



National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

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April 13, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

On behalf of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO), I write to request the Committee reauthorize and provide full and permanent funding for the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) at the current authorized level of \$150 million per year. The HPF requires reauthorization by September 30, 2015.

The HPF, created by Congress in 1976, provides essential funding to State Historic and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs and THPOs). SHPOs and THPOs carry out the federal preservation programs that preserve and leverage our nation's historic resources while generating revenue and creating jobs. Currently \$150 million in Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) lease revenues is deposited annually into the HPF.

SHPOs and THPOs are the backbone and essential financial and administrative infrastructure of our nation's historic preservation program. SHPOs use the HPF on activities such as identifying and documenting historic resources, National Register of Historic Places nominations; contributing technical expertise to thirty-day reviews of federal projects; providing guidance and approval of Historic Tax Credit projects; providing information, training, and technical assistance to communities and local, State, and Federal governments; preparing and implementing state preservation plans; and working with Certified Local Governments (CLGs). SHPOs provide a minimum 40 percent match to the federal funding and distribute at least 10 percent of their HPF allocation to their CLGs.

As authorized, the HPF, like the larger Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), derives its funding from OCS leases and not tax-payer dollars. The LWCF accomplishes its conservation mission primarily through federal land acquisition and grants to States. The HPF achieves its preservation mission of documenting, preserving and utilizing America's legacy of historic sites by providing funding to SHPOs and THPOs and through, at times, competitive grants to identify and protect historic resources. This essential support spurs job creating economic development and community revitalization.

Nationwide, in rural and urban communities alike, historic preservation has proven to be a sound investment that converts outdated structures to meet present-day needs and places vacant and under-utilized properties back on local tax rolls. The Historic Tax Credit (HTC) is an important tool in this

process. HPF dollars support SHPO administration of this National Park Service program which has incentivized the rehabilitation of over 40,000 buildings, creating 2.5 million jobs and leveraging \$117 billion in private investment. HTC projects are found in all 50 States and the District of Columbia. Project sizes and scopes vary significantly, from rural projects such as the \$398,000 renovation of the Northwestern Improvement Company Store into useable commercial space in Roslyn, Washington, to urban projects like the \$21.6 million rehabilitation of the McKinley Tower Apartments in Anchorage, Alaska.

Despite our many achievements, SHPOs and THPOs recognize that much more can be done. One of the greatest challenges facing the historic preservation community today is how to increase efficiencies in federal project planning and the environmental review process – a goal that we share with Congress, the Administration, and industry. The National Historic Preservation Act requires that federal projects be evaluated for their potential impact on historic resources. While the vast majority of historic reviews occur within the mandated 30-day time period, significant improvements to this process are feasible and easily achievable. Additional HPF support for a robust survey and inventory program that includes up-to-date software, GIS programs, and access to digital records is necessary to advance 21st century projects more quickly and cost-effectively. A 2013 survey of SHPOs found that only 55% of our nation’s historic resource records are digitized and 95% of States reported the lack of digital records hampers their ability to conduct project reviews.

Historic preservation distinguishes that which 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, five hundred or thousands of years from now. Nearly 50 years ago, Congress designed the National Historic Preservation Act as a forward-thinking national preservation program, recognizing that “the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, esthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans.” Ten years later Congress created the HPF to carry out the purposes of the Act, creating a unique federal-state-local partnership that has demonstrated nearly 40 years of unqualified success. Nonetheless, much remains undone.

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and SHPOs across the Nation look forward to working with the Committee as it plans for the use of federal OCS revenues, including to provide full and permanent funding for the HPF.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Hughes
President of the Board
National Conference of State Historic Preservation Offices

Cc: Alaska SHPO, Judy Bittner
Washington SHPO, Allyson Brooks
State Historic Preservation Offices
Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell
National Park Service Director, Jon Jarvis
White House Council on Environmental Quality Managing Director, Christy Goldfuss