

**Calumet National Heritage Area Management Plan
Recreation 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 NHA 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 Group. 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 Recreation, Environment and Stewardship, Cultural Heritage/Historic Preservation, The Arts, 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 Recreation, the *Feasibility Study* highlights a few potential priority recreation projects, potential approaches, and potential partners, as indicated in this table:

The Calumet region historically has contained significant places to relax and play. Priorities across the state line, and their connections to the regional themes noted above, are:		
Goals/Priorities & Connection to Themes	Potential Approaches	Potential Partners
Continue to develop the region’s system of trails and improve the connections between them (NR, II, CC)	Build partnerships among ecological conservation and management organizations and community groups who can collaboratively identify barriers and incentives to access. ¹ Raise awareness of regional history and identity, and use this broader regional self-concept and the opportunities of NHA status to leverage participation by formerly reluctant municipalities.	CLCP, CSI, NIRPC, SSMMA
Improve existing and develop new recreational sites (NR, CC)	See above. Convene broad input on recreational priorities and opportunities, particularly those that might bring people together across lines of social division.	CHP, CC, NIRPC, CMAP
Increase access to the Lake Michigan shoreline (NR, II, CC)	See above, but in this case with attention to the contentious nature of shoreline control and access.	Coastal
Promote tourism and ecotourism (NR, II, CC)	Convene existing tourism agencies to explore complementary and collaborative ways to promote the NHA and leverage the NHA designation to promote the areas they are charged with promoting.	CHP, CC

¹Also identified as a potential approach for the Environment and Stewardship goal to “provide improved access to existing natural areas.”

ABBREVIATIONS: CC= Calumet Collaborative; CHP = Calumet Heritage Partnership; CLCP = Calumet Land Conservation Partnership; CMAP = Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Coastal = Illinois/Indiana Coastal Zone Management Program; CSI = Calumet Stewardship Initiative; NIRPC = Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission; SSMMA = South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association

II. Purpose of the Recreation 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 Recreation Focus Area Planning Committee considers an NHA-relevant Recreation program, 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. Recreation and National Heritage Areas

The successful effort to create an Indiana Dunes National Park is the latest in a series of signs that the heritage of the Chicago region is marked by pioneering approaches to recreation and conservation in an urban setting. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (now the Park) was the first National Lakeshore when it was created in 1966 and the effort to create a National Park in this geography goes back to the beginnings of the National Park Service in 1916. The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Corridor was the nation's first when it was designated in 1984. The Illinois Prairie Path, launched in 1965 and inspired and led by May Theilgard Watts (who also had strong connections to the Dunes), was the country's first significant rails-to-trails conversion. The Cook County Forest Preserve system was a pioneering effort to create recreational and conservation spaces at the metropolitan scale, and it was inspired by the nation's first great regional plan, the Burnham Plan (1909).

Other efforts, of national significance, continue to this day. The new Kankakee National Water Trail bounds the geography of the NHA to the south and is paralleled by the Lake Michigan Water Trail to the North. Woven throughout the region is an incredibly compelling and growing network of hiking and biking trails. The Major Taylor Trail in Chicago commemorates a pioneering African American cyclist. The Big Marsh Bike Park presents biking opportunities next to a newly restored marsh (home to bald eagles), and adjacent to a landfill and an abandoned industrial facility.

The recreational possibilities of the region seem endless, and it is worth stating, insofar as they attract visitors to the region, they also pay. Another focus group will look further at the impacts of ecotourism, but it is worth knowing that the Indiana Dunes National Park is the number 1 tourist destination in the State of Indiana and that the new Pullman National Monument anticipates an increase of visitorship from 30,000 to 300,000 once its new Visitors Center is complete.

The task of this group is to focus on recreational programming. In the heritage area context, "recreation" tends to mean activities that are either classified as "outdoor recreation" (walking, biking,

fishing, hunting, birding, swimming, etc.) or “historic” tourism (historic sites, museums, etc.). There are many other things that people do with their leisure time that for the most part are outside the scope of this group. As noted on the table from the *Feasibility Study* above, the primary focus is on outdoor recreation.

