



Heritage Areas: Background, Proposals, and Current Issues

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Summary

Over nearly 30 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 FY2013 appropriation for the NPS for assistance to heritage areas was \$16.5 million.

The Obama Administration sought \$9.0 million for NHAs for FY2014. In the past, the Administration has expressed interest in having NHAs become financially self-sufficient. 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.

Each Congress typically considers bills to establish new heritage areas, to study areas for possible heritage designation, and to amend existing heritage areas. Bills with similar purposes are pending in the 113th Congress. Other 113th Congress measures seek to establish new units of the National Park System that would include sites in existing heritage areas.

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 113th Congress, one such measure (H.R. 445) 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.

Contents

Background.....	1
Origin and Evolution.....	3
Ownership and Management.....	3
Overview of Administration.....	4
Support, Opposition, and Challenges.....	6
Role of the National Park Service.....	7
Legislative Activity.....	9
113 th Congress.....	9
Overview of Legislative Proposals.....	9
Legislation to Establish Systemic NHA Procedures.....	10
Funding.....	12

Tables

Table 1. Existing National Heritage Areas, by Date of Authorization.....	1
Table 2. Bills in the 113 th Congress to Establish Heritage Areas or Authorize Studies.....	10

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	14
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Background

Over nearly 30 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.¹ 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.

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
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

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

National Heritage Area	State	Date of Authorization	Enabling Legislation
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 ^a	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 ^b	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
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, 98th-111th 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.

Origin and Evolution

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 would 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 the creation of the first NHA in 1984, interest in additional NHA designations has grown considerably. Over the past decade, the number of heritage areas more than doubled. Further, during this period, dozens of proposals to designate heritage areas, study lands for heritage status, or amend laws establishing heritage areas were introduced, and Congress held many hearings on heritage bills and issues. The number of measures to study or establish heritage areas was smaller in the 112th Congress than in recent Congresses. One factor accounting for the decline might be the establishment of a relatively large number of NHAs in the 108th-111th Congresses. Another factor could be changes in House and Senate rules and protocols regarding introduction and consideration of legislation containing earmarks, including a House Republican Conference “standing order” expressing conference policy that no Member request an earmark.²

The sizeable number of existing NHAs, together with the substantial number of proposals in recent Congresses 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.

Ownership and Management

NHAs reflect an evolution in roles and responsibilities in protecting lands. The traditional form of land protection for the National Park Service (NPS) has been through government ownership,

² The text of the standing order for the 112th Congress is on the website of the House Republican Conference at <http://www.gop.gov/resources/library/documents/rules/112th-Conference-Rules-As-adopted.pdf>. The House Republican Conference reapproved the standing order for the 113th Congress.

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. The NPS provides technical and financial aid to NHAs, but these areas are *not* part of the National Park System. 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 401 diverse units: national parks, national monuments, national historic sites, national battlefields, national preserves, and other designations.³

Heritage areas consist mainly of private properties, although some include publicly owned lands. In most cases, the laws establishing NHAs do not provide for federal 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.)

Many laws establishing national heritage areas contain provisions intended to address concerns about potential loss of, and restrictions on use of, private property as a result of NHA designation. For example, P.L. 111-11, which established the nine newest NHAs, stated for each area that the law does not abridge the right of any property owner; require any property owner to permit public access to the property; alter 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. P.L. 111-88, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010, contained a more general provision allowing any private property owner within an NHA to opt out of participating in any plan, project, program, or activity conducted within the area.⁴

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

³ 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.

⁴ P.L. 111-88, §127. In 2004 written testimony for the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, the Government Accountability Office (at that time known as the General Accounting Office) stated that “national heritage areas do not appear to have directly affected the rights of property owners.” The GAO research was based on the 24 NHAs in existence at that time. See GAO, *National Park Service: A More Systematic Process for Establishing National Heritage Areas and Actions to Improve Their Accountability Are Needed*, GAO-04-593T, March 30, 2004, p. 3, at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/120/110774.pdf>.

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.⁵

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.

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.⁶

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.⁷

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.

⁵ The "four critical steps" and 10 suggested criteria, frequently asked questions about feasibility studies, and examples of feasibility studies, are on the NPS website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/become/index.html>.

⁶ 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>.

