the National Park System. That System now has 388 diverse units, including national parks, national monuments, national historic sites, national battlefields, and national preserves. (For information on establishing units of the National Park System, see CRS Report RS20158, *National Park System: Establishing New Units*, by Carol Hardy Vincent.)

While the concept of heritage areas is more than two decades old, NHAs are still viewed by some as an experimental form of protecting lands that reflects an evolution in thinking on roles and responsibilities. The traditional form of NPS land protection has been through government ownership, management, and funding of lands set aside for protection and enjoyment. By contrast, NHAs typically are non-federally owned, managed by local people with many partners and NPS advice, funded from many sources, and intended to promote economic development as well as protect natural and cultural heritage resources and values.

Since the creation of the first NHA, interest in additional NHA designations has grown considerably. There has been significant interest from communities seeking tourism and economic revitalization, and within the conservation community. The Bush Administration generally has supported NHAs because they embody partnerships between communities and the federal government, locally driven resource preservation, and local (rather than federal) control of land. At hearings early in the 109th Congress, however, the Administration recommended deferring action on certain bills seeking to establish heritage areas, despite favorable studies of the areas, until systemic NHA legislation is enacted. (See “Legislative

Activity,” below.) In the past few Congresses, many proposals to designate heritage areas or study lands for heritage status have been introduced, and Congress has held many hearings on heritage bills and issues. More than twenty bills introduced early in the 109th Congress, and approximately 60 proposals introduced in the 108th Congress, to designate heritage areas or study lands for heritage status suggest a continued high level of congressional interest in NHAs. The sizeable number of existing NHAs, together with the substantial number of proposals to study and designate new ones, has fostered interest by some Members and the Administration in establishing a standardized process and criteria for designating NHAs. (See “Legislative Activity,” below.) However, some opponents believe NHAs present such numerous problems and challenges that Congress should oppose efforts to designate new areas and create a “system” of NHAs. (See “Support, Opposition, and Challenges,” below.)

In addition to the federal heritage areas, other heritage areas have been designated by local governments or announcements by local preservation groups, and a number of states have developed their own heritage area programs. A White House initiative, *Preserve America* (Executive Order 13287, Mar. 3, 2003), directs federal agencies to improve management of historic properties through adaptive reuse initiatives and to promote heritage tourism through partnerships with communities. Also, the Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA), a collaboration of the management entities for the federally designated NHAs, working through its Heritage Development Institute initiative, provides training to practitioners of heritage development. (See [<http://www.heritagedevelopmentinstitute.org/home>], visited on January 21, 2005.) The ANHA also operates a resource center for heritage areas, organizes educational workshops and programs, and promotes heritage tourism.

Overview of Operations

There is no comprehensive statute that establishes criteria for designating NHAs or provides standards for their funding and management. Rather, particulars for an area are provided in its enabling legislation. While there tended to be greater variety in the creation and operation of earlier heritage areas, over the past several years the establishment and management of heritage areas have become somewhat more standardized. Common understandings and characteristics are discussed below.

NHAs involve partnerships between the NPS, states, and local interests. In establishing heritage areas, Congress typically designates a management entity to coordinate the work of the partners. Management entities could include state or local government agencies, nonprofit corporations, and independent federal commissions. The management entity usually develops and implements a plan for managing the NHA, in collaboration with partners and other interested parties. While the components of the plans vary, in accordance with the authorizing legislation and local needs, they often identify resources and themes; lay out policies and implementation strategies for protection, use, and public education; describe needed restoration of physical sites; discuss recreational opportunities; outline funding goals and possibilities; and define the roles and responsibilities of partners. Once the Secretary of the Interior approves a plan, it essentially becomes the blueprint for managing the heritage area and is implemented as funding and resources are available. Implementation of management plans is accomplished primarily through voluntary actions.

