

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

Action

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

Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations for the National Park Service

Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski 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 2025 Appropriations for the National Park Service and its historic preservation programs. Founded in 1974, Preservation Action is a 501(c)4 nonprofit 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.

Preservation Action's mission is to demonstrate that historic preservation is a national priority. For 50 years we've advocated for sound preservation policy, including two of the most important federal tools for historic preservation: the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) and the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC).

First, we would like to thank the subcommittee for their continued support of historic preservation programs and priorities - especially for including language to reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund for one year in your FY24 Interior Appropriations bill. No doubt the Committee's support was instrumental in HPF authorization being included in the final bill. 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, promoting heritage tourism, and creating jobs. In Fiscal Year 2024 the HPF was funded at \$188.66 million, a nearly \$16 million cut below 2023 enacted levels. While we recognize the challenging budget, these cuts undermine the critical preservation work carried out by the program.

National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund (HPF)

The 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 programs, have the staffing capacity needed for the timely review of infrastructure, renewable energy, and other federal projects, per requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act. In FY 2022 SHPOs reviewed and consulted on 177,400 Federal undertakings (a 42.7% increase over FY 2021), provided 83,200 National Register eligibility opinions and surveyed over 5.3 million acres for cultural resources.

HPF's competitive grant programs preserve, document, and exhibit diverse histories. These programs address a wide variety of preservation needs across the country and fund various types of work. In 2019, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a \$665,000 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant to implement a grant program for the preservation of historic theaters in rural communities. Eight theaters received between \$80,000-\$90,000 to repair and preserve their venues. In 2023, the Chilkoot Indian Association received a Save America's Treasures grant for the stabilization and rehabilitation of the Noow Hít tribal house. Noow Hít is the last surviving example of Lingít vernacular architecture in Haines, Alaska and this \$744,507 grant preserves the knowledge of traditional construction techniques.

Preservation Action appreciates the support this Committee has shown for the HPF, but more is needed. The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act has added significantly to the workload of SHPOs and THPOs and cuts to HPF grant programs, like the ones mentioned above, undermine preservation efforts and the economic development these programs produce.

⇒ **Preservation Action recommends this subcommittee support historic preservation by appropriating \$225 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in FY25'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 Tribal lands. Tribal historic preservation plans are based on traditional knowledge and cultural values, and often 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.** Competitive grants that support the survey and nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places associated with under-represented communities.

Total FY 2025 Historic Preservation Fund Request: \$225 million

Additionally, we are grateful to Congress for reauthorizing the HPF for one-year as part of the FY24 Appropriations bill and urge support for a longer-term authorization. Preservation Action supports the bipartisan Historic Preservation Fund Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3350), which would reauthorize the HPF for 10 years and increase the authorized level to \$250 million annually. 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.

- ⇒ **Preservation Action encourages inclusion of language to reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund and increase the authorized level.** 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.

National Park Service: Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HTC)

The HTC, administered by SHPOs, THPOs, and the National Park Service is the most significant federal investment in historic preservation. The HTC supports historic rehabilitation projects across the country, like the recent rehabilitation of the Patton Home in Portland, OR. The Patton Home was built in 1890 to provide shelter and social services to those in need and is now continuing that tradition by providing affordable housing to Portland's neediest residents. The HTC has been a catalyst for development and job creation, and is responsible for:

- Rehabilitating more than 49,000 historic buildings across the nation.
- Leveraging over \$235 billion in private investment.
- Creating more than 3.2 million jobs since its inception.
- Producing over 199,000 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 (H.R 1785, 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 **support the HTC by sufficiently funding SHPOs, THPOs and the National Park Service who administer the program.**

National Park Service: African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program

The African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program was established by Congress in 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.

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

National Park Service: National Heritage Areas

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.

- ⇒ We express our support for **\$34 million for the Heritage Partnership Program**, which supports National Heritage Areas nationwide. This funding level keeps individual NHAs at their existing funding levels while providing funding for 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.** This 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 FY25 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 through our testimony. We 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 our cultural heritage.

Thank you for valuing the input of the preservation community as you consider the FY25 funding levels 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

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