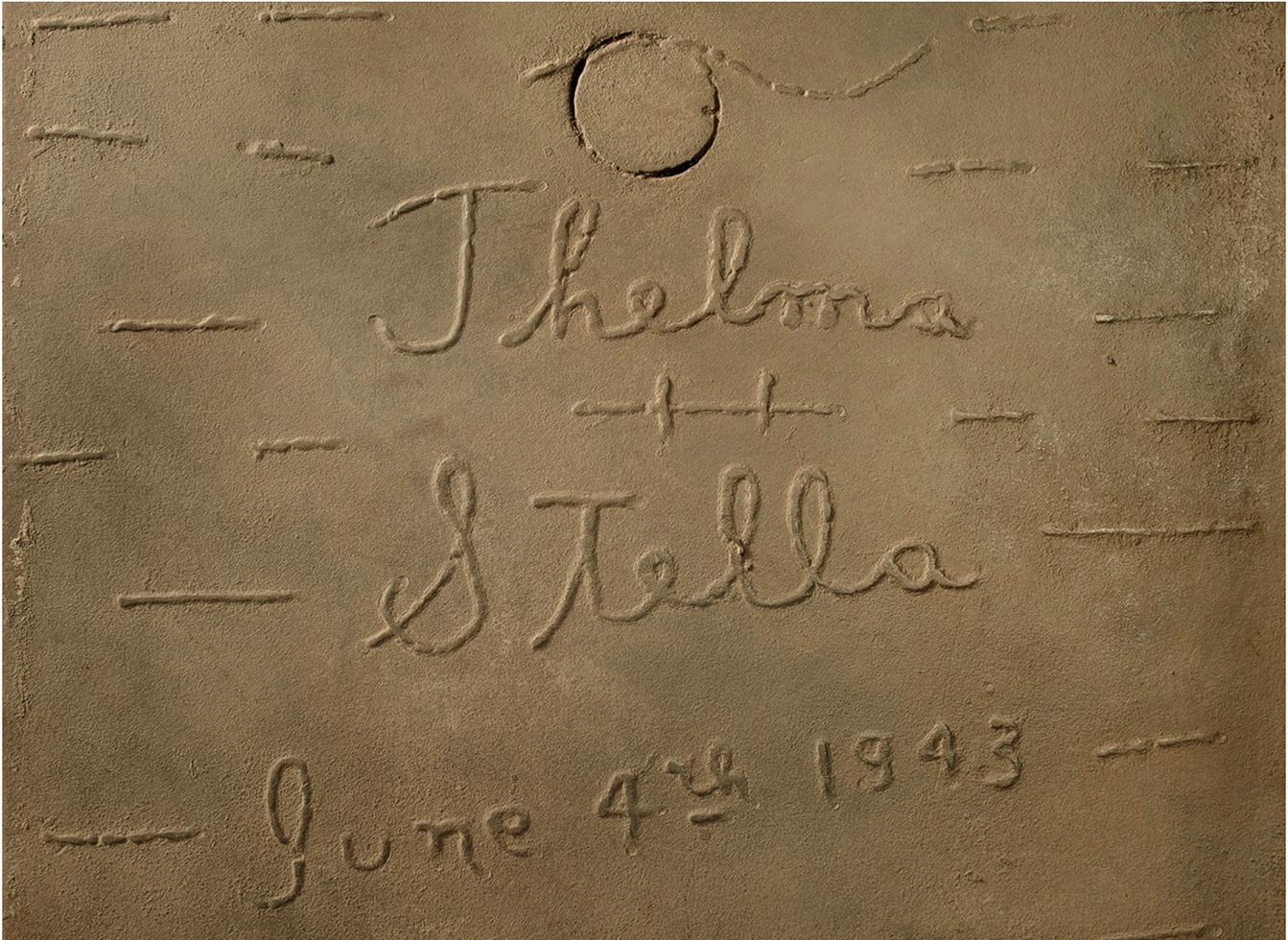


## Chapter 3: Interpretive Framework and Planning



Historic steel plate, Cleveland-Cliffs (formerly Inland Steel). John Weinstein.

### INTRODUCTION

Heritage areas are grounded in places and the stories told about those places. Chapter 2 described the Calumet region, what kind of place it is as a Heritage Area, what the important story lines are, and how people from a variety of walks of life—from the arts, education, conservation, historic preservation and so on—are eager to tell these stories. As those engaged in the Heritage Area effort roll up their sleeves and start to take the actions described in Chapter 4, they need to be armed with an appropriate framework for interpretation, so that the stories are coherently and effectively told, and they make the most of a visitor's experience. For this reason, Heritage Area Management Plans contain an interpretive plan.

The role of this chapter is to provide a general description of interpretation in the context of large landscapes like Heritage Areas and how it can apply to the overarching goals of the Calumet Heritage Area, and to share recommended interpretive models most applicable to this region. The format and content of this chapter are guided by National Park Service interpretive planning resources.

## 1. Foundation: conceptual framework

### 1.1 What is interpretation?

In the *Interpretive Planning Toolkit for Heritage Areas, Historic Gateways and Trails*, the National Park Service (NPS) describes interpretation as follows:

- Interpretation is communication that is specifically designed to reveal underlying meaning to the visitor through first-hand involvement with an object, a landscape, a natural feature, or a site.
- Interpretation helps people to connect intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually with the ideas, beliefs, and values embodied in our world.
- Interpretation is based on facts, but reveals what an object, place, feature or event means and why it matters—why it is relevant.

They go on to state that the core functions of interpretation should:

- Relate to the experience of the visitor.
- Reveal as well as inform.
- Provoke as well as instruct.
- Address the whole, not just the part.

The thing called “interpretation” comes alive in the actions: when we tell meaningful stories about a particular place, people, event, or object, we convey factual information, present multiple perspectives, embody common concerns and universal themes, and spark inquiry. Interpretive



Pullman neighborhood tour. Calumet Collaborative.

frameworks and formats create understandable and trusted ways to tell stories to visitors and participants in engaging, often experiential ways, such as exhibitions, self-guided tours, and public programs. Interpreters can use graphic design, touchable objects, interactive mapping, and other media to unpack and share heritage stories in ways that enrich learning, deepen understanding, shift perspectives, imagine futures, and inspire empathy.

