

**Calumet National Heritage Area Management Plan  
The Arts Focus Area Planning Committee**

**Background and Strategic Questions**

**I. Overall goals of the National Heritage Area (NHA)**

According to the National Park Service, “National Heritage Areas are places where historic, cultural, and natural resources combine to form cohesive, nationally important landscapes. Unlike national parks, National Heritage Areas are large lived-in landscapes.”

Few places are as distinctive and nationally significant as the Calumet region. Happily, the momentum to create a Calumet National Heritage Area (CNHA) has been building: the extensive *CNHA Feasibility Study* has successfully made the case to Park Service staff that the region is nationally significant and is operationally feasible. While the formal process to create an NHA requires Congressional action, there is great energy in the region to behave like a functioning NHA.

An ever-widening group of regional experts and stakeholders have joined in with a core set of partners to contribute time and talent to the project’s next phase: the creation of a Management Plan that specifies priorities, projects, and leaders for the next five years. The Calumet Heritage Partnership has spearheaded the overall NHA process and now works in close coordination with the Calumet Collaborative. Staff from the Field Museum are guiding the Management Plan process and prepared this paper to prepare *you* for participation in the Focus Area Planning Committee on the Arts in the Calumet region. Your involvement as part of the Calumet NHA Management Planning process is a major contribution to the NHA’s success, and will have a real impact on the shape and direction of the effort for the next five years.

Every Heritage Area has overarching themes, which are supported by identifiable resources on the ground. The themes are the key story lines that frame an experience of the area for visitors and residents alike. The themes for the Calumet Heritage Area are:

- Nature Reworked: The Calumet’s Diverse Landscape (NR)
- Innovation and Change for Industries and Workers (II)
- Crucible of Working Class and Ethnic Cultures (CC)

Chapter 2 of the *Feasibility Study* succinctly describes these themes as part of the NHA’s national significance. (The full *Feasibility Study* is available online at <http://www.calumetheritage.org/cnhastudy.html>)

The *Feasibility Study* also identifies how multiple stakeholders and partners have stated regional goals and priorities over two decades for the region across seven focus areas – including The Arts, Recreation, Environment and Stewardship, Cultural Heritage/Historic Preservation, Economy, Wayfinding and Branding, and Education. Those goals can now be coordinated with the NHA effort and its themes as

part of a coordinated regional strategy. For The Arts, the *Feasibility Study* highlights a few potential priority recreation projects, potential approaches, and potential partners, as indicated in this table:

The region’s landscape and heritage are significant sources of artistic inspiration, especially with attention-grabbing proximity of nature and industry. There is a thriving arts community in the Calumet region but it is not well recognized. Priorities are:		
Goals/Priorities & Connection to Themes	Potential Approaches	Potential Partners
Promote and support:  the existing folk and fine arts heritage of the region (NR, II, CC)  artists and arts organization (II, CC)	Make the variety and quality of the arts that exists at the regional scale visible across the many social and political boundaries that artists cite as barriers to reaching wider audiences.  Increase residents’ and visitors’ comfort crossing boundaries by stressing the shared Calumet regional identity.  Create arts events that focus on regional heritage themes of broad appeal.	CHP, SSA
Promote the role of the arts in regional-scale place-making (NR, II, CC)	Use art to transform heritage spaces in ways that build community, enhance civic engagement, and are compelling to visitors. This can be particularly important in places where original structures and landscapes have been erased/badly degraded and new constructions that evoke a blend of the old and new meanings are needed.	CHP, CC, TFM

**ABBREVIATIONS:** CC= Calumet Collaborative; CHP = Calumet Heritage Partnership; SSA = South Shore Arts; TFM = The Field Museum

## II. Purpose of The Arts Focus Area Planning Committee and Charge

The task of the Management Plan is to set the course for a functioning Heritage Area by turning the potential indicated in the *Feasibility Study* into a defined set of prioritized projects with clearly defined goals, activities, and project leaders for the next five years. Assuming that the NHA has an adequate core of staff and volunteers to undertake projects, the Management Plan should provide guidance on which projects the NHA should *lead*, on which projects it should *collaborate*, and of which projects it should be aware and *support*.

