



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

H32(2257)

FEB 11 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman:

Pursuant to Public Law 110-229, I am pleased to transmit the *West Virginia National Coal Heritage Area Evaluation Findings* (Evaluation). The National Park Service (NPS) engaged the consultant group Westat as the evaluator to independently assess the progress, analyze the investments, and identify the critical components for sustainability of the National Heritage Area. Based on the findings of the Evaluation, and as required by Section 462(c) of Public Law 110-229, the NPS recommends a future role with National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA), based on continued implementation of the corrective action plan noted below. NPS will also work with NCHA to implement its business, fundraising, and financial resource development plans, and form networks of operational and financial partnerships to further long-term sustainability of NCHA operations.

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While NCHA has remained true to the overall legislative and management plan goals, it has struggled to use funds. Since 1998, NCHA has been authorized \$1,537,217, of which more than \$300,000 was returned to the Treasury because it was not used during the authorized period. At

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NCHA spent the majority of the Heritage Partnership Program funding on planning and technical assistance. In addition to its management plan, NCHA supported seven planning activities including a Trail Plan for Greenways and Blueways, a New River State of the Watershed study, Coal Heritage Driving Tour, and planning for the Logan County Country Roads Scenic Interpretative Center. The Center is being constructed with \$480,000 from Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds. NCHA staff offers technical assistance through a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) organization.

However, according to the Evaluation, NCHA's impact on preservation and restoration has been limited. From 2004-2011, NCHA spent \$383,566 toward preservation and restoration of ten structures or natural resources, of which \$250,000 was spent on the Raleigh County Exhibition Coal Mine. NCHA is partnering with the Boy Scouts of America to develop Mt. Hope as the National Boy Scout Jamboree site and to engage scouts in service projects. This is anticipated to help with preservation and restoration activities, and organizational sustainability.

NCHA's impact in the area of interpretation, education, and marketing was also limited. Since 2004, NCHA spent \$100,288 on marketing and \$108,438 on two exhibits, twelve signs, a memorial, nine educational programs, workshops/conferences, and a film "The Living Monument – West Virginia's Courthouses." The film was broadcast by PBS and received the Spirit of West Virginia award from the Division of Tourism. NCHA provided \$10,000 to support the Upper Big Branch Memorial honoring 29 miners killed in a 2010 disaster, leveraging the community's contribution of close to \$500,000. Partnering with the WV Department of Transportation, Division of Highways, NCHA developed 155 signs to be located along five routes, publications, and a geo-tour. CHHA byway funds also contributed to signs, kiosks, and two exhibits.

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with the Wheeling National Heritage Area, also in West Virginia, could alleviate some problems that NCHA encountered.

An identical letter is being sent to the Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; the Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives; and the Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Bean". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Bean
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
The Honorable Joe Manchin III
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The Honorable Tom Udall
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While NCHA has remained true to the overall legislative and management plan goals, it has struggled to use funds. Since 1998, NCHA has been authorized \$1,537,217, of which more than \$300,000 was returned to the Treasury because it was not used during the authorized period. At

the time of the Evaluation, NCHA was carrying over \$768,260 in NPS funds. According to the NHCA coordinating entity, it struggled to meet its Heritage Partnership Program 50 percent match. Records of NPS funds and match from 1998-2004 were not available from NCHA. NCHA records are not easily accessible and were complicated by changes in fiscal agents. Since 2005, \$883,049 in NPS funds were matched with \$1,750,185.

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However, according to the Evaluation, NCHA's impact on preservation and restoration has been limited. From 2004-2011, NCHA spent \$383,566 toward preservation and restoration of ten structures or natural resources, of which \$250,000 was spent on the Raleigh County Exhibition Coal Mine. NCHA is partnering with the Boy Scouts of America to develop Mt. Hope as the National Boy Scout Jamboree site and to engage scouts in service projects. This is anticipated to help with preservation and restoration activities, and organizational sustainability.

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The Evaluation raises questions about NCHA's sustainability. Partnering with CHHA helped increase NCHA's capacity but both entities are dependent on Federal funds. Lack of a strong board and participation of some members has limited NCHA's effectiveness. Removal of NPS funds would result in the elimination of the NCHA coordinating entity. Although NCHA has many partners, no other organization provides resources for preservation, restoration, education, and interpretation. NPS staff at New River Gorge National River indicated that there would likely be more demand on their staff to provide resources, signage, and support without NCHA staff.

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for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

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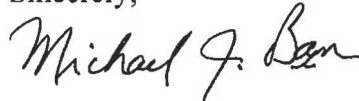
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