NHAs might receive funding to prepare and implement their plans from a wide array of sources, including philanthropic organizations, endowments, individuals, businesses, and

governments. Congress and the NPS do not ordinarily expect to provide NHAs with permanent federal funding, but rather encourage NHAs to develop alternative sources of funding to become financially self-sufficient. A March 30, 2004 report of the General Accounting Office (now called the Government Accountability Office) states that during the six-year period from FY1997 to FY2002, heritage areas received \$310 million in total funding. About half the funds (\$154 million) were derived from state and local governments and private sources, with the other half (\$156 million) provided by the federal government. Of the federal funding, about \$50 million came from the NPS heritage program and \$44 million came from other NPS programs, with the balance (about \$61 million) provided by 11 other federal sources.¹ A report of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas with data over a longer period shows the federal contribution at about one-third (34%) of total funding from 1985 through 2004. State and local governments also contributed about one-third (35%) of NHA funds, with private funding sources providing 27% and the remaining 4% deriving from other sources. For 2004, the report indicates that the federal (30%) and state and local (27%) shares of NHA funding were significantly less than private contributions (42%). The remaining 1% of NHA funding during 2004 was provided by other sources.²

Congress determines the total level of federal funding for NHAs and typically specifies in appropriations documents the funds for each NHA. The management entity generally receives any federal appropriations for the area. Federal funds might be used to help rehabilitate an important site, develop tours, establish interpretive exhibits and programs, increase public awareness, and hold festivals to showcase an area's natural and cultural heritage. In testimony presented in March 2003, an official from the Department of the Interior (DOI) testified to the success of NHAs in using funds provided by the NPS to leverage additional funding from other sources.³

Support, Opposition, and Challenges⁴

Some believe that the benefits of heritage areas are considerable and thus Congress should expand its assistance for creating and sustaining heritage areas. Supporters view

¹ The data reflect funding for 22 of the then existing 24 heritage areas. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *National Park Service: A More Systematic Process for Establishing National Heritage Areas and Actions to Improve Their Accountability Are Needed*, GAO-04-593T, Summary (Washington, DC, March 30, 2004), at [<http://www.gao.gov/>].

² See Alliance of National Heritage Areas, *Telling America's Story: Annual Report 2004*, p. 10, at [<http://www.nationalheritageareas.org/reports.htm>].

³ Testimony of Paul Hoffman, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, March 13, 2003, available at [http://energy.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=627&wit_id=1714].

⁴ For sources generally supportive of NHAs, see, for example, the websites of the National Park Service at [<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/>], Alliance of National Heritage Areas at [<http://www.nationalheritageareas.com/>], and the National Trust for Historic Preservation at [<http://www.ruralheritage.org/workarea.html>]. For information generally opposed to NHAs, see, for example, the websites of the Property Rights Foundation of America, Inc., at [<http://prfamerica.org/HeritageRiversAreasIndex.html>] and the American Policy Center at [<http://www.americanpolicy.org/prop/main.htm>], and congressional testimony by Daniel M. Clifton of Americans for Tax Reform at [<http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/108cong/parks/2003sep16/agenda.htm>].

NHAs as important for protecting history, traditions, and cultural landscapes, especially where communities are losing their traditional economic base (e.g., industry or farming), facing a loss of population, or experiencing rapid growth from people unfamiliar with the region. Advocates see NHAs as unifying forces that increase the pride of people in their traditions, foster a spirit of cooperation and unity, and promote a stewardship ethic among the general public.

Advocates of NHAs assert that they foster cultural tourism, community revitalization, and regional economic development. Heritage areas are advertised as entertaining and educational places for tourists, and may involve activities such as stories, music, food areas, walking tours, boat rides, and celebrations. Through increased tourism, communities benefit locally when services and products are purchased. In some cases, increased heritage tourism, together with an emphasis on adaptive reuse of historic resources, has attracted broader business growth and development.