It is not the intent of the Heritage Area effort for it to become all things to all people, nor for this process to re-invent the wheel and replicate the many excellent and compelling planning projects already undertaken. But it is important to be aware of projects that could benefit from affiliation with

the Heritage Area, or that might even require Heritage Area involvement to leverage resources to ensure project completion. As a result, as The Arts Focus Area Planning Committee considers an NHA-relevant program in The Arts, it needs to be broadly aware of what is happening in the region. This paper will provide some guidance on that question in the next section.

In thinking through what NHAs can do and what the current state of NHA-relevant programming in the region is, the group should try to answer some key questions:

- a. What are potential projects that could be undertaken within the next 5 years that would most tie in to the NHA?
- b. How would an NHA add value to this work?
- c. If the NHA did not exist, would this project even go forward?
- d. Of those projects, who should be the project lead or point person?
- e. What resources are needed to complete this work?

### **III. National Heritage Areas and The Arts**

In a region so clearly identified with heavy industry, to discover that a vigorous art practice is alive and well in the Calumet region can be a little disarming to the outside world. But that is the case. A “Working List of Arts Organizations and Institutions” developed for and distributed at the 2014 Calumet Heritage Conference focused on Arts and the Heritage Area found 66 arts venues, collectives, companies, and centers; college/university arts programs and facilities; and supporting organizations. Researchers who put the list together found that “the arts practice in the Calumet region is simultaneously broadly dispersed throughout the region and concentrated in vibrant pockets, especially in areas where the arts are supported by local government or institutions of higher learning, 2) artists have their creative networks but often feel separated from other pockets of artistic activity by social and political boundaries, and 3) youth art and repurposed or found art are important categories of practice.”

The arts tradition in the Calumet region has deep roots, and frequently takes its cues from the compelling landscape of nature, industry, and the community’s engagement with it. Poets, artists, musicians, and dramatists played a key role in the effort to create a Dunes National Park a century ago. Labor and environmental struggles frequently figure in works of art. The mingling of cultures in the region brings constant new life and forms of artistic expression to the scene. And it is not just the “scene”, but the sounds of the region as well that have blended into its rich musical tradition.

The close identification of the arts with a particular place is a key feature in the relatively recent emergence of the “placemaking” movement. As a geographer once put it, “A region is a medal cast in the likeness of its people.” NHAs are particularly well-suited to capture this regional personality, to draw it to the attention of residents and visitors, to enrich their lives, pose questions, and draw out response. The movement is gathering steam in the Calumet region, so much so that statements like this one by Roman Villarreal, artist and former steelworker, no longer seem far-fetched: “art is the new steel.”

The task of this group is to focus on particular, focused ways, in which the Arts add value to the heritage area, and the existence of a functioning heritage area opens news possibilities for programming in The Arts. As noted on the table from the Feasibility Study above, the primary focus is on the links to placemaking.

That said, examples from other NHAs provide serious food for thought about what could be accomplished in this region and convey the sense that NHAs can fulfill a variety of roles depending on the circumstances. For example:

- The Carrie Furnace in Pittsburgh's Rivers of Steel NHA is a restored blast furnace that is much more than a crucial remnant of the steel industry. Along with the nearby Pump House, it also serves as a site of public art, concert venue, and trailhead for the Great Allegheny Passage bicycle trail from Pittsburgh to Washington. The blast furnace is home to the amazing "Carrie Deerhead" sculpture, crafted out of materials found on site by a team of artists. Large concrete ore walls are covered in graffiti, but the graffiti on the walls has been curated by the NHA. A staff person of the NHA now teaches courses in regional graffiti art styles. The NHA has also partnered with the Westmoreland Museum of American Art for a large-scale exhibition of natural landscape paintings and artifacts, a book, and two films on the art of the Big Steel era entitled "Born of Fire: The Valley of Work" Pieces from this museum have been on exhibit in Germany, allowing for the heritage of the Rivers of Steel area to be shown on an international platform. In this instance, the NHA owns and operates structure, has staff, opens its site to music and arts festivals, and conducts programming.
- An entire "school" of art has its name embedded and its work celebrated in the Hudson River Valley NHA. At the annual Hudson River Valley Ramble event series, the self-guided Newburgh Open Studios Tour allowed 2,000 visitors to visit galleries, studios, and homes, many of which are not frequently open to the public. The NHA coordinates and publicizes events like this, and runs a region-wide events calendar.
- The Blue Ridge NHA has provided seed monies to develop recreation and heritage assets in Hayesville, NC, centered on the Cherokee experience in the mountains. The NHA worked closely with the Clay County Historical and Arts Center to place a Music Heritage sculpture in front of the local playhouse, which has made the town an important stop on the Blue Ridge Music Trails. In this instance, the NHA played the role of funding and programming partner.
- In the "Greenagers" program in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, young people work on projects in environmental conservation, sustainable farming, and natural resource management. The program mixes paid stewardship work, internships, apprenticeships, and school-based field trips. By forging a partnership with the Upper Housatonic Valley NHA, cultural sites, including the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and the Norman Rockwell Museum, are now added to the mix in a way that both develops the range of the teens' capacities, but also help those sites to engage younger audiences.
- The office of the Wheeling NHA are in a restored industrial building called The Artisan Center. This building also contains an artisan gift shop supplied by regional arts and craft products, a

