



Russ Carnahan
President, Preservation Action

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

Department of Interior Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations for the National Park Service

Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Merkley 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 2026 Appropriations for the National Park Service, its historic preservation programs, and related independent agencies. Specifically, we recommend the Committee support the following funding levels:

- National Park Service: Historic Preservation Fund → \$225 million
- National Park Service: Cultural Programs → \$46 million
 - African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program → \$3 million
- National Park Service: Heritage Partnership Program → \$34 million
- Independent Agencies: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation → \$10.5 million
- Independent Agencies: National Endowments for the Arts & Humanities → \$209 million

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.

For over 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). All Americans benefit from these programs that have a proven track record of saving places Americans value, revitalizing communities, increasing economic development, promoting heritage tourism, and creating jobs.

In the most recent Continuing Resolution, the HPF was funded at \$168.9 million for FY25. **In spite of this, we are deeply concerned that this congressionally appropriated funding has yet to be released.** To date, the Department of Interior has failed to post a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), which means State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs/THPOs) are unable to access funding to carry out their federally mandated duties.

While we appreciate the continued support the subcommittee has shown, we are afraid that recent cuts, drastic staff reductions at the National Park Service, funding freezes, contract cancellations, and ongoing uncertainty is undermining the ability for critical preservation work to be carried out. As we approach America's 250th celebration in 2026, we urge you to help facilitate the release of congressionally appropriated FY25 HPF funding and support robust funding for the programs that help preserve our shared heritage.

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 SHPOs and THPOs, who administer federal historic preservation programs, have the staffing capacity needed for the efficient review of infrastructure, energy, and other federal projects, per requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act. In FY 2024 SHPOs reviewed and consulted on 108,200 Federal undertakings, provided 91,600 National Register eligibility opinions and surveyed over 4.5 million acres for cultural resources.

HPF's competitive grant programs help to preserve, document, and exhibit our shared history. In 2019, a \$665,000 Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant was awarded to support the preservation of historic theaters in rural Oregon communities. In 2023, the Chilkoot Indian Association received a \$744,507 Save America's Treasures grant for the stabilization and rehabilitation of the Noow Hít tribal house, which is the last surviving example of Lingít vernacular architecture in Haines, Alaska.

Preservation Action appreciates the support this Committee has shown for the HPF, but more is needed. Cuts to the HPF undermine preservation efforts and the economic development these programs produce.

- **Preservation Action recommends \$225 million in funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in FY26's Department of Interior budget**, including funding at the following levels:
 - **\$70 million for 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, and reviewing impacts of federal projects. To maximize efficiency, SHPOs need reliable and adequate funding.
 - **\$34 million for THPOs.** THPOs assume the federal compliance role of the SHPO on Tribal lands, grounded in sovereignty, traditional knowledge, and cultural values. Funding has not kept pace with the growing number of THPOs.
 - **\$121 million for seven existing competitive grant programs.** Together, these grant programs provide vital funds to help preserve the places that collectively celebrate our nation's rich history. There is incredible demand for these grants, and robust funding is needed to rehabilitate our shared historic places.

Total FY 2026 Historic Preservation Fund Request: \$225 million

We are deeply concerned by the failure to release congressionally appropriated FY25 HPF funding. This is having dire consequences on historic preservation across the country. Multiple states have had to lay off SHPO staff impacting National Register nominations, federal project reviews, HTC assistance, and much more.

- **Preservation Action urges the committee to facilitate the immediate release of FY25 HPF funds** to ensure the important work of SHPOs and THPOs continues to aid in the preservation of our nation's heritage.

Additionally, we appreciate the subcommittee's inclusion of a one-year authorization for the HPF as part of the FY25 Appropriations bill. However, this authorization was not included in the recently passed Continuing Resolution and the program is not currently authorized.

- **Preservation Action encourages inclusion of language to reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund in the FY26 Department of Interior Budget.** We also support a longer term HPF authorization to provide certainty to the states, tribes, and local communities that rely on this funding to carry out their vital preservation work.

National Park Service: Cultural Programs

The National Park Service's Cultural Programs supports much of the federal historic preservation program. This includes managing the National Register of Historic Places, and administering the HTC, among other important activities and programs. The HTC supports historic rehabilitation projects across the country, like the rehabilitation of 1930's Red John's Cabin in Talkeetna, AK in 2020, named one of Alaska's most endangered historic places in 2017. The HTC continues to be a catalyst for development and job creation, and is responsible for:

- Rehabilitating more than 50,100 historic buildings in all 50 states.
- Leveraging nearly \$250 billion in private investment.
- Creating more than 3.3 million jobs since its inception.
- Producing over 365,000 in new housing units.
- Returning more to the Treasury than the cost of the program.

The HTC, along with other key preservation programs, depends on the capacity of SHPOs, THPOs, and the NPS staff. The delay in the release of FY25 HPF funds and recent layoffs at the NPS will lead to slow downs in project reviews and certifications, threatening the timely completion of rehabilitation projects and the economic development and job creation they generate. As Congress debates tax reform, Preservation Action urges lawmakers to include long-overdue improvements to the HTC that will enhance its value, expand access, and make the credit more attractive for smaller-scale projects. Additionally, we strongly support robust funding for Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship Programs at the Department of Labor to ensure a skilled workforce is available to carry out these critical rehabilitation efforts.

- **Preservation Action urges the Committee to fund Cultural Programs at \$46 million** to support the HTC and other important preservation programs that the NPS carries out.

National Park Service: African-American Burial Grounds Preservation Program

Within our Cultural Programs request, we specifically want to highlight the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program which was established by Congress in 2023 with strong bipartisan support. This program will identify, document, and preserve these historic and sacred burial sites whose protection and documentation has often been forgotten or neglected.

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

National Park Service: Heritage Partnership Program

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 Agencies: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation and enhancement of the nation's historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy.

- Preservation Action recommends the Committee support **\$10.5 million for the ACHP**. This will ensure the nation's historic and cultural resources are protected, advance tribal consultation, and deliver timely federal review of major infrastructure projects.

Independent Agencies: National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) are independent federal agencies that support museums, archives, theaters, and funding critical to communities around the country.

- Preservation Action recommends the Committee support **\$209 million for the NEA and NEH**. Both agencies play a huge role in supporting cultural infrastructure and directly bolster historic preservation programming in communities nationwide. We are also very concerned by the recent actions to cancel or rescind already awarded NEA/NEH grants. Cuts to these programs would have a devastating impact on cultural heritage across the country.

Conclusion

Preservation Action appreciates the opportunity to provide our views on the FY26 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 ACHP, NEA/NEH, and the instrumental work of SHPOs and THPOs in preserving our shared heritage.

Thank you for valuing the input of the preservation community as you consider the FY26 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

President, Preservation Action