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Testimony for the
U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Senator Feinstein, Chairman

April 25, 2008

- Request:**
- \$50,000,000 for State Historic Preservation Offices
 - \$5,000,000 for competitive grants to States for historic site survey fieldwork and digitization of documents

The programs are funded through the U. S. Department of the Interior's, National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund and authorized by the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act.

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record regarding the funding request for State Historic Preservation Offices and for historic site survey fieldwork and digitization. NCSHPO is the professional association of the State government officials who carry out the national historic preservation program as delegates of the Secretary of Interior pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). The NCSHPO acts as a communications vehicle among the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and their staffs and represents the SHPOs with Congress, federal agencies and national preservation organizations.

National Historic Preservation Act—NPS Leadership Responsibility

In 1966 Congress recognized the importance of preserving our past by passing the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 16 USC 470), which established today's Historic Preservation program. The NHPA directs State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to carry out the federal preservation program: 1) Locate and record historic resources; 2) Nominate significant historic resources to the National Register of Historic Places; 3) Foster historic preservation programs at the local government level and the creation of preservation ordinances; 4) Provide funds for preservation activities; 5) Comment on federal preservation tax projects; 6) Review all federal projects for their impact on historic properties; and 7) Provide technical assistance to federal agencies, state and local governments and the private sector.

SHPO Funding—Dollars Well Spent

For such a small program, SHPOs have extensive and wide ranging support - from within Congress, to State and local governments, community organizations and individuals across the country. Brent Warr, Mayor of Gulfport Mississippi said that through the Historic Preservation Fund's hurricane Relief Grant Program, "The historical character of our community is being renewed, distinguishing us from others and preserving our heritage so that it can be shared with future generations."

Historic preservation is a sound investment and as an economic tool has proved its worth. Since 1981, rehabilitation activities in Colorado have created almost 29,000 jobs and generated a total of over \$2 billion in direct and indirect economic impacts. In Florida, an examination of the assessed values of mainly residential property in eighteen historic districts found that in at least fifteen cases, property in historic districts appreciated greater than comparable, targeted non-historic districts and that there was no case where historic district designation depressed the property values. In 2007, HPF programs such as the Rehabilitation Tax Credit stimulated \$4.35 Billion in private investment and at the same time produced 6,553 low and moderate income housing units, a 17% increase over 2006, and created an estimated 40,755 jobs.

Though often unglamorous, SHPOs work is fundamentally essential to the preservation of our heritage. From 2002 to 2007, the number of Section 106 reviews conducted increased 104% to 129,200 while SHPO funding decreased by nearly 5 percent over the same time period. In 2007, SHPOs also provided nearly 82,000 National Register eligibility opinions, assisted in creating 58 new Certified Local Governments and provided technical assistance and preservation policy guidance to hundreds of thousands of communities and individuals nationwide.

Inventory Funding—NPS Steps Up to the Plate

Many of the programs discussed above could be done much more effectively and efficiently if States had an accurate inventory of their historic resources in a digitized format. Knowing what you have and defining the location and significance of the Nation's historic assets, is fundamental for all historic preservation activity. Further, having electronic access to that data is essential for federal project planning. We are pleased and encouraged that the NPS is "stepping up to the plate" and fulfilling its forty-year old commitment to find America's historic places by acknowledging and responding to the strong recommendations of the 2006 Preserve America Summit and by requesting inventory funding in FY08 and for FY09.

While, a select few SHPOs have made remarkable progress assembling a patchwork of funding to initiate digital access to inventory information, other SHPOs around the country are not as fortunate. After 40 years of the national preservation program we, as a Nation, still don't know the location of hundreds of thousands of our historic resources.

Support for inventory funding exists within Congress, State and local governments, and the private sector and while we are pleased that the Administration has requested funding we are disappointed in the proposed amount of \$2 million. We believe a minimum of \$5 million (the Administration's FY 08 unfulfilled request) a year for five years is needed.

Specifically, inventory funds would be used for two purposes 1) to conduct inventory fieldwork, filling in the current patchwork of identified sites which is essential for federal project review (Section 106) and lays a foundation of every future preservation activity, e. g., National Register) and 2) to convert existing paper records to electronic formats (data bases, GIS).

Recent natural disasters have also exposed the adverse consequences of the void in historic resources information. In the Gulf, in 2005 aid to victims and FEMA responses were delayed because digitized historic site locations were not available. The NPS detailed staff to do after the fact digitization of the location of historic places. The result of the work—on line access to maps of historic sites—led to a dramatic reduction in project review, from weeks to hours.

National Academy of Public Administration Report - Confirms NCSHPO Request

Federal funding for SHPOs is money well spent. Under the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool, management of Historic Preservation Programs received a score of 89% indicating exemplary performance of mandated activities. Reinforcing this finding is the December 2007 National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report "BACK TO THE FUTURE: A Review of the National Historic Preservation Program."

NAPA, a non-profit, independent coalition of top management and organizational leaders, found that the National Historic Preservation Program "stands as a successful example of effective federal-state partnership and is working to realize Congress' original vision to a great extent. And while the program's basic structure is sound, it continues to face a number of notable challenges." The Panel concluded "that a stronger federal leadership role, greater resources, and enhanced management are needed to build upon the existing, successful framework to achieve the full potential of the NHPA on behalf of the American people."¹

Report recommendations specific to SHPOs included the following:

- the NPS request funding and FTE increases sufficient to address the increased workload since Fiscal Year 1981 in National Register eligibility opinion, tax credit reviews, Section 106 reviews, and HPF grants administration and to redress, at least in part, the significant decline in inflation adjusted funding;
- the NPS build upon the National Preservation program's success by providing a stronger national leadership role in consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and other national partners as appropriate;
- the NPS expand its mission to make building the capacity of State Historic Preservation Officers and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers a top priority and that it pursue this goal aggressively in cooperation with its national partners;
- the Department of the Interior and the NPS strengthen the performance of the National Historic Preservation program and expand resources based on its demonstrated effectiveness in cooperation with the ACHP; and

¹ NAPA, "BACK TO THE FUTURE: A Review of the National Historic Preservation Programs" December 2007, p. 29

- the NPS improve the efficiency of national historic preservation efforts by taking full advantage of information technologies;

On behalf of the States, NCSHPO is working in concert with the NPS to strategize on implementing the recommendations. However, Congress ultimately decides funding levels and without additional funding, many of these recommendations are unattainable.

Conclusion—HPF: a Wise Federal Investment and the Right Thing to do

Congress stated in 1966 that “The spirit and direction of the nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage.” Historic preservation recognizes that what was common and ordinary in the past is often rare and precious today, and what is common and ordinary today may be extraordinary, fifty, one hundred or five hundred years from now.

NCSHPO thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony and for their commitment to historic preservation. The federal government plays an invaluable role in preserving our nation’s history and through our partnership, State Historic Preservation Officers stand committed to identify, protect, and maintain our Nation’s historic heritage.

Thank you.