museum exhibit documenting many of the past industries of the area, a restaurant, which is also used for public events and wedding receptions.

These examples highlight the flexibility inherent in the NHA concept. In most of the projects mentioned, the NHA was a critical – if not *the* critical – component of the project’s success. Its role varied depending on the situation, but in all situations, linking the recreation project to the themes and goals of the NHA added significant value, enhancing experiences for visitors and residents alike.

#### **IV. Environmental Scan of Arts and Heritage Projects in the Calumet Region**

Great projects are underway in the Calumet region, and now the question is, “how, exactly, can the NHA add value to this work?” This process is not intended to duplicate existing planning processes or the work of existing organizations (such as South Shore Arts or local arts councils), although it has made a strong effort to account for them. Field Museum staff studied significant regional plans for what they say concerning goals and priorities in the area of The Arts. (Links to these plans may be found in the Appendix.)

The starting point for this scan were the key areas identified in the Feasibility Study, reported on the Table above. What follows is an elaboration of those goals from the perspective of existing plans. This is meant to provide some background, to start a conversation, but not to be an exhaustive list.

##### **a. Promote and support the existing folk and fine arts heritage of the region; promote and support artists and arts organizations**

Existing plans point to the importance of arts in the region. 2012 *Quality of Life Indicators Report* notes that “Arts and culture, along with charitable giving, enrich the lives of Northwest Indiana residents and visitors.” (p6) The overall feel of the environmental scan is that this activity, while vigorous in places, is still emergent as a coordinated activity at the regional scale. There could be real opportunities for an NHA to provide at least communications, some coordination around events, and some heritage-specific programming.

Some NHA-relevant program, plans and priorities to consider include:

- *Artist financial support.* Proximity to key regional heritage sites and natural areas could be leveraged to support local nearby artists. For example, the Indiana Dunes National Park has an Artist-in-Residence program supported by the Chesterton Art Center.
- *Artspace.* Live/work space for artists has been constructed or is underway in Michigan City and Pullman in partnership with “Artspace”. Are there other candidate locations in the region?
- *Exhibit space in “heritage” locations.* Places that attract recreational or heritage tourists can also be venues for art-related exhibits and classes. For example, the grist mill at Deep River County Park houses exhibits and hosts monthly photography classes. The Cook County Forest Preserves

*Master Plan* calls for an expansion of “arts and cultural activities and events.” (p. 6) The district has moved forward with an “Art Outside” program, targeted at “arts groups who are interested in the District’s conservation and recreational goals and outdoor spaces; and who feel that their art work – performed or exhibited, taught, or observed would further those goals and/or augment the District’s outdoor environments.” (Pg. 46)

- *Arts districts.* The *Marquette Plan* calls for the creation of arts and culture districts, which can be designated by the Indiana Arts Commission. “Benefits can include increased tourism marketing, economic activity, opportunities for collaboration with the Indiana Artisan Program, and promotional highway signage.” The plan points to several districts in the making, such as Whiting, Gary-Midtown, Gary-Miller, and Michigan City. The *Positioning Pullman* document points out a number of existing and potential roles for the arts community in the Pullman neighborhood, as it develops a strong identity as an arts district.
- *Foster integration of the arts across sectors.* The *Indicators Report* goes on to say, “As with many aspects of life in Northwest Indiana, the arts tend to be standalone and would benefit from deeper integration with economic development, community development and public education efforts.” As a step in this direction, the Northwest Indiana Forum identifies the performing arts as one of Northwest Indiana’s target industry clusters (p8).

