

A training initiative of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas

Making the Commitment to the Heritage Area Process

No one ever said that the process to gain National Heritage Area designation was simple. Often, it can be a challenge just to explain to stakeholders and residents what a National Heritage Area actually is. So although your organization may have determined that the National Heritage Area strategy and program will benefit your region, there are still many facets of the process to consider before moving forward with a feasibility study or legislation.

First, it's important to recognize that the road to becoming a National Heritage Area may be a long one. It takes patience, perseverance, and an open mind that is willing to accept new ideas to organize and complete the process.

Next, take a long hard look at your organization. Because the design of heritage areas focuses on strong partnerships that work toward a common goal, stakeholders must be willing to share ideas, funds, strategies, and the work load. Is your organization ready and willing to become the management entity of the heritage area, coordinating many diverse groups toward a common goal? In order to honestly evaluate your organization, leaders should confirm that they are willing to make the long-term commitment to working in partnership with other stakeholders to develop the heritage area.

Continued on page 2.



In This Issue...

- Making the Commitment
- Spotlight on NHAs: Silos and Smokestacks
- Upcoming Events of Interest
- Additions to Your Heritage Development Reading List



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Continued from page 1.

Successful management entities are able to communicate shared goals, focus on a broad strategic vision, manage finances, and build and maintain partnerships.

If your organization's answer is an honest "yes," it's time to move forward. If not, it's time to evaluate other stakeholders and partners to determine the best management entity for the NHA.

Organizations must also determine whether or not their region is ready to embrace and support a National Heritage Area. Prior to moving forward with a heritage area strategy and taking the next steps toward a completed feasibility study and pursuit of a designation bill, potential management entities need to evaluate and confirm the level of positive public support from residents, property and business owners, and elected officials.

For example, the proposed Gullah Geechee National Heritage Area in the coastal South Carolina and Georgia region seeks to celebrate and preserve that region's rich Gullah and Geechee culture and heritage. Prior to the completion of the area's feasibility study and proposed legislation, numerous regional meetings were conducted with local residents, business owners,

tourism practitioners, and elected officials to discuss the impacts and benefits of the heritage area and gauge the level of support for designation. These meetings provided an open forum for honest and open dialogue and question and answer sessions. Once the public commitment was confirmed, the region moved forward with the completed feasibility study and currently has a designation bill pending in Congress.

Often, it's easy to decide that your region would benefit from becoming a National Heritage Area. However, it's often harder to put that decision into practice. If your region is close to or already a part of a national heritage area, you can greatly benefit from partnering with the existing NHA to form networks, learn from their experiences, and strengthen the region's local and federal support while moving forward with your own feasibility study.

National heritage areas provide great benefits but also require significant contributions from managers and partners. The most successful heritage area studies clearly demonstrate both a strong local management entity, a high level of public and private support, and long-term commitment.

Spotlight on NHAs: Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area

Silos and Smokestacks encompasses 37 counties in Northeast Iowa and focuses on the contributions that this region's settlers made to our country's tremendous agricultural development. By interpreting the story through diverse agricultural themes including the land itself, farmers and families, science and technology, agribusiness, and changes wrought by policies and politics, this NHA engages and attracts a wide variety of partners and visitors. Residents and visitors are able to explore the transformation of the area's agricultural landscape in both rural and urban locations through farms, roads, museums, historic sites, and open land.

For more information on this heritage area,
visit
www.silosandsmokestacks.org



Petting animals at Living History Farms



Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah

Upcoming Events of Interest

US/ICOMOS Annual Symposium
"From World Heritage to Your Heritage"

April 19-23

Newport, RI

www.icomos.org/usicomos

Preserving the Recent Past

April 22-23

Wildwood, NJ at Drew University

<http://depts.drew.edu/cue/certificates.htm>

2006 National Main Street Conference

June 4-7

New Orleans, LA

www.mainstreet.org

Additions to Your Heritage Development Reading List

- Gratz, Roberta Brandes. *The Living City: How America's Cities are Being Revitalized by Thinking Small in a Big Way*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1989.
- Hollis, Tim. *Dixie Before Disney: 100 Years of Roadside Fun*. Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
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For a comprehensive list of sources related to heritage development, visit www.heritagedevelopmentinstitute.org/research. This bibliography is updated monthly.

Future of the National Heritage Areas Program

A Partnerships Committee was formed earlier this year to make recommendations to the National Park Service Advisory Board regarding the future of the National Heritage Areas program within the National Park Service. The Advisory Board will use this report to make recommendations to the Director of the National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior.

For a copy of the report, visit <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/> and click on "Interim Report."

The Alliance of National Heritage Areas will hold their next Board of Advisors meeting in Charleston, SC during April 25-28. The meeting is hosted by the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor.

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The Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA) established the Heritage Development Institute (HDI) as a way of providing leadership to the heritage development field as well as creating training and analysis of the best practices in our heritage areas across the country. The HDI Newsletter is sponsored by the ANHA, Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation, and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. To submit information and update e-mail addresses, please e-mail us at hdi@mtsu.edu.