### 1.2 How does interpretation and interpretive planning serve a heritage area?

In large landscapes like heritage areas, interpretation can showcase the overarching story of a region’s significance in broad strokes, while simultaneously shining a spotlight on local sites or particular heritage resources that exemplify and comprise the broader narrative. In order to function successfully at multiple scales and in various settings in a coordinated way, the Calumet Heritage Area’s Interpretation and Education Working Group will work with the Cultural Resources Conservation and Natural Resources Conservation Working Groups (see Chapter Five for description of Working Groups in the management structure) and others to develop and implement an interpretive plan that strives to address regional goals in the following ways:

- Create a structure to develop, support and organize interpretive efforts at multiple scales, in varied formats, and comprised of a range of components.
- Develop a framework based on core heritage themes and sub-themes that guides content development and continues to expand those themes and surface the region’s compelling stories.
- Nurture an inclusive, collaborative, and flexible partnership with local and regional organizations to showcase the richness of their heritage assets through multiple perspectives.

### 1.2.1 Partnerships in interpretation planning.

The process of developing an interpretive plan that connects local heritage assets to each other and to the larger whole can create and strengthen formal and informal partnerships. Because of the emphasis on local heritage representation, the planning process can provide a creative, goal-driven way for organizations of different capacities and origin stories to collaborate on a level playing field. This work also creates inter-organizational bonds and inter-capacity bridges through which broad regional networks are formed. These networks grow and expand as connections are continually made with new organizations and projects.



*Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibition workshop at Field Museum. M. Tudor*

### 1.2.2. The benefits of working together on interpretation planning.

Organizations’ awareness of and appreciation for each other is also forged through the experience of working together to plan for and produce specific interpretive media and products. Individual organizations benefit from interaction with other members of the network through enriched storytelling, shared resources, and cross-promotion for reaching broader audiences. Such projects and activities offer tangible, effective ways to bridge organizations with different capacities, such as connecting grassroots organizations with grassroots organizations, in a way that builds understanding and trust.

This process applies to the CHA network in a number of ways. Through the management structure, for example, the Interpretation and Education Working Group can facilitate the growth and connectivity of the Calumet Curators group of local museums by expanding its partnership, linking to a wider range of existing projects, and developing an extensive spectrum of impactful programs. Such programs may focus on issues of equity and inclusion by showcasing local stories collected in works like “The Gary Anthology”, creating a docent program centered on the history of African American aviation in the storied African American town of Robbins, Illinois, or a tour that explores issues of identity through the perspectives of Native American steelworkers.

## 1.3 Principles of interpretation

With this sense of why an interpretive framework is needed and how it should be collaboratively addressed in the CHA, what are the significant guideposts for those taking on the work of interpretation in the Calumet area? How do the overarching principles of the Heritage Area articulated in Section 3.2 of Chapter 1 find expression in the interpretive framework?

The following interpretive principles will guide the scope of interpretive efforts, their development, and their production through various formats at a range of sites across the region.

- Prioritize first voice perspectives of those who live in the region.
- Work collaboratively with local heritage organizations and other regional partners to develop and implement interpretive plans, projects, and programs.
- Illuminate the value of and encourage appreciation for the natural environment by selecting natural areas as sites for interpretation, connecting people to nature, and highlighting the importance of this relationship.

- Illuminate the value of and encourage appreciation for industrial heritage by selecting sites of industrial importance for interpretation and examining the historical and current role of industry in the region.
- Illuminate the value of and encourage appreciation for diverse cultural heritage by identifying and explaining cultural assets.
- Bring together and illuminate multiple perspectives and different viewpoints to broaden and deepen understanding and connection, and encourage dialogue; also as a way of highlighting and investigating the complexity of the American story, as exemplified by the region and its core themes.
- Look for opportunities to showcase the intersection of themes through objects and/or stories that describe the past and the present, and objects that can tell multiple stories, share differing perspectives, touch on multiple themes, and invite discussion.
- Build dialogue and use a variety of formats to invite discussion.
- Address current issues and tensions, such as inequity and discrimination (based on race, gender, orientation, etc.), by unpacking them through heritage stories, connecting assets, and ensuring equity and inclusion in interpretation planning and implementation. Use the Heritage Area and its programs as “safe”, contemplative spaces where techniques like facilitated dialogue and other audience-centered experiences can provide a level playing field on which to untangle complex issues and divergent viewpoints.
- Lift up heritage as an action. Hold heritage as an active framework that looks to the past to understand and create the present; and guide actions for the future. Showcase historical cultural, industrial, and ecological assets, so that residents can shape their own present, tell *their* stories, and create a sustainable future rich in cultural and natural resources.
- Explore the creation of demonstration sites that showcase heritage-based models.



Lakeshore People's Museum PopUp event. Mario Longoni.

## 1.4 Goals of interpretation

Interpretation can be a powerful pathway to create relationships between people and place. Through stories and their presentation in creative formats, it can reveal meanings and relevance of objects, sites, and landscapes that connect to visitors' personal experiences and broader heritage themes. In places like the Calumet region, where there is deep-seated conflict and complex power inequities, interpretation can be especially effective in creating ways for people with differing perspectives and experiences to explore past or current events through multiple lenses. It can offer multiple "ways in" to learn about a site or heritage resource, to be explored at different levels of detail. Interactive interpretive formats in particular can lift up voices to and validate experiences and perspectives that are often left out of dominant narratives. By linking past and present, interpretation can guide people to think about possibilities for the future of the region.

The *Calumet National Heritage Area Feasibility Study* laid out a Thematic Framework with a Statement of Significance for the Calumet region and built out core themes, sub-themes and stories. These elements can guide interpretation efforts.

### 1.4.1 Thematic framework: Statement of significance, core themes, sub-themes, and messages

**Statement of significance:** The Calumet region contains globally rare natural areas, the nation's premier heavy industrial district, and distinctive communities that continue to shape the natural and built landscape. Its two urban National Parks—Pullman National Monument and Indiana Dunes National Park—bookend and highlight these contrasting features. Today's Calumet landscape—taken as an industrial, environmental, and community whole—shows how American life changed during the boom years of industrialization that followed the Civil War and how changes continued through booms and busts in the economy to the present day.

**Interpretive Core Themes, Sub-themes, Messages, Stories and Interpretive Formats:** Table 3.1 (below) illustrates how the core themes and sub-themes, drawn from the Statement of Significance, relate to messaging and the stories of the Heritage Area. The last column provides examples of interpretive formats. They in turn are discussed in more detail in Section 2 of this chapter.

The Core Interpretive Themes point to the three pillars that make the Calumet region unique—its natural environment, its industry, and the variety and meeting of cultures within it. The sub-themes break the core themes into more focused fields. In Table 3.1, an example message draws out one main idea from the corresponding sub-themes, though other messages can and should be developed. Messages connect the sub-themes to one another when possible.

Examples of larger messages, connecting the sub-themes of the Heritage Area include:

- The Calumet region boasts significant assets that span nature, industry, and culture.
- Heritage reverberates in everyday life aspects of the Calumet region and undergirds economy, environment, and community. The region’s heritage is built into possibilities for its future.
- The history and the future of the Calumet were and will be subject to the tradeoffs in decision-making and resource use, with implications for the environment, economy, and people of the region.



Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibition panel.

**Table 3.1. Core Interpretive Themes, Subthemes, Messages, Stories, and Interpretive Format**

<p><b>Core Interpretive Theme I—Nature Reworked: The Calumet’s Diverse Landscape</b>  <i>Natural areas, industries, transportation, and neighborhoods are found side by side in the Calumet region. Industry and nature meet each other here like few other places in the country. The mix of forest, prairie, lakes, and rivers attracted large-scale industry, agriculture, trade, and city growth. But in places, dry sands and wetlands proved too challenging to build upon. In time, and through much effort, they were preserved for their value as open space and as refuge for diverse plants and animals.</i></p>			
<p><b>Subtheme I.i</b> A Natural Crossroads</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—Post-Civil War, industrialization came quickly to the Calumet Region which was unusually biodiverse.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>— Wisconsin glaciation made wet-dry alternation of sand and marsh (dune-and-swale) which supported the development biodiversity in the region over millennia.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>— Scale model of landscape, depicting habitats and dune-and-swale ridges; color-coded to show glaciation process.</p>
<p><b>Subtheme I.ii</b> Changes to Lifeways and Landscapes</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—Industrialization would continue for the next century, altering the natural landscape of the region.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—The creation of Calumet Harbor (1870) and the widening and straightening of the Calumet River. Then Joseph H. Brown Iron and Steel Co. (later Wisconsin Steel) was built in the 1870s, dredge spoil from the slip created along the Calumet River was dumped into adjacent wetlands, providing drier footings for the factory. When North Chicago Rolling Mills moved to the mouth of the Calumet River, it added land to Lake Michigan for facilities, and evolved into U.S. Steel South Works.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>— Interpretive “bike hikes” (north/south) and group paddles (east/west) would allow participants to cover long stretches of the altered landscape while learning about it from guides and one another. For instance, a bike hike from Rainbow Beach to the mouth of the Calumet River would cover both the story at left and the most recent developments of parks, prairie, heritage displays, and rock climbing facilities at Steelworkers Park on the former site of US Steel South Works.</p>
<p><b>Subtheme I.iii</b> A Heritage of Activism and Stewardship</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—A century of citizen activism has conserved, protected, and restored the biodiversity, native beauty, and recreational quality of the natural environment, making the region a significant place to the American conservation and environmental justice movements</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—The proximity of residential areas to industrial zones has made the Calumet an area of concern for those who have borne a disproportionate share of polluted land, air, and water. Activists like Hazel Johnson, organizing from a base in public housing at Altgeld Gardens (with the support of a young community organizer named Barack Obama) became leaders in the national environmental justice movement.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>— Community-led, fee-based, bus tours of the far SE Side of Chicago and its history of industry and activism. Including lunches at the end of the tour, would provide employment opportunities for guides and food businesses, while fees could support local environmental justice and stewardship activities. Builds on the Southeast Environmental Task Forces “Toxics to Treasures” tour model.</p>
<p><b>Core Interpretive Theme II—Innovation and Change for Industries and Workers</b>  <i>As one of the great workshops of the world, the Calumet region lays bare epic stories of entrepreneurship, industrial development, the struggle for decent working conditions and wages, and of what happened when certainties crumbled.</i></p>			
<p><b>Subtheme II.i</b> Manufacturing and Industrial Urbanism</p>	<p><b>Message</b> - Extraordinary local, regional, and national interlinkages in both metal and non-metal industries, made the Calumet region the nation’s premier steelmaking district by World War II. The steel industry attracted other businesses.</p>	<p><b>Story</b> - George Pullman’s town, now the Pullman National Monument illustrates the rise of railroads, as hubs of a transportation network, as centers of industrial production, and as engines of economic, labor, and social change. Pullman’s manufacturing reach extended across the Calumet region, to include the Pullman-Standard works in Hammond and Haskell and Barker in Michigan City.</p>	<p><b>Possible Interpretive Format</b> - If South Shore Line train service were restored at Pullman, regular rail tours of the industrial lake plain could be bookended by visits to Pullman National Monument and the Barker Mansion.</p>

<p><b>Subtheme II.ii</b> Labor Takes a Stand</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—The profound remaking of the Calumet landscape in an industrial image brought thousands of workers to the region. Workers’ struggles for better conditions, wages, and rights captured national attention.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—Unsafe working conditions in steel mills were once commonplace. Workers who were injured on the job received no protection from or compensation for accidents which left them with physical challenges such as loss of a limb or compromised eyesight. Regardless of their compromised physical abilities, they were expected to continue to work without any accommodations. Through the dedicated efforts of organized labor, unions fought for and won mandated safety regulations and accident-related reparations, many of which are taken for granted today.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>—Presentations or panel discussions by some of the last living Calumet region labor activists of the 20th century, together with local accessibility experts, could discuss the struggle for safe and accessible working conditions. These presentations could draw audiences of their own, and be recorded and made available as video displays at member organizations of the Calumet Curators group of heritage museums, historical societies, and archives.</p>
<p><b>Subtheme II.iii</b> Deindustrialization</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—An era of drastic shutdowns dramatically changed the region’s industrial powerhouse and caused widespread job loss but regional resources remain.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—Local government, for-profit, non-profit, and grassroots entities and individuals have been gathering to re-vision the region through plans and studies like the Journey Through Calumet community ethnography process, the Marquette Plan, and the Millennium Reserve effort.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>—Interpretive signage at the locations of new parks, preserves, recreational facilities, green businesses, galleries, museums, etc., would put these new developments in the context of the history and heritage resources that brought them about.</p>

**Core Interpretive Theme III—Crucible of Working Class and Ethnic Cultures**

*Cultures came together as people moved to the Calumet region in large numbers. As they worked, played, and set down roots, they developed a significant popular culture. Strong advocates led struggles for equality, inclusion, and civil rights that achieved national prominence.*

