



**Statement of Marion Werkheiser,
Policy Director for the Coalition for American Heritage
Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
May 10, 2023**

Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer the Coalition for American Heritage’s recommendations for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations for the Department of the Interior.

The Coalition for American Heritage (“the Coalition”) is an organization comprised of heritage professionals, scholars, small businesses, non-profits and history-lovers across the country. Our 350,000 members work together to promote our nation’s commitment to historic preservation. Preserving historic resources helps stabilize neighborhoods, attract investment, create jobs, generate tax revenues, support small businesses, and power America’s heritage tourism industry.

We appreciate the strong funding provided to historic preservation programs in recent Interior Appropriations legislation. Investing in these programs will help ensure the continuance of our country’s proud tradition of preservation. The Coalition requests robust funding for all of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s historic preservation and cultural management programs, and for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Respectfully, the Coalition urges the Committee to approve the following funding levels for FY24:

- NPS Historic Preservation Fund: \$225 million
- National Recreation and Preservation, African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program: \$3 million
- NPS National Heritage Areas and Heritage Partnership Program: \$34 million
- BLM National Conservation Lands: \$78 million
- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: \$10.5 million
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH): at least \$211 million for each one

National Park Service

The popularity of our national parks is at an all-time high. Our country cannot afford unwarranted reductions to visitor services and cuts to the responsible stewardship of our historic and cultural resources. The NPS is responsible for 418 National Park System units. Over the past 20 years, more than 40 new parks have been added to the park system. Many recent additions preserve historic places and themes that have traditionally been underrepresented within the system.

Within the requested funds, we recommend robust funding for Resource Stewardship, including the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, the African American Civil Rights Network, and the Reconstruction Era National Historic Network. Funding for these popular initiatives provides the public with valuable educational resources that honor and preserve our country's rich African-American heritage and history for future generations.

We also urge the Committee to address the deferred maintenance backlog at America's national parks. Almost half of the current backlog concern historic assets. Robust investments in this area will contribute to the successful preservation of historic sites and structures and other NPS cultural resources. Without critically needed funding for repair and rehabilitation, these critical sites, buildings and artifacts that draw visitors to our national parks' assets risk further deterioration and potential loss.

NPS Historic Preservation Fund

We urge the Committee to appropriate \$225 million in FY24 for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), a vital program that, in partnership with states, local governments and tribes, is the cornerstone of our country's historic preservation initiatives.

Within the \$225 million request, we recommend the following funding breakdown:

- \$70 million for State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) for heritage preservation and protection programs.
- \$34 million for Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs).
- \$28 million for competitive grants to document, interpret, and preserve historic sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement.
- \$7 million for the competitive grants program to preserve the sites and stories associated with securing civil rights for all Americans, including women, Latinos, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, and LGBTQ Americans.
- \$40 million for Save America's Treasures grants for the preservation of nationally significant sites, structures, and artifacts.
- \$13 million for grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to preserve and repair historic buildings.
- \$17 million for Paul Bruhn preservation grants to revitalize historic properties of national, state, and local significance.
- \$5 million for competitive grants for the survey and nomination of properties associated with communities currently underrepresented on the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks.
- \$11 million for the Semiquincentennial Grants program.

National Recreation and Preservation

The Coalition asks the Committee to provide \$3 million for the recently established African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program, a program the Coalition strongly supports. The African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program will help identify burial grounds ahead of infrastructure projects and commercial development, thereby minimizing construction delays and avoiding unnecessary community heartache. These sacred sites, and the stories they tell, are an

integral part of our American heritage. This legislation will assist descendants and communities in honoring and remembering their shared past by providing grant monies to identify, interpret, and preserve historic cemeteries.

The Coalition support the President's budget request for \$1 million in additional resources for NPS administration of grant programs commensurate with recent increases in funding for National Recreation and Preservation grant programs, such as Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation, Japanese American Confinement Sites, American Indian and Native Hawaiian Art and Culture, the 9/11 Memorial Act, and multiple Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) programs that provide competitive grants to preserve the stories of civil and equal rights and underrepresented communities.

NPS National Heritage Areas

We recommend \$34 million in funding for the Heritage Partnership Program and our National Heritage Areas (NHAs). Through the use of public-private partnerships, NHAs support historic preservation, heritage tourism, and recreation. These programs collaborate with communities to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

BLM Cultural Resources Management

We recommend \$25 be allocated to BLM Cultural Resources Management. We appreciate the Committee's ongoing oversight of BLM's ability to oversee the largest, most diverse collection of historic and cultural resources on America's public lands. It is vital that BLM has sufficient staff to support Section 106 reviews, monitor compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and consult with tribes.

We respectfully request that the committee provide \$1 million in dedicated funds to enhance its National Cultural Resources Information Management System (NCIMS). This funding would also support ongoing collaboration with state historic preservation offices to standardize and integrate cultural resources data for BLM lands. Strengthening BLM's ability to update predictive modeling and data analysis will enhance the agency's ability to address large-scale, cross-jurisdictional land-use projects.

BLM National Conservation Lands

We urge a \$78 million FY24 appropriation for the National Conservation Lands. An increase in base funding will prevent critical damage to 36 million acres of congressionally and presidentially designated National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Wild Scenic Rivers managed by BLM. Increased funding will help achieve President Biden's goal of conserving at least 30% of our lands and waters by 2030.

Independent Agencies: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

We request \$10.5 million for the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), to fund its work to administer the rulemaking process for historic preservation law, assist in resolving conflicts from historic resource reviews, and provide advice on historic preservation.

National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities

The Coalition urges the Committee to fund the NEA and the NEH at a minimum of \$211 million each in FY24. Robust funding for the NEA and NEH is critical to communities across America.

NEH Preservation Assistance Grants help small and mid-sized institutions — such as libraries, museums, historical societies, archival repositories, cultural organizations, town and county records offices, and colleges and universities — improve their ability to preserve and care for their significant humanities collections, which may include books and journals, archives and manuscripts, prints and photographs, architectural and cartographic records, decorative and fine art objects, archaeological and ethnographic artifacts, furniture, historical objects, and digital materials.

The Coalition is grateful to the Committee for the opportunity to offer its perspective on FY24 appropriations for the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. The Coalition stands ready to work with the Committee on finding common ground to achieve the FY24 funding levels that will support and enhance historic preservation.