



# Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues

**Carol Hardy Vincent**

Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

**Laura B. Comay**

Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

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## Summary

Over more than 25 years, Congress has established 49 national heritage areas (NHAs) to commemorate, conserve, and promote areas that include important natural, scenic, historic, cultural, and recreational resources. NHAs are partnerships among 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 or a combination thereof. Heritage areas have been supported as protecting lands and traditions and promoting tourism and community revitalization, but opposed as potentially burdensome, costly, or leading to federal control over nonfederal lands. This report focuses on heritage areas designated by Congress (not other entities) 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 nonfederal, 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. Congress typically determines federal funding for NHAs in annual appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. NHAs can use federal funds for many purposes, including staffing, planning, and projects. The FY2012 appropriation for the NPS for assistance to heritage areas was \$17.4 million. Full-year funding for FY2013 has not been determined, and FY2013 funds are being provided under the terms of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution for FY2013 (P.L. 112-175).

The Obama Administration has expressed interest in having NHAs become financially self-sufficient, and some appropriators and other Members have emphasized self-sufficiency for these areas as well. One role of the NPS is to evaluate heritage areas at least three years before the expiration of the authorization for federal funds. The NPS has completed evaluations of nine NHAs designated in 1996, and anticipates submitting reports to Congress on these evaluations in the near future.

Each Congress typically considers bills to establish new heritage areas, to study areas for possible heritage designation, or to amend existing heritage areas. Such bills are pending in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. Other 112<sup>th</sup> Congress measures would extend the authorization for federal assistance to certain heritage areas, while still others, contrarily, would ban federal funding for heritage areas.

Further, the sizeable number of existing NHAs and proposals in recent years to study and designate new ones has fostered legislation to establish a system of NHAs, and to provide criteria for their designation, standards for their management, and limits on federal funding support. In the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, one such measure (H.R. 4099) has been introduced. The Obama Administration has supported such systemic NHA legislation. Some opponents believe that NHAs present numerous problems and challenges and that Congress should oppose efforts to designate new areas and/or to create a system of NHAs.

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## Background

Over more than 25 years, Congress has designated 49 National Heritage Areas (NHAs) to recognize and assist efforts to protect, commemorate, and promote natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources that form distinctive landscapes.<sup>1</sup> 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 these areas and 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 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.

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** 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	Aug. 24, 1984	P.L. 98-398
John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor	MA/RI	Nov. 10, 1986	P.L. 99-647
Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor	PA	Nov. 18, 1988	P.L. 100-692
Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission (Path of Progress)	PA	Nov. 19, 1988	P.L. 100-698
Cane River NHA	LA	Nov. 2, 1994	P.L. 103-449
Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor	CT/MA	Nov. 2, 1994	P.L. 103-449
America’s Agricultural Heritage Partnership (Silos and Smokestacks)	IA	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Augusta Canal NHA	GA	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333

<sup>1</sup> A map indicating the location of the 49 NHAs is on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/VST/INDEX.HTM>.