<p><b>Subtheme III.i</b> Working Class Housing and Cultural Traditions in the Landscape</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—People came from around the world to work in the Calumet. The region has an extraordinary diversity of ethnic origins. Separated from each other by patches of wetland, by belts of railroad tracks, and by the mills themselves, the communities developed distinctive identities shaped by physical, economic, and social factors.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—Within some Calumet communities, pocket enclaves developed especially strong local attachments to churches, schools, social halls, savings societies, and taverns, which ultimately fostered highly local—even isolated—place identification. Taken as a whole, these very locally centered communities are significant in the national story of immigration, enculturation, and group identity.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>—The people and organizations of distinct geographic, ethnic, and racial communities of the region stage cross-cultural comparative events to tell their stories to one another and wider audiences, exploring similarities and differences in their historic and current experiences.</p>
<p><b>Subtheme III.ii</b> Race Relations</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—Calumet industries were a draw for workers leaving the South during the Great Migration. Racially-charged struggles of national resonance erupted over schooling, housing, and politics.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—Richard Hatcher was elected in Gary as the first African American mayor of a major American city (1967) but the election sped postwar “white flight” to suburban areas, leading to the creation of a “dual metropolis” and the “environmental inequalities” that historian Andrew Hurley has documented. But it also led to the National Black Political Convention of 1972, the largest such gathering of the twentieth century.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>—Educators and civic organizations collaborate on regional history curricula that accurately deal with racial conflict, residential and urban change, inequality, solidarity, activism, and their current relevance. Sharing multiple perspectives can place a positive focus on the inclusive nature of being able to make a difference today in the vitality and quality-of-life in the region based on honest assessments of the past.</p>
<p><b>Subtheme III.iii</b> Living Cultural Traditions</p>	<p><b>Message</b>—A constellation of local history museums, traditions, festivals, foods, music, and literature make the region and its heritage come alive.</p>	<p><b>Story</b>—Especially active traditions include Labor Day commemorations, ethnic showcases like Whiting’s Pierogi Fest, and church oriented events like Southeast Chicago’s AnnuciataFest.</p>	<p><b>Possible interpretive format</b>—Develop published guides to sets of regional events. The guides would contain not only dates, descriptions, and locations, but also provide heritage context, connections, and themes.</p>

## 1.5 Target audiences and participants

NPS's guidance discussed in Section 1.1 refers to "visitors." but it is also clear that a key audience is "residents." Economic development efforts often focus on increasing visitorship and the expenditures that visitors make in the region, though the case is also made in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2 that economic development is increasingly turning to factors that enhance the quality of life of residents (thereby making the place more attractive to invest, work, live, and play.) And of course, quality of life is an important goal in its own right, and, clearly, an important function of the CHA. This basic distinction between visitors to the region and residents being understood, we discuss briefly the nature of current and potential



Hegewisch Marsh. Ania Ruszaj.

audiences. In Section 1.6 and following, "visitors" are treated as anyone accessing the interpretive formats of the Heritage Area, whether they originate inside or outside of the region.

In addition to generic categories of region "residents" and "visitors" to the region, the Heritage Area has some specific target audiences and participants. These include:

- Core partners and stakeholders. Boards and staffs of the Calumet Heritage Partnership (CHP) and Calumet Collaborative (CC), and the partners gathered through Calumet Curators and Calumet Outdoors, the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership (CLCP), and those who have attended Calumet Summits in 2013 and 2015 or annual Calumet Heritage Conferences make up this category.
- Interest group stakeholders. Each of the topical sub-areas described in Chapter 2 (Environment and Stewardship, Cultural Heritage/Historic Preservation, Recreation, Arts, Education, Tourism and Economic Development, and Wayfinding and Branding) has a cluster of lead participants and interested stakeholders.
- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+ communities. Of particular concern is to continue to proactively identify and engage the BIPOC and the LGBTQ+ communities as key audiences and participants in Heritage Area interpretation and education programs and projects. People with disabilities. Interpretive and educational programming will be planned to not only accommodate, but to engage people with disabilities.
- Educators and students. Heritage Area interpretation planning is especially important for the audience of teachers and students, including colleges and universities.

All of these audiences can be expanded, and the actions in the plan are directed at making the Heritage Area as inclusive as possible. Clearly, expanding these audiences will need considered study and action by the Joint Coordinating Committee of the CHA. The tools and principles of the interpretive plan are written to be as flexible and inclusive as possible, to create firm and fertile ground in which new audiences can grow.

## 1.6 Visitor experience objectives and evaluation

When visitors encounter an interpreted site, engage with an exhibition, or participate in a program, the overarching goal is for the information and experiences set forth by interpretation developers to be conveyed and received as intended. Creating meaningful engagement experiences takes planning and follow-up that identifies specific goals and objectives to guide interpretive formats that are accessible to a range of audiences, and ways to evaluate whether the goals and objectives have been met.



William W. Powers State Recreation Area, Visitor Center. Chris Young.

### 1.6.1 Visitor and participant experience objectives

- Guidelines for visitor and participant experience objectives are as follows:
  - Mission/theme-based
  - Resource or place specific (authentic)
  - Targeted toward outcome/objectives
  - Encourages further engagement in the region
- Visitors' and participants' rights and needs will be met in the following ways:
  - Comply with Americans with Disabilities Act to accommodate various learning styles and various abilities
  - Present interpretative material in ways that are accessible to various learning levels, where appropriate

- Visitor and participant experience goals are to do the following:
  - Familiarize visitors and participants with the concept of the Calumet as a region with a nationally significant identity.
  - Introduce the themes and components of the region that create this distinct identity.
  - Foster pride, joy, and excitement in the region.
  - Spark visitors' and participants' own journeys of discovery in the Calumet region.
  - Explain what a national heritage area is and why the Calumet region is uniquely qualified to gain this status.
  - Explain that the Calumet Heritage Area is committed to the natural and cultural stewardship of the Calumet region.
  - Understand the region as a continuous whole.
  - Prioritize opportunities for Audience Centered Experience (ACE), an interactive, interpretive approach used by the National Park Service and other interpreters to creatively engage visitors and participants in dialogue to connect their own experiences and perspectives with interpretive content.
  - Provide opportunities for visitors and participants to share their own connections to the Calumet area.
  - Provide visitors and participants with multisensory experiences.
  - Present content in a way that is interesting for both children and adults.

### 1.6.2 Measurable outcomes and evaluation strategies

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods will be used to determine the effectiveness of interpretive projects and programs in reaching their goals and objectives. A range of methods will be employed depending on the best fit for a particular component. Quantitative methods, such as counting visitor attendance or repeat program attendees will be monitored throughout the timeframe of the projects and programs. Qualitative methods will also be used and may be more indicative of success in terms of creating meaningful experiences and connections to build higher numbers, as a substantive jump in visitorship and participant numbers is not expected to materialize in all new programs. Front end (pre-project/program), formative (during project/program), and summative (post project/program) evaluation methods will be used. These include surveys, questionnaires, visitor feedback forms and interviews, tracking and timing of visitors and participants, other methods of observation, and focus groups. Creative methods of evaluation such as visitor story sharing and dialogue will also be used and may become part of the project/program experience.



Pullman Salon program. M. Tudor.