#### **b. Promote the role of the arts in regional-scale placemaking**

As discussed above, there is new energy and new investments in placemaking projects, from the Cal-Sag Trail and placemaking activities in Blue Island, to the neighborhoods in and around the Pullman National Monument, to work of the Chicago Park District to restore and develop its Calumet regional properties, to the work along the Indiana Lakefront, and southward toward the Kankakee River. The NWI Forum’s *Strategy for Economic Transformation* highlights a number of the reasons why such an effort is critical for the region.

“Enhancing quality-of-place amenities, such as arts, culture, entertainment, transit, agricultural lands, parks and recreation, and green space, is a growing economic development priority across the nation....There is growing evidence linking placemaking to successful economic development....Quality of place is a top consideration for people in choosing where they prefer to live and how communities should approach economic development. For example, two-thirds of all respondents and 74 percent of Millennials responded that investing in schools, transportation choices, and walkable areas is a better way to grow the economy than traditional approaches of recruiting companies... Cities such as Valparaiso, Whiting, Hobart, and Michigan City are making substantial investments in their downtown amenities.”

In a significant way, this consideration is part of the work of all of the Focus Area Planning Committees, and it does not need all to fall into the bailiwick of The Arts Focus Area Planning Committee to detail. But it is important to consider ways that The Arts conversation specifically feeds in. The following provides a few examples:

- *Expand heritage-oriented events.* FairsandFestivals.net, an online festival resource, points to several trends: people are increasingly willing to spend at craft shows, art fairs and festivals; holidays are especially important times for special events; and a variety of offerings are trending upward, such as music, cultural arts, scrapbooking, jewelry, and digital arts. The Cook County Forest Preserves conducts several heritage-themed events, such as an Art Fair at Little Red Schoolhouse and Settler's Day at Sand Ridge Nature Center.
- *Art in the Park.* The use of public art in parks is specifically singled out for expansion to all parks in the *Lake County Parks and Recreation Master Plan*. The Chicago Park District has long experience with public art projects, including the new Steelworker's Park.
- *Public art along trails.* NIRPC's *Greenways and Blueways Plan* is highly cognizant of the potential to place public art along the region's rapidly expanding trail network and calls out potential stakeholders in the effort. It seeks to "encourage the use of public art along trail corridors. Contact local high schools or colleges to promote art. Sponsor art projects. South Shore Arts to work with schools and local entities on projects. Developers: Collaborate with local artists with trails in developments. Corporate property owners: Collaborate with local artists with trails on property and sponsor. Govt: Promote national best practices and work with local entities on implementation. Schools: Art students to work with local entities on projects – schools to sponsor." The plan notes that "most effective are projects that are implemented where graffiti has been an issue." (Pg. 71) The Field Museum's experience in working with community organizations and community artists to create "Gathering Spaces" in Chicago's Burnham Wildlife Corridor may be especially helpful.
- *Rekindle the mural movement.* Murals can be an excellent way to tell a heritage story in unexpected places. The *Positioning Pullman* document provides an example: "Painting aspects of the Pullman stories on the viaducts located along the western edge of the national monument will enhance what is now an eyesore in the historic neighborhood. Pullman Art Space artists can partner with Chicago outdoor art groups to complete." (p42)
- *Art and Placemaking Summit.* The 2012 Quality of Life Indicators report sounded the need to update the community assessment survey and the regional cultural plan of South Shore Arts. With a focus on the retention of millennials by One Region, and a Placemaking initiative baked into the NWI Forum's "Ignite" process, could the NHA play a role in coordinating a Placemaking Summit? It would provide a strong moment to share best practices, new projects, and possibilities for regional coordination.

It should be noted that other ideas related to tourism, such as market research and promotion, could be referred to the Tourism Focus Area Planning Committee for further workshopping.

## V. Next steps

As the Focus Area Planning Committee gathers to consider some of these ideas and their applicability to the NHA, please consider the following questions.

- Does the preceding discussion capture the full range of possible NHA-relevant work in the area of Recreation? If not, what's missing?
- What specific project ideas could be undertaken in the next five years?
- Of these project ideas, which have the highest priority to be completed?
- For each project area, please consider needed roles, resources, and suggested pathways for completion. Who should lead the work? What is the role for the NHA and its constituent organizations? What is needed to complete the work (in terms of policies, procedures, and financial resources.)
- Is there anything surfaced that should be referred to other Focus Area Planning Committees for further discussion?

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