



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, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

Pursuant to Public Law 113-291, I am pleased to transmit the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area (SRHA) 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. Based on the findings of the Evaluation, the NPS recommends a future role with the SRHA. The NPS will continue to work with the SRHA to implement business, fundraising, and financial resource plans and continue to form networks of operational and financial partnerships to further sustainability of the SRHA's operations.

In 2000, Congress designated the SRHA to conserve, interpret, and develop the historical, cultural, natural, and recreational resources related to the industrial development and cultural heritage of the Schuylkill River Valley. The SRHA is 1,700 square miles in Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. It includes 81 National Historic Landmarks, 1,064 National Register of Historic Places properties and districts, 3 National Parks, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail. It was designated as a State Heritage Area in 1995 by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) a non-profit 501(c)(3) is the SRHA's coordinating entity headquartered in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

The Evaluation determined that the SRHA 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 SRHA as it brings partners together to complete projects. The SRGA successfully met the 50 percent Federal funding match requirements from 2001-2015, with a total of over \$16.6 million in matched funds to \$6.8 million in NPS Heritage Partnership Program dollars. Their match included \$6.2 million from state funds, \$1.7 million from local governments, \$5.8 million in corporate/foundation funds, and \$2.6 million from memberships, donations, sales, events, and investment income.

The goals of *Living with the River: Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area Final Management Plan*, completed in 2003, include Heritage Tourism/Community Revitalization, Building the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT), and Resource Conservation and Stewardship. Nearly \$6 million or 38 percent of total project expenditures were related to heritage tourism and community revitalization.

They awarded nearly \$400,000 in grants to communities and created a Schuylkill River Heritage Towns and Tours Toolkit to promote sustainable economic development. The SRGA, partnered with Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) for a \$3.7 million capital campaign to develop the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center in Pottstown where they are co-located. From 2000-2008, as part of the DCNR's Heritage Park Program they funded 100 projects with \$1.7 million to support projects.

Investments in the SRT utilized \$6.1 million or 39 percent of total expenditures. The SRGA owns, manages, maintains and develops much of the trail across five counties including creation of 32 trailheads and 20 water landings to promote access to and use of the Schuylkill River and the SRT. Working with the Schuylkill River National Trail Council, they have developed approximately 50 percent of the 128-mile SRT. Since 2001, the SRGA has invested more than \$3.6 million or 23 percent of total expenditures in Resource Conservation and Stewardship. From 2006-2015, the SRGA made 58 awards through the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund supporting 73 projects for more than \$2.5 million in funding from the Exelon Corporation as part of a mitigation program. From 2011-2016, 33 projects received \$387,334 through the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Initiative Landscape Grants from the SRHA.

The Evaluation found that the SRGA has the governance in place and is staffed appropriately to operate a sustainable national heritage area organization. They successfully engage volunteer Trail Keepers and Trail Ambassadors to help sustain projects. They have the support of local governments, corporations, and foundations including the William Penn Foundation, which is supporting 23 environmental centers. The SRHA is fulfilling its legislative mandate. The superintendents of Valley Forge National Historical Park, Hopewell Furnace Historic Site, and Independence National Park have served interchangeability as liaisons on the SRGA Board and partner for events, trainings, and programs including the annual Schuylkill River Sojourn and Pedaling through our National Parks. The SRGA provides technical assistance for wayside exhibits and facilitates collaboration with partners. The SRGA partnered with NPS and the Federal TRIO Upward Bound Program to create Youth Heritage Treks for high school students. The SRHA and the NPS jointly applied for the AmeriCorps VISTA program to work on community engagement and stewardship projects.

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, appearing to read 'Todd D. Willens', with a long horizontal stroke above it.

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 Brendan Boyle
The Honorable Matt Cartwright
The Honorable Ryan Costello
The Honorable Charles Dent
The Honorable Patrick Meehan
The Honorable Lloyd Smucker