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. In this instance, the NHA owns and operates the structures, and participates in the broader trail partnership.
- The Ohio and Erie Canalway NHA is a 120 long passage from downtown Cleveland to south of Canton that features not only a towpath hiking/biking trail, but a parallel National Scenic Byway auto route and a tourist railroad that offers frequent enough weekend service to be of practical use to recreational cyclists and hikers. In this case, the NHA coordinates the Canalway, and provides a coordinated public-facing website that puts the complicated organizational arrangements in the background.
- In 2013, the Delaware and Lehigh NHA added 13 miles to the Delaware and Lehigh Trail, constructed three trailheads, and completed an assessment of a larger Lehigh Valley Trail Network. The success of the D&L Trail prompted the Landmark Towns Project, which aims to bring people from the trail to nearby downtown areas. Here, the NHA actually led the trail construction project.
- The Baltimore NHA has put more than a thousand schoolchildren on to Chesapeake Bay through its “Kids in Kayaks” program, operating with the support of a number of public and non-profit partnering entities. Here, the NHA convened the partners and served as the “glue” of the project.
- The National Coal Heritage Area NHA established 26 informational kiosks along the route of Paint Creek to tell the story of the creek’s central place in the lives of its residents, its environmental degradation over time, and its recovery. The NHA also developed an Auto Tour, a CD, and an app, and foregrounds the voices of local residents in telling the story. In this case, the NHA played a primary interpretive role.

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 Recreation 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, 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 Recreation. (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.

a. Continue to develop the region's trails and improve the connections between them

A remarkable set of improvements to the regional trail network has been unfolding within the framework of NIRPC's *Greenways and Blueways Plan* and CMAP's 2050 planning process. Other trail planning organizations such as Openlands, Active Transportation Alliance, and Northwest Indiana Paddling Alliance provide key insights, staff support, and volunteer energy. County level agencies, including Forest Preserves of Cook County and Lake County Parks and Recreation, have recently conducted significant planning processes. Some new trails like the Cal-Sag Trail specifically tie to regional heritage themes, but for the most part the trail planning work is focused on completing key links in the system rather than heritage interpretation. Some preliminary themes for the Focus Group to consider where an NHA would add value do emerge, however. They include:

- *Interstate cooperation.* The *Greenway and Blueways Plan* makes specific reference for the need to “review bi-state trail planning initiatives including the development of the tristate Marquette Greenway” with partner agencies like CMAP and the Southwestern Michigan Metropolitan Planning Commission. The Plan also suggests consulting with groups like ATA to garner support. (p. 147) Such cooperation could be a coordinating role for the NHA, which could also ensure that interpretive priorities remain central to the trail planning.
- *Specific trail ideas.* The Marquette Greenway is an example of a specific trail idea with long pedigree (extending back to the first Marquette Plan of 2005) that is meant not only to forge strong transportation connections, but by virtue of the near lakeshore routing through industrial and dunes geographies, to carry strong interpretive possibilities as well. Other trail ideas with strong interpretive possibilities surfaced in visioning sessions, such as a “historic trail between Hyde Park and the Dunes [which] would pass through many sites that have tales to tell in the history of science, ecology and geology, the Great Migration, railroads, industry and labor.” (NPCA Dunes Report, p. 35) A similar conceptual idea surfaced at the 2015 Calumet Summit, in the immediate wake of the declaration of the Pullman National Monument, to create a “Pullman-Porter” trail from Pullman to the Indiana Dunes National Park near Porter. In these ideas, the NHA could serve as a primary framing device for the transportation feature.
- *Links to the local scale.* A special feature of the NHA is the way that local stories and places can be gathered with other local stories to tell a story of national significance at the regional scale. As individual municipalities come “on line” with active transportation plans and projects, strong opportunities exist to link local sites of heritage interest into the regional network.
- *Best practices:* Trails plans typically do not hold regional heritage as top of mind, but individual features overlap with other NHA goals, such as broader questions of access, wayfinding and signage, and conservation functionality.

b. Improve existing and develop new recreational sites

The NHA effort began in 1999 with a National Park Service Resource Study to determine whether a Calumet Ecological Park would be feasible. At the time, NPS accounted for the available resources and determined that among the management alternatives, there was not enough in the region to create a National Recreation Area. One wonders if that same conclusion would be reached today. It is worth considering how many new sites of recreation – each of them utterly distinctive and part of the case made for the national significance of the NHA -- have appeared in the region in the past 20 years: a new National Monument and a newly named National Park; three excellent golf courses (Lost Marsh, Harborside, and Centennial) now sit atop landfill; the Big Marsh Bike Park has opened on land once ticketed to be a landfill; Steelworkers Park in Chicago and the Hammond Lakefront Park, both excellent birding locations, have appeared on lakefill on former industrial sites; the Portage Riverwalk and Lakefront was still being cleaned up two decades ago; and ecological restoration have enhanced the ecological value of the region; and the waters, while not clean enough to swim in, allow at least some paddling activities to take off.

