



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

OCT 01 2018

H32(2256)

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

Please find transmitted the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) Evaluation Findings. In 2003, Congress designated the BRNHA in Public Law 108-108 to preserve and interpret the cultural, natural, and historic resources of the Blue Ridge Mountains in 25 counties of western North Carolina. These resources played a unique role in the development of the culture of the United States through several distinct legacies encompassed in five heritage themes: craft heritage, Cherokee heritage, traditional music and folklife, agricultural heritage, and historic and natural resources in the communities surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway. The coordinating entity is the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership (BRNHA Partnership) a 501(c)(3) based in Asheville, NC.

Evaluation requirements in Public Law 110-229 and other laws related to evaluation of national heritage areas prompted the National Park Service (NPS) to develop program policy to evaluate all national heritage areas prior to termination of authorization for Federal funding. Per this policy, the NPS sought independent consultants to objectively assess the progress, analyze the investments, and identify the critical components for sustainability of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Based on the findings of the ARCBridge Evaluation, the NPS recommends a future role with the BRNHA.

The Evaluation determined that the BRNHA Partnership addressed the legislated mandate of preserving and interpreting the cultural, natural, and historical resources of the area while working with the private sector, Cherokee Preservation Foundation, and state and local governments for the cultural, economic and educational benefits of the region consistent with the management plan, through the federal resources provided. Both the NPS funds and the National Heritage Area designation are of value to the BRNHA. The BRNHA Partnership successfully met the 50 percent federal funding match requirements from 2004 to 2016, with more than \$10.7 million in matching funds from state, local, and private contributions to \$8.7 million in NPS Heritage Partnership Program dollars.

The Evaluation found that the BRNHA has the governance in place and staff to operate a sustainable national heritage area organization. They work closely with NPS staff on several initiatives including providing staff support, creating exhibits and public programs at the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center in Asheville, NC serving over 1 million visitors since 2007.

An identical letter is being sent to the Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; the Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives; and the Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P. Daniel Smith", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

Enclosure

cc: Senator Richard Burr
Senator Thom Tillis
Representative Virginia Foxx
Representative Patrick McHenry
Representative Mark Meadows