

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 3167, TO ESTABLISH THE APPALACHIAN FOREST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

September 22, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 3167, a bill to establish the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area, and for other purposes.

The Department supports enactment of S. 3167, as the proposed Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area has been found to meet the National Park Service's interim criteria for designation as a national heritage area.

However, along with designating any new national heritage areas, the Department recommends that Congress pass national heritage area program legislation. There are currently 49 designated national heritage areas, yet there is no authority in law that guides the designation and administration of these areas. Program legislation that establishes criteria to evaluate potentially qualified national heritage areas and a process for the designation, funding, and administration of these areas would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas. It would offer guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardize timeframes and funding for designated areas. The Department also notes that newly-authorized national heritage areas will compete for limited resources in the Heritage Partnership Program. The President's FY17 Budget proposes \$9.4 million for the current 49 areas. The authorization of additional national heritage areas will leave less funding for each individual national heritage area.

S. 3167 would establish the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area encompassing 16 counties in northeastern West Virginia and two counties in western Maryland, a region that has a rich history of human activity shaped by the geography of the forested central Appalachian Mountains. The proposed local coordinating entity would be the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, Inc., a non-profit organization that currently coordinates forest-related heritage tourism activities in this region. The provisions in this bill are similar to provisions in most of the other national heritage area designation bills that have been enacted in recent years, including a total authorization of \$10 million and a sunset date for the authorization of funding 15 years after the date of enactment.

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, Inc. prepared a feasibility study for designation of the area as a national heritage area several years ago. The National Park Service (NPS) reviewed the study and found that it met the NPS interim criteria contained in *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines*. The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, Inc. was informed of this finding in a letter dated August 16, 2007.

The area encompassed by the proposed national heritage area is a significant part of the central Appalachian highlands that has a long history of timber harvesting, forest management, and the

production of forest products. The forests provided resources for industrial expansion in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, but large portions of the forests have regrown. Areas within the proposed national heritage area include the Monongahela National Forest, portions of the George Washington National Forest, the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and the Seneca Rocks-Spruce Knob National Recreation Area, along with a large number of state forests and parks and areas protected by nonprofit conservation organizations. The extensive hardwood forests and undeveloped rural character of the area provide scenic vistas and opportunities for nature observation and outdoor recreation.

There are also numerous historic and cultural resources within the area, such as sites from the logging era and Civilian Conservation Corps structures. It is a place well-suited to demonstrate the connection between forest and forest products, and the folklife, music, dance, crafts, and traditions of central Appalachia. Designation as a national heritage area would help the region realize the full potential of the cultural, natural, historic, and recreational resources of the region.