

## March 15, 2007 - Rep. Slaughter Supports Designation of Niagara Falls as National Heritage Area

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today testified before the Natural Resources Subcommittee on House National Parks, Forests and Public Lands in support of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Act, legislation she has authored and introduced to the House.

The Act, which will designate Niagara Falls as a National Heritage Area, is designed to heighten national appreciation for the region, better preserve its natural and historic resources, improve coordination among existing programs at the Falls, expand the local economy, and enhance the quality of life of the people of the Niagara region.

"This Act will serve as an engine for the revitalization and promotion of our region's natural, historic, and scenic resources to residents and visitors alike," Rep. Slaughter said. "This is an opportunity we must seize, one that will protect the beautiful natural resources of our region while promoting tourism that is critical to financial growth and job creation."

"More than 15 million people travel to Niagara Falls every year to take in this awe-inspiring natural phenomenon. This legislation will give Niagara Falls the federal resources and attention it deserves, and will solidify its position as one of the world's preeminent wonders and tourist locations for years to come," Rep. Slaughter added.

Also testifying before the Subcommittee was Bob Emerson, the Executive Director of Old Fort Niagara, the oldest continuously occupied military site in North America. Mr. Emerson made his trip to Capitol Hill at the invitation of Congresswoman Slaughter.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Act was reintroduced in the House this January, with a companion bill being introduced in the Senate. Both bills are currently awaiting consideration and are expected to be viewed favorably by Congressional leaders.

## BACKGROUND

Niagara Falls is a geological wonder that has been a world-renowned tourist destination for more than 200 years. Rich in natural and cultural resources, the Niagara Falls area has significant historical associations with Native Americans, early European exploration, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Underground Railroad.

National Heritage Area designations, awarded by Congress, protect and preserve many of the most unique and highly prized natural resources in the United States. The designation promotes cooperation among preservationists and those involved in community renewal efforts. In Heritage Areas, for and not-for-profit businesses, individuals, and a wide variety of organizations combine their skills and resources for the benefit of their communities.

A National Heritage Area designation will heighten national appreciation for the region, better preserve its natural and historic resources, improve coordination among existing programs at the site, and improve the quality of life and economy of the Niagara region.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will comprise the area stretching from the Western boundary of the Town of Wheatfield to the mouth of the Niagara River, and from the river to Lake Ontario. It will also include the City of Niagara Falls, the Villages of Youngstown and Lewiston, and all land and water lying within these boundaries.

If the Act is passed, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area will be managed by a Federal Commission for its first five years in existence before being turned over to a local management entity.

For these reasons, there has been widespread public interest in establishing a National Heritage Area in the Niagara region since 2000, when Western New York leaders met with National Park Service officials to discuss the concept. In 2002, Public Law 107-256, the "Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Study Act," directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the feasibility of establishing a Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. The National Park service began work on the study in May 2003, and interviewed over 30 local stakeholders, state agencies, local communities, historians, tourism interests, and business interests along the Niagara corridor.

The Niagara National Heritage Area Study report, issued in November 2005, found that the Niagara region met the criteria for establishing a National Heritage Area. The majority of public comments on the Study expressed support for a National Heritage Area that included Niagara Falls and a network of thematically related sites, and was initially managed by a limited five-year federal commission. The National Park Service formally recommended this vision for the Niagara NHA on May 26, 2006. The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Act would implement the National Park Service's final recommendation.

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