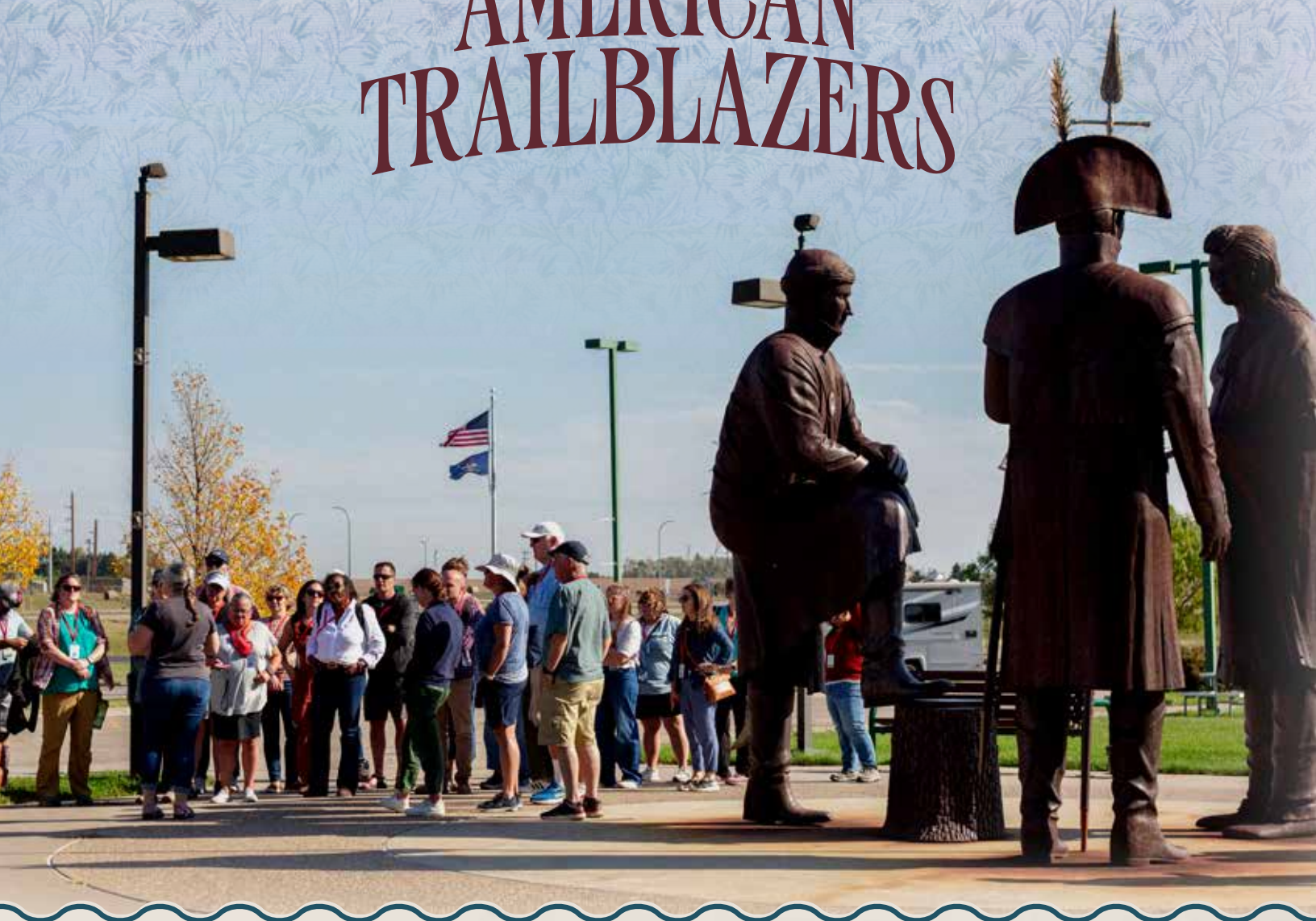


ALLIANCE *of* NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS

CONNECTING THE
Heart & Soul
OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

EDITION NO. 9 ★ FEBRUARY 2026

AMERICAN
TRAILBLAZERS



Pictured: Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Northern Plains National Heritage Area, North Dakota

Visit us online at NationalHeritageAreas.us

Alliance of National Heritage Areas

National Heritage Areas facilitate locally driven economic development and conservation projects in hundreds of communities across 35 states and one territory. Their work would not be possible without steadfast support from those who champion National Heritage Areas at the state and federal levels, as well as at allied organizations. The Alliance of National Heritage Areas is proud to honor four of these leaders as **2026 Heritage Champions**.



SENATOR MICHAEL BENNET (D-CO)

Senator Bennet has been a strong champion for Colorado's three National Heritage Areas (NHAs). Along with fellow Colorado Senator John Hickenlooper, he led the effort to reauthorize Colorado's NHAs and has supported initiatives to secure the future of NHAs. Senator Bennet plans to continue his efforts to preserve Colorado's history and natural beauty in his future endeavors.



REPRESENTATIVE DANNY DAVIS (D-IL 7th)

Rep. Davis sponsored the legislation that created the Bronzeville-Black Metropolis National Heritage Area, one of the newest NHAs. Bronzeville's story is personal for Rep. Davis; like many who settled there during the "Great Migration," he was born in the rural South but found a home on Chicago's South Side. Rep. Davis is retiring at the close of the 119th Congress, marking the end of a notable 30-year career in Congress.



REPRESENTATIVE MIKE EZELL (R-MS 4th)

Rep. Ezell represents a southern Mississippi district that includes the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area. Through his role on the House Committee on Natural Resources, Rep. Ezell was the only Member to question Interior Secretary Doug Burgum during a June 2025 budget hearing about why the department was withholding funds from National Heritage Areas. His direct and public questioning of the Secretary was essential in efforts to release FY 2025 funding. Although only in his second term, his efforts are already worthy of a Heritage Champion.



THERESA PIERNO President and CEO of National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)

Theresa Pierno has served as President and CEO of NPCA since 2015 and has been with the organization since 2004. Among her many achievements is strengthening NPCA's ties with the ANHA and integrating NHAs into the broader National Park community. As she retires in early 2026, the ANHA is proud to name her a Heritage Champion in recognition of her many years of advocacy for both National Parks and National Heritage Areas.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Rivers That Run Through Us

In September 2025, the Alliance of National Heritage Areas experienced the Northern Plains National Heritage Area (NPNHA), located along the historic Missouri River in North Dakota. Rivers are the defining feature of many of the 62 National Heritage Areas, and there is a good reason for that. Where rivers flow, civilizations have traditionally thrived, creating a rich tapestry that underscores the enduring link between people and natural landscapes.

Rivers have also served as routes for many American trailblazers, including Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, who navigated parts of the Missouri River over 220 years ago, in what is now the NPNHA. The theme for this year's Heart & Soul, "American Trailblazers," honors these early explorers and other pioneers—of all kinds—who are essential to the American story and the work of National Heritage Areas (NHAs).

The Northern Plains National Heritage Area exemplifies the contributions and importance of NHAs. Through historical programs and innovative partnerships, the NPNHA leaves a lasting impression of the Great Plains landscape on visitors and residents alike, transporting them to an American identity that risks being forgotten amid today's fast-paced life. National Heritage Areas help us cherish the beauty of quintessential American landscapes and cultures—through their highs and lows, booms and busts, and the resilience of those who made homes along waterways, from Wheeling, West Virginia, to Washington state.

NHAs focus on conserving both the physical aspects and spiritual qualities of a place, helping to revitalize the economies of communities of all sizes, while boosting their sense of pride. These initiatives come to life through the collaboration of volunteers, local small businesses, and major corporations, working together to forge brighter futures across NHA communities nationwide. Whether it's the rivers that carried us or the Revolution that shaped us, National Heritage Areas will always serve as the keepers of the stories that define America.



SARA CAPEN

Chair, Alliance of National Heritage Areas | Executive Director, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Courtesy of LARA



ABOVE: Patriot soldiers atop the redoubt
BELOW: British bombardment
LEFT: British Landing

Annie Harris



Courtesy of JGPR and Nicole Goodhue



ESSEX NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Connecting with the Roots of Our Democracy

The Battle of Bunker Hill occurred on June 17, 1775, and it came alive again on June 21-22, 2025. This is when more than 1,000 British and American Patriot reenactors joined together to recreate the Battle of Bunker Hill along the coast of the Essex National Heritage Area in Massachusetts. The original battle site is too urban to accommodate

such a large reenactment, so the battle took place north of Boston in the City of Gloucester. The Essex NHA led the fundraising efforts and coordinated with many partners to organize logistics, align marketing, and recruit volunteers.

The reenactment of the Battle of Bunker Hill drove home to the 20,000 spectators the overwhelming odds that our Patriot forebearers faced when, in 1775, they rebelled against the British Empire, at that time the most powerful nation in the world. It also made clear that the fight for independence was not fought by professional soldiers but by farmers, craftsmen, and townspeople who risked everything for liberty

and self-governance. Watching their struggle play out on the battlefield underscored the enormity of the risks they endured to take that critical step on the road to freedom—and the fear, the uncertainty, and the unwavering commitment to a cause greater than themselves.

