

**Calumet National Heritage Area Management Plan  
Environment and Stewardship 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 Committee. 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 Environment and Stewardship, Cultural Heritage/Historic Preservation, The Arts, Economy, Wayfinding and Branding, Recreation, and Education. Those goals can now be coordinated with the NHA effort and its themes as part of a coordinated regional strategy. For Environment and Stewardship, the *Feasibility Study* highlights a few potential priority environment and stewardship projects, potential approaches, and potential partners, as indicated in this table:

<p>The Calumet region has played an important role in conservation, ecological study, and environmental protection. The area continues to possess a rich conservation ethic, ecologically significant sites, and outstanding services by agencies to protect the environment and public health. Priorities to enhance environmental treasures across the bi-state region are:</p>		
<b>Goals/Priorities &amp; Connection to Themes</b>	<b>Potential Approaches</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Identify, connect, and enhance important sub-geographies such as the Dune & Swale, Moraine Forest, and river corridors (NR)	Convene the member organizations of existing conservation consortia and partnerships that are already working in the region.	CLCP, CSI
Coordinate land management, ecological restoration, land acquisition, and trail development activities in key habitat area (NR, II, CC)	Convenings described above and include key civic stakeholders like block and social clubs, congregations, and service agencies with geographically define constituencies so they can give input on acquisitions, management, and development.	CHP, CSI
Provide improved access to existing natural areas (NR, II, CC)	Build partnerships among ecological conservation and management organizations and community groups who can collaboratively identify barriers and incentives to access.	Coastal
Restore, manage, and promote healthy watershed systems (NR, II, CC)	Convene point source polluters and pollution concerned stakeholders to discuss pollution impacts and remedies.	NWI Urban Waters
Promote the protection of coastal and estuarine areas and waters (NR, II, CC)	Encourage conservation behaviors and improve access.  Use ethnographic data and CBSM approaches to leverage diverse social norms to promote behavioral change.	CSI, TFM
Develop a stewardship model for bi-state Calumet that includes measures of success for both ecosystem restoration and volunteer engagement; connect environmental stewardship to health/well-being activities (NR, II, CC)	Measure will depend on the nature of individual programs	CSI
Reduce the impact of light pollution on the region's environment (NR, II, CC)	Support municipalities that integrate the International Dark-Sky Association's measures into their planning.	CHP

**ABBREVIATIONS:** CHP = Calumet Heritage Partnership; CLCP = Calumet Land Conservation Partnership; CSI = Calumet Stewardship Initiative; NWI Urban Waters; TFM = The Field Museum  
 Note: CSI has now been integrated into CHP as the Calumet Outdoors group.

## II. Purpose of the Environment and Stewardship 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 Environment and Stewardship Focus Area Planning Committee considers an NHA-relevant Environment and Stewardship 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. Environment and Stewardship 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 environment and stewardship in an urban setting. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (now the National Park) was the first National Lakeshore when it was created in 1966 and the push 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 continue to this day, and just a few examples indicate the national significance of the ecological restoration work in a difficult built-up landscape with many operating industries and numerous legacy pollution issues. The cleanup of most of the Grand Calumet River, the only one of 41 Great Lakes Areas of Concern to fail all 14 "beneficial use impairments" in the Great Lakes basin when originally determined twenty years ago, and the restoration of adjacent natural areas along the stream, is likely the most significant in the Great Lakes basin. The Nature Conservancy's restoration of Indian Boundary Prairie in Illinois and numerous fragments of rare ridge and swale habitat of northwest Indiana

are national models. The Shirley Heinze Land Trust has added more than 2,400 acres to its portfolio since its inception in 1981 and the organization received the Land Trust Alliance's National Excellence Award in 2018, only the 18<sup>th</sup> recipient from among 1,000 land trusts in the award's twelve years. Save the Dunes maintains its staunch advocacy for the dunes ecosystem while leading efforts to restore the Dunes ecosystem. In Chicago, the Chicago Park District now owns nearly a thousand acres on lands that once held operating steel mills or other industries or were ticketed for development as sanitary landfills. Great Lakes Audubon has spearheaded the restoration of key sites in both Chicago and in Northwest Indiana for marsh birds. The Cook County Forest Preserve's recent Next Century Conservation Plan sets ambition goals for both acquisition and restoration.