<b>National Heritage Area</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Date of Authorization</b>	<b>Enabling Legislation</b>
Essex NHA	MA	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Hudson River Valley NHA	NY	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
National Coal Heritage Area	WV	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor	OH	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Rivers of Steel NHA	PA	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District	VA	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
South Carolina National Heritage Corridor	SC	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
Tennessee Civil War Heritage Area	TN	Nov. 12, 1996	P.L. 104-333
(MotorCities-)Automobile NHA	MI	Nov. 6, 1998	P.L. 105-355
Lackawanna Valley NHA	PA	Oct. 6, 2000	P.L. 106-278
Schuylkill River Valley NHA	PA	Oct. 6, 2000	P.L. 106-278
Wheeling NHA	WV	Oct. 11, 2000	P.L. 106-291
Yuma Crossing NHA	AZ	Oct. 19, 2000	P.L. 106-319
Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor	NY	Dec. 21, 2000	P.L. 106-554
Blue Ridge NHA	NC	Nov. 10, 2003	P.L. 108-108
Mississippi Gulf Coast NHA	MS	Dec. 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447
National Aviation Heritage Area	OH/IN <sup>a</sup>	Dec. 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447
Oil Region NHA	PA	Dec. 8, 2004	P.L. 108-447
Arabia Mountain NHA	GA	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Atchafalaya NHA	LA	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership	NY/VT	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Crossroads of the American Revolution NHA	NJ	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Freedom's Frontier NHA	KS/MO	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Great Basin National Heritage Route	NV/UT	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor	FL/GA/NC/SC	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Mormon Pioneer NHA	UT	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Northern Rio Grande NHA	NM	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Upper Housatonic Valley NHA	CT/MA	Oct. 12, 2006	P.L. 109-338
Abraham Lincoln NHA	IL	May 8, 2008	P.L. 110-229
Journey Through Hallowed Ground NHA	MD/PA/VA/WV	May 8, 2008	P.L. 110-229
Niagara Falls NHA	NY	May 8, 2008	P.L. 110-229
Baltimore NHA	MD	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Cache La Poudre River NHA <sup>b</sup>	CO	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Freedom's Way NHA	MA/NH	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm NHA	AK	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Mississippi Delta NHA	MS	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11

National Heritage Area	State	Date of Authorization	Enabling Legislation
Mississippi Hills NHA	MS	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Muscle Shoals NHA	AL	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Northern Plains NHA	ND	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
Sangre de Cristo NHA	CO	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11
South Park NHA	CO	March 30, 2009	P.L. 111-11

**Sources:** U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Heritage Areas Legislative History, 98<sup>th</sup>-111<sup>th</sup> Congresses*, at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/LEG/2009LegislativeHistory.pdf>.

- a. P.L. 108-447 established the area in the states of Ohio and Indiana. However, the boundaries in the law and the associated map (referenced in the law) contain only areas in Ohio, and the NHA as constituted does not include areas in Indiana, according to the staff of the National Aviation Heritage Alliance.
- b. In establishing this NHA, Section 8002 of P.L. 111-11 repealed P.L. 104-323, which had authorized the Cache La Poudre River Corridor on October 19, 1996.

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 or a combination thereof. 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 creating and operating new units of the National Park System. That system now has 398 diverse units: national parks, national monuments, national historic sites, national battlefields, national preserves, and other designations.<sup>2</sup>

While the oldest heritage area is more than 25 years old, NHAs are still viewed by some as an experimental form of protecting lands that reflect an evolution in 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 nonfederally owned, managed by local people with many partners and NPS advice, funded from many sources, and intended to promote local economic development as well as to protect natural and cultural heritage resources and values.

<sup>2</sup> For information on establishing and managing units of the National Park System, see CRS Report RS20158, *National Park System: Establishing New Units*, by Carol Hardy Vincent; CRS Report R41816, *National Park System: What Do the Different Park Titles Signify?*, by Laura B. Comay; and CRS Report R42125, *National Park Service: Management Partnerships*, by Laura B. Comay.

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 as well as conservation and preservation. In the past three Congresses (109<sup>th</sup>-111<sup>th</sup>), 22 NHAs were established and one was reauthorized, dozens of proposals to designate heritage areas or study lands for heritage status were introduced, and Congress held many hearings on heritage bills and issues. The sizeable number of existing NHAs, together with the substantial number of proposals in recent years to study and designate new ones, fostered interest by some Members and the Obama and George W. Bush Administrations in establishing a standardized process and criteria for designating NHAs. (See “Legislative Activity,” below.) However, the absence over the decades of such a systemic law has provided legislative flexibility in the creation of new NHAs and the modification of existing ones. Further, some opponents of NHAs believe that they threaten private property rights, are burdensome, or present other problems and challenges, so Congress should oppose any efforts to designate new areas and/or to 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 announced by local preservation groups, and a number of states have developed their own heritage area programs. 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. The ANHA also operates a resource center for heritage areas, organizes educational workshops and programs, and promotes heritage tourism.

