

Testimony

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Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives

H.R. 2288

To increase the total authorization of appropriations for the Erie Canalway  
National Heritage Corridor  
"Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Reauthorization Act"

April 30, 2019

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Madam Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young and Members of the Subcommittee thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 2288, a bill to increase the total authorization of appropriations for the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the "Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Reauthorization Act."

My name is Bob Radliff and I serve as the Executive Director of the Erie Canalway Heritage Fund, Inc. and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. My resume and related information have been previously delivered to your Subcommittee staff.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and honor to share with you the national significance of the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca Canals, collectively known as the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (<https://eriecanalway.org/>). Through this testimony, and a five-minute presentation to the Subcommittee that includes power point slides, I will not only share our cherished history but also identify our 21<sup>st</sup> century pursuits of economic revitalization through heritage development.

## **Congressman Paul D. Tonko (NY-20)**

Before I describe the Erie Canalway's national significance and our current efforts to utilize these amazing upstate New York waterways, please let me first **thank Representative Tonko (NY-20) for his incredible leadership** on issues relevant to us today – how we can stimulate and sustain economic rejuvenation in communities by investing in our unique and authentic heritage. Congressman Tonko's thorough understanding and passion for heritage development is inspiring and contagious. We see that on a daily basis through his efforts to not only support the Erie Canalway but also through his steadfast efforts to support national heritage areas across the country. This of course has manifested itself with the comprehensive national heritage area Program Legislation (H.R. 1049) that is now under consideration. We thank the Congressman for his efforts, integrity and diligence in establishing a model program that best serves the varied needs and communities across the United States.

## **Erie Canalway: National Significance**

The Erie Canal is the most successful and influential human-built waterway and one of the most important works of civil engineering and construction in North America. It facilitated and shaped the course of settlement of the Northeast, Midwest, and Great Plains, knit together the Atlantic Seaboard with the area west of the Appalachian Mountains, solidified New York City's place as the young nation's principal seaport and commercial center, and became a central element forging the national identity.

New York's canal system, including the Erie Canal and its laterals – principally the Champlain, Oswego, and Cayuga-Seneca Canals – opened the interior of the continent. Built through the only low-level gap between the Appalachian Mountain chain and the Adirondack Mountains, the Erie Canal provided one of the principal routes for migration and an economical and reliable means for transporting agricultural products and manufactured goods between the American interior, the eastern seaboard, and Europe.

The Erie Canal was a heroic feat of early 19<sup>th</sup> century engineering and construction, and at 363 miles long, more than twice the length of any canal in Europe. It was without precedent in North America, designed and built through sparsely settled territory by surveyors, engineers, contractors, and laborers who had to learn much of their craft on the job. Engineers and builders who

got their start on New York's canals went on to construct other canals, railroads, and public water supplies throughout the new nation.

In addition to cargo, New York's canal system carried people and ideas – immigrants to the United States, and New Englanders, drawn by the prospect of rich farmland in upstate New York and beyond, along with innovators and manufacturers who established businesses along the canal. The general prosperity and ease of communication along New York's canal corridors created a climate that fostered a number of nationally significant social reform and religious movements.

### **Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor**

**New York's canal system has been in continuous operation since 1825, longer than any other constructed transportation system on the North American continent.** It can trace direct ancestry to short canals and navigation improvements to the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers built during the 1790s, and to the network of natural waterways that had been used for centuries for travel and commerce by members of the Iroquois Confederacy and other native peoples.

Beyond the canal system's role in facilitating and shaping the growth of the nation, it is the **unbroken living tradition of the waterways, the communities that line their banks, and the people who live and work on and near the canals and related navigable lakes that make the Erie, Champlain, Oswego, and Cayuga-Seneca especially significant.**

By establishing the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Congress affirmed a permanent national interest in this Corridor, including 524 currently navigable miles, historic alignments and more than 230 communities.