Reenactments invite us to feel the heat of battle, to imagine the cost of freedom, and to reflect on the enduring values that continue to define our nation. They remind us that liberty was hard-won and that its preservation still demands awareness, respect, and participation from every generation.



Stratford Hall, Stratford, VA

Jason Buttram

NORTHERN NECK NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The “First” Founding Father

Virginia’s Northern Neck National Heritage Area (NNNHA) is often called the “birthplace of our nation” because three of the first five U.S. Presidents were born here, as well as other founders who shaped the independence movement and the early Republic.

Among them is Richard Henry Lee, the “first founding father.” Raised at Stratford Hall in the Northern Neck, Lee grasped the emerging dangers of British colonial policy long before most and responded creatively to the menace posed to American prosperity and liberty. When polite protests against the Stamp Act failed, Lee pivoted to organized resistance, drafting the 1766 Leedstown Resolves, which rallied Virginians from 12 counties to obstruct the Act.

On June 7, 1776, Lee rose in the 2nd Continental Congress to move formally that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States,” a motion adopted on July 2, 1776, and preserved verbatim in the Declaration of Independence.

Designated in 2023, NNNHA is in the early phase of management planning, though much is happening. From January 2025, the NNNHA sponsored a speaker series focused on colonial America and the founding. This past October, it held a Discovery Symposium, “We the People,” which highlighted new research findings. Currently, NNNHA is bringing partners together for Virginia Resolved, a day-long commemoration of American independence and Richard Henry Lee, to be held at Stratford Hall on June 7, 2026. In all its programs, NNNHA seeks to include multiple perspectives in recognizing and honoring the nation’s founding and the evolving American experiment.



Images courtesy of Call of the Loon Productions

MAURICE D. HINCHEY HUDSON RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

A Revolutionary River

Known for its natural beauty, cultural contributions, and significant role during the Revolutionary War, New York’s Hudson River Valley helped shape the American identity. The Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area (a.k.a. Hudson River Valley NHA) tells that story.

The Valley boasts hundreds of historic sites telling the story of America’s path to victory. Key sites include West Point, the nation’s oldest continuously occupied military post, where the Continental Army stopped British ships; Stony Point Battlefield State Historic Site, where General George

Washington staged a nighttime assault to gain control of a British fort in less than a half hour; and Mount Gulian Historic Site, headquarters of Major General Friedrich von Steuben, drill master of the Continental Army.

The region is accessible by train, and visitors can discover more about what is outside their window using the Hudson River Train Tour app developed by the Hudson River Valley NHA. Audio stories about the Revolutionary War highlight battles, British Loyalists, Indigenous tribes, enslaved people, food of the period, and more.

The Hudson River Valley NHA also supports partners in sharing Revolutionary War history with their communities. In 2025, it sponsored Revolutionary Westchester 250’s Meet the Women of Revolutionary Westchester, held at Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, and Hendrick Hudson Free Library’s Camp Life in the Revolutionary War. Both events featured reenactors and activities designed to engage children and families.

Through the work of Hudson River Valley NHA, events of 250 years ago come to life along America’s revolutionary river.



PHOTOS: Washington’s Headquarters, Newburgh, NY



UPPER HOUSATONIC VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Unsung Heroes of the Revolution

THE ROLE OF [NEWS]PAPER IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Newspapers and broadsides played a vital role in communication between colonial communities and American patriots - and a means to inspire colonists to action. During the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area focuses on the technology of paper and its role in informing people before, during, and after the American Revolution. Though paper was available two thousand years ago, it was first made in the American colonies, in Philadelphia, in 1690. In 1704, a two-page sheet newspaper was published in Boston, one of the first in the colonies. Before long, there were others, including the Massachusetts Spy, the Merrimack Packet, and the Boston Gazette. In time for the Stamp Act in 1765, many newspapers and related broadsides decried Britain's restrictive policies and taxation. Amid a growing population and the increasing discontent with Britain, newspaper and broadside circulation soared.

The Upper Housatonic Valley NHA is recording oral histories of people who currently work in paper mills. A few paper mills in Berkshire County still operate — including Crane, where the paper for America's currency is made. This paper mill was established in the county in 1801 by Zenas Crane. Crane was a direct descendant of a mill owner in eastern Massachusetts, where Paul Revere acquired some of his paper. Revere's broadsides helped inspire the revolution; his masthead designs graced the front pages of several early papers, spreading the word about the coming American Revolution and forever changing the fate of the continent.

Masthead engraved by Paul Revere

Judith Monachina



Courtesy of CNHA

CROSSROADS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Meeting at the Crossroads

PREPARING FOR AMERICA AT 250

New Jersey's Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area (Crossroads NHA) is specifically dedicated to increasing knowledge and understanding of the American Revolution. It is the only National Heritage Area among the state and territorial planning entities recognized by the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission.

The New Jersey Legislature created RevolutionNJ to plan the state's official commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. It is a partnership between the non-profit Crossroads NHA and the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the New Jersey Department of State. RevolutionNJ is the sole state commemoration created by this unique partnership. Through initiatives that explore the history of the American Revolution, its context, and legacy, RevolutionNJ is engaging the entire state in the commemoration.

Crossroads NHA was instrumental in garnering state support for visitor-readiness capital projects at ten state-owned Revolutionary War sites. Projects such as new HVAC systems, landscaping, restrooms, and ADA upgrades are underway and will be completed in 2026. Most notably, a new visitors' center is under construction at Washington Crossing State Park — replacing the one built in 1976, during the last milestone birthday — in time for the 250th anniversary reenactment of Washington's Crossing of the Delaware on December 25, 2026.

Under RevolutionNJ's banner, hundreds of communities, nonprofits, businesses, and schools are planning activities. In July, a major celebration at Liberty State Park in conjunction with World Cup events will showcase New Jersey's cultural and historic resources and kick off the celebration of our nation's 250 years of democracy.

Learn more about New Jersey's plans at RevNJ.org.

SOUTHERN MARYLAND NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Finding a New “Old” Home

Being hanged, beheaded, or drawn and quartered were just a few of the punishments that Southern Maryland's own Thomas Stone and the 55 other signers of the Declaration of Independence risked on July 4, 1776. Thomas Stone, a Founding Father of the United States of America, is rightly remembered at the Thomas Stone National Historic Site in Charles County, Maryland. The site of Stone's home, Haberdeventure, which holds great regional and national significance, will soon serve as the official headquarters for the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.

Thomas Stone embodies the American spirit of trailblazing in the face of adversity, as many other Marylanders have since the nation's founding (Harriet Tubman and Thurgood Marshall come to mind). Unfortunately, the Thomas Stone National Historic Site, which commemorates him, maintains a restricted schedule. The facility is open to visitors only during certain months, then just on weekends due to limited resources. This new partnership between the site and the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will soon mean all who visit the Heritage Area will have more opportunities to participate in this historic site.

The mutually beneficial partnership will eliminate some burdens on the Thomas Stone National Historic Site staff, while providing the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area with a significant facility from which to conduct business and serve the region. The contract bearing the signatures or 'John Hancocks' has been signed, and as Thomas Stone said himself, “The Die is Cast!” The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area looks forward to ‘moving in’ in June of 2026.

Brandon Rosario, Ranger David Lassman, Ella Flister, Alan Spears, Lucille Walker, and John Hartline outside Haberdeventure



Courtesy of Southern Maryland NHA



SOUTH CAROLINA NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR



SC7 Turns to the American Revolution

The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor proudly owns and manages SC7, a statewide initiative that bridges Healthy People, Healthy Places, and a Healthy Economy. Each July, SC7 embarks on a 30-day expedition across South Carolina, where thousands of participants hike, bike, kayak, and scuba dive from the mountains to the sea, visiting seven of South Carolina’s unique geographic wonders. Along the journey, the expedition engages communities through service projects such as litter cleanups, trail development, living shoreline restoration, and educational forums that highlight the role of the health of people and the environment in sustaining a strong and resilient economy.

In 2026, SC7 will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution by switching from its traditional trails to retrace the paths of history that were instrumental in shaping the United States of America’s independence. This special edition of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor’s SC7 will also advance the National Park Service’s Healthy Parks, Healthy People initiative and the Fit for 250 program, encouraging participants to celebrate their shared heritage through outdoor activity. In addition to the daily events, SC7 will host a special 4th of July Celebration and conclude the expedition on the deck of the USS Yorktown with a “Road to Yorktown Remembrance Gala.”

Through this combination of adventure, conservation, education, and commemoration, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor is helping communities rediscover their history, restore their natural places, and reignite the trailblazing spirit that continues to shape America.