These and other activities are undertaken with the strong awareness that they are embedded in working landscapes and are neighbored by many communities. The Chicago region's national leadership in Volunteer Stewardship certainly extends to the Calumet region. Volunteer stewardship is accompanied by vigorous educational outreach as well.

The task of this group is to focus on environment and stewardship programming. In the heritage area context, "environment" typically means activities that protect or enhance natural areas, rather than activities focused on pollution prevention. "Stewardship" tends to entail activities that draw in the community, especially as volunteers in natural areas. Other focus groups in this process will focus on outdoor recreation or environmental education possibilities.

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. According to the NPS, in 2018 NHAs restored 11,000 acres of land through invasive species removal, replanting, and toxic site clean-up. The means varied. For example:

- In the Last Green Valley NHA in Connecticut, volunteers and staff work to maintain 116 miles of waterway. In 2013, 206 volunteers dedicated 1,237 hours at over 200 locations to monitor water quality. Water cleanup activities involved 1,100 people retrieving 13,500 pounds of trash.
- The Schuylkill River NHA in Pennsylvania manages the Schuylkill Restoration Fund Grant program, a private and publicly funded grant program designed to improve the quality and quantity of water in the watershed. Since its inception in 2006, 23 projects were successfully completed and an additional 17 are in progress. Results include thousands of feet of repaired stream-bank, invasive species removed along riparian buffers, and many best management practices installed in the five county area. The NHA also established The Heritage Conservation Corps (HCC) to engage local youth in trail construction, establish a community garden on vacant land, and other conservation projects and marketable skills in a region of declining employment and environmental degradation. Partners included AmeriCorps Vista, the PA CareerLink job program, the Schuylkill Vision community group, the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Schuylkill County Community Foundation, the USDA and others. In the one project, the NHA served as spearhead and fiscal agent; in the other, it brought a number of non-conservation community actors into a conservation project.

- 1500 acres of wetland were restored in the challenging desert environment in the Yuma Crossing NHA in Arizona. The East Wetlands project is the result of a partnership with the City of Yuma, the Quechan Indian Tribe, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Bureau of Reclamation. The partners signed an agreement to each maintain 350 acres of wetlands in the Multi-Species Conservation (MSCP) Program, ensuring 50 years of maintenance. The NHA's role here was to build trust with the Tribe by spearheading a project to restore a historic bridge between their lands and downtown Yuma, which played a significant role in gaining their participation in the Wetlands project.
- In South Park NHA in Colorado, staff partnered with the Coalition for the Upper South Platte to bring middle school students to High Creek Fen, a rare, ecologically diverse wetland. Students learn about water quality monitoring and biological indicators in class before completing field work on World Water Monitoring Day. This unique program combines laboratory science with field ecology, while increasing students' awareness of issues in their community. Here, the NHA incorporates conservation into its educational programming.
- The Mississippi Gulf Coast NHA developed the Gulf Coast Outpost program to recognize nature-based tourism industries who protect and conserve the environment on which their business depends. The program targets companies whose primary business is dependent on the natural environment in Mississippi's six coastal counties. This includes eco-tours, locally-owned outfitters, charter boat operators, tour guides, eco-lodges and agritourism entities. Partners include Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain, and the USM Marine Education Center. In this instance, the NHA developed a program and worked with tourism and conservation entities to achieve conservation-compatible tourism.
- The Paint Creek Scenic Trail Association in the National Coal Heritage Area NHA worked for two decades to restore the creek that was severely degraded by years of coal mining. Thanks to the members' environmental restoration efforts, the state now stocks Paint Creek with thousands of trout every year, attracting fishing enthusiasts from across the region. 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.
- The "Greenagers" program in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts connects young people to 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 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 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 NHA has engaged a landscape architect to design an ecological restoration plan for the lands surrounding the blast furnace. In this

instance, the NHA owns and operates the structures, and acts as a potential natural area landowner.

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 environment/stewardship project to the themes and goals of the NHA added significant value, enhancing experiences for visitors and residents alike.

