

The National Register and Heritage Areas

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places recognizes those buildings, structures, districts, sites, and objects that are important in our nation's history and are worthy of preservation. Over the years, the scope of the National Register has expanded to encompass broader themes and larger geographic areas. However, issues of significance, integrity, and public acceptance have prevented the nomination of large landscapes even when these areas are distinct and definable. A new initiative that develops heritage areas or corridors addresses the recognition of historic regional values.

Heritage areas and corridors designate cultural landscapes in regions that reflect the ongoing interrelationship between people and the land. They are living places where people of today live with the past, sometimes continuing traditional use of the land, but more often adapting the landscape to the needs of a new economy. While many of our landscapes are distinctive and valuable, they only become heritage areas when the local community joins together to recognize the past and develop a plan for its conservation.

Heritage areas and the National Register of Historic Places share common ground. Both have their feet firmly planted in the communities' desire to recognize and preserve the significance of the past. Both designations hope to inspire others to join in this effort, but have no regulatory power to enforce a preservation solution. There are also key differences. Heritage areas and corridors can be very large, encompassing many counties, a whole watershed, and even cross state lines. The boundaries can be based on political units and natural features as well as cultural continuity. The areas may include many features of everyday life that the National Register program would identify as intrusions from shopping malls to industrial parks. They often contain the remnants of many different stories and overlapping periods of history. They are too large and complex to have integrity of place or time. Another

major difference is that they recognize the full range of resources including natural features, folklore, artifacts, and recreational opportunities. Finally, heritage areas recognize the significance of what we do today: there is no 50-year waiting period.

The heritage area strategy brings together all levels of government, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector to develop a common agenda based on the special qualities of the region's resources. Heritage areas can be established at the local level or as part of a state or federal system. A National Heritage Area is a place designated by Congress as having a cohesive nationally distinctive landscape with a variety of historic, cultural, and natural resources. These areas receive funding and technical assistance from the National Park Service. To date, there are 23 nationally designated areas with increasing congressional interest in the program (see box).

The National Register is an important tool that can assist communities in identifying, interpreting, and planning for the preservation of the built environment. Some of the partnership opportunities between the two preservation approaches are outlined below.

National Register Standards

National Register nominations provide standardized and accurate information on historic resources in all 50 states and territories. While the listed properties reflect the richness and diversity of our nation, they also meet uniform standards of integrity and significance. Every heritage area is required to prepare a management plan that identifies the regional assets including cultural resources. One of the best sources for this information is found in National Register documentation, available from the National Park Service or from the appropriate state historic preservation office. As the Automobile Heritage Area in Michigan began its planning, an important layer in its geographic information system was the state's list of properties listed and eligible for listing in the National Register.

Heritage areas also use the "seal of approval" that National Register listing conveys to prioritize technical assistance and grant funding. Annie Harris, the executive director of the Essex Heritage Area in Massachusetts, stated, "Our grant program assists organizations that are restoring or interpreting authentic properties that meet the National Register criteria."

National Register Information

Beyond baseline data of a property's existence, significance, and location, National Register nomination forms contain a wealth of historical information on the individual properties or districts. That information can be used to generate brochures, walking tours, interpretive signs, and exhibits. The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor in partnership with the National Park Service used information from National Register listed properties in the Corridor to create an online travel itinerary. Visitors can access maps, historic overviews, individual site descriptions, and links to other tourist information from the World Wide Web. Allan Sachse, executive director of the Delaware and Lehigh, has noticed an increase in inquiries about the Corridor generated by the web site. He noted that meeting planners find it particularly useful in

planning tours and events. This travel itinerary and others can be seen at <www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/>.

Heritage Area Support

Comprehensive historic site survey information is the basic building block of a good National Register program, but completing the work and keeping it up to date is a challenge. Heritage areas need this information to develop management plans for interpretation and preservation. The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor made a grant of \$30,000 to the Connecticut Historical Commission to complete the historic and architectural survey for six towns in the Corridor. The Commission matched the grant and supervised the survey work to ensure that it met state standards. Most of the heritage areas have matching grants programs that can be used to undertake cultural resource surveys or to prepare National Register nominations.

Heritage Areas and Public Involvement

The preservation of the past depends on people in the community. The primary focus of heritage development is to raise a region's awareness of its heritage and to share the sites, stories and special places with local citizens and the visiting public. Heritage areas and corridors link small historical organizations and historic preservation groups into a framework of regional interpretation. They encourage partnerships between preservation organizations, open space advocates, and local government officials to preserve heritage landscapes. In short they offer the best hope to save not just individual historic properties, but the context in which they exist.

Jeff Harpold of the National Coal Heritage Area in West Virginia is planning a traveling exhibit with the state preservation office, the Division of Culture and History, which will visit each of the counties in the heritage area. The overall focus of the exhibit is life in the coalfields, but it will provide specific historical information on each county it visits drawn from state site surveys and National Register nominations. Harpold is excited by the project and the partnership. He knows that the preservation of the built environment will only happen when a community puts a value on the past. Heritage areas are committed partners in this most important work—building a constituency for the past.

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National Heritage Areas

America's Agricultural Heritage Partnership (Silos & Smokestacks)
Augusta Canal National Heritage Area
Automobile National Heritage Area
Cache La Poudre River Corridor
Cane River National Heritage Area
Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor
Erie Canalway National Corridor
Essex National Heritage Area
Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area
Illinois & Michigan National Heritage Corridor
John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
Lackawanna Valley National Heritage Area
National Coal Heritage Area
Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor
Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor
Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area
Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area
Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District
South Carolina National Heritage Corridor
Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission
Tennessee Civil War Heritage Area
Wheeling National Heritage Area
Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area