Some supporters see NHAs as generally more desirable than other types of land conservation. They prefer the designation of NHAs because the lands typically remain in nonfederal ownership, to be administered locally. Other NHA backers view establishing and managing federal areas, such as units of the National Park System, as too costly, and observe that small federal investments in heritage areas have been successful in attracting funds from other sources. Proponents also see NHAs as flexible enough to encompass a diverse array of initiatives and areas because the heritage concept lacks systemic laws or regulations.

Property rights advocates take the lead in opposing heritage areas. They contend that some national heritage areas lack significant local support. They charge that private property owners should be routinely notified when their lands fall within proposed heritage areas, because the NPS could exert a degree of federal control over nonfederal lands by influencing zoning and land-use planning. Some fear that any private property protections in legislation would not be routinely adhered to by the federal government. They are concerned that localities have to obtain the approval of the Secretary of the Interior for heritage area management plans and believe that some plans are overly prescriptive in regulating details of private property use (e.g., the species of trees that landowners can plant). Another concern of opponents is that NHA lands will be targeted for purchase and direct management by the federal government.

The lack of a general statute providing a framework for heritage area establishment, management, and funding has prompted criticism that the process is inconsistent and fragmented. Some see a need to establish and define the criteria for creating NHAs, specify what NHAs are and do, and clarify the federal role in supporting these areas. They are concerned that the enactment of additional heritage bills could substantially increase the administrative and financial obligations of the NPS. Some detractors assert that federal funds would be more appropriately spent on park units and other existing protected areas rather than on creating new heritage areas. Still others cite a need for a mechanism to hold the management entities accountable for the federal funds they receive and the decisions they make.

Some observers recommend caution in creating NHAs, because in practice NHAs may face an array of challenges to success. For instance, heritage areas may have difficulty providing the infrastructure that increased tourism requires, such as additional parking,

lodging, restaurants, and well-coordinated attractions. Other areas may need additional protective measures to ensure that increased tourism and development do not degrade the resources and landscapes. Still other NHAs may require improvements in leadership and organization of the management entities, including explaining their message and accomplishments. Some NHAs may experience difficulty attracting funds because the concept is relatively recent and not universally accepted as a sustainable approach to resource preservation or economic development. Some conservationists think the protective measures are not strong enough and some economic development professionals think the heritage idea does not fit the traditional framework for development. Also, achieving and maintaining appropriate levels of public commitment to implementation may be challenging.⁵

Administrative Actions

The NPS assists communities interested in attaining the federal NHA designation by helping them craft a regional vision for heritage preservation and development. The agency also provides a variety of types of assistance to areas once designated — administrative, financial, policy, technical, and public information. The NPS seeks to serve as a catalyst by offering assistance to designated heritage areas only for a limited number of years. Specifically, the NPS has sought to limit each heritage area to no more than \$1 million per year, not to exceed \$10 million per area over 15 years. In 2004, the Administration presented a draft National Heritage Partnership Act that sought, in part, to codify these funding parameters and require each heritage area management plan to include a business plan demonstrating financial capability to carry out the plan. This business plan was intended to foster self-sufficiency of NHAs.⁶ Similar provisions were included in S. 2543, which passed the Senate but was not enacted in the 108th Congress. This legislation has been reintroduced in the 109th Congress. (See “Legislative Activity,” below.)

As part of its annual budget justification to Congress for the National Park Service, the Administration submits its desired overall funding level for the NPS Heritage Partnership Program. Congress generally determines a total funding level and the distribution of the funds for specified NHAs. NHAs can use such funds for varied purposes including staffing, planning, and implementing projects. For FY2006, the Administration has requested \$5.0 million for NHAs, a significant decrease from the FY2005 level of \$14.6 million. Historically, the Bush Administration’s requests for NHA funding have been significantly lower than the previous year’s appropriation; however, Congress typically has restored or increased NHA funds.