#### **IV. Environmental Scan of Environment and Stewardship 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 Environment and Stewardship. (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. Identify, enhance, and connect important sub-geographies and**
- b. Coordinate land management, ecological restoration, land acquisition, and trail development activities in key habitat area**

While the Calumet region has nationally significant natural areas, the region’s intense industrial, transportation, and urban development has left them generally fragmented from each other. Regional planning agencies on both sides of the state line recognize that fostering connectivity is important to overall regional development and quality of life. To foster its goal “to promote coordinated and sustainable development redevelopment and preservation within the region through collaborative local and regional land use planning,” the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s (CMAP) *On to 2050* plan suggest designating “liaisons to sub-geographies areas” and facilitating “planning processes based on non-jurisdictional geographies (e.g. watershed based boundaries)”. Similarly, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission’s (NIRPC) *2050 Comprehensive Plan* calls out the importance of sub-geographies and notes the special opportunities to connect them via greenways which “allow for greater transportation access for humans and allow wildlife to utilize routes for travel and to better access food, water, mates and nesting spaces.”

In important respects, major steps have already been taken over the past fifteen years in the Calumet region to develop a coherent strategy for the identification, protection, restoration, and management of these landscapes. The NHA Management planning process comes at an excellent time in this bi-state regional discussion, and it presents an opportunity to dovetail these efforts with a broader regional re-development strategy that highlights the enormous value that these assets present.

Among the steps that have been taken are the following:

- The creation of a Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure Vision in 2004 as the “spatial expression” of CW’s *Biodiversity Recovery Plan*. This vision was drawn in broad brushstrokes, but it established the principle that in addition to large swathes of the Indiana Dunes, Moraine forest, Hoosier Prairie, and Indian Boundary Prairie ecosystems, the corridors of the Little Calumet River, Grand Calumet River, Trail Creek, Coffee Creek, Salt Creek, Thorn Creek, and Kankakee River could serve as major connecting corridors.
- The Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure Vision map was used as a major framing device in a map prepared especially for the Calumet region public in 2008. That map also showed a number of sites of ecological restoration, many of them derived from Lee Botts’s work on “The Restoration Revolution in Northwest Indiana.” The map also depicted the Chicago Lake Plain and Valparaiso Moraine regions, and showed an approximate regional boundary that subsequently served as the study area for the CNHA Feasibility Study.
- The CW Green Infrastructure Vision was incorporated into the CMAP’s *Go to 2040 Plan*. A related version was also incorporated in the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission’s (NIRPC) 2040 plan.
- In 2012, Chicago Wilderness refined its Green Infrastructure Vision map. This “2.0” version was produced by the Conservation Fund. It was more spatially explicit, as it used GIS tools to layer data sets to determine areas with the most potential to create conservation corridors between conservation hubs. This version of the GIV reinforced the corridors identified in the GIV 1.0, but it added large swathes of potential land in the moraine forest region, important not only for its conservation potential but because this region stands in the path of future urban development.
- In 2014, some of the region’s key conservation partners were gathered together as the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership (CLCP). CLCP includes Save the Dunes, The Nature Conservancy, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, NIRPC, Openlands, Metropolitan Planning Council, National Parks Conservation Association, Field Museum, and Great Lakes Audubon. With the GIV 2.0 as a starting point, this group made further recommendations to delineate sub-regional conservation focus areas, and began to make progress in coordinated conservation planning and action in four of them: the Indiana Dunes ecosystem, East Branch of the Little Calumet River, Hobart Marsh, and the swathe of ridge and swale landscape from Lake Calumet to Miller Woods that the group dubbed the “Heart of Calumet”. An important start has been made to identify potential lands for acquisition, places to focus restoration for greatest impact, opportunities to coordinate management activities, and, importantly, fresh ways to integrate community heritage and aspirations into conservation planning.
- A new bi-state sustainable development non-profit, the Calumet Collaborative, began operation in 2017, including conservation and the support of the heritage area project as two of its four key initiatives. In 2018, the Collaborative coordinated the creation of Conservation Action Plans in three additional sub-geographies: Hoosier Prairie, Moraine Forest, and Ambler Flatwoods. These were called “gap” plans because they did not figure in the NOAA-approved 2012 Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) process, nor were they part of CLCP’s initial conservation focus areas. The process developed a common language used across all three areas, grouping potential lands for acquisition into three strategic sub-types: management and restoration of lands already under conservation management; lands which buffer or connect these “core” lands; and lands that incorporate conservation into municipal or utility

decision-making (e.g. via rights-of-way.) The conservation priorities maps were presented in a format and with a language that could be used to align the other sub-geographies discussed here.

