



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.

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NCHA has not fully utilized Federal investments. Based on the Evaluation, the NPS and NCHA have developed and are implementing a corrective action plan that ensures NCHA uses allocated Federal funds prior to additional funds being appropriated and ensures proper accounting of funds. If reauthorized, a reduction in NCHA Federal match requirement to bring it into parity

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 cursive script that reads "Michael J. Bean".

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

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
The Honorable Joe Manchin III
The Honorable Evan Jenkins
The Honorable Tom Udall
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FEB 11 2015

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Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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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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FEB 17 2015

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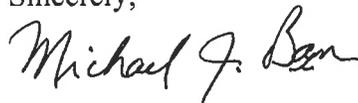
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