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Alaska Congressional Delegation

Senator Lisa Murkowski

Senator Dan Sullivan

Dear Senator Murkowski & Senator Sullivan:

As Congress searches for ways to help Americans who have been hard hit by the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus, {INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION HERE} asks you to consider the role America’s ***National Heritage Areas*** can and should play in our nation’s recovery.

America’s National Heritage Areas revitalize local communities through heritage preservation and tourism. National Heritage Areas not only meet the required 50-50% federal match, but leverage an average of $5.50 in local, state and private funding to advance crucial community projects. The **Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area** has accomplished this work in both urban and rural areas where other means of support were limited or non-existent, *restoring both a sense of hope and pride of place*.

We request the following measures from Congress as part of a national recovery initiative.

1. ***Waive the matching requirements temporarily for all National Heritage Areas in FY2020 & FY2021-*** As corporate, local and state governments commitments lag in the face of this economic turmoil, many National Heritage Areas will find it difficult to secure the required one-to-one match for federal funds in FY 2020 and FY2021. The Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area relies on the completion of community based grants to secure their one-to-one match. In light of COVID-19, many projects and events depending on community group gatherings will be put on hold this summer. As projects are delayed or are slowed in their completion, KMTA NHA’s ability to secure their necessary match for FY 2020 and FY 2021 will struggle. Temporarily waiving National Heritage Areas’ matching requirements will ensure their programs will continue running and ultimately benefit our local communities.
2. ***Fund the National Heritage Area program at $32 million (as supported in FY21 appropriations requests)***. Fully funding the National Heritage Area program will generate stimulus in the hundreds of communities we represent that rely on tourism as a significant portion of their economies. Whether it is completing sections of the Iditarod National Historic Trail in Girdwood, installing interpretive signs at Caines Head State Recreation Area in Seward, or restoring the MP 11 Forest Service Guard Station in Hope, AK, these grants dollars will be spent locally, ensuring our communities are not left behind as the nation recovers.
3. ***Enact the National Heritage Area Program Act (H.R. 1049/S. 3217)*** – S. 3217 and H.R. 1049 establish a system of National Heritage Areas as an integral part of the National Park Service, ensuring uniform standards for the way National Heritage Areas are designated, managed, and assessed, and will provide Congress with an enhanced ability to conduct oversight of the program. ***Without program legislation, 30 NHAs will lose their federal funding authority in 2021, with another 15-following suit by 2024.*** Without long-term stability, NHAs cannot make the long-term commitments to our partners that will help them recover from this crisis. Passage of S. 3217 and H.R. 1049 will enable us to make those commitments and focus on our communities at this critical time.

We ask you not to miss this opportunity to engage the talent, connections, and abilities of America’s National Heritage Areas to serve our partners and local economies. Their track record is sound and each of the 55 National Heritage Areas are committed to doing their part to stabilize our communities, grow the economy, and help get our neighbors back on their feet, back to health, and back to work.

If we can fulfill our role in this partnership, we know the American people will fulfill theirs. This is the spirit that National Heritage Areas harness.

Sincerely,

{Name}

{Title}