- Meanwhile, in 2015, five agencies in Illinois with jurisdiction over 23 important sites listed on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory established the Millennium Reserve Conservation Compact. The entities include the Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and The Nature Conservancy. The partners have identified compatible, shared, and coordinated conservation outcomes for these sites, and will undertake protection and restoration activities necessary to provide effective long-term conservation. The Compact calls specifically for the development and implementation of a regional habitat management plan for wetland wildlife habitats, with a focus on deep marshes and the restoration of hydrology and vegetation sufficient to support marsh-nesting birds.
- Other conservation projects have begun in regions such as the Cal-Sag Channel/Little Calumet/Grand Calumet corridor in Illinois and the West Branch of the Little Calumet in Indiana.

To sum up, some form of conservation planning is now occurring in at least 10 sub-geographies in the Calumet region, as listed here:

Heart of Calumet  
Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance (IDEA)  
Hobart Marsh  
East Branch, Little Calumet River  
Hoosier Prairie  
Moraine Forest  
Ambler Flatwoods  
Millennium Reserve Conservation Compact  
Cal-Sag Channel/Little Calumet/Grand Calumet  
West Branch, Little Calumet River  
Other specific sub-geographies TBD  
Remaining areas not part of conservation focus areas

The opportunity now exists to further coordinate this planning. Stakeholder engagement processes could be conducted in each sub-geography so that a basic common denominator of conservation planning exists across the region. The processes can serve to identify lands for acquisition, restoration, and management. At the same time, the outcomes of each sub-geography can be gathered into an overall regional conservation framework plan, such that the activities proposed can be better prioritized. The Heritage Area process represents a major opportunity to contribute to this work, especially insofar as it explicitly connects the internal work of the conservation community to a community-facing dialogue relating conservation to other high priority regional goals.

**c. Provide improved access to existing natural areas**



Improving access to natural areas is increasingly stated as a value that goes beyond the conservation community. For example, the business-oriented Northwest Indiana Forum's *Strategy for Economic Transformation* states that "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." The Quality of Life Council's Indicators report notes "though the region is exceptionally blessed with natural areas readily accessible to residents and visitors, and more tourism focus is placed on them, neither residents nor visitors fully take advantage of these natural amenities." "Access" involves not simply better car transportation, but attention to public transportation and active transportation, means for the differently able to enjoy natural areas, ways to creatively engage communities adjacent to natural areas that moves beyond volunteer stewardship, and "perceptual access", such that the region's assets are broadly known, appreciated, and enjoyed.

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."

As new conservation lands come on line, some of them embedded in former industrial spaces or in region's not previously thought of as "natural areas", some creative approaches will be needed. For example, access to the Lake Calumet region was stated as a priority by the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee: "The opportunity for Lake Calumet and adjacent lands to be made publicly accessible is one of the premier desires and focus areas for the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee. It represents one of the best opportunities to advance all three of the primary purposes of Millennium Reserve (ecological, economic and community development)." The committee made special mention of the opportunity created by the new Pullman National Monument, which "will undoubtedly increase visitation to Chicago's South Side and will connect many urban residents with a "neighborhood" national park. Beyond preserving history and spurring business growth, readily accessible national parks serve as

gateways for urban populations to the larger park system, the great outdoors, our culture, and our past."

#### **d. Restore, manage, and promote healthy watershed systems**

Major ways in which the development of the region as a nationally significant industrial/commercial area involved significant re-orientation of the region's hydrology as well as severe impairments to water quality. Streams have been widened, deepened, and straightened, and significant flood control structures have been built in places. Canals have been built to connect the Mississippi drainage with the Great Lakes, and in an important sense, the continental divide between the two great sub-continental drainage systems was moved. Impairments to natural water flow have severely affected wetlands.

At the same time, the efforts to clean up some of these systems are also a part of the national significance of the region. A number of the sub-geographies noted above center on riparian-oriented conservation corridors, and to some extent, the conservation planning noted there accounts for aquatic species, water quality, and other water-oriented issues. In some instances, such as the Grand Calumet River AOC, restoration of the stream has created opportunities for terrestrial conservation in lands adjacent.