Once a heritage area is designated by Congress, the NPS typically enters into a cooperative agreement, or *compact*, with the designated management entity, often comprised of local activists, to help plan and organize the area. The compact outlines the goals for the heritage area and defines the roles and contributions of the NPS and other partners, typically

⁵ Information on challenges to NHA success is found in Jane Daly, “Heritage Areas: Connecting People to their Place and History,” *Forum Journal (Journal of the National Trust for Historic Preservation)*, vol. 17, no. 4 (summer 2003), pp. 5-12.

⁶ Testimony of A. Durand Jones, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, March 30, 2004, at [<http://energy.senate.gov/hearings/witnesslist.cfm?id=1128>].

setting out the parameters of the NPS's technical assistance. It also serves as the legal vehicle for channeling federal funds to non-governmental management entities.

At congressional direction, the NPS also prepares studies as to whether areas are suitable for designating as NHAs. The NPS often testifies before Congress on the results of these studies. The studies typically address a variety of topics, including whether an area has resources reflecting aspects of American heritage that are worthy of recognition, conservation, and continued use. They usually discuss whether an area would benefit from being managed through a public-private partnership, and if there is a community of residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and state and local agencies that would work to support a heritage area.

Administration representatives have testified in support of developing systemic NHA legislation to list the qualities a prospective area must possess and the parameters under which designation could occur. At a March 30, 2004 hearing of a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee, a DOI witness⁷ outlined the Administration's draft legislation to create a National Heritage Areas Program. At an earlier subcommittee hearing, the Deputy Director of the NPS expressed "strong support" for legislation to establish a national heritage program, while suggesting modifications to S. 2543 on behalf of DOI.⁸

The NPS Advisory Board was created in 1935 to advise the Director of the NPS and the Secretary of the Interior on issues relating to the National Park Service. The Partnership Committee of the NPS Advisory Board has begun a review of NHAs and the Heritage Partnership Program and will report recommendations regarding future NPS involvement with NHAs. The report is scheduled to be completed in mid-2005.

Legislative Activity

109th Congress Overview. The 109th Congress appears to continue a high level of interest in heritage area bills and issues. As of March 23, 2005, five measures to designate heritage areas have been reported by committee. Also, one bill to designate a heritage area, and another measure to study an area for possible heritage designation, have passed the House. Other bills to designate heritage areas or study specific areas for possible heritage status have been introduced. Some of them would create heritage "corridors," "routes," or "partnerships." A number of existing heritage areas have similar titles, and the NPS considers all of them to be NHAs. These bills are shown in **Table 2**, below. General heritage area legislation (in contrast to area designations or studies) is discussed following the table and is identified in the "Legislation" section, below.

Other pending legislation pertains to existing heritage areas. H.R. 326 and S. 505 seek to amend the boundary of the Yuma Crossing NHA, and the House bill also would extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance until 2020. H.R. 1205 and S. 574 seek to amend the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Testimony of A. Durand Jones, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, June 24, 2004, at [http://energy.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=1243&wit_id=169].

Act to increase the authorization of appropriations and extend the date on which the authority of the Secretary of the Interior terminates. For each of several heritage areas, H.R. 888 would extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior from September 30, 2012, to September 30, 2027, and increase the total authorization of appropriations from \$10 million to \$20 million. It also would rename the Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor as the Ohio and Erie National Heritage Canalway, and make other changes regarding that area, the National Coal Heritage Area, and the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor.

On March 15, 2005, a Senate subcommittee held a hearing on establishing three heritage areas that feasibility studies determined to be appropriate for designation. They are in the “Bleeding Kansas” area (KS, MO; S. 175), Champlain Valley (NY, VT; S. 322), and Upper Housatonic Valley (CT, MA; S. 429). Several witnesses testified in favor of establishing one or more of the areas as NHAs, while one witness testified against NHAs generally. The Administration recommended deferring action on the bills until the enactment of systemic NHA legislation that would set guidelines and a process for designating NHAs. The Administration also recommended deferring action due to current fiscal constraints and for consistency with the Administration’s FY2006 budget. While the budget includes a sizeable decrease in funding for the NPS for NHAs, the Administration asserts that through several efforts and programs the budget “will go a long way toward supporting local efforts to preserve” heritage resources.⁹ At a March 1, 2005, Senate committee hearing on the DOI budget, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton stated that the NPS is seeking money for heritage areas from sources including one proposed program — Preserve America.

