

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA GOLDFUSS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
CONGRESSIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMITTEE, CONCERNING S. 1641, TO ESTABLISH THE APPALACHIAN
FOREST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

July 23, 2014

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1641, a bill to establish the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area, and for other purposes.

The Department supports the objectives of Title I of S. 1641, which would designate the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area. This area has been found to meet the National Park Service's interim criteria for designation as a National Heritage Area. However, the Department recommends that Congress pass program legislation that establishes criteria to evaluate potentially qualified National Heritage Areas and a process for the designation, funding, and administration of these areas before designating any additional new National Heritage Areas.

Regarding Title II, which provides for the extension of funding authority for the National Coal Heritage Area and the Wheeling National Heritage Area, the Department recognizes the important work that has been done by the organizations involved with both national heritage areas. However, we recommend that Title II be amended to authorize an extension for both heritage areas' 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 (NHA) program legislation is enacted that standardizes timeframes and funding for designated national heritage areas.

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 national heritage areas, yet there is no authority in law that guides their designation and administration as a national system. National heritage area program legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluation of proposed national heritage areas, guiding planning and management, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas.

Title I of S. 1641 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 NHA 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 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 NHA 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. It is an area that provided resources for industrial expansion in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, but where large portions of the forests have regrown. Areas within the proposed NHA 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, opportunities for nature observation, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

There are also numerous historic and cultural sites within the area, such as historic sites from the logging era and Civilian Conservation Corps structures. It is an area 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 NHA would help the region realize the full potential of the cultural, natural, historic, and recreational resources of the region.

Title II of S. 1641 would extend the authorization of funding for the National Coal Heritage Area until September 30, 2017. The National Coal Heritage Area was established in 1996 by Public Law 104-333. Its funding authorization, which expired in 2012 under that law, has been extended through appropriations acts through September 30, 2015. In total, the NHA has received approximately \$3.6 million, and every federal dollar has been matched at least once with non-federal funds or in-kind services.

The National Coal Heritage Area spans 13 counties in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia and includes significant resources such as coal mines, camps, company stores, train depots, memorials, parks, National Register Districts, and trails. Its mission is to preserve, protect, and interpret historic, cultural, and natural resources associated with West Virginia's coal mining heritage to stimulate tourism and economic development, enhancing the quality of

life for residents. The NPS is currently concluding an evaluation of this NHA, as required under Public Law 110-229.

Title II would also extend the authorization of funding for the Wheeling National Heritage Area until September 30, 2017. The Wheeling National Heritage Area was established in 2000 by Public Law 106-291. Its funding authorization will expire under that law on September 30, 2015. In total, the NHA has received approximately \$9.7 million of the total \$10 million authorized to be appropriated, and every federal dollar has been matched in accordance with its enabling act.

The Wheeling National Heritage Area encompasses significant historic and cultural resources in and around City of Wheeling, West Virginia, including many that are National Historic Landmarks or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Wheeling played an important role in the development and establishment of a multitude of industries in the United States that facilitated the Nation's expansion. The NHA helps preserve the city's Victorian architecture, waterfront park, historic city markets, and renovated industrial buildings.

We recommend a technical amendment to the Title II heading and to the section subheadings to make it clear that the bill would extend the authorization for federal funding for the two national heritage areas, instead of reauthorizing the national heritage areas. While both National Coal and Wheeling face sunset dates for their federal funding, their national heritage area designations will not sunset.

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