## 2. Recommended formats of interpretation

Interpretation projects can meet overarching Heritage Area priorities identified through the *Feasibility Study* and further refined in this *Management Plan*. These include the following: tell local stories of regional heritage at a national scale; illuminate and build regional identity; build partnerships (through discussion and collaboration); strengthen networks locally and regionally; contribute to economic development; and deepen pride in place. The models and actions described below will address, where appropriate, projects within the four main heritage area goals:

1. **Grow and Sustain CHA Operations and Partnerships**
2. **Tell the Story: Interpret, Share, and Connect Core Regional Themes**
3. **On the Ground: Showcase, Steward, and Preserve the Heritage Landscape**
4. **Spread the Word and Deepen the Impact: Support Regional Economic Development**

Underlying these operational goals are the interpretive principles (outlined above) that pervade the entire Heritage Area, and how this work reinforces the ways in which interpretation gets baked into Heritage Area programming.

There are a wide variety of ways to creatively engage partners and the public in the many heritage stories embodied in the Calumet landscape. Regardless of the format of interpretation or type of media, size, or scale, the basic pattern is the same: a compelling object(s) or special place(s) evokes a story that invites inquiry, teaches core facts, and connects to broader themes. Interpretation often uses text in combination with sensory elements of color, design, touch, and interaction. Alongside these interpretive elements are the organized components of the overall story itself—its “big idea” or central message to get across, the “so what” test of its importance, related examples or themes, and the sequencing of information into a hierarchical structure of messaging. These elements all work together to provide a rich, meaningful interpretive experience.

Table 3.1 above set up the big picture of how the core themes and sub-themes, drawn from the Statement of Significance, relate to messaging and the stories of the Heritage Area. It pointed toward the different ways that the stories could be told—called here the “interpretive formats.” In a way, it says, “if this is the story I want to tell, what’s a good way to tell it?” But as we know, the existence of a cool new tool can spark all kinds of thinking about new ways to use it, sometimes even leading us to re-frame the reason we picked it up in the first place. Section 2.1 below takes a closer look at the interpretive format toolkit, and turns the question around: “If we have a variety of interpretive formats at our disposal, what stories can we tell?”

### 2.1 Interpretive formats

This section takes each of the major interpretive format categories in turn. Under each format category name and description, some of the specific elements or features of that particular format are highlighted, followed by possible stakeholders and/or places where this particular format might best be deployed. Each broad interpretive category is then broken out by suggested examples. Storytelling possibilities are embedded throughout the examples, though it might be helpful to refer back to Table 3.1 while reading through them.

Some of the examples in this section specifically call out collaboration and co-created content. Others highlight elements for visitors to actively experience and participate in. It’s important to note that while not all examples touch on these approaches, they are part of the overarching context of interpretation. Collaboration in particular is a core principle and undergirds all interpretive efforts, to ensure that different perspectives are honored and local voices are showcased.

### 2.1.1 Exhibitions

*In many ways, heritage areas are like sprawling exhibitions on the landscape instead of in the confines of museums. Exhibitions can share heritage stories with a variety of audiences in creative ways that engage, educate, entertain, and inspire. By strategically organizing a range of elements, exhibitions can communicate complicated information in accessible, inviting displays. They can be powerful tools that can be used at local and regional scales to build identity, provide pathways between past and present, and create and strengthen partnerships. Exhibition techniques can be used effectively in a variety of formats and in a range of spaces.*

**Possible interpretive elements:** Object/resource (artifact, artwork, photographs, specimen, site); Content (theme/story); Label text; Graphics (typeface/font, color palette, icons or symbols, patterns, photographs, maps), spatial organizations; quotes; audio/video; touchable objects or replicas; interactives (computer, manual)

**Potential locations and organizations:** Large museums; large galleries; neighborhood museums; small galleries; local history centers; arts organizations; storefronts; park district field houses; libraries; colleges and universities; chambers of commerce; governmental buildings; bank lobbies; reused spaces; outdoor spaces (open air museums)



Pictured above and below: Various Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibition components. M. Tudor.

**2.1.1.1 Large- and small-scale exhibitions.** Heritage areas can use exhibition formats to connect resources to their broader context by presenting “objects”—whether 100-year-old artifacts, contemporary artwork, photographs, native plant specimens, an actively-stewarded ecological, or the site of a pivotal labor protest—together with interpretive labels. Graphic elements such as color palette and design provide a “look and feel” that ties the exhibition together and enhances the visitor experience, creating a stronger connection to the less tangible aspects of the stories being told. Adding audio and visual media, along with artifacts or replicas that visitors and participants can touch and/or computer-generated elements that visitors and participants can interact with, can further the visitor experience by creating multi-sensory, immersive environments. When curated strategically, even the simplest exhibitions can showcase important stories in a compelling, engaging way.



**2.1.1.2 Collaborative exhibitions.** The Calumet Curators network of local museums, history centers, and galleries located throughout the region is one example of how heritage organizations can work in partnership to develop powerful, multi-layered exhibitions. They are developing a series of related *Calumet Voices/National Stories* exhibitions which illuminate the CHA's core themes and elevate the region's heritage. Each exhibition weaves together collections and stories from a different set of partners working together to identify stories and messages, share perspectives, carefully select objects from their collections, and think creatively about effective, engaging display components. The exhibition locations span the Heritage Area, telling local stories of national significance from a regional perspective. The collaborative model developed by the Calumet Curators will continue to evolve and be utilized as a cornerstone of the region's interpretive strategies.

**2.1.1.3 Traveling exhibitions.** Exhibitions can be created to travel from their home institution to other locations in the region or across the country (or internationally). The entire exhibition to travel, or just select components. In either case, the receiving institution might add their own stories and related elements to the installation. There could also be a cumulative interactive element, such as an electronic message board or photo gallery to which visitors and participants can contribute in their locations and see contributions made by visitors and participants in the previous location.

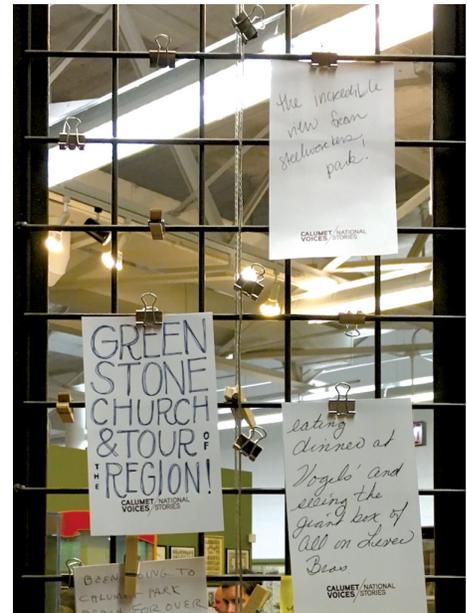
**2.1.1.4 Collaborative-Traveling-Series exhibitions.** Traveling exhibitions may have collaborative elements, and some or all elements of collaborative exhibitions might travel. Exhibitions might be designed as a series in which all of the exhibitions have thematic ties or present different interpretations based on one or more themes. Some exhibition projects combine all three approaches.