## **Overview of Administration**

There is no comprehensive statute that establishes criteria for designating NHAs or provides standards for their funding and management. The NPS has outlined “four critical steps” to be taken prior to establishment of an NHA. They are (1) the completion of a suitability/feasibility study, (2) public involvement in the study, (3) demonstration of widespread support of residents for the designation, and (4) commitment from constituents, for instance, government, industry, and non-profit organizations. Further, the agency has suggested 10 criteria that a suitability/feasibility study should evaluate. They include whether the area has resources representing American heritage that are worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed through partnerships; there is a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles of all participants; and the proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area.<sup>3</sup>

The particulars for an area typically are provided in its enabling legislation. While there tended to be more variety in the creation and operation of earlier heritage areas, the establishment and management of heritage areas have become somewhat more standardized through the inclusion of some similar provisions in their enabling legislation. Common understandings and characteristics are discussed below.

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<sup>3</sup> The “four critical steps” and 10 suggested criteria are on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FSGUIDE/nhafeasguidelines.pdf>. Examples of feasibility studies are on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/plans.htm>.

NHAs usually involve partnerships among 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 want to provide NHAs with full and permanent federal funding, but rather encourage NHAs to develop alternative sources of funding. A report of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas shows that for 2009, the federal contribution to NHAs was about one-fourth (26%) of total funding. State and local governments contributed the largest portion (61%) of NHA funds, with private funding sources providing 11% and the remaining 2% from other sources.<sup>5</sup>

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 sponsor special events to showcase an area's natural and cultural heritage.

## **Support, Opposition, and Challenges<sup>6</sup>**

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 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

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<sup>4</sup> Guidance on how to develop a management plan is on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/REP/Notebook.pdf>. Existing management plans for NHAs are on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/plans.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> This information is from the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, *2009 Annual Report*, p. 4. The most recent report, the *2010 Annual Report*, does not contain similar information.

<sup>6</sup> 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.preservationnation.org/>. For information generally opposed to NHAs, see, for example, the websites of the Property Rights Foundation of America, Inc., at <http://prfamerica.org/indices/HeritageRiversAreasNatI-Index.html> and the American Policy Center at <http://americanpolicy.org/category/property-rights>, and congressional testimony by Daniel M. Clifton of Americans for Tax Reform before the House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands, September 16, 2003.

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 often 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. Some 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, while others favor a standardized program and process.

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 may one day 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 NPS 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, and restaurants. 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.<sup>7</sup>

## **Role of the National Park Service**

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 may provide 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. The Obama Administration expressed interest in having heritage areas become financially self-sufficient “after a given period of time,” and an intent to issue guidance for the development of self-sufficiency plans to foster attainment of this goal.<sup>8</sup> The NPS subsequently provided (in 2011) a series of training courses for heritage area managers and organizations to assist with long-term organizational sustainability. Courses addressed topics including entrepreneurial funding strategies, strategic planning, business planning, and fundraising. Previously, the Bush Administration had sought legislation that would limit each heritage area to no more than \$1 million per year, not to exceed \$10 million per area over 15 years.

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 setting out the parameters of the NPS’s technical assistance. It also serves as the legal vehicle for channeling federal funds to nongovernmental 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, interpretation, 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. Legislation authorizing an NHA might follow a positive study recommendation, although such recommendation is not a requirement for enacting legislation to designate an NHA. In other cases, a study is undertaken by another entity, such as a local non-profit organization or state or local government. The NPS provides guidance to these efforts, although it does not fund them.

Another NPS role is to evaluate heritage areas before the expiration of the authorization for federal funds. At least three years before this expiration, the NPS seeks to evaluate a heritage area

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2012*, p. NR&P-57 (hereafter *FY2012 Budget Justification*), on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2012/data/greenbook/FY2012\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2012/data/greenbook/FY2012_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

and make recommendations on the future NPS role (if any). The recent focus has been on evaluating nine heritage areas designated in 1996, as required by P.L. 110-229.<sup>9</sup> That law required an evaluation of the “accomplishments” of the areas; an assessment of the management entity in achieving the purposes of the law designating the area and the goals and objectives of the management plan for the area; an analysis of the impact of investments in the area; and a review of the management structure, partnership arrangements, and funding for the area so as to identify components required for sustainability. NPS is to report its results and recommendations to Congress. To aid with these evaluations, the NPS developed a methodology to assess the strengths and weaknesses of NHAs.