On March 10, 2005, the House passed H.R. 3, the Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, to authorize funds for federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, among other purposes. The omnibus bill authorizes appropriations for FY2005 through FY2009 for congressional “high priority projects” under Title I, Federal-Aid Highways. Title I includes authorizations for projects at the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Title III, Federal Transit Administration Programs, includes project authorizations for new fixed guideway capital projects. Among the projects authorized for alternatives analysis and preliminary engineering for FY2004 through FY2009 is the Aviation Heritage Corridor Streetcar Project in Dayton, Ohio. (For more information on the operation of federal highway and transit programs, see CRS Issue Brief IB10138, *Surface Transportation: Reauthorization of TEA-21*, by John W. Fischer.)

⁹ Testimony of Janet Snyder Matthews, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, March 15, 2005, at [<http://energy.senate.gov/hearings/witnesslist.cfm?id=1412>], visited March 22, 2005.

Table 2. Bills to Establish Heritage Areas or Authorize Studies, 109th Congress
(as of March 23, 2005)

Bill Number	State	Type	Title	Status
H.R. 61	VI	Study	St. Croix NHA Study Act	Introduced
H.R. 73	VA	Study	Northern Neck NHA Study Act	Introduced
H.R. 87	NJ	Desig.	Crossroads of the American Revolution NHA Act	Introduced
H.R. 412	OH	Study	Western Reserve Heritage Area Study Act	Passed House
H.R. 413 S. 175	KS/MO	Desig.	Bleeding Kansas NHA Act	Introduced Hearing Held
H.R. 522 S. 204	LA	Desig.	Atchafalaya NHA Act	Introduced Committee Reported
H.R. 694	FL, GA, NC, SC	Desig.	Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act	Passed House
H.R. 732/ S. 63	NM	Desig.	Northern Rio Grande NHA Act	Introduced Committee Reported
H.R. 938/ S. 429	CT/MA	Desig.	Upper Housatonic Valley NHA Act	Introduced Hearing Held
H.R. 956	MA/NH	Desig.	Freedom's Way NHA Act	Introduced
H.R. 1087	NC	Study	Northeastern North Carolina Heritage Area Study Act	Introduced
H.R. 1192	IL	Desig.	Abraham Lincoln NHA Act	Introduced
H.R. 1289	SC	Study	Southern Campaign of the Revolution Heritage Area Study Act	Introduced
S. 163	UT	Desig.	Mormon Pioneer NHA Act	Committee Reported
S. 200	GA	Desig.	Arabia Mountain NHA Act	Committee Reported
S. 249	NV, UT	Desig.	Great Basin National Heritage Route Act	Committee Reported
S. 322	NY, VT	Desig.	Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership Act	Hearing Held

Source: Compiled by CRS from the Legislative Information System (LIS) of the U.S. Congress, 109th Congress data file.

109th Congress Proposals to Establish Systemic Procedures. House and Senate companion bills, H.R. 760 and S. 243, have been introduced to establish a heritage areas program and a unified process for creating, operating, and funding NHAs. S. 243 was reported by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on March 9, 2005. These bills are essentially identical to legislation (S. 2543) passed by the Senate but not enacted in the 108th Congress. They would require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct suitability-feasibility studies, or review and comment on such studies prepared by others, for areas under consideration for NHA designation. They set out criteria by which such areas would be evaluated, including identification of a local coordinating entity, demonstration of support by local governments and communities, development of a conceptual financial plan outlining the responsibilities of participants, and concurrence of managers of any federal lands within the proposed NHA. The criteria include evidence of resources and traditional uses that are

of “national importance,” a term used to avoid confusion with the “national significance” needed for designating units of the National Park System.