**2.1.1.5 Networked exhibitions.** Inside each Calumet Curator organization, a small kiosk would share information about the Heritage Area, points on a map, the institutions’ local story, and its connection to the core theme(s) of the region. There could be a display of that organization’s *Calumet Voices/National Stories* exhibition components, and the “Share YOUR Calumet Voice” interactive. Community members could share and curate their objects and stories. The display could grow further by continuing the *Calumet Voices* inter-organizational sharing of collections and stories. Other interested organizations could also join.

**2.1.2 Wayfinding and interpretive signage, banners, and panels**

*The content and design of the region’s wayfinding system and interpretive signage will be developed according to the thematic and interpretive approaches used in the above formats. Color palette and other design materials developed as part of the region’s brand and identity toolkit, together with messaging based on one or more core themes, will be used to reinforce the region’s identity and highlight the heritage significance and connectedness of locations throughout the region. Wayfinding signage, for example, will display textual information in a hierarchical arrangement of place name, overarching statement or question, factual information about the place/resource, story with local voice/quote, where to go for more information; graphical elements such as maps, branding, and photographs will be situated according to consistent design guidelines.*



**Possible interpretive elements:** Object/resource; large-scale steel artifacts; public art pieces; content (theme/story); label text, graphics (typeface/font, color palette, icons or symbols, patterns, photographs, maps); spatial organization; quotes; touchable objects or replicas; kiosks; banner; pamphlets

**Potential locations and organizations:** Museums; libraries; galleries; visitor centers; trails and trail heads; boat launches

**2.1.2.1 Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibition partnering organizations.** Calumet Curator organizations who participated in the *Calumet Voices/National Stories* exhibition project would have exterior and interior banners with the CHA logo to showcase their connection to the Heritage Area and the Heritage Area’s connection to them.

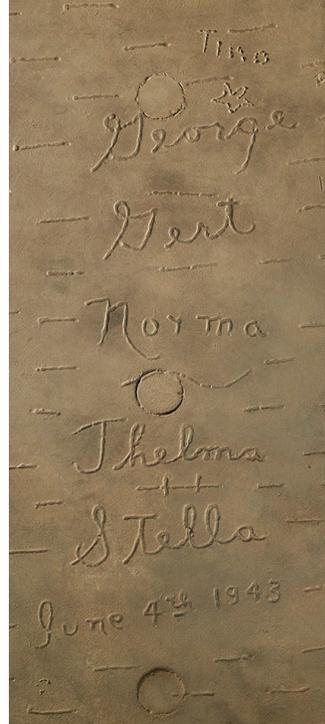
**2.1.2.2 Local and regional visitors centers.** These sites could also display publicly-visible CHA-branded banners and related materials.

**2.1.2.3 Trails.** Interpretive signage (or kiosks) would figure prominently throughout the Pullman-Dunes trail, featuring first-voice perspectives from Native American tribes that call this region home. Public art pieces and large-scale steel artifacts, along with interpretive panels, would be placed strategically along the trail as well. A prototype project is to infuse the insights of the Calumet Curators into the planning of a Calumet Heritage Route that will connect the Pullman National Monument with the Indiana Dunes National Park. Such a route merges the interests of the cultural heritage, recreation, arts, and regional economic development and heritage tourism groups at work on Management Plan implementation, and also provides an on-the-ground demonstration of the value of a Calumet Heritage Area. Currently the pathway between the parks is a mix of dedicated trail, city sidewalk, on street walking, and creative bushwhacking.



*For us, the Calumet Region provided some of the greatest diversity in natural resources as it relates to all forms of water, flora and fauna. Historically, the plants and wildlife found within the region provided great benefit to us, many of which are not found outside of the region.*

Pokégnek Bodéwadmik  
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians



Examples of trail elements. (Clockwise from upper right) Ivanhoe Prairie, Laura Milkert. Historic steel plate, John Weinstein. Trail sign design, Calumet Heritage Area Brand Toolkit. Big Marsh Park sculpture with lead artist Roman Villarreal and Frank Diaz, Paul Fitzgerald. *Calumet Voices/National Stories* exhibit banner.

**2.1.2.4 Gateways.** Gateways are sites that let visitors and locals alike know that they are entering (or are in) the Calumet Heritage Area and why it's an important, exciting, and interesting place to be. They are hubs of wayfinding and interpretation. The region's geography spans a range of places that embody its ecological, industrial, and cultural heritage; the juxtaposition of many of these resources is one thing that makes the region so unique. Gateway sites would be representative of at least two of the three core regional themes and would be located at points on or near the region's border and at in particular locations within the region. Each site would provide an interpretive orientation to the broader heritage area and to the local gateway location through branded banners/signage, maps, pamphlets, and possibly small displays. Another criterion to be a gateway is to be a highly trafficked location, such as the Indiana Dunes State Park.



Ford Calumet Environmental Center, Big Marsh Park. Paul Fitzgerald.

#### 2.1.4 Significant sites and house museums

*Nearly 250 heritage-based resources of national significance have been documented in the region, with an additional 200+ recognized as critical sites in the region's story, and the list continues to grow.*

**Possible interpretive elements:** Object/resource; large-scale steel artifacts; public art pieces; content (theme/story); label text; graphics (typeface/font, color palette, icons or symbols, patterns, photographs, maps); spatial organization; touchable objects or replicas; plaques; signage; pamphlets

**Potential locations and organizations:** Museums; libraries; galleries; visitor centers; neighborhood or city parks; state parks; national parks; forest preserves; environmental conservations areas; sites of current and former steel mills, industry, and related businesses; architecturally significant homes; current and former homes of residents with important local, regional, and/or national heritage; places of worship; non-designated cultural and natural sites that are important to community heritage; homes and businesses currently or previously owned by residents with diverse cultural heritage

**2.1.4.1 Ecologically, industrially, and culturally significant sites.** The vast majority of these sites are without even the simplest interpretive marker and are ripe for inclusion in the wayfinding system, as well as other kinds of interpretive programming that tell their stories of local, regional, and national importance.

**2.1.4.2 Historic sites.** Historic sites span the region and many already display plaques that depict their city, state, or national historic status. Heritage area interpretation would enhance that status and provide visibility and depth to the stories that support current historical designation. There are many sites in the region of great significance and meaning that have not been formally recognized, and heritage area interpretation could be instrumental in preserving the authenticity of the region.

