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U.S House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations for the National Park Service

Chairman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Preservation Action’s more than 3,000 members and supporters, I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony on the Department of Interior’s FY 2021 for the National Park Service and its historic preservation programs. My name is Russ Carnahan and I’m the President of Preservation Action. Founded in 1974, Preservation Action is a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization created to serve as the national grassroots advocacy organization for historic preservation. We represent an active and engaged grassroots constituency from across the country, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide their perspective.

On behalf of members and supporters across the country, I’d like to thank the subcommittee for their strong support of historic preservation programs and priorities in the past several Interior Appropriations bills, and especially for the FY20 Interior Appropriations bill which was perhaps the most preservation-friendly funding bills in history. Thanks to your support, programs that have a proven track record of saving places Americans value, revitalizing communities, reusing infrastructure, and telling a complete history of America, continue to benefit all Americans.

Preservation Action’s mission is to make historic preservation a national priority. For 45 years we’ve advocated for sound preservation policy, including two of the most important tools for historic preservation- the Historic Preservation Fund and the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC).

**National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund**

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) is the principal source of funding to implement the nation’s historic preservation programs. Since 1976 the HPF has helped to recognize, save, revitalize and protect America’s historic resources. Preservation Action is extraordinarily grateful for the strong support Congress and especially this Committee, have shown for the HPF in recent years, including FY 2020’s $118.66 million, the highest level of HPF funding in history. The HPF provides funding to states and tribes to carry out their federally mandated duties and supports critically important competitive grant programs that empowers states and local communities to preserve places that help to tell a more complete American story.
Preservation Action urges this subcommittee to continue their strong support of historic preservation by appropriating the fully authorized $150 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in FY20’s Department of Interior budget. Including funding at the following levels:

- **$61 million for State Historic Preservation Officers** (SHPOs) for heritage preservation and protection programs that create jobs, economic development, and community revitalization. In partnership with the federal government, SHPOs carry out the primary functions of the National Historic Preservation Act including – finding and documenting America’s historic places, making nominations to the National Register, providing assistance on rehabilitation tax credit projects, reviewing impacts of federal projects, working with local governments, and conducting preservation education and planning. Additionally, states are required to match at least 40% of the money they receive from the HPF.

- **$22 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers** (THPOs). THPOs are designated by federally recognized tribal governments that have entered into an agreement with the Department of the Interior to assume the federal compliance role of the SHPO on their respective Tribal lands. Tribal historic preservation plans are based on traditional knowledge and cultural values, and may involve projects to improve Indian schools, roads, health clinics and housing. Funding levels have not kept pace with the growing number of Indian Tribes with THPO programs, resulting in a lower average grants per tribe.

- **$20 million for the African American Civil Rights Initiative Competitive Grants.** A competitive grant program to preserve the sites and stories of efforts to advance African American Civil Rights.

- **$8 million for the Civil Rights Initiative for All Americans Competitive Grants.** A newly established competitive grant program to preserve the sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for All Americans.

- **$18 million for Save America’s Treasures Program.** Save America’s Treasures grants program help preserve nationally significant historic properties and collections that convey our nation’s rich heritage to future generations of Americans.

- **$10 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.** Funding would provide grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to preserve and repair historic buildings on the campuses of HBCUs.

- **$10 million for Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program.** The purpose of the program is to rehabilitate and preserve historic resources, while fostering economic development of rural communities.

- **$1 million for the Under-Represented Communities Grant Program.** These competitive grants support the survey and nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places and as National Historic Landmarks associated with communities currently under-represented.

**Total Historic Preservation Fund Request: FY 2020 $150 million**
We’d also like to express our support for the Preservation Partnership Program which supports National Heritage Areas nationwide. Designated by Congress, National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are community-driven sites that weave cultural, natural, and historic resources together to tell nationally significant stories. NHAs rely on public-private funding where every federal dollar allocated is matched with an average of $5.50 in public and private funds. Preservation Action greatly appreciates Congress and this Committee’s continued support of NHAs.

While we appreciate Congress’s support of NHAs, funding has not kept pace. Since 2004 the number of NHAs have doubled while funding for the program has only increased by 33%. To bring funding in line with the increased number of NHAs, Preservation Action requests, in accordance with the National Alliance of National Heritage Areas, $32 million for National Heritage Areas through the Preservation Partnership Program in the FY20 Department of Interior’s budget. Preservation Action also supports the bipartisan National Heritage Area Act of 2019 (H.R. 1049) which establishes standardized criteria of NHAs and ensures long term sustainability.

Preservation Action would like to thank the subcommittee for including report language in the FY20 Interior Appropriations bill expressing concern over the Administration’s proposed rule changes to the National Register of Historic Places and encouraging the National Park Service to withdraw the proposed rule. We remain extremely concerned over the impact the proposed rule changes would have on how historic resources are nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and determined eligible. While the stated intent is to bring regulations current with recent amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the proposed revisions clearly go far beyond that purpose and are inconsistent with the language in and intent of the NHPA.

The Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC), administered by SHPOs and the NPS, is the most significant federal investment in historic preservation. Since its creation more than 35 years ago, the HTC has been a catalyst for development with the rehabilitation of more than 44,000 buildings across the nation. Since inception, the HTC has created over 2.7 million jobs and leveraged over $162 billion in private investment. In addition to revitalizing communities and spurring economic growth, the HTC returns more to the Treasury than it costs. The HTC has helped to rehabilitate historic structures and revitalize communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S Virgin Islands.

The Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (H.R 2865) would increase the value the HTC, improve access to the credit, and make the credit more appealing for smaller projects. The bill is up to 63 bipartisan cosponsors. Preservation Action and its national members urge Congress support the HTC-GO Act and continue to protect the Historic Tax Credit by sufficiently funding SHPOs and the NPS who administer the program.
Conclusion

Preservation Action appreciates the opportunity to provide our views on the FY21 Department of Interior budget. We work closely with a broad cross-section of preservation professionals from the state and local level and are pleased to be able to add their perspective.

Preservation Action continues to value the dedicated work of National Park Service employees, the partnership of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as well as the instrumental work of SHPOs and THPOs in preserving America’s cultural heritage.

Thank you for valuing the input of the preservation community as you consider the FY21 Department of Interior budget and your past support of vital historic preservation programs. We look forward to working with the committee and are happy to answer any questions you may have.