

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA GOLDFUSS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,  
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
NATIONAL PARKS, COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,  
CONCERNING S. 2111, A BILL TO REAUTHORIZE THE YUMA CROSSING  
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA**

**July 23, 2014**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 2111, a bill to reauthorize the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (NHA).

The Department recognizes the important work of the Board and Staff of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Corporation to preserve Yuma, Arizona, a natural crossing area on the Colorado River, and a landmark in America's westward expansion. We recommend that S. 2111 be amended to authorize an extension for heritage area program funding until such time as the National Park Service (NPS) has completed an evaluation and report on the accomplishments of the area and the future role of the NPS; and until national heritage area program legislation is enacted that standardizes timeframes and funding for designated national heritage areas. In this case, we note that funding is currently authorized for the Yuma Crossing NHA through FY 2015.

The NPS is initiating phase-in of a funding formula for NHAs, which is a merit-based system for allocating heritage area funding that considers a variety of factors based upon criteria related to program goals, accountability, and organizational sustainability. When fully implemented, the performance-based funding formula plan will reward NHA entities that bring in additional non-Federal investment and that have developed a sustainability plan. The Department would like to work with Congress to determine the future federal role when national heritage areas reach the end of their authorized eligibility for heritage program funding. We recommend that Congress enact national heritage area program legislation during this Congress.

There are currently 49 designated heritage areas, yet there is no authority in law that guides the designation and administration of new heritage areas as a national system. Program legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offer guidelines for successful planning and management, clarify roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardize timeframes and funding for designated areas.

S. 2111 would extend the authorization for federal funding for the Yuma Crossing NHA for 15 additional years, until September 30, 2030. The Yuma Crossing NHA was established in 2000 by Public Law 106-319. Since its creation, this NHA has become the nexus of the Yuma, Arizona, community, bringing together a multitude of partners including business and Quechan Indian Tribe leaders; economic development organizations; city, county, state, and federal government representatives; and members of the agricultural community to focus on improving regional recreation, economic development, historic preservation efforts, and natural resource conservation opportunities. In total, the NHA has received \$4.2 million in federal Heritage

Partnership Program funding, and every federal dollar has been matched at least once with non-federal funds.

Yuma Crossing NHA is an example of how effective collaborative efforts can be in supporting local communities and economies. This NHA has made tremendous progress over the last decade revitalizing Yuma's riverfront, which was once an overgrown thicket of non-native trees and underbrush and a corridor for illegal activities. Thanks to the work coordinated and accomplished by the NHA, working with the Bureau of Reclamation and other state and federal agencies, the Yuma Crossing NHA has reconnected the community to the Colorado River, created an extensive multi-use recreational trail system and restored more than 400 acres of wetlands. The effectiveness of Yuma Crossing NHA in creating an increased sense of community for the region, expanding regional recreational opportunities, supporting the restoration of critical wetlands habitat and important community cultural assets, and leveraging local financial and human capital support cannot be overstated.

The Yuma Crossing NHA has succeeded in leveraging its relationships and abilities to better the overall community. For instance, in 2008-2009, when faced with a severe economic recession, Arizona State Parks contemplated closing the Yuma Quartermaster Depot and the Yuma Territorial Prison, both key state historical parks within the City of Yuma. In response to this situation, the City of Yuma and the Yuma Crossing NHA agreed to lease and manage the two parks, rather than see them shuttered. The community embraced this collaborative effort and demonstrated its support by donating \$70,000 during the first two months of the parks' new management. Since then, the NHA has upgraded the parks' museum exhibits, reduced operational costs, and increased visitation.

We recommend a technical amendment to the long title of the bill to make it clear that the bill would extend the authorization for federal funding for the national heritage area, instead of reauthorization of the national heritage area. While the Yuma Crossing NHA faces a sunset date for its federal funding, its national heritage area designation will not end.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.