



**Paul D. Tonko**



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## **Tonko, McKinley Introduce Bill to Strengthen National Heritage Areas System**

*Bipartisan legislation backed by 60+ members establishes process for designating, evaluating and maintaining National Heritage Areas across the U.S.*

**WASHINGTON** – Representatives **Paul Tonko** (D-NY) and **David McKinley** (R-WV) announced today that they have introduced the **National Heritage Area Act of 2019**, backed by a bipartisan group of 60 total cosponsors. This bill establishes, for the first time, standard criteria for designating new National Heritage Areas and creates a rigorous process for maintaining existing National Heritage Areas.

**“National Heritage Areas connect us, and perhaps more importantly future generations, with the voices and places that have shaped who we are as Americans,”** said Tonko. **“These sites deliver more than just a significant economic return, they help us reveal the diverse and sometimes hidden gems of our cultural heritage and fill us with a sense of place that brings our complex history to life. Our National Heritage Area Act will help establish and maintain the strong local partnerships necessary to restore and protect these sites for generations to come. I am grateful to my fellow co-chair David McKinley and all of our cosponsors who recognize that we must know our heritage to understand ourselves.”**

Tonko and McKinley are longtime supporters of National Heritage Areas and serve as co-chairs of the Heritage Areas Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives.

**“The National Heritage Area Act will allow us to continue to celebrate and promote the beauty of our states, preserve our heritage, and plan for the future. National Heritage Areas ensure that the people who live, work and visit our beautiful states can enjoy them,”** McKinley said. **“Our bill will provide a clearly defined structure to oversee the management of heritage areas and will allow these popular public-private-partnerships to better preserve our national heritage, spur economic growth and create jobs.”**

National Heritage Areas are sites that hold historic, cultural, and natural significance to the people of the United States of America. The National Heritage Area (NHA) Program is a cost-effective program run through the Department of the Interior based on a public-private

partnership model that matches every federal dollar with an average of \$5.50 in other public and private funding. There are 49 National Heritage Areas across the country including the Erie Canalway and Hudson River Valley Heritage Areas, which continue to benefit the Capital Region. These sites and the organizations that maintain them have become a source of vital job creation and economic, cultural, historical, environmental, and community development.

#### **The National Heritage Area Act:**

- Establishes a standardized process for establishing new National Heritage Areas (NHAs)
- Creates an evaluation process for existing NHAs that guarantees accountability
- Modernizes the program to allow for long-term sustainability
- Defines an oversight structure that will effectively allow these popular public-private partnerships to better preserve the nation's heritage and spur economic growth with basic federal support

The Alliance of National Heritage Areas offered strong support, saying, **“We are very grateful for the leadership of Congressmen Paul Tonko and David McKinley in sponsoring the National Heritage Area of 2019 along with each of the bill’s 60 co-sponsors. This reflects broad bi-partisan support from across the country. The Alliance of National Heritage Areas looks forward to working with Congress to advance this significant piece of legislation which furthers National Heritage Areas' efforts to preserve, protect, and promote our nation's story.”**

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) also expressed strong support for the bill: **“National Heritage Areas use public-private partnerships to preserve and promote the broad range of stories that make up our rich, shared American experience. The National Heritage Area Act standardizes the way heritage areas are designated, managed and assessed, and will make an already effective program even more impactful and efficient.”**

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