ABOVE: Morning hike in Sumter National Forest
LEFT: SC7 Beach Cleanup with Lt. Governor Pamela Evette

Images courtesy of SCNHC



A MORE
PERFECT
UNION



Courtesy of Rediscover Mapledale

FREEDOM'S WAY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

A Golf Course Earns Its Rightful Place in a Region of 'Firsts'

A region of 'firsts' in American invention, thought, and design, the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area (FWNHA) is well-known for the many 'revolutions' that occurred within its boundaries. And while the 'shot heard round the world' and Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond immediately come to mind, another revolution of a different sort took place in Stow, Massachusetts. In 1926, African American businessman and golf pioneer Robert Hawkins purchased the Randall Estate and founded the Mapledale Country Club, home to one of the first Black golf courses in America.

Featuring a nine-acre golf course and country club with facilities for horseback riding, tennis, and winter activities, Mapledale was home to the first three United States Colored Golf Association (USCGA) Opens from 1926 to 1928. What began as a dream for a place to play the game Hawkins loved evolved into much more—a showcase event that played on municipal courses in northern cities, attracting Black golfers from all over the country.

In 2022, financial and technical support from the FWNHA Partnership Grant Program helped to establish Rediscover Mapledale. With ongoing support from the Heritage Area, the organization undertook historical research and continues to develop resources to interpret and share Hawkins's story.

The vision of Rediscover Mapledale is to continue to commemorate Black history in Stow, Massachusetts, and educate and promote the rich history to the community. An annual golf tournament was initiated in 2024. In 2026, Stow will celebrate the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Mapledale Country Club.

FREEDOM'S FRONTIER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Quindaro: A Story of Strength in Numbers

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area tells the uniquely American story that unfolded in the heart of the continent along the Kansas-Missouri border — where East met West, North confronted South, and conflicting definitions of liberty ignited and fueled the Civil War.

Amid this turmoil, Quindaro, located in present-day Kansas City, Kansas, emerged as a beacon of solidarity.

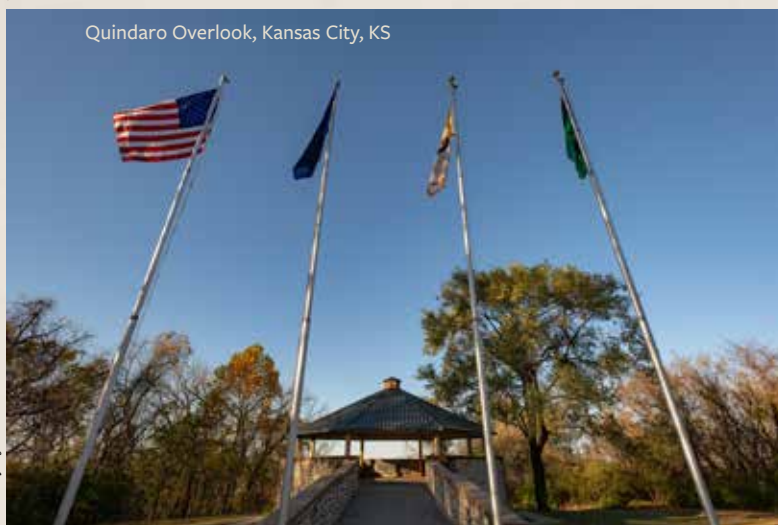
Forced from their Ohio homelands, members of the Wyandot Nation founded the settlement in 1843, naming it after a tribal symbol of combined strength. As the nation edged toward civil war, Quindaro's Indigenous residents welcomed White abolitionists and freed African Americans, forming a fully integrated community.

Over the next decade, the town became a vital gateway to free territory, offering refuge to freedom seekers from Missouri and further east. It served as a key stop on the Underground Railroad and was home to the first Black university west of the Mississippi River.

Shifting political and economic tides eventually forced residents to relocate, and by the end of the 20th century, little physical evidence of the once-thriving port remained.

In recent years, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area has led a coalition of community stakeholders, archaeologists, and historians dedicated to preserving Quindaro's ruins. The collaboration secured the town's designation as a National Commemorative Site in 2019. In the summer of 2025, the National Park Service voted unanimously to recommend Quindaro for its National Historic Landmark designation.

More than 150 years after its founding, Quindaro's legacy of unity, courage, and collective fortitude continues to inspire.



Courtesy of FFNHA



Courtesy of NFNHA

NIAGARA FALLS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

A Trailblazing Force for Niagara Falls

For decades, Niagara Falls, New York, has wrestled with the consequences of decline. The city still bears the marks of failed urban renewal projects, environmental catastrophe, and the loss of once-vibrant neighborhoods and industries.

Since 2008, the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA) has emerged as a bold revitalization force, a trailblazer in heritage interpretation, community revitalization, and cultural programming in Niagara Falls.

In 2016, NFNHA launched the Discover Niagara Shuttle through a public-private partnership. Each year, this free transportation service connects more than 200,000 residents and visitors to 31 destinations along the Niagara River Corridor. NFNHA also sponsors community-based organizations by providing free transportation for field trips and events.

In partnership with the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission, NFNHA opened the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center in 2018. The Heritage Center organizes speaker series, special events, school supply drives, and neighborhood cleanups.

Over the past six years, NFNHA has spearheaded nearly 40 public art initiatives that celebrate Niagara Falls' unique history, including murals in the North End neighborhood.

Another NFNHA initiative, Discover Niagara Tours, launched seven new tours in summer 2025. Tours were given throughout the city, highlighting NFNHA's public art and historic sites



Kim Smith



Courtesy of NFNHA

LEFT: Badass Women of Niagara tour highlights Polly King's artworks featured in NFNHA's revitalization of the historic Jenns Building
BELOW: Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center's Community Engagement Director Allah prepares for a tour
BOTTOM: Discover Niagara Shuttle, wrapped in artwork by Polly King, by the historic Frontier House

associated with the Underground Railroad, Niagara's daredevils, and renowned artist Polly King.

Through its visionary leadership, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area has revitalized public spaces, expanded access to arts and heritage, strengthened community and city pride, and connected hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors to the stories and places that define Niagara Falls.



F. Kefelas

THE LAST GREEN VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

A Trailblazer in American Education

The rugged terrain of what is now The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor in eastern Connecticut and south-central Massachusetts has always demanded a revolutionary and rebellious spirit from those who settled there. Trailblazers called the place home long before the nation was founded.

The story of Connecticut's State Heroine, Prudence Crandall, embodies this pioneering spirit. Crandall was a trailblazer in educational reform. In 1833, she opened the first school for young Black and Brown women in our young nation after being convinced of the need by Sarah Harris, a 19-year-old Black woman.

The school was short-lived, as mob violence forced it to close. The site, now the state-owned Prudence Crandall Museum in Canterbury, Connecticut, shares the stories of the students who attended the school and their subsequent roles as leaders, activists, and educators throughout their influential careers. Although only open for a matter of months, the school influenced changes in the law and drew the attention of education reformers worldwide.

Recently, The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor partnered with the museum to offer a special tour and grant-writing workshop for nonprofits aimed at fostering community engagement and planning for America's 250th anniversary. Additionally, the Heritage Corridor awarded the museum a small America's 250th grant to explore educational opportunities across American history. The museum is developing innovative programs to connect with the site's history at the regional, state, and national levels, and examining how changes in our education system continue to influence the country today.



TOP: Welcome to Prudence Crandall Museum by Joan DiMartino, Curator & Site Supt.
ABOVE: Prudence Crandall

ARTS,
CULTURE &
STORYTELLING



Courtesy of NPNHA

NORTHERN PLAINS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Reflecting North Dakota's Spirit of Collaboration

Collaboration and partnerships are key themes that Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery relied on during their time in the Northern Plains National Heritage Area (Northern Plains NHA). Along the Missouri River in central North Dakota, these themes continue to play a vital role in the Northern Plains NHA's past, present, and future.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition (a.k.a. The Corps of Discovery Expedition) set out to map the lands acquired from the French. Early on, the explorers encountered the Mandan and Hidatsa nations. These encounters were friendly, as the Mandan and Hidatsa centered trade, partnerships, and commerce. The Corps of Discovery wintered at Fort Mandan, which was built at the center of Mandan and Hidatsa country. Throughout the intense winter, Mandan and Hidatsa tribal citizens helped the Corps of Discovery. From navigation capabilities to identifying and preparing edible plants, the explorers gained knowledge. Fort Mandan became a bustling hub of communication, cooperation, and trade between the Mandan, Hidatsa, and expedition members.

Local languages played a central role between the expedition members and the native nations they encountered. One famous woman, Sacagawea, bridged the language gap. Sacagawea's language skills proved crucial to communication among the various parties during the Corps of Discovery's time in the Northern Plains NHA and on the journey westward. Sacagawea's presence among the group of men opened dialogues, bridged cultures, and formed alliances that aided the expedition.

This pioneering theme of communication and collaboration persists on the Northern Plains NHA today. On October 22, 2025, the first phase of the Mandan Art Alley in historic downtown Mandan, North Dakota, was completed. The funding partnership included the City of Mandan Visitor's Fund (\$35,000), the North Dakota Council on the Arts (\$2,500), the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation (\$5,000), the Bismarck Professional Women Public Art Fund (\$2,500), and the Northern Plains Heritage Foundation (\$35,000).

