



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

OCT 06 2016

H36(2257)

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

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

Pursuant to Public Law 111-11, Section 8201, I am pleased to transmit the Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor 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 corridor. Based on the findings of the Evaluation, the NPS recommends a future role with the Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor (TLGV). The NPS will work with TLGV to implement business, fundraising, and financial resource development plans and continue to form networks of operational and financial partnerships to further long-term sustainability of TLGV.

In 1994, Congress designated the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor, renamed The Last Green Valley. The corridor includes 26 towns in Connecticut and 9 towns in Massachusetts along the Quinebaug, Shetucket, and Thames Rivers. Seventy-seven percent of the land remains forests and farms, including 24 state parks and forests, 6 Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control facilities, and 66 miles of National Recreation Water Trails. TLGV's history is significant, including sites from Native Americans, Colonial America, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the Industrial Revolution, as well as 5 national historic landmarks and 278 historic sites and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Evaluation determined that from 1995-2014, the TLGV addressed its legislated purposes and goals of the management plans with the support of the NPS Heritage Partnership Program funds provided. Both the NPS funding and the National Heritage Area designation are of value to The Last Green Valley NHC. TLGV received \$10.9 million in NPS funding and matched and leveraged these funds with \$253.6 of in-kind donations and financial contributions to partner organizations.

TLGV's management plan goals focus on preservation, conservation, agriculture, economic development, tourism, and recreation. The largest expenditures were to protect and conserve natural resources, land use, and agriculture utilizing over \$4 million (41 percent) of NPS

funding. To support this goal, it provided over \$2 million to 74 grant projects for trail development, natural resource inventories, and land use plans. These grants exceeded the match requirement and leveraged \$9.3 million. Promotion of economic development, recreation, community revitalization, and tourism utilized over \$3.5 million (33 percent) of NPS funds. Of this, over \$2 million was granted to towns for visitor centers, streetscape improvements, parks, site restoration, and promotions. TLGV supported the development of walking, hiking, biking, and paddling trails with grant funds. It also invested \$3 million (26 percent) of NPS funds in preservation of historic and cultural sites, including over \$1 million in grants to 112 projects. In addition, TLGV used \$100,000 of NPS funds for 13 Mill ReUse Initiative redevelopment projects.

TLGV NHC has worked closely with Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program staff for development of trails, programs, and for National Recreation Trail designation. In 2013 TLGV worked with RTCA to analyze programs and activities.

TLGV has components of sustainability, including a Board with expertise in farming, economic development, non-profit lending, and banking. Strategic plans include the 1997 management plan, the 2000 and 2010 revisions, a 2006 sustainability plan, *The Trail to 2015: A Sustainability Plan*, and *Vision 2020: The Next Ten Years*. These plans outline fees for services, income-producing activities, program support from contributions, and endowment income. While the efforts resulted in beneficial changes for the organization, they did not replace the federal funds.

The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor is fulfilling its legislative mandate. With appropriate authorization, a range of options exists for NPS involvement in supporting the area, including providing financial and technical assistance, training, guidance on planning and operations, partnering with national parks, or consulting on preservation and conservation.

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,



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

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
The Honorable Edward J. Markey
The Honorable Richard Blumenthal

The Honorable Christopher S. Murphy
The Honorable Richard E. Neal
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The Honorable Joe Courtney



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Dear Chairman Bishop:

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