Via coordinating efforts such as the Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Partnership and the Calumet Stormwater Collaborative, and planning initiatives like Great Rivers Chicago, collaboration is being enhanced. The Marquette Plan's call to complete watershed management plans for all relevant sub-watersheds is gradually being met.

Recreational groups like the Northwest Indiana Paddling Alliance have taken an active role in advocacy for clean water. The Lake Michigan National Water Trail and Kankakee River National Water Trail and the proposed Underground Heritage Water Trail has put the spotlight not only on recreation, but conservation of the resource.

As much of the region lies in the Lake Chicago plain, older cities have combined stormwater systems, and residential flooding is a widespread issue, the interests of green infrastructure approaches for stormwater management have increasingly converged with interests of the conservation community to enhance biodiversity and create stream-based conservation corridors.

All these points are made in the relevant regional planning documents.

#### **e. Promote the protection of coastal and estuarine areas and waters**

Most regional planning documents are highly sensitive to the grand fact that Lake Michigan borders the region to the north. According to NIRPC's *2050 Comprehensive Plan*, "Lake Michigan represents NWI's most prominent natural asset. A 45-mile coastline defines the northernmost boundary for the region and remains the only Great Lakes border for Indiana. The benefits of Lake Michigan are both recreational and commercial. The coastline provides NWI residents ample outdoor recreational

opportunities with pristine beaches, parks, and marinas lining the shore. Additionally, the lake is an essential and abundant source of freshwater, not only for region residents, but including critically-important industrial centers that require large water bodies for production and shipping.'

Both Illinois and Indiana now have vigorous Coastal Zone Management Programs that prioritize conservation of lands draining into the lake, as well as the protection of cultural and natural resources in the coastal region.

**f. Develop a stewardship model for bi-state Calumet that includes measures of success for both ecosystem restoration and volunteer engagement; connect environmental stewardship to health/well-being activities**

The Calumet region has a rich tradition of volunteer stewardship. For nearly twenty years the Calumet Stewardship Initiative (CSI) has existed as a means to link organizations who engage volunteers in ecological restoration. CSI is itself a voluntary entity, and has moved through several attempts to define its role and measure its impact. Key partners within CSI convened the Calumet Summits of 2013 and 2015. At the 2013 Summit, when called on to “think big”, participants named the creation of an NHA as the top priority. At the 2015 Summit, “heritage” was explicitly incorporated as a theme of the convening, along with “stewardship” and “education”. In 2018, CSI was formally linked to the Calumet Heritage Partnership (CHP), as one of CHP’s “groups”. So important groundwork has already been laid to draw together the conversations around “heritage” and “stewardship”.

In that spirit, the Focus Group’s attention is drawn to some of the recommendations that came from the 2015 Summit, which are reflected in the two key themes mentioned in this section. The first theme generally encourages deepening and expanding the existing path already set by CSI to encourage volunteers, coordinate efforts, and track progress. The second theme suggests crafting a new stewardship model to find new ways to engage communities in the work and in so doing finding new ways to enhance quality of life and to care for nature. In reporting these recommendations below, the Focus Group is reminded that other Focus Group are also at work on “education” and “recreation”; some elements that could be taken up by those groups are simply reported here to indicate overlapping areas of concern. The Environment and Stewardship group might want to foreground the question, “which of these have the greatest potential to enhance the environment of the region in the context of an NHA?”

The bulleted points below drawn from the Summit report, focus on deepening and expanding the current stewardship model:

- Developing a stewardship model for bi-state Calumet that includes measures of success for both ecosystem restoration and volunteer engagement. This includes:
  - Identifying and promoting a suite of volunteer opportunities that are utilized by multiple organizations committed to promoting these opportunities through their volunteer networks