Project leaders initially planned for up to seven murals in Phase I, with future phases to follow. The call for Phase I prompted the involvement of 14 artists who created 16 murals. City of Mandan Mayor James Froelich said, "This is a great addition to Mandan." He added, "You have to invest in the culture and the happiness of the citizens, [and the art alley partnership and collaboration] is a great example of that."

Because of the Northern Plains NHA collaboration and partnership cohort, the Mandan Art Alley is now part of the larger, evolving Northern Plains NHA art & culture trail. It links residents and visitors of both urban and rural North Dakota to their history, current life, and envisioned future. Like Fort Mandan, the Mandan Art Alley is a space that serves as a continued hub of communication, collaboration, cooperation, and trade in the Northern Plains NHA.



ABOVE: Shawna Romero Fricke & Aprill Perkins speak at the unveiling ceremony
LEFT TO RIGHT: Mandan Mayor James Froelich after the grand unveiling; A new mural at Mandan Art Alley; North Dakota's official troubadour, Chuck Suchy, serenades attendees



A scene from the film, "From Courtroom to Capital"

ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

From Courtroom to Capital

Abraham Lincoln stands out as one of the most revered presidents—and people—in American history. The short film, "From Courtroom to Capital: Lincoln's Path to the Presidency," delves into the pivotal role Lincoln's legal career and working relationships played in his ascent from a small-town lawyer in Illinois to the 16th President of the United States of America.

Produced by the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area in partnership with the Abraham Lincoln Association, the film highlights Lincoln's 20-year career working in Illinois' Eighth Judicial Circuit, bringing to life the influential figures he encountered. His notable legal accomplishments and the people he met informed Lincoln's growing wisdom, which would eventually help him guide the country through one of its most trying times.

The film also examines how Lincoln utilized his expertise as an attorney when interpreting the Constitution and federal laws during his presidency. By examining Lincoln's adeptness—particularly during monumental decisions such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus—the film offers insight into his development as a political and historical powerhouse whose legacy continues to shape the country.

The collaborative efforts of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area and a dedicated team of Lincoln historians shine in the creation of this film. This initiative aligns with the mission of National Heritage Areas to highlight the people and places in our nation who have blazed new paths for what America was to become, and is today.

The film is available on Looking for Lincoln's YouTube channel.

BLUE RIDGE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

A Nod to Southern Craftsmanship

Western North Carolina, the region designated as the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, is renowned for its ingenuity and craftsmanship. Its people have made notable contributions to American artistry and culture, underscoring the lasting legacy of connecting the creative Appalachian people with the country's founding principles.

The skills of Appalachian artisans showcase America's dedication to self-reliance. These makers, dreamers, and workers—both past and present—create art essential to daily life, with pieces of beauty woven into our traditional heritage. Appalachian crafts, including pottery, fiber arts, woodworking, and glassmaking, demonstrate a resourcefulness that was crucial in establishing and maintaining the nation's prosperity.

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area created the Blue Ridge Craft Trails initiative in 2022 to spotlight the craft artisans of Western North Carolina and guide others in discovering their art and skills. In early 2025, in partnership with Smoky Mountain News, Inc., the Heritage Area launched the complementary Blue Ridge Craft Trails Magazine as a guide to locating 346 artists, galleries, and craft destinations full of traditional and contemporary handmade treasures.

While many Blue Ridge trailblazers have come and gone without individual recognition, their innovations are honored through the living heritage preserved by the Heritage Area's Blue Ridge Craft Trails initiative and the new magazine. Through these efforts, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and Western North Carolina's artists honor the craftsmanship of those before them and pass down their knowledge to new generations, ensuring that the beautiful merging of handicrafts and self-sufficiency endures.

Woodturner Nathan Favors, Bakersville, NC



Courtesy of BRNHA

GULLAH GEECHEE CULTURAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

{ Soul Recipes }

The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor running along the coast from North Carolina to Florida is a cultural landscape unlike any other in America. The Gullah Geechee people, descendants of Africans, transformed tidal marshlands into fertile rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton fields, creating the foundation for early American agriculture. Yet their contribution extends beyond the fields; it lives in the kitchens, where memory and innovation meet.

Gullah Geechee chefs are modern-day culture bearers, preserving recipes rooted in West African tradition while inspiring the broader American culinary landscape. Dishes like okra soup, red rice, and shrimp and grits are not merely food but are living history, seasoned with the wisdom of generations.



Today, chefs across the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and beyond are reclaiming this heritage, drawing national attention to the flavors that gave birth to Southern cuisine.

The Heritage Corridor celebrates these culinary trailblazers alongside artisans, storytellers, and land stewards. An example is the Heritage Corridor's 'Gullah Convening: An Evening of Culture, Conversation, and Cuisine'. World-renowned Gullah Geechee chefs are featured at this exclusive black tie event held in Charleston, South Carolina, in December.

In the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, history is not confined to museums—it lives in the Gullah Geechee people and the scent of simmering okra soup and red rice. As the nation celebrates trailblazers across the land, among them are the Gullah Geechee as architects of culture and keepers of a legacy that continues to inspire and empower generations.



Dan Milleson, owner of Waterfront Hall, was awarded \$100,000 to help restore a historic downtown structure

WHEELING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

PRESERVING PROGRESS:

Subgrant Program for Revitalization

Across Wheeling, West Virginia, preservation is powering progress through the Wheeling Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program, established by the Wheeling National Heritage Area with support from the National Park Service's Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant.

Through an initial Revitalization Grant in 2021 and a subsequent one in 2023, the Wheeling Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program has been awarded \$1.5 million in federal funds to distribute to local property owners and nonprofits for the rehabilitation of commercial and neighborhood historic sites. The grants support architectural and engineering services in addition to the property's physical preservation. Each project restores more than bricks and mortar; it revives Main Street vitality, sustains local tradesmen, and preserves the stories embedded in Wheeling's architecture.

By documenting each project through short films and photography, the Wheeling National Heritage Area's media team brings these preservation efforts to life, highlighting craftspeople, business owners, and residents who are transforming historic structures into vibrant community assets. From restored storefronts to reimagined gathering spaces, the program reflects a shared belief that the past is not a relic—it's a foundation for the future.

The Wheeling National Heritage Area's media team carefully documents each project at each phase to highlight progress across the community – to share with Wheeling's residents and others. By capturing these transformations, they inspire greater community pride and invite everyone to see how preservation and progress can thrive together.

Through this work, the Wheeling National Heritage Area continues to champion America's trailblazers: the builders, artisans, and dreamers whose legacies shape the places called home.



Skilled Filipino workers laid underwater communication cables between Seattle and Alaska, 1903-1904

University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

MARITIME WASHINGTON NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Filipinos that Shaped Washington's Waterfront

For decades, the contributions and stories of Filipino Americans who shaped Washington state's waterfront have been out of the historical spotlight. Now, the Maritime Washington National Heritage Area (NHA) is sharing the stories of these American trailblazers who built communities and industries across the state—cannery workers, longshoremen, Navy sailors, and community leaders—through the new “Filipinos and Washington's Waterfront” exhibit.

The exhibit explores more than a century of Filipino American history, labor, and community along Washington's shores. Created in partnership between the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) and Maritime Washington NHA, the project includes both a traveling exhibit—which has been hosted at museums, festivals, and ferry terminals throughout the state—and a digital companion at maritimewa.org/fanhs.

Through the creation of this exhibit, the FANHS and the Maritime Washington NHA documented important stories by digitizing archival images, conducting original research, and recording new oral histories. Now, the exhibit is sharing the voices of these waterfront trailblazers, including ‘Alaskeros’ (Filipino cannery workers) who shipped out to Alaska from Seattle docks, vessel operators aboard ferries and cruise ships, cooks fusing Filipino cuisine with Pacific Northwest seafood, families who have forged beachfront traditions, and more.

“This history is part of American history,” says Dr. Dorothy Cordova, director of FANHS and the exhibit's lead researcher, “Filipino stories are the tales of immigrants who came to America by water for many different reasons. This exhibit brings them to light—not just to honor the past, but to inspire pride and connection in future generations.”



Images courtesy of Atchafalaya NHA



TOP: Teddy's Juke Joint in Zachary, LA
LEFT: The making of the “At Sunset” mural
ABOVE: Corey Ledet playing Zydeco music inside Hamilton's Place

ATCHAFALAYA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Rhythms of the River

Few places in the world can boast a musical legacy as rich and diverse as Louisiana. The Louisiana Music Trail—a partnership among the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (Atchafalaya NHA), the Louisiana Office of Tourism, and the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development—celebrates the lives and legacies of the state's musical trailblazers through an interactive website and a series of interpretive markers. From historic juke joints and rural dancehalls to colorful murals, gravesites, and genre museums, the trail showcases the deep roots of Louisiana's influence on American music.