Our mission is to plan for, encourage and assist historic preservation, conservation, recreation, interpretation, tourism and community development throughout the Corridor in a manner that promotes partnerships among the Corridor's many stakeholders, and reflects, celebrates and enhances the Corridor's national significance for all to use and enjoy.

*"This nationally significant landscape and waterway contains an abundance of natural, historic, and cultural wealth, and richly deserves our best efforts for the benefit of all our citizens." – Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Interior, 6/26/06*

Our goals from our award-winning *Preservation & Management Plan* (<https://eriecanalway.org/resources/preserve-plan>) include:

- The Corridor's **historic and distinctive sense of place** will be widely expressed and consistently protected
- The Corridor's **recreational opportunities** will achieve maximum scope and diversity, in harmony with the protection of heritage resources
- The Corridor will be a **"must-do" travel experience** for regional, national and international visitors
- The Corridor's **current and future generations of residents and visitors will value and support preservation of its heritage**
- The Corridor's **natural resources** will reflect the highest standards of environmental quality
- The Corridor's **economic growth** and heritage development will be balanced and self-sustaining

Our vision: that the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, working through a wide range of partnerships, is preserving and interpreting our nation's past, providing world class recreational and education opportunities, fostering economic revitalization, improving quality of life in Corridor communities, and **guiding the reemergence of the Erie Canalway as a 21<sup>st</sup> century "River of Commerce and Culture."**

### **Activities and Results**

The Erie Canal is an evolving American story full of vision, hope, ingenuity and determination. In the 1800s, these inland waterways literally transformed our fledgling nation economically and socially by greatly facilitating the affordable movement of goods and people between the coast and the interior.

**New York's canal system has remained in continuous operation for 200 years. Today, communities connected by these waterways are refocusing on their waterfronts and utilizing the canal system's amazingly unique infrastructure to attract investment and fuel rejuvenated economies.**

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor's impact on upstate New York is unparalleled. Erie Canalway's vision and leadership provides cohesive guidance to a 524-mile Corridor that contains large cities, scattered suburbs, quaint small towns and villages interspersed with scenic rural areas.

Essentially, we engage in three general areas:

- Preserving and sharing our extraordinary canal heritage
- Promoting the Corridor as world-class destination
- Fostering vibrant communities connected by our waterways

A few highlights of current programs and activities include:

- Development of a 450-mile long *New York State Canalway Water Trail* (<https://eriecanalway.org/explore/boating/watertrail>), including the recent writing and printing of 3,000 280+ page guidebooks and navigational map sets for paddlers
- Provision of small grants to municipalities and nonprofits helping to implement our Preservation and Management Plan (<https://eriecanalway.org/resources/grants>)
- Supporting first rate field trips for students to visit and experience canal sites through our *Ticket to Ride* program (<https://eriecanalway.org/learn/teachers>); cumulatively, we have supported more than 45,000 students
- Launching the *Canalway Challenge*, where residents and visitors can reach one-of-a-kind personal mileage goals by cycling, paddling, running, hiking or walking along legendary canals (<https://eriecanalway.org/explore/challenge>)
- Developing resident and visitor tools, including user-friendly websites for trip planning (<https://eriecanalway.org/explore/plan-your-visit>), Find Your Park itineraries (nine different regions; <https://eriecanalway.org/explore/itineraries>), Maps & Guides (70,000 printed/year; [https://eriecanalway.org/application/files/5015/3211/2967/ECNHC\\_MapGuide\\_2018\\_finalrev\\_spreads.pdf](https://eriecanalway.org/application/files/5015/3211/2967/ECNHC_MapGuide_2018_finalrev_spreads.pdf)) and an annual photo contest (more than 300 entries/year) with winners featured in a Calendar (18,000 printed/year; <https://eriecanalway.org/get-involved/photo-contest>) showcasing the beauty of the Corridor

## **Economic Impacts**

A recent National Park Service evaluation of Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (ARCBridge Consulting & Training; pending final review and release), as required by Congress, found that \$37.71 million in total investments has been realized by the Erie Canalway and our partners from 2002 – 2017. More than \$22

million were non-federal funds. The report should be released later this year after additional NPS and Congressional review.

