

National Heritage Partnership Act S. 243

Establishing a Framework to Promote America's Unique Heritage

Status:

On February 1, 2005 Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY) introduced the National Heritage Partnership Act (S. 243) which establishes a program and criteria for National Heritage Areas. The bill is similar to legislation which passed the Senate in the 108th Congress. In early February, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee passed the measure by unanimous consent. A companion bill has not yet been introduced in the House for the 109th Congress.

The Need:

In recent years, interest and enthusiasm for cultural heritage has been growing, with heritage tourism a significant portion of the \$600 billion U.S. travel industry. Heritage areas, heritage tourism, and development of heritage resources provide economic benefits to local communities and protect the historic resources and character of a region. There are hundreds of heritage areas in the nation, with 27 of these areas designated as National Heritage Areas. Currently, neither a formal process to designate and support National Heritage Areas nor a system to coordinate assistance and provide information for ongoing heritage initiatives exists.

The Program:

1. The bill establishes a National Heritage Area program which defines standards for designation and requires specific criteria for national significance before an area can be designated.
2. Under the program, the Secretary of Interior shall conduct studies to assess the suitability and feasibility of designating the proposed National Heritage Area. Additionally, the program requires the local coordinating entity to prepare and implement a management plan.
3. The bill calls for a limit on annual funding of \$1 million per National Heritage Area with a total appropriation of \$15 million each year.
4. Individual feasibility studies are capped at \$250,000 per study up to a total of \$750,000 each year.
5. Total funding for each National Heritage Area would be capped at \$10 million over 15 years.
6. Grant recipients are required to match funds in an amount equal to the grant.

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