⁷ This information is from the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, *2009 Annual Report*, p. 4. More recent reports do not contain similar information.

Support, Opposition, and Challenges⁸

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 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 promote routine notification of private property owners when their lands fall within proposed heritage areas, on the grounds that 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. 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

⁸ 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.

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 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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 George W. 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

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

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 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. 110-229.¹¹ 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 May 2013, 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 is submitting its evaluations of and recommendations on these areas to Congress.¹²

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.¹³ 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."¹⁴ Obama Administration

¹¹ P.L. 110-229, §462.

¹² This information was provided to CRS by Martha Raymond, NPS National Coordinator for National Heritage Areas, on May 29, 2013.

¹³ Legislation (H.R. 445) to create a process for designating, managing, and funding NHAs has been introduced in the 113th Congress. (See "Legislative Activity," below.)

¹⁴ Testimony of Stephen E. Whitesell of the National Park Service on S. 127 (112th Congress), May 11, 2011, before a Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, at http://energy.senate.gov/public/_files/Whitesell_NationalParkService_CombinedTestimony.pdf.

representatives also have testified in favor of deferring action on certain bills to study or establish heritage areas until heritage program legislation is enacted.¹⁵ Other witnesses have 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 communities and the federal government, locally driven resource preservation, and local (rather than federal) control of land. However, the Administration also recommended deferring action on certain bills seeking to establish additional heritage areas, despite favorable studies of the areas, until systemic NHA legislation was enacted.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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

113th 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 113th Congress as of June 3, 2013, are reflected in **Table 2**.

Other pending legislation pertains to existing NHAs. H.R. 770 would amend the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor to designate the South Carolina Heritage Corridor, Inc., as the management entity. H.R. 1471 and S. 702 propose to rename the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor as “The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor.”

¹⁵ See, for example, testimony of Peggy O’Dell of the National Park Service on S. 228 (113th Congress), April 23, 2013, before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, at http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?Id=9df237db-2a0f-4e28-9476-b1c5b43d454a&Statement_id=ac5083d5-870d-4ffb-b19e-fe5afcec48a0.

¹⁶ See, for example, testimony of Janet Snyder Matthews of the National Park Service on H.R. 1885 (110th Congress), July 12, 2007, before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources, at <http://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/matthewstestimony07.12.07.pdf>.

¹⁷ 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>.

Still other measures seek to establish new units of the National Park System that would include sites in existing NHAs. For instance, S. 503 would establish the Sangre de Cristo National Historical Park, including sites within the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. H.R. 706 and S. 371 seek to establish the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, including sites within the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. In addition, the bills would designate the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc., as management entity for the national heritage corridor. S. 371 was ordered reported from the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on May 16, 2013.

Table 2. Bills in the 113th Congress to Establish Heritage Areas or Authorize Studies
(as of June 3, 2013)

Title	State	Type	Bill Number	Status
Alabama Black Belt	AL	Designate	S. 869	Introduced
Mountains to Sound Greenway	WA	Designate	H.R. 1785	Introduced
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta	CA	Designate	H.R. 1004 S. 228	Introduced Hearing Held
Saint Croix	Virgin Islands	Designate	H.R. 89 H.R. 2200	Introduced Introduced
Santa Cruz Valley	AZ	Designate	H.R. 1349	Introduced
Susquehanna Gateway	PA	Designate	S. 219	Hearing Held

Source: Compiled by CRS from the Legislative Information System (LIS) of the U.S. Congress, 113th Congress data file, on June 3, 2013. No bills to authorize studies of areas for possible heritage designation had been introduced as of June 3, 2013.

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 had expired, but were extended until September 30, 2013.¹⁸ Specifically, P.L. 113-6 extended the authority of the Secretary to provide assistance to 11 of the heritage areas, and the authority of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. The law also extended, through September 30, 2013, the authorization of appropriations of \$1.0 million annually for implementing the management plan of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor.¹⁹

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 reintroduced in the 113th Congress. Under H.R.

¹⁸ 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 had expired on September 30, 2012, while the authorization for the management entity for the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor had expired on October 12, 2012.

¹⁹ P.L. 113-6, Division F, Title IV, Section 1404. The measure became law on March 26, 2013.

