



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA COAL HERITAGE

*History Can Be Translated to
Economic Benefits For Region Say Rahall - Rockefeller*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A broad range of development initiatives is envisioned by a National Park Service report to Congress highlighting the significance of southern West Virginia's coal mining heritage, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) and Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) announced today.

"In no other state has coal mining so dominated the economy and social structure," the study summarized. "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."

According to Rahall: "Our coal mining heritage not only played an essential role in the formation of our culture and values, but to the industrialization of the United States," Rahall said. "The old mining camps, company stores, tipples and related structures are an integral and important part of our heritage and the lessons learned from them should not be forgotten or lost to future generations."

"The National Park Service has underscored what we have stated all along: that our state has a unique story to share with the nation," Rockefeller said.

The National Park Service compiled the document, entitled A Coal Mining Heritage Study: Southern West Virginia, as a result of legislation sponsored by Rahall in order to identify sites of cultural and historical significance involving southern West Virginia's coal heritage. Funding for the study was secured through the efforts of Rockefeller, Sen. Robert C. Byrd and Rahall.

Envisioned by the study is a coal heritage strategy grounded on "community-based heritage conservation and development." According to the Park Service, this concept "provides a thematic framework for many communities to work together toward common goals."

Toward this end, nine interpretive sites and areas are identified: The 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."

MORE

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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.

"Tourists are absolutely fascinated with our coal heritage and the history of coal mining," Rockefeller said, pointing out that West Virginia's coal mine exhibit was the most heavily visited attraction at the U.S. Pavilion at the 1982 World's Fair. "Development of a coal heritage tour is economic development, tourism and historic preservation all in one project -- and it makes a great deal of sense to preserve our heritage for the future, while at the same time creating jobs for those now living in these areas."

The study area included the 11 southern West Virginia counties of Boone, Cabell, Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne and Wyoming. Five of these counties, known as the core coal mining region (Boone, Mingo, McDowell, Logan and Wyoming) were the subject of a intensive survey that identified 100 specific sites and areas along with their potential historic and cultural significance. The survey was conducted by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History under a NPS contract.

"The following places possess historical resources which would provide a foundation for the interpretation of coal mining heritage in southern West Virginia: the Racine-Nellis area, Madison, Logan, Blair Mountain, Williamson, Matewan, the Itmann-Mullens area, the Kaymoor-Thurmond area, Hinton, the Beckley-Exhibition Coal Mine, Welch, Bluefield and the Bramwell-Pocahontas area," the study noted.

Among the other important historic resources identified during the survey are the Morrisvale Company Store in Boone County; Red Jacket and Glen Alum in Mingo County; the Devil Anse Hatfield Cemetary in Logan County; Coalwood in McDowell County; Contentment, Cotton Hill and the Hawks Next Tunnel in Fayette County; Green Bottom and the Huntington Historic District in Cabell County.

"This study lends us official recognition of the significance our coal heritage in southern West Virginia has to the Nation as a whole," 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."