The measures would provide for the local coordinating entity for an NHA to develop a management plan for the area within three years of the availability of funds, and a process and time frame for action by the Secretary of the Interior to approve/disapprove the plan. The management plan is to include a business plan demonstrating that the local coordinating entity has sufficient partnerships and financial resources to carry out the plan, to encourage self-sufficiency of heritage areas. For each NHA, the bills would authorize funding of not more than \$1 million per year, with a total of not more than \$10 million over 15 years. The bills would cap funding for all NHAs at \$15 million per year. They seek to protect private property owners, for instance, by not requiring their participation in NHA plans and activities. They also seek to protect existing regulatory authorities — for example, by not altering “any duly adopted land use regulation, approved land use plan, or other regulatory authority.” They set out the responsibilities of local coordinating entities and the authorities of the Secretary of the Interior (through the NPS).

108th Congress Overview. The 108th Congress considered measures to designate and study heritage areas, as well as to extend the authorization of existing NHAs, establish uniform criteria and procedures for designating and managing heritage areas, and appropriate funds for heritage areas. The 108th Congress also held legislative and oversight hearings on heritage bills and issues.

In addition to enacting several measures (see below), the 108th Congress considered, but did not enact, about 60 bills for more than 20 different areas, to establish other NHAs or to study the suitability and feasibility of areas for heritage status. Some of these bills passed the House and/or Senate. Other legislation sought to extend the authorization for certain NHAs from September 30, 2012, until September 30, 2027, and increase the total funding authorized for each area from \$10 million to \$20 million. Still other measures proposed changes to existing NHAs to add explicit property rights protections, revise boundaries, or amend management authorities.

108th Congress Measures Enacted. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY2005 (P.L. 108-447) established three new NHAs: the National Aviation Heritage Area (OH/IN), the Oil Region NHA (PA), and the Mississippi Gulf Coast NHA (MS). The language for all three heritage areas seeks to protect private property rights, although the Mississippi Gulf Coast provisions do not include property owner notification and consent language. Such language for the other two areas provides that private property shall not be “preserved, conserved, or promoted by the management plan for the Heritage Area” until the owner receives written notification and gives written consent. Owners of land within the boundary of the heritage area “shall have their property immediately removed” upon written request. Further, private property owners cannot be compelled to allow public access to their property or to participate in, or be associated with, the NHA. Private property provisions have been advocated as necessary to prevent federally influenced restrictive zoning, to protect land-use options of property owners, and to prevent possible future federal ownership of heritage lands. Opponents have criticized such provisions as impractical, expensive, and burdensome for the local management entities. In earlier action, provisions of P.L. 108-108 established the Blue Ridge NHA (NC) with specified private property protections.

As in previous Congresses, the 108th Congress enacted appropriations for the NPS to partially fund heritage areas. The FY2005 request for NHA funding was \$2.5 million, an \$11.8 million decrease from the FY2004 enacted level. P.L. 108-447 provided \$14.6 million for 25 of the 27 existing heritage areas for FY2005, including \$500,000 for three NHAs established in the law. For FY2004, Congress enacted \$14.3 million for the NPS for heritage areas (P.L. 108-108).

108th Congress Proposals to Establish Systemic Procedures. Legislation governing the evaluation, designation, and management of new NHAs was considered but not enacted during the 108th Congress. S. 2543, which passed the Senate on September 15, 2004, sought to establish a unified process for creating, operating, and funding NHAs. It was similar to draft legislation prepared by the Administration. This legislation was reintroduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243 and H.R. 760) and is discussed above.

