

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, BUSINESS SERVICES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1182, TO AMEND THE QUINEBAUG AND SHETUCKET RIVERS VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR ACT OF 1994 TO INCREASE THE AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS AND MODIFY THE DATE ON WHICH THE AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TERMINATES UNDER THE ACT.

July 12, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1182, a bill to amend the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor Act of 1994. S. 1182 would increase the ceiling on appropriations to the heritage area from \$10,000,000 to \$15,000,000 and extend the termination date of the Secretary of the Interior's financial commitment from September 30, 2009 to September 30, 2015.

The Department believes it is premature to consider S. 1182 based on the fact that the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor has two years remaining on its authorization and the Department also would like time to review and make recommendations on the evaluation recently completed by the Corridor that details its accomplishments and provides a plan for its future. Therefore, the Department opposes S. 1182 at this time.

Less than a year ago, there were 27 heritage areas. Today, there are 37. Our understanding is that national heritage areas are locally driven grassroots efforts to preserve resources that were intended to operate independent of Federal funding at the end of the authorization period. While the National Park Service would continue to support the heritage areas through technical

assistance, the heritage areas were to be largely self-sufficient after an initial period of financial assistance from NPS. This was the understanding, particularly for those heritage areas created or reauthorized since 1996.

The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, also known as The Last Green Valley, was authorized in 1994 and comprised 25 communities in northeastern Connecticut. It began receiving federal funding in 1996 with appropriations through 2007 totaling \$6,303,750. It became the first national heritage area to be managed by a non-profit organization, the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. Its first plan, *Vision to Reality: A Management Plan*, was completed in 1997.

In 1999, the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor (QSHC) was expanded to include 10 additional communities in its watershed in Connecticut and Massachusetts, making it the second bi-state national heritage area in the country. At the same time, its original seven-year authorization was extended through 2009 and a new ceiling of \$10,000,000 was authorized with an annual amount not to exceed \$1,000,000, in keeping with other similar national heritage areas. At that time, *Vision 2010: A Plan for the Next Ten Years* was completed, along with the *Interpretive Initiative for the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor*. With the additional federal investment and larger regional focus, many successful programs were initiated.

The National Park System Advisory Board in its report entitled *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas* recognized the important role of national heritage areas in expanding

conservation stewardship and in identifying and preserving significant historic resources. The report also recognized that national heritage areas need a legislative foundation that establishes a clear process for designation, administration, and evaluation to become self-sufficient.

The Administration's proposal for national heritage area program legislation, which was transmitted to Congress in July 2006, would provide such a framework. Bills were introduced in the 109th Congress (S. 243, H.R. 760 and H.R. 6287) that incorporated the majority of the provisions of the Administration's proposal, and S. 243 passed the Senate. During the 110th Congress, a similar heritage area program bill, S. 278, has been introduced.

The proposed legislative framework recommended that, three years prior to the cessation of Federal funding, the Secretary conduct an evaluation and prepare a report on the accomplishments, sustainability, and recommendations, if any, for the future of a designated national heritage area. This evaluation would examine the accomplishments of the heritage area in meeting the goals of the management plan; analyze the leveraging and impact of investments to the heritage area; identify the critical components of the management structure and sustainability of the heritage area; and recommend what future role, if any, the NPS should have with respect to the heritage area.

Under its existing authorization, the QSHC will continue to receive annual federal funding for two more years. During last year's hearing on another reauthorization bill for the area, the Department recommended that the area begin to evaluate how it will sustain its efforts to protect resources when federal funding ends in 2009. To this end, the QSHC has recently completed an

evaluation on the heritage area that included extensive public input during the process, but the NPS has not had a chance to officially review the study.

The nearly 1,100-square miles of The Last Green Valley provide a challenge to cohesive and engaging regional interpretation of natural and historical resources. Over the past several years, QSHC has developed a number of interpretive strategies to educate residents and visitors alike, while providing an entertaining base from which to generate tourism. For example, Last Green Valley Ventures is a program that (1) circulates people and information throughout the region; (2) provides adequate visitor services, orientation to The Last Green Valley and interpretation of the many regional themes; (3) assures quality, consistency and hospitality; and (4) collects important statistical data to inform future marketing and programming. The program combines current assets of The Last Green Valley, the compendium of existing research and support brochures, the complimenting businesses offering unique experiences, and partners from public and private sectors into one cohesive product.

Last Green Valley Ventures also dovetails with an on-line educational resources guide, *Valley Quest*, used by regional educators, parents and youth group leaders to educate and inspire the future stewards of the QSHC.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.