After years of tireless efforts by Congressman John Garamendi and Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area was created on March 12, 2019 when the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act was signed into law. Although there are now 55 National Heritage Areas (NHAs) nationwide, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA is California's first.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta NHA traces back to the 2009 Delta Reform Act, which charged the Commission with developing a proposal to protect, enhance, and sustain the unique cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural, and economic values of the Delta as an evolving place. The proposal includes a plan to establish state and federal designation of the Delta as a place of special significance, which may include application for a federal designation of the Delta as a National Heritage Area.

The Commission completed an NHA Feasibility Study in 2012, incorporating public involvement throughout its process via public meetings and presentations, stakeholder interviews, review memos, and study team meetings. The National Park Service (NPS) reviewed and found that the Feasibility Study met the criteria for NHA designation, subject to Congressional approval. The study was submitted to Congress for consideration and to the Delta Stewardship Council for inclusion in the Delta Plan. Prior to Congressional designation, the Commission embarked on the Delta Heritage Area Initiative to advance and elevate recognition of the Delta's unique values.

What are National Heritage Areas?

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, historic, and recreation resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Designated local coordinating entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

NHAs support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects through public-private partnerships. NPS provides technical assistance and distributes matching federal funds to NHA entities. NHAs have no effect on water rights, property rights, or hunting and fishing rights within the designated area. See the NHA Program website - www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas - for more information.