What is next? The *Feasibility Study* encourages thinking on this question, although trails plans are largely silent, other than to suggest an enhanced Visitors Center at the Dunes or *Greenway Centers* at key trailhead locations. It is worth considering other possible “gateway” locations as part of an emerging network of regional sites that may also be conceived as anchor points in the Heritage area.

The plan review also surfaces new concepts in recreational thinking that certainly dovetails with some of the concerns of the NHA. These include:

- *Cultural relevance.* New concepts in recreational trail planning include making the efforts more culturally relevant. Many “creative placemaking” ideas fall within this realm
- *Sensitivity to archeological sites.*
- *Convergence of ecological ideas with recreational planning.* The *Blueways and Greenways Plan* specifically links trail planning to “conservation corridors”, which are a key feature in “green infrastructure” planning schemes to link core natural areas with each other. Trails should model best landscaping practices, including native plantings and invasives management, and also offer golden opportunities to interpret these practices to the public. It is worth noting that the Calumet Heritage Partnership has made a commitment to join an NPS-led effort to link NHAs to pollinator recovery efforts.
- *Outreach to new audiences.* Potential new audiences include children (via “nature play” opportunities”), those with accessibility constraints, and links to healthcare providers.
- *New opportunities for interpretation.* Because of the vigor of ecological restoration activity, for example, on the west side of Gary, it may be possible to think of new environmental education opportunities in existing parks or newly restored natural areas.

c. Increase access to the Lake Michigan shoreline

For much of the region, wonderful guidance on access to the Lake Michigan shore is provided by the Marquette Plan, which sets an ambitious goal of making 75% of the shore accessible to the public. As that accessibility is enhanced, the plan lays the groundwork for the Marquette Greenway, “51 miles of continuous trail along the shoreline that is tied to other trail systems developing in the region, various waterway and greenway systems, with diverse surface materials, trailheads, lookout points, interpretive areas, and activity nodes.” Enhancements are also underway at Calumet Park and Steelworkers Park in Chicago.

While South Shore railroad improvements are a factor in improving access to the lake shore, plans also call out the need to provide north-south transit access, and the need for better boat launches, both along the lake and on tributary streams (such as at Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve and other locations along the Calumet River, and at the Portage Marina).

Exemplary pathways that provide a link to regional heritage have been created at Hammond and Whiting, and at Portage.

Other local efforts include those in Gary, where the Gary Green Link plan of a dozen years ago still provides a fund of excellent ideas that may be relevant to the NHA effort: “One of the goals of this Master Plan is to develop a natural resources greenway and recreation corridor, the Gary Green Link, which will ring the City of Gary, connecting the Grand Calumet River, the Little Calumet River, and the Lake Michigan shoreline.”

d. Promote tourism and ecotourism

The re-naming of the Indiana Dunes National Park (the state’s number one tourist destination) comes at an excellent time for the developing NHA effort. The 2012 *Quality of Life* report looks for a “leadership role for the National Lakeshore in integrating the park more deeply into economic and community development arenas. This can serve as a starting place for a serious, thoughtful effort to make the Dunes central to the identity and image of Northwest Indiana.” Issues of “identity and image” are the sweet spots for NHAs.

One way to develop this connection between regional identity and the magnetic attraction of the dunes is to enhance the presence of the NHA at the Visitors Center. If the Center develops as a regional “gateway”, what better place to frame the regional story? Efforts already underway to develop a Native American Heritage Trail on site at the Visitors Center invite further exploration of the region’s heritage and also indicates a potentially replicable model for trail development rooted in cultural history and knowledge. The NHA has a potentially critical role to play in developing interpretive materials, tours, fostering further conversation about creating “culture-nature” trails, and perhaps leading an effort to create a regional-scale “nature-industry” interpretive trail (such as the one that anchors the visitor experience in the Ruhr area of Germany.)

Other tourism gateways could play a similar role. Such places include the Indiana Welcome Center in Hammond, Lake Etta, the casinos, downtown Whiting, and Pullman National Monument.

It will be important to determine what the potential interpretive role will be at the “Greenway Centers” proposed in the *Greenways and Blueways* plan, which could “increase public access to conservation lands and provide ecotourism magnets.” (p. 53) A specific task that could benefit from NHA involvement on the way to developing the “eco-tourism infrastructure” at the centers is to “identify and map points of interest for recreational users and tourists...” (p. 160)

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?