445, 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. 445.

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;²⁰ 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 sustainability; and contain an implementation plan, among other components.²¹ 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.²²

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

²⁰ The legislation refers to this entity as the local coordinating entity.

²¹ H.R. 445, §6.

²² H.R. 445, §11.

is to include recommendations on the future role of the NPS, including whether federal funding should be continued or eliminated.

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 recent years, Congress has provided direction to the NPS as to how the total appropriation should be allocated among NHAs. The NPS has indicated that since FY2009, funds have been allocated to heritage areas using formula-based criteria.

Most recently, the agency has developed, in conjunction with Congress and heritage area managers, a merit-based system for allocating heritage area funding. Criteria relate to program goals, accountability, and sustainability. Within available funding, appropriations would be awarded to NHAs under a three-tier system. Under Tier 1, a heritage area would receive \$150,000 if it is authorized, can meet federal matching requirements, and can expend funds “within a reasonable period of time.” Under Tier 2, an area could receive an additional \$250,000 if additional requirements are met, including those related to management plan approval and full-time staffing. If appropriations are insufficient to provide each qualifying area with Tier 1 and Tier 2 total funding of \$400,000, then funds would be divided among NHAs meeting the criteria. Under Tier 3, any additional appropriations would be allocated to NHAs that also have long-term sustainability plans and that can meet certain matching requirements. The NPS anticipates phasing in this three-tier system in the near future.²³

For FY2013, the full-year appropriation for heritage areas was \$16.5 million.²⁴ The Administration sought a reduction to \$9.0 million for the NPS for heritage areas for FY2014.²⁵ While the FY2014 budget request provided little explanation of the proposed cut, prior Administration requests for reduced NHA funding contained more detail. For instance, a reduction proposed 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, according to the NPS. The agency further 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.²⁶

²³ U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2014*, pp. NR&P-61-62 (hereafter *FY2014 Budget Justification*), on the DOI website at http://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2014/upload/FY2014_NPS_Greenbook.pdf.

²⁴ This information was provided to CRS by Martha Raymond, NPS National Coordinator for National Heritage Areas, on May 29, 2013. The figure reflects a reduction under the President’s sequester order of March 1, 2013.

²⁵ NHA activities planned for each area based on FY2014 requested appropriations are contained on pp. NR&P-80-87 of the *FY2014 Budget Justification*, on the DOI website at http://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2014/upload/FY2014_NPS_Greenbook.pdf.

²⁶ U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2013*, NR&P-59 (hereafter *FY2013 Budget Justification*), on the DOI website at http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf.

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ In its report on the FY2013 appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Committee noted that “plans for long-term sustainability have yet to be realized.”³⁰

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. Appropriations for NHAs for FY2013 were included in P.L. 113-6. The law required agencies to report to the Appropriations Committees on how appropriations would be allocated below the account level, such as at the program, project, and activity level. Accordingly, the NPS determined the level of FY2013 appropriations for heritage areas, among other programs.

The \$16.5 million appropriated for NHAs for FY2013 was \$0.9 million (5%) less than the FY2012 appropriation of \$17.4 million.³¹ During the five-year period from FY2009 through FY2013, funding for the NPS for national heritage areas increased overall from \$15.7 million to \$16.5 million (in current dollars).³² During this period, nine new NHAs were created and one was reauthorized.

²⁷ *FY2013 Budget Justification*, NR&P-59, on the DOI website at http://www.doi.gov/budget/2013/data/greenbook/FY2013_NPS_Greenbook.pdf.

²⁸ Explanatory Statement, *Congressional Record*, February 23, 2009, p. H2092.

²⁹ H.Rept. 112-151 on H.R. 2584, p. 34.

³⁰ H.Rept. 112-589 on H.R. 6091, p. 28.

³¹ The appropriation to each national heritage area for FY2011, for FY2012, and cumulatively since establishment of the area, is contained on pages NR&P-59-60 of the *FY2014 Budget Justification*, on the DOI website at http://www.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2014/upload/FY2014_NPS_Greenbook.pdf.

³² Specifically, the appropriation for FY2009 was \$15.7 million; for FY2010, \$17.8 million; for FY2011 and FY2012, \$17.4 million; and for FY2013, \$16.5 million.

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