From the bayous to the Mississippi River delta, Louisiana's blues tell stories of hard work, heartbreak, and resilience. In Baton Rouge, artists like Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, and Lightnin' Slim defined the distinctive “Swamp Blues” sound—a soulful, rhythmic blend of blues, Cajun, and Zydeco that later inspired global icons such as The Rolling Stones and Creedence Clearwater Revival. Southwest of the capital, the prairies of Acadiana pulse with vibrant Cajun and Zydeco music.

To preserve and share three spaces, the Atchafalaya NHA collaborated with the Louisiana Music Trail and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training at Northwestern State University to digitally reconstruct three-dimensional models of the interiors of Hamilton's Place and La Poussière—two historic Cajun and Zydeco dancehalls—along with Teddy's Juke Joint, a Baton Rouge landmark for blues music. The project included recording local musicians performing inside these venues. The final product lets viewers from around the world virtually step inside these storied rooms, hear the authentic sound, and experience the spaces where

legends like Clifton Chenier, Geno Delafosse, and Kenny Neal jammed. This digital preservation effort ensures that Louisiana's cultural and musical heritage stays accessible for future generations.

To mark the centennial of Zydeco pioneer Clifton Chenier's birth, the Atchafalaya NHA teamed up with the Louisiana Division of the Arts to fund a mural in Sunset, Louisiana. Titled “At Sunset”, the mural depicts the Chenier brothers—Clifton, wearing his trademark crown, and Cleveland, playing signature rubboard. The artwork honors the King of Zydeco and acts as a cultural attraction for the small town of Sunset, proudly placing it on the Louisiana Music Trail.

The Atchafalaya NHA's work in music extends beyond preserving history—it also supports the future of Louisiana sound. In partnership with the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, the Heritage Area has provided funding and sponsorships for established Grammy winners and emerging local artists to showcase their talents at national events, including Americanafest, Folk Alliance International, and Grammy Week. These opportunities help regional artists reach national and international stages, advancing one of the Heritage Area's key goals: promoting sustainable cultural and economic growth while celebrating the state's creative community.

From Jerry Lee Lewis's fiery piano playing to the jazz clubs of New Orleans, Louisiana's music continues to evolve—still dancing, still singing, still alive and inspiring the next generation of America's sound. Through the Louisiana Music Trail, the Atchafalaya NHA celebrates this living heritage and the artists who influenced genres and shaped the rhythm of generations.

SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Weaving the Stories of Traditional Artisans

Nestled in the high desert of southern Colorado, the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area (NHA) is home to artists whose work has long been more than mere decoration; it has preserved history, identity, and faith. For generations, women in the San Luis Valley carried on the artistic traditions of colcha embroidery and weaving, using thread and yarn to create beauty. Each stitch tells a story of survival, resilience, and love for the land beneath the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Eppie Archuleta (1922-2014) taught new generations of women and children her beloved art of weaving. As a fourth-generation master weaver and textile artisan, Archuleta blended Hispano and Native American weaving techniques to create both traditional and contemporary works. In 1985, Eppie became the first Hispana weaver to receive the nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts, the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship. Examples of her weavings are permanently displayed on the walls of the Smithsonian Institution.

Eppie's artistry extended beyond the loom. In 1989, she purchased and founded the San Luis Valley Wool Mill, where she processed local wool and spun it into yarn. Today, the mill's original machines are rare survivors of a nearly lost craft.

The Sangre de Cristo NHA is repairing the roof of Eppie's studio while working to have the site designated a National Historic Landmark. Through the Heritage Area's efforts to preserve her studio, record oral histories, and install interpretive signage, Eppie's legacy continues to inspire—ensuring the San Luis Valley's stories in thread remain unbroken.



TOP: Eppie Archuleta, 1979
ABOVE: Eppie Archuleta, 1980

Photos by Kathleen Figgen, Southern Colorado Council on the Arts Folklorist Collection, Adams State University, Nielsen Library

TECHNOLOGICAL TRAILBLAZERS

HENRY CUMMING: CANAL VISIONARY

AUGUSTA CANAL NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Panic of 1837 left many communities in the United States struggling with an economic downturn. Businesses, banks, and industries in the North failed. In the South, the price of the dominant crop—cotton—dropped 25 percent, devastating the region. In Augusta, Georgia, Henry Cumming searched for ways to diversify the city's economy and help it recover from the recession.

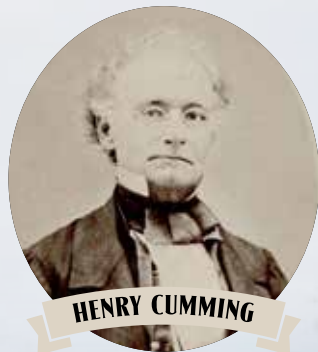
Cumming settled on building a canal to take advantage of Augusta's geographical position near the fall line of the Savannah River. The river descends 52 feet in elevation as it flows toward Augusta, providing enough power to make a canal feasible.

Cumming was so committed to the idea of a canal that he paid for the first survey. By 1850,

the Augusta Canal—which began seven miles upriver from the city—boasted a sawmill, a gristmill, a textile mill, and other factories. During the Civil War, the Augusta Canal supplied power for industrial activities such as the Confederate Powder Works, an iron foundry, and a pistol factory.

Today, the canal provides electric power, supplies 75% of the city's drinking water, and is used for boating and fishing. The Augusta Canal National Heritage Area operates the canal's three hydroelectric plants and sells power to the historic mills' new tenants as well as Georgia Power. There are two electric boats with tour guides that

carry visitors along the canal. One of these boats, the *Henry Cumming*, honors the man whose vision transformed Augusta and whose legacy lives on today.



HENRY CUMMING



Tour group on the canal boat *Henry Cumming*

Courtesy of ACNHA



Historic Darden Mill,
Elkins, WV

Courtesy of AFNHA

APPALACHIAN FOREST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

DARDEN MILL: A Key to Past & Present

Spanning 18 counties across West Virginia and Western Maryland, the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area (Appalachian Forest NHA) provides historic and heritage preservation, grant funding, tourism connections, and a thriving AmeriCorps program that dedicates service members to organizations across the region. In 2021, the Appalachian Forest NHA received the “key” to retelling the region's history and recognizing its heritage: a physical key to a grist mill built in 1902, gifted to them for just \$1.

The Darden Mill, once home of the Elkins Milling Company, now stands as a tangible symbol of the Appalachian Forest NHA's values. Housing the Heritage Area's Appalachian Forest Discovery Center, the Mill provides a physical space for visitors to hear the stories that shaped the region and discover new destinations that help tell that story through its Discovery Sites Program. The Darden Mill is a relic from a different era, but it serves as a visual reflection of the history of the lumber industry, offering an opportunity to tell the story of the real hands that shaped rural Appalachian forests—both physically and economically—through an industry still important in the region.

Currently, Appalachian Forest NHA is working to restore the Darden Mill and reimagine its continued use as a center for learning, storytelling, and connection. The Mill has served many purposes over the years, and in the semiquincentennial year of the nation, it continues to tell the evolving story of the enduring spirit of the Appalachian forest and the people who call it home.

SILOS & SMOKESTACKS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Iowans Led the Way for Rural Electrification



Iowa Secretary of Agriculture, Michael Naig, speaks during the National Historic Landmarks Ceremony

“
This plant is more than a historic structure; it is a monument to the very strength and ingenuity of the community.
”

—Iowa Secretary of Agriculture, Michael Naig

Courtesy of S&S NHA

The Reeve REA Power Generating Plant in rural Franklin County, Iowa, is a recognized site within the Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area (S&S NHA). During the past several years, S&S NHA has provided technical assistance to the Franklin County Historical Society, including guidance through the National Historic Landmarks Program's nomination process, as they worked to preserve the Reeve plant. Designated a National Historic Landmark in December 2024, the Reeve REA Power Generating Plant is nationally significant as the last remaining original plant built under the 1936 Rural Electrification Act.

Authorized by this act, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was a New Deal program conceived by FDR, intended to help address rural poverty, modernize American farms, and stimulate the national economy.

In 1938, the diesel engine-powered Reeve plant became the first cooperative west of the Mississippi River to generate and distribute its own farmers-owned electricity. It was one of four plants in the country to receive a generation and transmission loan from the REA. This loan program initiated a significant shift in the REA's policy, helping the agency overcome obstacles from private utilities that were unwilling to sell power to rural cooperatives at affordable rates.

Between 1935 and 1950, the percentage of rural households with electricity rose from 11 to 78 percent, a monumental change driven by cooperatives like the one that operated the Reeve plant. The plant's operation transformed life for rural Iowans, making it possible to power washing machines, milking equipment, and other aspects of daily and farm life.



