

P R E S E R V A T I O N

*Action*

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United States House Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

**Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations for the National Park Service**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Preservation Action's thousands of members and supporters - representing nearly every state - we appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony on the Department of Interior's FY 2024 Appropriations for the National Park Service and its historic preservation programs. 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 this testimony reflects their priorities.

First, we would like to thank the subcommittee for their strong support of historic preservation programs and priorities in the past several Interior Appropriations bills – especially for the FY23 Interior Appropriations bill, which funded the Historic Preservation Fund at \$204.515 million. This marked the eighth consecutive year of record funding for the program – again exceeding the program's outdated \$150 million authorized level – reflecting the growing need of State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and the impactful work the HPF makes possible through competitive grant programs. Thanks to your support, all Americans continue to benefit from programs that have a proven track record of saving places Americans value, revitalizing communities, combating climate change by reusing infrastructure, and creating jobs.

Preservation Action's mission is to demonstrate that historic preservation is a national priority. For 49 years we've advocated for sound preservation policy, including two of the most important tools for historic preservation: the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) 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.

HPF funding is critical to ensure State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs/THPOs), whose job it is to administer federal historic preservation program, have the staffing capacity needed for the timely review of infrastructure and other federal projects per requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act.

HPF funding also supports critically important competitive grant programs. The Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant Program is helping to foster economic development in rural communities through subgrants, like the REvitalizeME Subgrant Program that supports projects

in 22 small communities across Maine. While programs like the African American Civil Rights Grant Program, the History of Equal Rights grant program, the Underrepresented Communities Grant Program, and others are helping to tell a more diverse and inclusive American story.

Preservation Action recognizes the strong support Congress, especially this Committee, has shown for the HPF in recent years. But more is needed, especially as SHPOs and THPOs face increased workloads as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is implemented.

⇒ **Preservation Action recommends this subcommittee to continue their strong support of historic preservation by appropriating \$225 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in FY24's Department of Interior budget**, including funding at the following levels:

- **\$70 million for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs).** SHPOs carry out the primary functions of the National Historic Preservation Act: finding and documenting America's historic places, nominating places to the National Register, aiding rehabilitation tax credit projects, reviewing impacts of federal projects, working with local governments, and conducting preservation education and planning. Due to 2023 changes to SHPO apportionments, 23 states did not receive an increase in funding from 2022 to 2023.
- **\$40 million for Save America's Treasures Program.** The Save America's Treasures grants program helps preserve nationally significant historic properties and collections that convey our nation's rich heritage to future generations of Americans.
- **\$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs).** THPOs are designated by federally recognized tribal governments and 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. THPOs are chronically underfunded. Funding levels have not kept pace with the growing number of Indian Tribes with THPO programs, resulting in a lower average apportionments per tribe.
- **\$28 million for the African American Civil Rights Initiative Grants.** A competitive grant program to preserve the sites and stories of the African American struggle to gain equal rights.
- **\$13 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).** Funding provides grants to HBCUs to preserve and repair historic buildings on their campuses.
- **\$17 million for Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Subgrants.** Supports the rehabilitation of historic properties and fosters economic development of rural communities through subgrants.
- **\$11 million for the Semiquincentennial Grants.** Competitive grant program that preserves publicly-owned historic sites commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of the U.S.
- **\$7 million for the History of Equal Rights Grant Program.** A competitive grant program to preserve sites and stories related to the struggle of all Americans to achieve equal rights.

- **\$5 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 associated with currently under-represented communities.

#### **Total FY 2024 Historic Preservation Fund Request: \$225 million**

- ⇒ **Preservation Action also encourages the permanent reauthorization of the Historic Preservation Fund and increasing the authorized level from \$150 million to at least \$300 million.** The HPF's authorization has not been increased since the program's inception in 1976 and the program's current authorization is set to expire in September of this year. This would provide much needed certainty to the states, tribes, and local communities that rely on this funding to carry out their critical preservation work.

#### **National Park Service: Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit**

The Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC), administered by SHPOs, THPOs, and the National Park Service is the most significant federal investment in historic preservation. The HTC has supported historic rehabilitation projects across the country, like the renovation of the 1927 Bonneville Hotel in Idaho Falls, ID or the rehabilitation of the historic Stand Theatre in Rockland, ME. The HTC has been a catalyst for development and job creation, and is responsible for:

- Rehabilitating more than 48,000 historic buildings across the nation.
- Leveraging over \$199 billion in private investment.
- Creating more than 3 million jobs since its inception.
- Producing over 185,000 affordable housing units.
- Rehabilitating buildings and revitalizing communities in all 50 states.
- Returning more to the Treasury than the cost of the program.

Preservation Action supports the bipartisan **Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (S. 639)**, which would increase the value of the HTC, improve access to the credit, and make the credit more appealing for smaller projects.

- ⇒ **Preservation Action urges the Committee to continue to support the Historic Tax Credit by sufficiently funding SHPOs, THPOs and the National Park Service who administer the program.**

#### **National Park Service: African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program**

- ⇒ **Preservation Action supports \$3 million in funding for the newly authorized, African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program.**

This program was established by Congress as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 and was included in the President's budget request. This program will identify, document, preserve, research, and interpret these historic and sacred burial sites whose protection and documentation has too often been neglected or forgotten.

#### **National Park Service: National Heritage Areas**

⇒ We express our support for **\$33.5 million for the Heritage Partnership Program**, which supports National Heritage Areas (NHAs) nationwide.

Designated by Congress, 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. We appreciate the passage of the bipartisan National Heritage Area Act, which established standardized criteria of NHAs and ensures long-term sustainability. The bill also created 7 new NHAs. \$33.5 million keeps all NHAs at their existing funding levels while providing funding for the newly authorized NHAs.

### **Independent Agency: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation**

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of the nation's diverse historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. We appreciate the continued support of this important agency.

⇒ Preservation Action recommends the Committee support **\$10.5 million for the ACHP in the FY 2023 Interior Appropriations Bill**. An increase in funding will enhance the critical functions of the agency: ensuring the nation's historic and cultural resources are protected, advancing tribal consultation, and finding efficiencies to deliver timely federal review of major infrastructure projects.

### **Conclusion**

Preservation Action appreciates the opportunity to provide our views on the FY24 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 add their perspective via our testimony.

Preservation Action continues to value the dedicated work of National Park Service employees, partnership with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and 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 FY24 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.

Sincerely,



Russ Carnahan  
President, Preservation Action