**2.1.4.3 House museums.** Some homes are open to the public and showcase instances of a particular moment in history, a chance to see where and how someone famous came of age or enjoyed the fruits of wealth, or represent an example of extraordinary architecture or design. A growing number of house museums (as in Park Forest or Pullman or the National Public

Housing Museum in Chicago) are meant to evoke domestic experiences more commonly shared across the population. More sites can be identified that fit these descriptions; they can be connected to each other by tours and representation on the CHA Website.



Bierenberg House, Pullman House Tour. *History Coming Home* exhibit, National Public Housing Museum.

**2.1.4.4 Current and former steel mill sites.** Sites where steel mills once stood would have prominent CHA panels, with interpretive signage and a map depicting where the site was located. Ideally, the signage would be located at the boundaries of the mill, or even at specific areas within the footprint of the mill. Along with more standard signage, transparent signs depicting nearly transparent historical photos of the mill could evoke a simultaneous sense of past and present. Wayfinding panels would be located on adjacent streets. The sites would be shared on tourism and city websites, maps, and other media. Additional materials such as podcasts, and group tours would be developed. Currently operating mills, such as Cleveland-Cliffs sites (former Inland Steel’s Indiana Harbor and Riverdale, Illinois, as well as Burns Harbor) could offer group tours.



An example of signage that can frame the landscape with an empty frame, and bring past and present together by superimposing a semi-transparent photo onto all or part of the opening. Fathom Studio.



Showing past meets present, photographer Khánh Hmoong holds up old photographs to their modern day locations and photographs the juxtaposition of past and present. Khánh Hmoong (Creative Commons).

### 2.1.5 Maps and media

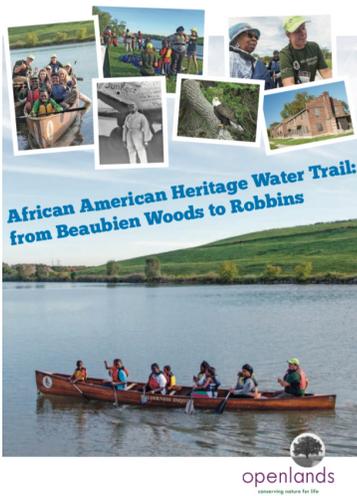
Maps can serve as visual tools that tell stories of both people and places, in addition to creating and utilizing maps for storytelling and information sharing, digital tools and formats should be leveraged to make the CHA available to a broader audience in various contexts.

**Possible interpretive elements:** Content (theme/story); interpretive text; script; photographs depicting the past era being shown in Augmented Reality sites

**Potential locations and organizations:** Wide variety; particular area that has undergone dramatic change in land use and appearance; museums; libraries; galleries; arts organizations; environmental organizations; educators; recreational organizations

**2.1.5.1 Hand held apps and Augmented Reality.** Creating interpretive resources that can be accessed on mobile devices or enjoyed as part of a virtual Augmented Reality experience can extend resources to a broader audience. Hand-held apps and digitally available tools and interactive programs make CHA stories available to folks to explore on individual bases, during a global pandemic and its aftermath such tools may be especially popular while gatherings are still limited.

**2.1.5.2 Interactive maps and story maps.** Maps can be used to assist folks into and through the Calumet, by providing meaning and interpretative and encouraging interaction with the landscape and the people of the region. Story maps can be a digital resource that allow people to explore the Calumet remotely and still feel immersed. Existing pamphlets or brochures that identify and interpret important sites within the region, such as the “Southeast Chicago Public Art” and the “Southeast Side Green Sites” brochures, could be developed into an interactive format.



African American Heritage Water Trail. Openlands.



**2.1.5.3 Podcasts and video.** Creating a podcast about the CHA, or connecting with existing podcast programs is another option for encouraging remote exploration of the Heritage Area. The NPS hosted a podcast series about NHAs in 2017-2019, but podcasts need not be limited to Heritage Area-specific communication channels and could also connect with programs about arts, culture, nature, industry, etc. Local history museums and other organizations could provide supplemental audio resources to enhance the audio storytelling.

### 2.1.6 Public programming

*Programs and events enrich and expand visitor connection to heritage sites and stories. Organizations are encouraged to partner on programming, to provide comparative perspectives and broader audiences. Some programs are designed for group interaction and others are created for individuals to participate in at their own pace. This is a sampling of program ideas and models which can be developed and hosted by a range of organizations across the region, including in conjunction with Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibitions.*

**Possible interpretive elements:** Content (theme/story); interpretive text; interpretive guide or docent; activity demonstration; activity guide; presentation; facilitation; place/site; script; audio/video; maps; brochures

**Potential locations and organizations:** Tourism agencies; museums; libraries; galleries; arts organizations; environmental organizations; educators; recreational organizations; colleges and universities; filmmakers; film festivals

**2.1.6.1 Guided tours.** Guided tours would offer visitors and residents the opportunity to explore and understand the Calumet landscape. Tours would be organized around a particular theme or geographic area, and could originate from an exhibition or from a particular site where an interpretive kiosk or marker has been placed. For example, a thematic tour could explore similarities and differences in African American heritage in Robbins, Illinois and Gary, Indiana.

**2.1.6.2 Guided interpretation.** One example of a program that incorporates guided interpretation and a version of historical reenactment is “Where they Stand” at Steelworkers Park, which is on the former site of US Steel South Works. The concept is for visitors to hear from retired US Steel steelworkers about where they worked when the mill was operational, and in relation to the current landscape. Each retiree will be given a space to occupy in the park that they can use to explain the job they held at the facility when it was operational. Artifacts, images, and maps of the facility when it was in operation for the volunteer to tell their story and the work that they did.

**2.1.6.3 Speaker series and symposia.** Much has been written about, documented, and planned for the Calumet region. However, important aspects of the region’s heritage remain overlooked. Series and symposia could include speakers from Calumet area Native American communities, Chicago Architecture Foundation and the American Planning Association, scholars such as Christine Walley (*Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*), and popular novelists such as Sara Paretsky, who sets her V.I. Warshawski novels in the Calumet region. Presentations of lesser-known stories might include women steelworkers, LGBTQ+ perspectives on regional identity, and the region through a neo-futurist lens.

**2.1.6.4 Film screenings.** Film screenings could explore films set in the region, as well as filmmakers who grew up there, such as *The Fugitive*, *A Christmas Story*, *Four Friends*, and *The Blues Brothers*. Screenings could also include short films, documentaries (*Wrapped in Steel*, *Exit Zero*, *Shifting Sands*, Calumet Films’ documentaries), experimental films and include a discussion with the filmmakers. Film series such as One Earth Film Festival could continue to be shown in the region, and new series could be hosted.



Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area Graffiti Workshops. <https://riversofsteel.com/>

**2.1.6.5 Artist-led programs.** The Calumet region is full of powerful works created by local artists, which interpret and showcase the region’s heritage in public art formats such as murals, graffiti, and sculpture. To bring the region’s artistic heritage to the next level, Calumet artists could lead muraling, graffiti art, and sculpting programs in former steel mills and other heritage-based sites (based on the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area arts programming).

**2.1.6.6 Programs for children and families.** Planting gardens or garden boxes, decorating hard hats with hand-made stickers, and creating mini-exhibit displays are all examples of flexible program formats that could be fun and educational for children and families. An informational handout could be provided to participants, and/or a brief presentation about the subject could kick off the activity.

**2.1.6.7 Pop-up museum.** A show-and-tell style program, developed by the Lakeshore People’s Museum, could be used throughout the region to surface and share residents’ heritage stories. The programs are organized around one or more core themes and invited participants bring items that embody meaningful stories related to the theme(s). A facilitator leads the participants in sharing their objects and stories with the rest of the group. Video, photography, or audio recording could make a lasting record of the items, people, and their stories. Formats could be developed to display the objects and/or their documentation to create traveling exhibits or a pop-up exhibit.

**2.1.6.8 Stewardship days.** Organized stewardship days to cleanup local natural areas could tie in with existing stewardship activities organized by the CHA.

**2.1.6.9 Workshops.** A range of subjects and activities could be organized into a workshop format. Ideas include heritage-based curriculum development for local educators, arts and crafts using local materials, and exploring genealogy.

**2.1.6.10 Other programs and events.** Opportunities abound for creative programming, such as book clubs, poetry, performance, makers’ nights, culinary events, and creating objects or posters related to exhibit themes.

**2.1.7 Educational curricula and tools**

*Educational curricula will draw on the CHA’s core interpretive themes and will focus on creating a cohesive and accessible set of tools to share out with educators, local schools, community groups, and other stakeholders. Activities and lesson plans will make connections to the Calumet Voices/National Stories exhibition series. The curriculum will leverage expertise in object-based learning, curriculum development, and teacher engagement to provide standards-aligned lessons that take place off-site (i.e., in the exhibitions) but also in the classroom.*

**Possible interpretive elements:** Content (theme/story); object/resource; text; photographs; maps; activity guide; presentation; facilitation

**Potential locations and organizations:** Public schools; private schools; home schools; community organizations; museums; libraries; galleries; arts organizations; park fieldhouses/park programs; Boys and Girls Clubs/scouting; nature centers

**2.1.7.1 Educational curricula development.** Use primary sources from and about the Calumet region to develop analytical skills and critical thinking adaptable for grades 3-12. Such sources may include intergenerational interviews, scientific notes, newspaper articles, and historical or contemporary photographs. Benefits of teaching with primary sources, include mutually applicable instructional strategies between language learning and science, which are cross-curricular and grounded in authenticity. They provoke deep thinking and analysis, and provide another access point to science.

**2.1.7.2 Civic dialogue.** Trained facilitators lead small group dialogues, use discussion guides covering topics such as sustainability, equity, economy, activism, and understanding nature to lead 6th - 12th graders and adults in consideration of their views, priorities, and understandings within topic areas for the region. Dialogue strengthens understanding in Social studies/History, build analytical skills in knowing how we know what we know, and promotes system thinking, the relating of different parts to being part of a whole.

**2.1.7.3 Learning kits lending library.** Object, activity, photo, and primary document based learning kits could be developed for loaning out from Calumet Curator locations. Multiple copies of kits and the rotation of kits between host locations would ensure equitable distribution across the region without small institutions having to host large numbers of boxed kits. Supports experiential learning as exemplified in the increasingly popular Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia pedagogies. Would be suitable for in school use 3rd -12th grades, depending on kit, and for home use.



Experience boxes from the N.W. Harris Learning Collection at the Field Museum can be used as models for the learning kits. (left to right: World Percussion, Pig Iron, Wild in Chicago). Copyright Field Museum.

### 2.1.8 Higher education consortium: heritage based internships and fellowships

*As first mentioned in Chapter 2, higher education consortia exist on either side of the stateline, with the potential for the CHA to develop a bistate consortium. It would allow schools to collectively be kept aware of CHA goals, priorities, assets, and programs; thus providing the structure for member institutions to identify their faculty, staff, students, and resources that could advance goals they share with the CHA. Resulting partnerships with the other institutions and organizations of the CHA could include (but not be limited to) internship for students; faculty consulting and research; venue sharing; access to archives, libraries, and other research facilities; and collaborative programming in the visual, digital, performative, culinary, and industrial arts. Internships for students at community based heritage organizations and fellowships for community based heritage practitioners at regional centers of higher education are a couple possibilities that would help build out regional interpretive programming.*

**Possible interpretive elements:** Content (theme/story); collections of local and regional archives and museums (texts, objects, photography, maps, activity guides), 1st voice and scholarly presentations, and facilitation.

**Potential locations and organizations:** local museums, history centers, and historical societies; libraries and archives; university and college academic departments in the social sciences, humanities, and arts; any community or academic venues suitable for performances, displays, or exhibition.

**2.1.8.1 College and graduate level heritage interpretation internships.** Students at regional and near-region colleges and universities get placements at local heritage organizations or partnerships to further their own experience doing interpretation that builds on their academic training in areas like history, anthropology, art & design, and ecology. In turn partner organizations get assistance in activities such as public program development, exhibitions and display, community resource inventories, docent training, marketing, and the development of interpretive guides and tools.

**2.1.8.2 Fellowships for community based heritage practitioners.** Across the Calumet region there are avocational and volunteer collectors and keepers of its stories. These people are often the leaders of local history museums or historical societies, or more widely nonprofits dedicated to community betterment. A fellowship program could be created to allow them to utilize university-level training and resources to develop specific interpretive products, or receive training in specific forms of interpretation, or heritage management.

## 3. Conclusion

This chapter has told a story about stories, about their power to connect people to place and to each other. It has touched on the importance of story-telling, the overall arc and themes of the “big picture” of the Calumet regional story, and the many ways that the Heritage Area can tell, show, support, and weave together the region’s multiple story lines.

The chapter has offered a framework for story-telling as a way to suggest strategies and to point to examples for interpretation. It is not intended to cover the entire territory, nor is it meant to specify particular actions. As the storybook of the Calumet Heritage Area comes together, it will be the responsibilities of all stakeholders in the Heritage Area, organized as described in Chapter 5, and pursuing prioritized Action Steps as described in Chapter 4, to bind it together. The Heritage Area is wide open to an array of possibilities. The task will be to continually tack back and forth between the big vision and the immediate actions.