

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY O'DELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 219, A BILL TO  
ESTABLISH THE SUSQUEHANNA GATEWAY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN  
THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**April 23, 2013**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 219, a bill to establish the Susquehanna Gateway National Heritage Area in Pennsylvania.

The Department supports the objectives of S. 219. The Susquehanna Gateway area has been found to meet the National Park Service's interim criteria for designation as a National Heritage Area. However, the Department recommends that Congress pass program legislation that establishes criteria to evaluate potentially qualified National Heritage Areas and a process for the designation, funding, and administration of these areas before designating any additional new National Heritage Areas.

There are currently 49 designated national heritage areas, yet there is no authority in law that guides the designation and administration of these areas. Program legislation would provide a much-needed framework for evaluating proposed national heritage areas, offering guidelines for successful planning and management, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and standardizing timeframes and funding for designated areas.

Flowing for 441 miles, the Susquehanna River is the longest river on the East Coast and the largest contributor of fresh water to the Chesapeake Bay. The portions of the river flowing through Lancaster and York Counties in Pennsylvania exhibit exceptional natural and recreational value and traverse landscapes of historical importance to our nation.

The region of the proposed Susquehanna Gateway National Heritage Area was first inhabited by Native Americans who left evidence of their occupation in a myriad of archeological sites, as well as rock art at several petroglyph sites. When Captain John Smith journeyed up the Susquehanna River in the summer of 1608, he sent emissaries to the Susquehannock town located on the east side of the river near present day Washington Boro in Lancaster County. Tribal leaders there entered a trade alliance, opening to the English a trade network extending hundreds of miles.

In 1668, William Penn set the tone for religious tolerance in Pennsylvania and brought colonists who settled the great fertile valley of the Susquehanna Gateway region, beginning its long history as an abundant agricultural center. Serving as an important transportation corridor, the river provided opportunities for commerce and invention. It was here that John Elgar constructed the first iron steamboat in America. The birthplace of Robert Fulton, the original inventor of steam powered boats, is a National Historic Landmark in Lancaster County. Here,

too, Phineas Davis designed and built the first practical coal burning steam locomotive, thereby revolutionizing railroad transportation.

The region is the home ground of the “Plain People” – the Amish and Mennonites. Their religious values, simple way of life, and well-tended farms speak to the deepest feelings that Americans have about ourselves and our national experience.

In this region, visitors also find evidence of our Revolutionary War past. Lancaster and York Counties served as venues for the Continental Congress when it left Philadelphia upon the British occupation of that city. In the courthouse in York, the Congress approved the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, the nation’s “first constitution,” and sent it forth to the states for ratification. In the summer of 1781, Continental Army General James Wood established Camp Security, housing more than a thousand British soldiers from General John Burgoyne’s army, which had surrendered at Saratoga.

The region also has an abundance of natural resources including migratory bird nesting sites, remnants of old growth forests, and areas of both ecological diversity and scenic quality. Ferncliff, known for its wildflowers, and the Susquehanna Gorge are both designated National Natural Landmarks. Recreational resources abound in the region, including the Kelly’s Run and Susquehanna River Water Trails, both National Recreation Trails.

S. 219 designates the Susquehanna Heritage Corporation, a non-profit organization, as the local coordinating entity for the Susquehanna Gateway National Heritage Area. This organization has served as the coordinator for the state heritage area covering this region designated in 2001. The Susquehanna Heritage Corporation has demonstrated success in coordinating diverse partners in Lancaster and York Counties. Over the past nine years, the Corporation has been effective in facilitating preservation, interpretative, and educational projects and in leveraging community participation and funding. The heritage area has strong support from the public and from a myriad of state, local, federal, and non-governmental partners throughout the area. In 2008, the Corporation prepared a national heritage area feasibility study that was reviewed by the National Park Service and found to meet the interim criteria for potential designation found in the *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines*.

If the committee decides to act on S. 219, we would like to recommend language to make the bill more consistent with other National Heritage Area legislation enacted most recently and also to simplify the criteria for approval of management plans.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions from members of the Committee.