Student utilizing the solar scope for daytime astronomy

Courtesy of GBNHA

GREAT BASIN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Reaching for the Stars

In the high desert of Nevada’s Great Basin National Park, a 27.5-inch diameter telescope peers into the cosmos. It enables students to explore fundamental questions about the universe. Located at the center of the Great Basin National Heritage Area (NHA), a region with exceptionally dark night skies, the Great Basin Observatory boasts the only research-grade telescope in a national park.

Built and operated by the Great Basin National Park Foundation, the Observatory exemplifies the principle of public-private partnerships. The Great Basin NHA contributed the first major grant for the Observatory. The National Heritage Area also provided administrative support during the construction and launch of the Observatory, and it continues to sustain the Foundation’s Reach for the Stars education program through grants.

Since 2016, the Reach for the Stars program has reached over 5,600 students with curriculum-based, K-12 astronomy programs. The Observatory also provides research opportunities to undergraduate and high school students throughout the region. These young astronomers operate the telescope remotely to investigate stellar bodies, including double stars, globular star clusters, and black holes.

Star-studded night skies with the Milky Way arching above are something most Americans have never experienced. Beyond the classroom, the Foundation has enabled over 15,000 visitors to connect to this heritage by supporting the park’s astronomy programs with telescopes, solar scopes, and astronomy interns. The Great Basin NHA will continue to assist the Foundation’s education, research, and outreach programs, creating pathways to learning and inspiration that are out of this world.

Learn more at GreatBasinObservatory.org and GreatBasinHeritage.org.

MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Birthplace of MODERN ARCHITECTURE

The Charnley-Norwood House in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, marked a key moment in American residential architectural design. It reflects innovation, simplicity, and harmony with nature. Built in 1890 as a winter retreat for Chicago lumber magnate James Charnley and his wife Helen, the home was designed by architect Louis H. Sullivan along with his young apprentice, Frank Lloyd Wright. Together, these two trailblazers helped lay the groundwork for modern American architecture.

Sullivan held the revolutionary view that “form follows function.” A striking departure from the ornate Victorian styles of its time, the Charnley-Norwood House embraced clear forms, open spaces, and natural materials. Its horizontal lines, expanses of glass, and seamless connection between indoor and outdoor spaces foreshadowed the Prairie and Craftsman styles that defined early 20th-century architecture.

Because of its significance, the State of Mississippi undertook restoration of the home in 2013, following Hurricane Katrina’s damage to the Mississippi Coast in 2005. Today, the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area manages this National Historic Landmark, letting visitors explore the rooms where modern American architecture was born.

As interest in the Charnley-Norwood House continues to grow, the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area is actively expanding educational outreach through docent-led tours, school field trips, instructional videos, and interpretive programs that connect architecture, history, and nature.

Through these efforts, the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area promotes education, tourism, and appreciation for the enduring impact of American design, connecting communities to the broader narrative of innovation and creativity inherent in America’s trailblazers.



Charnley-Norwood House, Ocean Springs, MS

Courtesy of Lynne Satter Collection/MDAH

CONSERVING OUR NATURAL WONDERS



Volunteers remove debris from the Blackstone River

BORRINGTON

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

HEALING THE BLACKSTONE:



From Industrial Innovation to Environmental Renewal



The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has a strong claim as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. In the 1790s, Samuel Slater developed his first water-powered spinning machinery at Slater Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, igniting an economic transformation. Powered by the Blackstone River and other waterways, his innovation fueled new industries, spurred invention, and reshaped the nation's economy.

But progress came at a cost. For over 150 years, mills and factories discharged waste into the Blackstone River. By the mid-20th century, it was one of the most polluted waterways in the country. The health of the river—and the communities along it—declined.

In 1972, hundreds of volunteers responded to the call to “ZAP the Blackstone,” one of the largest single-day cleanups in American history. That trailblazing spirit continues through the many organizations and volunteers that work alongside

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor to restore the river. In 2022, the Corridor and partners joined to commemorate the 50th anniversary of ZAP with a watershed-wide cleanup.

The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, through its Volunteers-In-Parks program and partnerships with local nonprofits, municipalities, and state agencies, continues to organize cleanups and stewardship efforts, both large and small, throughout the Valley. These efforts honor the river's transformative industrial legacy while advancing a new story of healing, resilience, and environmental consciousness.

The Blackstone River's journey—from powering America's growth to inspiring community renewal—demonstrates that trailblazing takes many forms. Today, the route points toward a cleaner, more sustainable future.

ARABIA MOUNTAIN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Arabia Mountain Trailblazer:

Tyrone Burkette

The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (AMNHA) is just 30 miles east of Atlanta, Georgia. Dominated by two granite outcrops, it provides natural beauty, rich history, and exciting outdoor activities. Stunning scenery, unique ecosystems, and fascinating cultural stories—from early settlers to immigrant rock cutters, freed slaves, and Trappist monks—all come together in this one-of-a-kind landscape.

At the heart of the AMNHA are expanses of open land dotted with picturesque barns and modest granite buildings that attest to the area's rural quality, including a historic quarry industry. Overlaid by a system of trails, the AMNHA offers opportunities for hiking, biking, fishing, and geocaching across 40,000 acres and provides a robust trail map system and an array of programs.

Tyrone Burkette was the creator of much of the unpaved trail system. In 2001, already retired, he stumbled upon the Heritage Area and saw Arabia Mountain's granite base. Soon after, Burkette volunteered as a trail guide and was eventually hired as a county park ranger. Even after retiring again, he loved Arabia Mountain so much that he led hikes there three times a week. He encouraged everyone to get outside and take in nature. Many of the AMNHA's most popular soft trails are traced back to Burkette.

Thanks to Burkette's enthusiasm and other volunteers like him, AMNHA has hundreds of walks, hikes, bike rides, guided nature programs, and more. To honor his legacy and encourage future trailblazers, the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area created the Tyrone Burkette Memorial Internship in 2025.



Tyrone Burkette leading one of his popular Superbowl Hikes

Courtesy of AMNHA

The Greeley Number 3 Irrigation Ditch



Courtesy of Cache NHA

CACHE LA POUDE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Foraging a Water Legacy

The stories of the Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area (Cache NHA) reveal the struggles of early pioneers to harness the promise and power of America's western rivers. The settlers' ingenuity in adapting to Northern Colorado's arid climate left a lasting legacy on agricultural, engineering, and legal advancements crucial for Western settlement.

Locally known as the Poudre, the Cache la Poudre River has been a crucial resource, supplying water for residential, agricultural, and industrial uses. The water allocation system, born out of conflicts over limited quantities, has shaped today's Western water law. The principle of Prior Appropriation—“first in time, first in right”—and the concept of “beneficial use” led to the engineering of structures for water diversion and the necessity of measuring flow in irrigation channels.

Early Colorado farmers engineered complex irrigation systems to redirect the Poudre's water to their fields. In the 1920s, Ralph Parshall designed a new type of flume — a channel flow-metering device. His design became a globally adopted tool for measuring volumetric flow, and it remains in use today.

Presently, much of the 150-year-old water infrastructure remains operational, while Colorado's growing population demands improvements. The Poudre Runs Through It (PRTI), a Cache NHA program, brings together regional experts and water users to address critical issues and seize cooperative opportunities, ensuring the Poudre remains a healthy, working river. PRTI's work significantly influences modern water law and management.

As America celebrates 250 years, Colorado's water trailblazers demonstrate that history doesn't reside in the past but is being shaped now.



Gateway sculpture ribbon cutting

Courtesy of ORNHA

OIL REGION NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Gateway Sculpture Marks the Spot in the Oil Region

The term trailblazer literally means a person who marks a path. Those markings, meant as reminders and guides for others to follow, are called blazes. With hundreds of miles of recreational trails and waterways, blazes are a common sight in northwest Pennsylvania's Oil Region National Heritage Area.

In June 2025, a new kind of blaze was installed south of Titusville in the form of a sculpture commissioned by the Heritage Area as a gateway for its northern section. The initiative was made possible in part by grants from the National Park Service and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, as well as in-kind support from the City of Titusville.

Artist Adam Stempka of Stempka Designs in Erie used Corten Steel to create the 15x15-foot piece. The material is "designed to patina over time," according to Stempka. The sculpture mimics oil derricks and pumping jacks as a nod to the region's heritage as the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry, with elements of scenery, wildlife, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The piece is situated as an entrance gateway to the City of Titusville and the Drake Well site, a National Historic Landmark. It represents the best attributes of the Oil Region National Heritage Area, from its world-changing oil heritage to its burgeoning reputation as an outdoor recreation hub.

The Titusville Gateway is envisioned as the first in a series of gateway projects in the region's communities. It marks the way, as the Oil Region National Heritage Area blazes a path to the future.



Fred Phillips

YUMA CROSSING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Wetlands Restoration in the Desert Southwest

In 2002, the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (NHA) launched an ambitious effort to restore 400 acres of degraded land along the Lower Colorado River in Yuma, Arizona. The site was overrun with invasive vegetation, plagued by saline soils, and suffered from limited water flow. Adding to the complexity, local stakeholders—including farmers, the Quechan Indian Tribe, and environmental groups—had a long history of mistrust and limited collaboration.

