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COAL HERITAGE STUDY SENT TO CONGRESS

*Will Serve As Catalyst
For Economic Development Says Rahall*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The National Park Service has officially transmitted to Congress the final southern West Virginia coal heritage study, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) announced today. Rahall was the author of the legislation which authorized the initiative.

"This study not only lends official recognition of the significance our coal heritage in southern West Virginia has to the Nation as a whole, but should serve as a catalyst for preservation and economic development initiatives," Rahall noted. "As the old saying goes, the past is prologue, and in this case our history will serve as a prologue for future economic benefits."

According to the study: "In no other state has coal mining so dominated the economy and social structure. The remoteness of the area, combined with rapid industrialization and population growth, resulted in the creation of a society unusual for its ethnic and racial diversity. Today, the relationship among different elements of the past and present in the coal mining region form a distinctive landscape of national interest."

The study suggests three coal heritage conservation alternatives. However, after reviewing the draft study this summer the National Park System Advisory Board endorsed the Community-Based Heritage Conservation Alternative. One of the other alternatives represents maintaining the status quo, while the other suggests the establishment of a historic site tour route in the region.

Toward this end, nine proposed interpretive sites and areas are identified: The Peytona-Racine-Nellis area in Boone County; Blair Mountain in Logan County; the Matewan area in Mingo County; the Canyon Rim Visitor Center and Kaymoor-Thurmond area in Fayette County; the Itmann-Mullens area of Wyoming County; Bramwell in Mercer County; and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine and planned Cultural Heritage Center in Raleigh County.

What the study termed as "regional networking centers" could be established at Madison, Logan, Williamson, Welch, Hinton, and Bluefield. Meanwhile, Huntington, Beckley and Bluefield would serve as "gateway information centers."

Two heritage tour routes are proposed, one between Fayetteville and Welch primarily following Routes 19 and 16 and into the Bluefield area on Route 52; the other between Charleston and Williamson along Route 119.

The study area included the 11 southern West Virginia counties of Boone, Cabell, Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne and Wyoming.

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