United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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Policy Memorandum 12-01

To: All Employees

From: Director Jonathan B. Jarvis

Subject: National Heritage Areas Program

While it is common knowledge that the National Park Service manages units of the national park system, it is not common knowledge that the Service also manages programs that reach far beyond national park boundaries. Although these programs operate mainly outside the national parks, they form a vital part of the NPS mission and help sustain and enhance the quality of life throughout America. These programs rely on a spirit of partnership and cooperation, which I believe must be the hallmark of the NPS in the decades that lie ahead. And nowhere is that spirit of partnership and cooperation more fully displayed than in the National Heritage Areas Program. *The purpose of this memorandum is to affirm the NPS's support for the National Heritage Areas Program and encourage NPS managers to help the National Heritage Areas succeed.*

Background. The National Heritage Areas Program expands on traditional approaches to resource stewardship by supporting large-scale, community centered initiatives that connect local citizens through preservation, conservation, and planning processes. Through the facilitation of a local coordinating entity—which may be a Federal commission, nonprofit group, or State agency or authority—this Program provides assistance to residents of a region to improve their quality of life by protecting their shared cultural and natural resources. National Heritage Areas are created by Congress to promote the conservation of natural, historic, scenic, and cultural resources, while sustaining the areas' economic vitality. The work of each heritage area is guided by a management plan approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Many of these areas include one or more units of the national park system within their boundaries.

Authority. The NPS's authority to carry out this program is found in the Historic Sites Act, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and related statutes. The National Historic Preservation Act established a national policy for Federal agencies to, among other things, use measures such as financial and technical assistance to foster conditions under which our modern society and our prehistoric and historic resources can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations. Each National Heritage Area has been authorized by a specific statute (see 16 U.S.C.A. 461 note) to effectively carry out that national policy. These same statutes have also assigned a prominent role for the National Park Service to play in nurturing the areas and supporting their success.

National Park Service Policy. I have witnessed the growth and maturity of the heritage area movement and of individual areas, and am convinced of their effectiveness. They strengthen, complement, and support units of the national park system in a variety of collaborative efforts. Therefore, I encourage you and the superintendents and other staff of parks in or near National Heritage Areas to participate in and assist, to the maximum extent practicable, local heritage area initiatives. Similarly, I ask that you help me develop and sustain the system of heritage areas and ensure that they are fully integrated as part of the National Park Service family. Nationally important resources, cultural heritage, and the public can only benefit from our increased engagement with these versatile, community-supported entities.

I endorse the recommendations of the 2009 National Parks Second Century Commission report—*Advancing the National Park Idea*—that advocate creation of a clearly defined system of National Heritage Areas as well as funding at a level that will allow them to carry out their work. The National Park Service will continue to pursue program legislation that will establish a system of regional and community-based heritage areas in partnership with the National Park Service. This legislation would enable the National Park Service to provide technical and financial assistance to support the initial operations and development of each area and to assure each area's continued success into the future.

National Heritage Areas are particularly well positioned to advance the goals of *A Call to Action.* Heritage areas function largely through partnerships and community engagement, as called for throughout that report. They create a deep connection to regional aspects of the national story, connect with youth and diverse communities, interpret lived-in and working landscapes, and focus on heritage education and stewardship of important waterways, natural areas, battlefields, built environments, and healthy ecosystems.

National Heritage Areas are places where small investments pay huge dividends, providing demonstrable benefits in communities across the country and in partnership with our national parks. It is important for us to recognize the benefits that heritage areas have for our parks and our programs, and to find ways to build on their success by integrating their work with ours and providing support to them in any way possible.

cc: All National Heritage Areas