



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

SEP 07 2017

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

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

I am pleased to transmit the Oil Region National Heritage Area (ORNHA) Evaluation Findings (Evaluation). The National Park Service (NPS) engaged Westat as the evaluator to independently assess the progress, analyze the investments, and identify the critical components for sustainability of the national heritage area per evaluation questions in Public Law 110-229. Based on the findings of the Evaluation, the NPS recommends a future role with the ORNHA. The NPS will continue to work with the ORNHA to implement business, fundraising, and financial resource plans and continue to form networks of operational and financial partnerships to further sustainability of the ORNHA's operations.

In 2004, Congress designated the ORNHA to conserve, enhance, and interpret the significant features of the lands, water, and structures in northwestern Pennsylvania. The region played an important role in the development of the United States as the location of the world's first commercial oil well in 1859 at Drake Well. The area's landscapes include natural and cultural resources related to the oil industry, abandoned boomtowns, oil farms, and industrial landscapes. The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism (ORA) is the coordinating entity headquartered in Oil City, Pennsylvania. The area was designated a state heritage area in 1994.

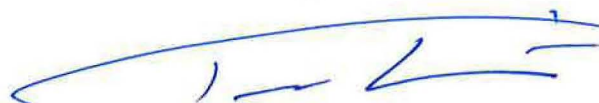
The Evaluation determined that the ORNHA Corporation addressed its legislated purposes and management plan goals with the support of the federal resources provided. Both the NPS funds and the National Heritage Area designation are of value to the ORNHA. The ORA successfully met the 50 percent federal funding match requirements from 2005 to 2015 with a total of \$6.5 million in funds from state, local, and private sources to the \$2.8 million from NPS under the Heritage Partnership Program. Other federal funds totaled over \$2.5 million from the Department of Labor, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Transportation, the Small Business Administration, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The Alliance has spent a total of \$19.5 million on programmatic activities and \$4.2 million on operational expenses from 2005-2015, of a total \$23 million available to the organization.

The ORA's efforts focus on heritage development, economic development, and tourism destination marketing. From 2005 to 2015, the ORA has invested \$6.8 million in heritage development activities, or 35.3 percent of investment, reusing and redeveloping the ORNHA's historic sites such as the Tarbell House, preservation of historic petroleum / natural gas artifacts, education programs, and trail development. The ORA invested \$6.7 million in economic development, or 34.5 percent of funds for projects related to the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail within the NHA, developing industrial parks, reusing brownfield sites, and working with the Oil City Main Street Program. Tourism accounted for 10 percent of funding such as visitor guides, fishing reports, biking maps, and hiking-biking-water trails maps. Over 150,000 people utilized trails in the area in 2013 according to economic impact studies. Property management accounted for 20 percent of spending related to business functions of the ORA.

The Evaluation found that the ORA has the governance in place and is staffed appropriately to operate a sustainable national heritage area organization. The ORA is fulfilling its legislative mandate.

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 blue ink, appearing to read 'Todd D. Willens', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Todd D. Willens
Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish
and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Bob Casey, Jr.
The Honorable Patrick Toomey
The Honorable Mike Kelly
The Honorable Glenn Thomson