A 15-acre pilot project quickly revealed a major obstacle: irrigation. Fortunately, the solution grew out of Yuma's agricultural legacy. For decades, local farmers had perfected flood irrigation, using laser-leveled fields and concrete-lined ditches to cultivate nearly 250,000 acres of farmland—earning Yuma its reputation as the nation's winter vegetable capital.

The Yuma Crossing NHA reached out to these farmers for help. Though initially skeptical, they agreed to lend their expertise. By adapting their proven irrigation techniques to support native vegetation instead of crops, the NHA transformed the Yuma East Wetlands into a thriving, award-winning wildlife conservation area.

Today, the Yuma East Wetlands provides critical habitat for hundreds of species, including threatened and endangered wildlife. It has also become a popular eco-tourism destination, offering outdoor recreation opportunities and generating positive economic impacts for the Yuma community.

Yuma Crossing NHA's groundbreaking collaboration bridged the gap between agriculture and conservation, proving that both can thrive together. The success of the Yuma East Wetlands has since inspired similar restoration efforts throughout the Lower Colorado River Corridor—ushering in a new era of wetlands restoration in the desert Southwest.

View of the award-winning Yuma East Wetlands



Trail Crew building trail to connect to Mineral Creek Trail

Courtesy of MTSCNHA

MOUNTAINS TO SOUND GREENWAY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Blazing a Better Trail for Bull Trout

Mineral Creek Trail passes through the Central Cascades in Washington state, linking recreationists to the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Unfortunately, a section of the route went through the historic floodplain of the Kachess River, an important home for threatened bull trout. Early 20th-century dam construction isolated and decimated bull trout populations, leaving the remaining fish struggling against warming waters, habitat loss, and declining food and shelter.

To address these challenges, the Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT) completed a major restoration project to improve conditions for migration, spawning, and habitat. They constructed log jams, removed old levees, and planted thousands of native plants. Then, KCT teamed up with the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area to blaze a new trail that would enable recreation and habitat restoration to co-exist in the area. The Heritage Area's Trail Crew spent two seasons building a new route above the floodplain to protect the newly restored habitat, carving seven switchbacks by hand and chiseling through granite



Bull Trout

Courtesy of William Meyer, WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

to reconnect the truncated Mineral Creek Trail to its new future trailhead, thanks to Legacy Trails Program funding. Volunteers play an important role in maintaining the trail, clearing brush, and repairing drainage and tread as needed.

Today, thanks to the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area, KCT, and the work of many hands, threatened bull trout have a future free from the hiking boots that once disturbed their fragile habitat, and Mineral Creek Trail's visitors can enjoy the area's natural beauty.



SCHUYLKILL RIVER GREENWAYS NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Securing Valley Forge's Legacy

Many Americans recognize Valley Forge as the Pennsylvania site where General George Washington and the Continental Army endured a brutal winter, helping them emerge stronger and better disciplined on their path to American independence. Yet, the story of how this historic landscape evolved into both a state and national park is equally compelling.

With the backdrop of Yosemite's 1865 state park designation and Yellowstone becoming the first national park in 1872, Pennsylvanians began advocating to preserve Valley Forge from industrial threats, including a proposed distillery along the Schuylkill River. For decades, local advocates played vital roles in these efforts, perhaps most notably a "distinguished party of ladies" from the Daughters of the American Revolution who visited the site in 1891.

The determination of these individuals culminated in the Pennsylvania Legislature's 1893 decision to

create the Commonwealth's first state park—250 acres dedicated to protecting Valley Forge. Eventually, on July 4, 1976, during America's Bicentennial celebration, President Gerald Ford accepted the park as a "gift" from Pennsylvania, establishing what is now known as the Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area partners closely with the Valley Forge National Historical Park to tell both of these stories. Recently, the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area hosted kayaking trips and a "Parks on Tap" (a pop-up brewery) event. These programs blended recreation with historical interpretation, giving hundreds of participants the chance to connect with Rangers and historians and ensuring that the Valley Forge site remains valued and appreciated for generations to come.

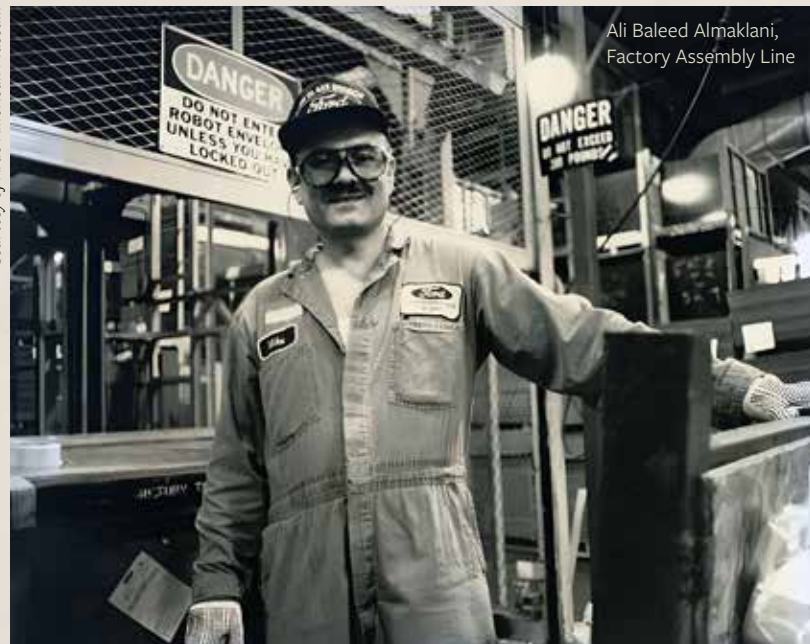


Valley Forge National Historic Park, PA

AMERICA ON
THE MOVE

DRIVING THE AUTO INDUSTRY

Courtesy of Arab American Museum

Ali Baleed Almaklani,
Factory Assembly Line

The MotorCities National Heritage Area’s “Share Your Story” program celebrates the voices of everyday people whose lives helped shape the American automotive industry (a.k.a. auto industry). As America’s 250th birthday approaches, these personal narratives illuminate the profound impact of workers—engineers, line workers, designers, and union leaders—who were true trailblazers in transforming not only Michigan, but the nation.

From the assembly lines of Ford’s Highland Park plant to the innovation hubs of Detroit’s Big Three, workers revolutionized manufacturing and labor. Their ingenuity and resilience laid the foundation for mass production, labor rights, and a middle-class dream powered by horsepower. In turn, the American auto industry shaped their lives—offering economic mobility and a platform for social change.

“Share Your Story” captures this dynamic relationship, highlighting how workers didn’t just build cars—they built America’s industrial backbone. Their stories reflect the determination of trailblazers who drove progress. Whether it’s a woman who became the first female toolmaker in her plant or a migrant worker who found opportunity on the line, these voices echo the broader American story of innovation and perseverance.

Anyone can share their auto story through a community-driven archive available on the MotorCities National Heritage Area’s website. By preserving these accounts, the MotorCities National Heritage Area honors the legacy of those who blazed trails in factories and boardrooms alike. Their impact continues to resonate, reminding us that the road to progress is paved by the stories of those who dare to drive it forward.

A former Kenwood
Line Station

Courtesy of BBMHA

BRONZEVILLE-BLACK METROPOLIS
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAA New Trail
for Bronzeville

The remnants of the Kenwood Line’s concrete stations and elevated tracks bisecting the Bronzeville-Black Metropolis National Heritage Area (NHA) in Chicago, Illinois, are part of Chicago’s multi-million dollar plan for community redevelopment. The Kenwood line (1907-1957) played a significant role in the development of Bronzeville. Built by the Union Stockyards and Transit Company (USY&T) in 1864, the line connected the sprawling 340-acre Union Stockyards with the Illinois Central Railroad line on the lakefront at 43rd Street. Although the line was intended to connect the various freight lines, passenger service was added around 1882.

The passenger service would play an important role in the growth of the area. African Americans moved to cities like Chicago during the Great Migration of the early 20th century. A nationwide labor shortage presented opportunities for a better life. African Americans blazed a well-trod trail northward, seeking better-paying jobs in industry and manufacturing. One place they found employment was the Union Stockyards. They settled in nearby Bronzeville because of discriminatory housing practices, such as redlining and restrictive covenants. Black workers traveled to their jobs at the Stockyards and neighboring facilities using the Kenwood Line.

In 2020, the Bronzeville Cultural Trail Planning Board was created to develop a recreational corridor on the decommissioned rail line. The NHA is actively involved with the Planning Board, assisting with the historical interpretation, including in a 2025 digital podcast. This continues the Bronzeville-Black Metropolis NHA’s work to revitalize the communities within its boundaries and tell the stories of the Kenwood Line, the Great Migration, and Bronzeville.