As of September 2012, the NPS had completed evaluations for the nine areas: America’s Agricultural Heritage Partnership, also known as Silos and Smokestacks; Augusta Canal NHA; Essex NHA; Hudson River Valley NHA; National Coal Heritage Area; Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor; Rivers of Steel NHA; South Carolina National Heritage Corridor; and Tennessee Civil War Heritage Area. The NPS anticipates submitting reports to Congress on these evaluations in the near future.<sup>10</sup>

The Obama Administration has expressed support for developing systemic NHA program legislation that would establish criteria for evaluating areas for heritage designation and set out processes for designating and administering heritage areas. For instance, on May 11, 2011, a National Park Service representative testified that “[p]rogram legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas.”<sup>11</sup> Earlier, the Administration had expressed an intent to submit a related legislative proposal, and urged Congress to enact systemic NHA legislation.<sup>12</sup> The Administration had not submitted such a proposal as of October 19, 2012. However, legislation (H.R. 4099) to create a process for designating, managing, and funding NHAs has been introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. (See “Legislative Activity,” below.)

Obama Administration representatives also testified during the 111<sup>th</sup> and 112<sup>th</sup> Congresses in favor of deferring action on certain bills to study or establish heritage areas until heritage program legislation is enacted. Other witnesses supported studying or establishing the NHAs being addressed at the hearings.

Similarly, the George W. Bush Administration supported the development of systemic NHA legislation. The Bush Administration supported NHAs as embodying partnerships between

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<sup>9</sup> P.L. 110-229, §462.

<sup>10</sup> This information was provided to CRS by Martha Raymond, NPS National Coordinator for National Heritage Areas, on October 19, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Testimony of Stephen E. Whitesell of the National Park Service, May 11, 2011, before a Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, on S. 127 at [http://energy.senate.gov/public/\\_files/Whitesell\\_NationalParkService\\_CombinedTestimony.pdf](http://energy.senate.gov/public/_files/Whitesell_NationalParkService_CombinedTestimony.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, see the Administration’s testimony before a Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on March 17, 2010, on S. 2892, at [http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Testimony&Hearing\\_ID=1b096249-c35e-9699-4710-049b19d7007b&Witness\\_ID=18d50115-13b7-44cc-89b1-2025db28e8ef](http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Testimony&Hearing_ID=1b096249-c35e-9699-4710-049b19d7007b&Witness_ID=18d50115-13b7-44cc-89b1-2025db28e8ef); on May 19, 2010, on S. 349 at [http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing\\_ID=84308bfa-b069-a677-9467-1a5a0a75dfc0](http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=84308bfa-b069-a677-9467-1a5a0a75dfc0); and on September 29, 2010, on S. 3261 at [http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing\\_ID=441fffd4-01f3-b02d-18f5-85c51d45dd34](http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=441fffd4-01f3-b02d-18f5-85c51d45dd34).

communities and the federal government, locally driven resource preservation, and local (rather than federal) control of land. However, the Administration recommended deferring action on certain bills seeking to establish additional heritage areas, despite favorable studies of the areas, until systemic NHA legislation was enacted.<sup>13</sup> The Bush Administration had presented to Congress a draft of such legislation based on the findings and recommendations of the National Park System Advisory Board.<sup>14</sup> The 2006 draft proposed a National Heritage Areas System, and standards and processes for conducting feasibility studies, designating NHAs, and developing and approving management plans. It aimed to protect the rights of property owners. The draft also would have authorized the Secretary of the Interior to provide technical and financial assistance to local coordinating entities. A heritage area could receive up to \$1 million per year, but not more than \$10 million over a 15-year period, and a nonfederal match would be required.

## Legislative Activity

### 112<sup>th</sup> Congress

#### Overview of Legislative Proposals

Each Congress typically considers a number of bills to designate heritage areas or authorize the study of areas to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the study area as a heritage area. Such proposals introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress as of October 19, 2012, are reflected in **Table 2**, below.