Furthermore, a 2018 economic impact study by Level 7 Market Research for the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor found a \$1.3 billion annual impact on tourism (<https://eriecanalway.org/our-work/promote-tourism>). The study focused on events, boat tours, paddle sport rentals and historic site/museum tours.

A National Park Service commissioned study by Tripp Umbach in 2015 analyzed impacts from 2012 – 2014. The study determined the economic impact of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor was \$307.7 million, supported 3,240 jobs and generated \$34.9 million in tax revenue ([https://eriecanalway.org/application/files/2814/5678/4378/2016\\_Economic\\_Impact\\_Report\\_ECNHC.pdf](https://eriecanalway.org/application/files/2814/5678/4378/2016_Economic_Impact_Report_ECNHC.pdf)).

An April 2014 report for the New York State Canal Corporation, a key strategic partner for Erie Canalway, on the economic benefits of non-tourism use of the canal system found total annual economic impact of \$6.2 billion, direct employment of 8,821 jobs and indirect employment of 26,472 jobs (<http://www.canals.ny.gov/economic-benefit-report.pdf>).

Thus, a modest investment of federal resources into Erie Canalway is having enormous direct and leveraging impacts.

## **H.R. 2288**

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is grateful to our congressional representatives who firmly believe that the **Erie Canalway is both worth preserving and fully utilizing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**. We are humbled by their support and look forward to further preserving our Canalway's extraordinary heritage and fostering vibrant communities connected by our waterways.

We are very fortunate to have much of Congressman Tonko's 20<sup>th</sup> District in our Corridor, along with eight other House Members from New York State – Representatives Delgado (NY-19), Stefanik (NY-21), Brindisi (NY-22), Reed (NY-23), Katko (NY-24), Morelle (NY-25), Higgins (NY-26) and Collins (NY-27). For many years, we have received consistent and strong support from the entire upstate New York delegation and we thank them.

In fact, a letter dated March 12, 2019, addressed to the Honorable Betty McCollum, Chair, and Honorable David Joyce, Ranking Member, of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, was signed by eighteen (18) Members of Congress in support of increasing Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor's cumulative funding cap before the next appropriation's cycle. The letter also states that Erie Canalway's funding cap was not increased in the recent S. 47 Lands Package due to an oversight (letter attached).

We are also grateful for the hundreds of partnerships we have developed over the years. Please accept this sample of nine (9) support letters from various partners:

New York State and Municipalities:

- New York State Assemblymember John T. McDonald III (108th District)
- City of Lockport
- Village of Brockport
- Village of Fairport, Office of Community + Economic Development

Chambers of Commerce and Business Membership Groups:

- Chamber of Southern Saratoga County
- Discover Albany
- Lockport Locks Heritage District Corporation

Nonprofit Organizations:

- Capital Repertory Theatre
- Rochester Accessible Adventures

The ability of Erie Canalway to work collaboratively with federal, state, municipal, community-based, and private partners in pursuit of its mission provides an irreplaceable sense of cohesion for hundreds of public and private partners who work to implement the *Preservation & Management Plan*. The loss of federal funding caused by a cumulative funding cap would likely result in a significant setback to the work of these partners and negatively impact the overall quality of life in upstate New York.

It is our understanding that H.R. 2288 would enable Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor to continue providing high quality services and high impact activities in more than 230 communities by increasing its cumulative funding cap from \$12,000,000 to \$14,000,000. We strongly encourage your support so that

upstate New York can continue to preserve and utilize this cherished and nationally significant resource.

**National Heritage Area Program Legislation (H.R. 1049)**

We believe National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are uniquely American. They bring out the best of both the private/citizen and public sectors. NHAs effectively utilize public resources to leverage community-driven entrepreneurial determination and sound stewardship. NHAs bring citizens together around shared heritage and common interests, resulting in appropriate community and economic development activities and results across this great nation. We support Representative Tonko and others efforts to authorize a National Heritage Area Program (H.R. 1049).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.