- Building the capacity of volunteer leaders to help with long-term maintenance of priority habitats (sub-regions)
- Engaging a diverse mix of participants in experiential events to strengthen community and civic connections to priority habitats in the bi-state Calumet landscape.
- Allow opportunities for volunteers to travel around the region and make connections
- Promote micro-stewardship to allow volunteers to find smaller project to take charge
- Have more site stewards
- Communicate--with volunteers, ecologists, community partnerships of different types (e.g. region-wide, inter-agency, new stakeholders)
- Outreach and engagement using different strategies (e.g. volunteer opportunity clearinghouse, workshops, community service, social media, tapping industry employees)
- Every Kid in the Park to foster youth engagement, helping them become stewards in order to preserve and care for the environment, now and in the future
- Developing the CSI website as a 'one stop shop' for all recreational happenings within the Calumet. This online resource would help solidify a regional identity and provide a shared space for recreational news and developments in both Indiana and Illinois.
- Working with land managers, table discussions focused on developing strategies for Dan Ryan Woods, Hobart Marsh, Miller Woods, Roxana Marsh, and William Powers/Eggers Woods. Common threads in all the conversations follow: Build Partnerships, Community Outreach & Engagement, Branding & Regional Connections, Address Invasive Species, Sensitive Ecologies
  - Spotlight new and unique things communities are doing
  - Spotlight tried and true efforts to support stewardship
  - Designate Hobart Marsh as an international wetland
  - Come up with a better name for the west side of Hobart
  - Put together a collection of stewardship best practices (e.g., see the Coastal Management Program)
  - Get the region on at least one list of distinction to help establish a sense of place and pride with the natural area
  - Repurpose invasive species
  - Connect Oak Savannah Trail to developed area to the north

A second set of recommendations from the Summit drew attention to new ways of engaging the community that move beyond the traditional volunteer "work day". They include:

- Connecting stewardship to health (e.g. yoga followed by volunteering, monitoring calories burned).
- Active activity that works to get kids out so they can have 'natural fun' learning about nature while also doing something healthy like kayaking, hiking, or biking.
- Get kids to know the area so they can love it! Parks create better citizens - use them for education as well as fun. Use unstructured play and games, and give lots of information along the way. Focus on outdoor classroom and stewardship training together.
- Partnering with health care providers and insurance, making the logical connection between health and education; Tourism Departments and Chambers of Commerce since the outdoors can

also be used (with care) to produce economic benefits; and organizations like Rotaries / Elks/ Lions Clubs which often look for local projects to support via funding but also volunteers.

- Long-term goal: Develop a vision of outdoor recreation that encourages visitation, physical activity and interaction with nature in the open spaces and on the trails within the Calumet Region.
- Increase non-motorized activity, Connect water and land, Blend stewardship and recreation, Get on the water, Make new connections
- Make connections with recreational areas to get kids out so they can have ‘natural fun’ learning about nature while also doing something healthy. Kayaking, hiking, and biking are great ways to get around and connect to the environment without leaving a trace.
- Developing a vision of outdoor recreation that encourages visitation, physical activity and interaction with nature in the open spaces and on the trails within the Calumet Region requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes identifying: Existing and potential open space and non-motorized land and water trails; Existing and potential recreation programming; Access routes and barriers to surrounding populations; Opportunities to improve wayfinding and programming, and; Amenities that increase visitation and improve the visitor experience.
- Blend Stewardship and Recreation: Focus on repurposing natural lands for recreation that also creates support for preservation and stewardship; Promote stewardship on the rivers by engaging youth in fun stewardship activities; Improve water quality and access for play in the region’s bodies of water
- Make New Connections: Increase river access for communities that currently do not have access to local bodies of water; Focus on untapped opportunities in urban and developed areas; Get involved in the White House initiative, “Every Kid in a Park”; Re-use the thousand plus acres of City of Chicago owned land for outdoor recreation; Help people make “connections” and “feel alive” through recreation!

#### **g. Reduce the impact of light pollution on the region’s environment**

As a region where hearth fires lighted up the night and where industrial enterprise thrums 24/7, it should come as no surprise that public comments on the feasibility study pointed out the need to show light itself is a major way that nature has been reworked in the region. And characteristically for a region where natural areas are juxtaposed with industry, the Calumet region contains a community that is a leader in the “dark sky” movement: Beverly Shores is one of only 22 certified IDA Certified International Dark Sky Communities. The town’s location as a key site in the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival is a reminder that the dark sky movement advances conservation connectivity even as it clears the air for nighttime observation of the stars.

#### **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 Environment and Stewardship? 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 Committee for further discussion?