Other pending legislation pertains to existing NHAs. H.R. 1553 would expand the boundaries of the Abraham Lincoln NHA to include three additional counties in Illinois. H.R. 6090 would amend the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor to designate the South Carolina Heritage Corridor, Inc., as the management entity. H.R. 6440 proposes to rename the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor as “The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor.” H.R. 3191 and S. 1708 seek to establish a new unit of the National Park System that would include sites within the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. A Senate subcommittee held a hearing on S. 1708 on March 7, 2012.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, testimony of Janet Snyder Matthews of the National Park Service on July 12, 2007, before a Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources, at [http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=266&Itemid=1](http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=266&Itemid=1).

<sup>14</sup> The National Park System 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. A key recommendation of the Advisory Board’s review of NHAs was to establish a legislative foundation for a system of NHAs in the Park Service, based on specified concepts. Concepts included requiring a feasibility study to demonstrate that future proposed heritage areas meet certain criteria; setting standards for management planning that include a business plan; and protecting the rights of private property owners. Another recommendation was to develop performance measures for NHAs. The report is on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/NHAreport.pdf>.

**Table 2. Bills in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress to Establish Heritage Areas or Authorize Studies**  
(as of October 19, 2012)

Title	State	Type	Bill Number	Status
Buffalo Bayou	TX	Designate	H.R. 2378 S. 127	Introduced Hearing Held
Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway	WI	Designate	H.R. 4148 S. 2158	Introduced Hearing Held
Naugatuck River Valley	CT	Study	H.R. 2174 S. 1191	Introduced Hearing Held
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta	CA	Designate	H.R. 486 S. 29	Introduced Hearing Held
Saint Croix	Virgin Islands	Designate	H.R. 2448	Introduced
Santa Cruz Valley	AZ	Designate	H.R. 2037	Introduced
Susquehanna Gateway	PA	Designate	S. 1150	Hearing Held

**Source:** Compiled by CRS from the Legislative Information System (LIS) of the U.S. Congress, 112<sup>th</sup> Congress data file, on October 19, 2012.

The laws establishing heritage areas typically contain provisions explicitly authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to provide financial assistance to the areas. The authorizations for federal assistance to 12 NHAs have expired.<sup>15</sup> Pending measures would extend the authorities for these areas. H.R. 6091, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee, would extend until September 30, 2014, the authority of the Secretary to provide assistance to 11 of the heritage areas. Similarly, it would extend the authority of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission.<sup>16</sup> The measure also would extend, through September 30, 2014, the authorization of appropriations of \$1.0 million annually for implementing the management plan of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. House and Senate companion bills, H.R. 6572 and S. 3623, would extend the authority of the Secretary to provide assistance to 10 of the heritage areas through September 30, 2016. They also would extend the authorization of appropriations for implementing the management plan of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor through September 30, 2016, and extend the authority of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission through October 12, 2016.

Other bills would extend the authority of the Secretary to provide assistance to one or a few of the areas where authorization for federal assistance has expired. Specifically, S. 2133 would extend, until September 30, 2022, the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the America's Agricultural Heritage Partnership (Silos and Smokestacks). S. 2267 would extend until September 30, 2012, the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the

<sup>15</sup> The 12 areas are the America's Agricultural Heritage Partnership (Silos and Smokestacks); Augusta Canal NHA; Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor; Essex NHA; Hudson River Valley NHA; John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor; Lackawanna Valley NHA; National Coal Heritage Area; Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor; Rivers of Steel NHA; South Carolina National Heritage Corridor; and Tennessee Civil War Heritage Area. The authorization for federal assistance for 11 of the areas expired on September 30, 2012, while the authorization for the management entity for the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor expired on October 12, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Staff of the House Appropriations Committee have indicated that the authority for the commission would be extended until September 30, 2014.