H.R. 1427, to establish procedures for designating, managing, and funding heritage areas, was introduced in the 108th Congress but no further action was taken. The bill would have authorized the Secretary of the Interior to recommend to Congress that an area be granted heritage designation if, within five years of Congress authorizing a feasibility study, the Secretary has completed the study, determined the area to be suitable, and approved a management plan for the area. Prior to the Secretary's recommendation, private property owners would have been notified and given an opportunity to decide whether to include their property in heritage area activities. The bill outlined requirements for conducting and approving feasibility studies. It would have required the local coordinating entity for the proposed area to prepare a management plan and would have provided for action by the Secretary to approve/disapprove the plan.

H.R. 1427 would have authorized the Secretary to make grants during the five-year period following authorization of a feasibility study for a "proposed" NHA. For established heritage areas, the bill would have authorized the Secretary to make grants during a 10-year period, and would have authorized appropriations of not more than \$1 million yearly per area with not more than \$10 million total per NHA. Grant recipients would have been required to provide matching funds, while the Secretary would have been authorized to provide technical assistance on a nonreimbursable basis. The bill also contained provisions seeking to protect private property, and outlined circumstances and procedures under which the Secretary would terminate funding for an NHA.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report. A GAO report on NHAs, released March 30, 2004, concluded that because there is no systematic process for designating NHAs, or well-defined NPS criteria for assessing the qualifications of areas, it is not possible to ensure that future areas will have the resources and support to be viable or that federal funds are well spent. The agency also concluded that the NPS does not employ key management controls in overseeing heritage areas; for instance, the NPS does not consistently review areas' financial audit reports or use results-oriented goals and measures. Further, the agency asserted that existing heritage areas do not appear to have affected property owners' rights. The GAO recommends that in the absence of congressional action to establish a formal heritage program, the NPS take the following actions: develop standards and processes for the agency's regional staff to use in approving heritage area management plans; require regular and consistent review of audit reports of NHAs; and develop results-oriented goals and measures for heritage area activities.

LEGISLATION

Measures to establish individual heritage areas or authorize studies of individual areas, as of March 23, 2005, are listed in **Table 2**, above. This section includes general heritage area legislation introduced in the 109th Congress.

H.R. 760 (Hefley); S. 243 (Thomas)

The National Heritage Partnership Act would establish a program and criteria for NHAs. H.R. 760 introduced Feb. 10, 2005; referred to Committee on Resources. S. 243 reported March 9, 2005 (S.Rept. 109-26), by the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 888 (Regula)

For several existing NHAs, seeks to extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior and to increase total authorization of appropriations, among other changes. Introduced Feb. 17, 2005; referred to Committee on Resources.

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, REPORTS, AND DOCUMENTS

108th Congress

U.S. Congress, House Committee on Resources, *Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area Act*, H.Rept. 108-362, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., Nov. 17, 2003 (Wash., DC: 2003).

—*Oil Region National Heritage Area Act*, H.Rept. 108-366, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., Nov. 17, 2003 (Wash., DC: 2003).

—*St. Croix National Heritage Area Act*, H.Rept. 108-361, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., Nov. 17, 2003 (Wash., DC: 2003).

—*To Establish the National Aviation Heritage Area, and for Other Purposes*, H.Rept. 108-370, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., Nov. 17, 2003 (Wash., DC: 2003).

—*Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area Act*, H.Rept. 108-365, 108th Cong., 1st Sess., Nov. 17, 2003 (Wash., DC : 2003).

U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *National Heritage Partnership Act*, S.Rept. 108-329, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., Aug. 25, 2004 (Wash., DC: 2004).

—*Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Act*, S.Rept. 108-294, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 7, 2004 (Wash., DC : 2004).

—*National Aviation Heritage Area Act*, S.Rept. 108-292, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 7, 2004 (Wash., DC: 2004).

- Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area Act*, S.Rept. 108-293, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 7, 2004 (Wash., DC: 2004).
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