
October 24, 2007 - Rep. Slaughter's Niagara Falls Heritage Bill Passes House

Washington, DC -Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today is pleased to announce the passage of H.R. 1483, which amends the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 and creates the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. This bill passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 291-122. Congresswoman Slaughter authored the original Niagara Falls Heritage Act and orchestrated its inclusion as part of H.R. 1483.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The bill is designed to heighten national appreciation for the region, better preserve its natural and historic resources, improve coordination among existing programs at the Falls, enhance the quality of life and expand the economy for people of the Niagara region.

"I am enormously pleased to see this long-awaited and crucial bill for Niagara Falls finally pass through the House," said Rep. Slaughter. "Designating Niagara Falls as a national heritage area will serve as an engine for the revitalization and promotion of our region's natural, historic, and scenic resources and will benefit residents and visitors alike."

"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 highlight its prominent designation as one of only seven world wonders."

BACKGROUND:

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Act was introduced on January 28, 2007 in the House, with Senator Charles Schumer introducing a companion bill in the Senate. 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.

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. H.R. 1483, which includes the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Act, would implement the National Park Service's final recommendation.

FULL TEXT OF MS. SLAUGHTER'S STATEMENT IS BELOW:

Today I rise in support of H.R. 1483, a bill amending the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996. This bill reauthorizes already existing national heritage areas. But most important for me and my district, this bill authorizes the creation of the Niagara Falls Heritage Area.

This truly is a monumental day for the city of Niagara Falls, the surrounding communities, and the millions of people who visit Niagara Falls each year.

Every time I drive across my congressional district, I am reminded of how fortunate I am to represent such a beautiful part of the country. From the shores of Lake Ontario to our vineyards and apple orchards, Mother Nature has bestowed some of her finest treasures upon Western New York.

But none are as widely recognized, at home and around the world, as Niagara Falls. Every year, more than 15 million people travel to Niagara Falls to take in this awe-inspiring natural phenomenon.

It is time the national treasures that are Niagara Falls and the Niagara River be granted the official status they have long deserved: that of a National Heritage Area.

This scenic corridor was carved by the Falls in a process started more than 10,000 years ago.

This truly is a special place.

Niagara Falls has always been a source of energy for our region. I don't need to remind you that it is the foremost source of hydroelectric power in North America, as well as the birthplace of modern hydroelectric power.

This bill will help to solidify Niagara Falls' standing as something more: an engine for the revitalization and promotion of our region's natural, historic, and scenic resources to residents and visitors alike.

As you know, a National Heritage Area designation ties together private and public lands linked by geography and history.

With the approval of this designation, the National Park Service will assist our local and state organizations to develop and implement a plan that will conserve and promote Niagara's natural attributes.

Niagara Falls is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. It is a national treasure for all of us to cherish, and the benefits of this designation are obvious for all to see.

By linking the Falls to a broader network of closely related sites in Niagara and Erie counties - as this legislation will do - we will be better able to move our economy forward and promote our home to visitors from across the United States and across the globe.

The national profile of our region will be made even greater, as will international awareness of the unique attractions we have to offer.

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.

A greater recognition of our region's unique history and natural wonders is long overdue.

Today, with the passage of this bill, everyone will know what we have known for a long time: the treasures we live among are the heritage of our country - and it is our responsibility to ensure that they are treated that way.

I urge my colleagues to support this important bill.

Thank you.

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