Hudson River Valley NHA. Another Senate bill, S. 2131, would extend, until September 30, 2022, the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the Rivers of Steel NHA, the Lackawanna Valley NHA, and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. For the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, S. 2131 also would extend, through September 30, 2022, the authorization of appropriations of \$1.0 million annually. Finally, H.R. 2202 and S. 1198 would extend for 15 years (until September 30, 2027) the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the Essex NHA. The bills also would increase the total authorization of appropriations for the area from \$10.0 million to \$20.0 million. A Senate subcommittee held a hearing on three Senate bills (S. 1198, S. 2131, and S. 2133) on March 7, 2012, and on one Senate bill (S. 2267) on June 27, 2012.

Several bills seek to ban federal funding for heritage areas. Specifically, H.R. 408 and S. 178 contain provisions to eliminate federal funding for the National Heritage Areas program. These provisions are part of broad legislation seeking to reduce federal spending. Further, H.R. 3716 would prohibit the use of federal funds to carry out each law establishing a heritage area.

Another bill, H.R. 6130, would require that in issuing visas to applicants seeking to visit the United States for pleasure, the U.S. give priority to those intending to visit a national heritage area or a national park. The measure also seeks to improve roads and bridges used by international visitors that are in communities with national heritage areas and national parks. It would require the Secretary of Transportation to make grants to support such infrastructure projects that have been prioritized by a metropolitan planning organization.

### **Legislation to Establish Systemic NHA Procedures**

Legislation to establish a National Heritage Areas System, and governing the designation, management, and funding of NHAs, has been introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. Under H.R. 4099, the National Heritage Areas System would be comprised of existing NHAs and future NHAs designated by Congress. The bill sets out the relationship between the NHA System and the National Park System, stating explicitly that NHAs are not to be considered units of the Park System nor subject to the authorities applicable to that system. The NHA System would expire 25 years after enactment of H.R. 4099.

For areas under consideration for NHA designation, the Secretary of the Interior would be required to conduct feasibility studies, when directed by Congress, or to review and comment on such studies prepared by others. The bill sets out criteria by which areas would be evaluated, including inclusion of resources associated with nationally significant themes and events; selection of a local managing entity;<sup>17</sup> and demonstration of support by local governments, residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

The bill provides a procedure for developing NHA management plans and specifies components of such plans. The planning process is to provide opportunities for stakeholders to be involved in developing, reviewing, and commenting on the draft plan. A management plan is to include an inventory of the resources related to the nationally significant themes and events that should be “protected, enhanced, interpreted, managed, or developed”; identify goals, strategies, policies, and recommendations; outline a strategy for the local managing entity to achieve financial

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<sup>17</sup> The legislation refers to this entity as the local coordinating entity.

sustainability; and contain an implementation plan, among other components.<sup>18</sup> Designation of an NHA by Congress is to be contingent on the prior completion of a management plan, as well as a determination by the Secretary of the Interior that the area meets the criteria established for feasibility studies.

The bill outlines the responsibilities of the local managing entity, such as developing and submitting the management plan to the Secretary of the Interior for approval/disapproval, as well as submitting an annual report. It also lists the purposes for which the entity can use federal funds, with the prior approval of the Secretary of the Interior, such as for making grants, entering into cooperative agreements, hiring staff, and supporting activities of partners.

The bill seeks to protect private property owners—for instance, by not requiring their participation in NHA plans and activities. It also seeks to protect existing regulatory authorities—for example, by not altering any “duly adopted” land use regulation, approved land use plan, or other regulatory authority.<sup>19</sup>

For each NHA, the bill authorizes appropriations for various purposes. Authorizations include \$0.3 million per year for all NPS feasibility studies, of which not more than \$0.1 million could be used for any one study, and \$0.7 million per year for the activities of each local managing entity. The provision of federal funds is contingent on specified matching requirements.

At least every 10 years, the Secretary of the Interior would be required to evaluate and report to Congress on NHAs. The evaluation would assess the progress in achieving the purposes in the establishing law and the goals and objectives in the management plan, determine the leverage and impact of investments in the area, and identify the components for sustaining the area. The report is to include recommendations on the future role of the NPS, including whether federal funding should be continued or eliminated.

