

300-15—Discretionary**Eliminate the National Park Service's Local Funding for Heritage Area Grants and Statutory Aid**

(Millions of dollars)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	
						2010–2014	2010–2019
Change in Spending							
Budget authority	-22	-22	-22	-22	-23	-111	-229
Outlays	-18	-21	-22	-22	-23	-106	-224

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Two National Park Service programs—National Heritage Area (NHA) grants and a statutory aid program—assist local organizations in establishing, preserving, or operating areas of natural, historical, cultural, or recreational importance. Locations designated as National Heritage Areas by the Congress are eligible for NHA grants; other local programs may be allocated statutory aid by specific authorization. Both programs support sites that are operated and managed by state or local agencies, nonprofit groups, or private partnerships. As of 2008, 40 sites had been designated National Heritage Areas, up from 27 in 2006; 13 sites or programs received statutory aid in 2008. For 2009, \$15.7 million has been appropriated for NHA, up from \$15.3 million in 2008. Funding for the Park Service's statutory aid program is \$5.6 million in 2009, up from \$5.3 million in 2008.

This option would eliminate both programs, with a resulting reduction in discretionary outlays of \$18 million in 2010 and of \$106 million over five years.

NHA grants are intended as seed money to help organizations become self-sustaining through the establishment of partnerships with state and local governments, nonprofit groups, and businesses that would fund the organizations' ongoing operations. The Park Service states that Heritage Areas should "tell nationally important stories... [and] provide outstanding opportunities for conservation. Where appropriate, they should also strengthen, complement, and support existing units of the National Park System." NHA grants are capped at \$1 million annually and may last up to 15 years (although the total cannot exceed \$10 million) for areas designated since 1996. Heritage Areas may receive other federal funding (primarily from the Department of Transportation for road and infrastructure improvements). By statute, half of the funding for each Heritage Area must come from nonfed-

eral sources. Statutory aid supports local efforts to establish, preserve, and operate other sites. Both programs are intended to extend the Park Service's mission of preserving nationally significant natural and historical resources without acquiring or managing those resources itself.

The previous Administration criticized the NHA grant program for its lack of demonstrated results and for not using a competitive process to award the grants. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has stated that the Park Service lacks systematic processes for identifying qualified NHA sites and recommending them to the Congress for approval. According to GAO, the Park Service has not established "results-oriented performance goals and measures" in its oversight of heritage areas and has failed to track federal funding or determine the appropriateness of expenditures for the NHA program. (The Park Service maintains that it has not been funded to carry out those latter tasks.) GAO also contends that sunset provisions (which establish each grant's ending date) have been ignored. In a 2004 report, GAO noted that the Congress had extended all of the NHA grants that had reached their original sunset dates, and that those NHAs continue to receive funding under the originally enacted authorizations. Nine Heritage Areas designated in 1996 sought extensions in 2006.

One argument for eliminating the NHA grant program is that grant recipients have not become self-sufficient, as evidenced by the continued funding of Heritage Areas beyond their sunset dates. Property rights advocates also have voiced concern that the NHA program could be a way to exert federal influence over local zoning and land use planning. Moreover, the efforts funded by the NHA program and the statutory aid program are—in the words of the Park Service itself—"secondary to the primary mission of the National Park Service."