Visitors learning at the *White Bird*

Courtesy of NAHA

NATIONAL AVIATION HERITAGE AREA

HIGH-FLYING
HISTORY

In Dayton, Ohio, the legacy of America’s first aviation pioneers continues to soar thanks to Wright “B” Flyer, Inc. and the National Aviation Heritage Area (NAHA). Wright “B” Flyer is a volunteer-run organization that keeps the Wright brothers’ legacy alive and brings the story of early flight out of the museum and into the sky.

At the heart of this project is the *White Bird*, a full-scale, airworthy look-alike of the Wright brothers’ 1910 Model B. Wright “B” Flyer provides visitors with a memorable sight: a Wright-era aircraft taking off.

In 2024, Wright “B” Flyer received a NAHA grant to buy a shipping container and customize it for the safe transport of the aircraft. Using the container, the *White Bird* traveled to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to take part in EAA AirVenture - the world’s largest general aviation airshow. At Oshkosh,

hundreds of thousands of visitors saw the *White Bird* and learned about the Wright brothers’ role in the birth of aviation.

During an October 2024 flight demonstration at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the *White Bird* experienced an engine failure, leading to an emergency landing. Although no injuries occurred, the aircraft sustained extensive damage. With another NAHA grant, the Wright “B” Flyer volunteers began an ambitious restoration project to rebuild the plane.

Thanks to NAHA’s ongoing partnership, the *White Bird* takes to the sky again, connecting audiences across the country with the story of two American brothers whose innovation and perseverance helped shape the modern era of air and space travel.



The Mifflin Farm,
Wrightsville, PA

Courtesy of SNHA

SUSQUEHANNA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Trail to Freedom Across the Susquehanna

At the core of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area (Susquehanna NHA) is the Susquehanna River. Long a natural barrier to westward expansion, the river eventually became a key marker in America’s long trail to freedom. In the 1730s, John Wright, Sr., overcame this obstacle by establishing a ferry across a mile-and-a-quarter-wide stretch. Wright’s ferry carried many German (Pennsylvania Dutch) and Scotch-Irish settlers fleeing religious persecution. His crossing became a vital link on the Great Wagon Road, the route that helped spread a new American identity from eastern Pennsylvania to the Appalachian backcountry and beyond.

Between 1780 and 1865, thousands of freedom seekers escaping the bonds of slavery crossed the river near Wright’s Ferry in the direction opposite the earlier settlers. Crossing to the east bank of the Susquehanna River was a major step on their journey to freedom. The Susquehanna NHA is highlighting the stories of these brave men and women who paved a path to freedom through the Heritage Area.

In 2023, Susquehanna NHA acquired the historic Mifflin Home & Farm, saving it from demolition. Once the residence of Quakers Jonathan Mifflin and his wife Susanna (John Wright’s granddaughter), many east-bound freedom seekers found safety and shelter within its sturdy walls, situated near the Susquehanna River. The Susquehanna NHA will develop the property into the Susquehanna Discovery Center & Heritage Park, a premier visitor destination highlighting the nationally significant stories of the two-county National Heritage Area. Naturally, this will also honor the brave trailblazers who risked everything in pursuit of freedom.

Courtesy of OECNHA



Annual Towpath Marathon

OHIO & ERIE CANALWAY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Lasting Legacy of the Ohio & Erie Canal

The Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area commemorates the canal era in Ohio—an often unappreciated yet significant period in American history. From its inception in 1832 to the Great Flood of 1913, the Ohio & Erie Canal influenced Ohio’s economy and social development, fostering communities, connections, and businesses along its route.

The Ohio & Erie Canal opened Ohio to the world and created new economic opportunities. Its construction provided jobs and later spurred growth along the waterway. Stores thrived as new goods were transported easily via the canal. In homes, cast iron stoves, pots, and pans became commonplace, all delivered smoothly by canal boat. Diets shifted from pork, cornmeal, and wild game to wheat bread, beef, and mutton arriving on the canal. News traveled faster than ever from New York to Cleveland, Akron, and across Ohio. By 1850, the canal had doubled Ohio’s population.

Today, the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area preserves and shares this rich heritage through the activation of the more than 90-mile Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, including the annual Towpath Marathon with 2,000 runners; the Huntington Towpath Century Ride, an annual 101-mile bicycle ride with 100 cyclists; and other free community walks and events that bring people to the historic route and highlight its history. Each year, over 2.5 million Americans enjoy the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail that runs through the Heritage Area, reminding them of the canal’s central place in the past and present of Northeast Ohio.



Restored 1909 Delaware & Hudson Railroad Bridge
along the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail

Courtesy of LHVNHA

LACKAWANNA HERITAGE VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The Reinvention of the Lackawanna Valley

In Scranton, Pennsylvania—the birthplace of America’s first electric streetcar—the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Area (NHA) celebrates a legacy of movement and innovation that continues to shape the communities along its river. Long before coal and rail transformed the region, the Lenape, Munsee, and Susquehannock peoples followed footpaths along the Lackawanna River. Centuries later, those paths guided the New York, Ontario & Western Railway, linking the valley’s coal fields to distant markets.

Today, the 70-mile Lackawanna River Heritage Trail follows that same historic corridor. Where locomotives once roared (and still do at the Steamtown National Historic Site), families now walk, run, and ride beside a river that tells the story of renewal.

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley NHA led the effort to reclaim the former rail line, secure funding, and restore

historic bridges, including Carbondale’s 1909 Delaware & Hudson truss bridge. Working with local partners and volunteers, it reopened the corridor as a safe, inviting public space and continues to support community projects through its Partnership Grant Program.

In collaboration with the Steamtown National Historic Site, the Heritage Express: 4th Grade Edition invites thousands of students aboard steam-powered excursions that bring the region’s history to life. Each holiday season, the Santa Train continues that spirit, uniting communities from Scranton to Carbondale in a joyful celebration of Christmas in a Small Town.

Together, these efforts weave a living heritage—where the sound of a whistle still echoes across the valley, reminding us that the journey of discovery is never truly finished.

Trailblazers in Economic Development

National Heritage Areas are making an impact in their communities – and nationwide.

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) serve as catalysts for economic growth in their communities and regions. The NHAs’ collaborative approach brings together community stakeholders, making sure that successful economic development and other initiatives are driven locally. Thanks to the efforts of staff and volunteers, NHAs turn a modest federal investment into a significant community impact.

Data presented is from reports submitted by 58 of the 62 NHAs for 2024 (the most recent year for which data is available). In 2025, NHAs continued to serve communities and support their partners with a renewed collective purpose.

ENGAGED
5,266 PARTNERS
IN HERITAGE AREA ACTIVITIES.



In 2024, National Heritages Areas

**LEVERAGED
\$60 MILLION**

in cash & in-kind support to carry out heritage projects and programs,

**CREATING
MORE THAN A
2:1 IMPACT**



of the \$28.1 million
in federal Heritage
Partnership
Program funding

NHAs
BENEFITED FROM
**18,525
VOLUNTEERS**

CONTRIBUTING
MORE THAN
**178,740
HOURS**
FOR HERITAGE
AREA PROJECTS

EQUATING TO
MORE THAN
**\$5.7M
IN VALUE!**

Preserving Our Heritage

Across the country, National Heritage Areas and their partners are reviving historic downtowns, preserving large landscapes and cultural practices, and sharing our nation’s history



**COLLECTIONS
PROJECTS**

WERE UNDERTAKEN
including the
conservation of artifacts
and creation
of oral histories



**291
HISTORIC SITES &
9,654
ACRES OF CULTURAL
LANDSCAPES**

were preserved &
maintained, including
battlefields



91 HISTORIC PRESERVATION GRANTS AWARDED = \$1.8M

Educating Current & Future Leaders

Through a variety of educational programs, National Heritage Areas and their partners are providing meaningful and inspirational connections to our nation’s heritage via educators and the (outdoor) classroom.

338
grants to support
educational
programs
awarded totaling
\$2.9M



197
educational
program
offerings
developed



CAPACITY-
BUILDING
ASSISTANCE
PROVIDED TO
1,228
ORGANIZATIONS

Recreation & Conservation



Through recreational projects such as access to land and water trails, National Heritage Areas are improving connectivity and accessibility, creating more vibrant and healthy communities.



4,012 MILES
of new trails developed
675 MILES
of trails maintained

**92 RECREATION
PROJECTS
UNDERTAKEN**

**58 RECREATION
GRANTS AWARDED
TOTALING \$936,615**

Through collaborative conservation activities, National Heritage Area entities and their partners are improving air and water quality and supporting healthy ecosystems.

**11,200 ACRES
OF LAND
RESTORED
& MAINTAINED**



VIA INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL,
REPLANTING, AND TOXIC SITE CLEAN-UPS.

**34 CONSERVATION GRANTS
AWARDED TOTALING \$691,036**



CONNECTING THE
Heart & Soul
OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES



**There are 62 National Heritage Areas
across 35 states and one territory.**

Find out more about Heritage Areas near you at NationalHeritageAreas.us

ANHA

Alliance of National Heritage Areas

To join the Congressional caucus on National Heritage Areas, please contact:

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