## **111<sup>th</sup> Congress**

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress considered varied measures to authorize studies of areas for possible heritage designation, to establish new heritage areas, and to amend existing heritage areas. Perhaps most notably, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-11) contained a heritage areas title with provisions to establish nine new NHAs, reauthorize one area (Cache La Poudre River (CO)),<sup>20</sup> study two areas for possible heritage designation, and amend four existing heritage areas. Specifically, the law established the following new heritage areas: Sangre de Cristo (CO), South Park (CO), Northern Plains (ND), Baltimore (MD), Freedom’s Way (MA, NH), Mississippi Hills (MS), Mississippi Delta (MS), Muscle Shoals (AL), and Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm (AK). For each new area and for Cache La Poudre River, the law contained language intended to address concerns about potential loss of, and restrictions on use of, private property as a result of NHA designation. For instance, for each area the measure stated that it does not abridge the right of any property owner; require any property owner to permit public access to the property; alter

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<sup>18</sup> H.R. 4099, §6.

<sup>19</sup> H.R. 4099, §11.

<sup>20</sup> In establishing this NHA, P.L. 111-11 repealed P.L. 104-323, which had created the Cache La Poudre River Corridor. The NPS describes this action as a reauthorization of Cache La Poudre. See, for example, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2010*, p. NR&P-55, on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2010/data/greenbook/FY2010\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2010/data/greenbook/FY2010_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

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. The measure required the Secretary of the Interior, within three years of the date on which federal funding terminates, to evaluate each new area and report thereon to the congressional authorizing committees.

The law also included provisions to study the Chattahoochee Trace National Heritage Corridor (AL, GA) and the Northern Neck (VA) for possible NHA designation. The Secretary is to report findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the congressional authorizing committees within three fiscal years after funds for each study are provided. Further, P.L. 111-11 made changes to the management of four existing heritage areas: the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor (CT, MA), the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (PA), the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (NY), and the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (MA, RI).

Finally, P.L. 111-11 stated that nothing in the heritage areas title is to be construed as affecting recreational access otherwise allowed by law or regulation, including for hunting, fishing, or trapping. Similar provisions were included in other titles of the law.

In addition, the Interior appropriations law for FY2010<sup>21</sup> contained provisions on the inclusion and removal of private property within NHAs. They were intended to give private property owners the option of being included in or excluded from a heritage area. One provision amended P.L. 111-11 with regard to the Northern Plains NHA, to provide that no privately owned property will be included in the NHA except on written request of the owner. Further, it provided for the removal from the NHA of private property on written request of the owner, and of public property on written request of the pertinent state or local government. A more general provision of the law would allow a private property owner within an NHA to opt out of participating in any plan, project, program, or activity conducted within the area.<sup>22</sup>

## **Funding**

As part of its annual budget justification, the Administration submits to Congress its desired funding level for the NPS Heritage Partnership Program. Appropriations for heritage areas typically have been provided in the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations laws. NHAs can use such funds for varied purposes including staffing, planning, and implementing projects.

In the past, Congress generally has determined a total funding level and the distribution of the funds for specified NHAs. More recently, Congress has provided direction to the NPS as to how the total funds should be allocated among NHAs. The NPS has indicated that since FY2009, funds have been allocated to heritage areas using formula-based criteria. The agency continues to develop, in conjunction with Congress and heritage areas, a merit-based system for allocating heritage area funding. Criteria are expected to relate to program goals, accountability, and sustainability, such as whether management and financial self-sufficiency plans have been adopted and the amount of funding provided to areas over time.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> P.L. 111-88, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> §120 and §127, respectively, of P.L. 111-88.

<sup>23</sup> *FY2012 Budget Justification*, NR&P-57, 71, on the DOI website at <http://www.doi.gov/budget/2012/data/greenbook/> (continued...)

For FY2013, the full-year appropriation for heritage areas has not been determined, as discussed below. The Administration sought \$9.3 million for the NPS for heritage areas for FY2013, and expressed an intent to use these funds in part as seed money to support newer NHAs.<sup>24</sup> As was the case for the FY2011 and FY2012 requests, the Administration's FY2013 request was roughly half the level that was appropriated for the prior year (e.g., \$17.4 million appropriated for FY2012). According to the NPS, the proposed reduction for FY2013 was intended to focus resources on national park units and on other community partnership programs, and to encourage self-sufficiency of more established NHAs. The agency asserted that state and local managers of NHAs continue to depend heavily on federal funding, even though long-term federal funding was not the intent.<sup>25</sup>

The proposed reduction for FY2013 also was intended to address concerns of appropriators about the expanding number of NHAs and their ability to become more financially self-sufficient, according to the NPS.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the conferees on the FY2009 appropriations bill had expressed concern over the "rapid" increase in heritage areas and the number of proposals for new areas. They expressed that funding for heritage areas is limited, and that funding for new areas should come primarily from savings when "mature" heritage areas no longer receive federal funding. They directed the NPS to develop guidelines requiring self-sufficiency plans for NHAs, and sought to condition future federal funding on adoption or development of such plans.<sup>27</sup> More recently, in its report on the FY2012 appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Committee expressed that FY2011 funding for NHAs was sustained at roughly the FY2010 level in part to allow heritage areas to develop plans for long-term sustainability, and directed that heritage areas "move expeditiously" to develop such plans.<sup>28</sup> In its report on the FY2013 appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Committee noted that "plans for long-term sustainability have yet to be realized."<sup>29</sup>

The House Committee on Appropriations supported the President's request of \$9.3 million for heritage areas for FY2013. The committee approved this level in H.R. 6091, the FY2013 appropriations bill for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, as reported by the committee. By contrast, the bipartisan leadership of the Senate Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, in a draft bill released on September 25, 2012, supported FY2013 funding for heritage areas at the FY2012 level of \$17.4 million. Because no bill providing full-year funding for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies was enacted before the October 1, 2012, start of

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(...continued)

FY2012\_NPS\_Greenbook.pdf, and U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2013*, p. NR&P-59 (hereafter *FY2013 Budget Justification*), on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> NHA activities planned for each area based on FY2013 requested appropriations are contained on pages NR&P-78-87 of the *FY2013 Budget Justification*, on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> *FY2013 Budget Justification*, NR&P-59, on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> *FY2013 Budget Justification*, NR&P-59, on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Explanatory Statement, *Congressional Record*, February 23, 2009, p. H2092.

<sup>28</sup> H.Rept. 112-151 on H.R. 2584, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> H.Rept. 112-589 on H.R. 6091, p. 28.

the fiscal year, funds for heritage areas and other programs in that bill are being provided under the terms of a continuing appropriations resolution.<sup>30</sup>

The FY2012 appropriation for NHAs of \$17.4 million was level with the FY2011 appropriation.<sup>31</sup> During the five-year period from FY2006 through FY2010, funding for the NPS for national heritage areas fluctuated between \$13.3 million and \$17.8 million. During this period, 22 new NHAs were created and one was reauthorized. Specifically, the appropriation for FY2006 and FY2007 was \$13.3 million; for FY2008, \$15.3 million; for FY2009, \$15.7 million; and for FY2010 \$17.8 million.

## **Author Contact Information**

Carol Hardy Vincent  
Specialist in Natural Resources Policy  
chvincent@crs.loc.gov, 7-8651

Laura B. Comay  
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy  
lcomay@crs.loc.gov, 7-6036

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<sup>30</sup> Funding for heritage areas, as for other programs typically funded in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, is being provided through March 27, 2013, under the terms of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution for FY2013 (P.L. 112-175). The law generally provides funds at the account level, with agencies subsequently determining the level of funding for individual programs (e.g., heritage areas) within each account.

<sup>31</sup> The appropriation to each national heritage area for FY2011, for FY2012, and cumulatively since establishment of the area, is contained on pages NR&P-57-58 of the *FY2013 Budget Justification*, on the DOI website at [http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013\\_NPS\\_Greenbook.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf). NHA activities planned for each area with FY2012 appropriations are at the same link on pages NR&P-60-77.