

PARTNERSHIPS PANEL:

THE NEW JERSEY COASTAL HERITAGE

TRAIL ROUTE: A PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

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The New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route is a vehicular tourism route that is being developed to provide for public understanding and appreciation of significant natural and cultural sites associated with the coastal areas of New Jersey. Authorized by federal legislation in 1988, the Trail is a public/private partnership involving the National Park Service, state of New Jersey, units of local government, and public and private entities. The Trail region extends along nearly 300 miles of coastline. Trail themes will include Maritime History (the initial demonstration theme), Coastal Communities, Recreation and Inspiration, Wildlife Migration, and Coastal Habitats. This paper reviews the history and development of the Trail as a model for partnership efforts in managing and interpreting natural and cultural resources.

Introduction

The New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route (hereafter Trail) was authorized by Congress in 1988 as a public/private partnership to provide for understanding and enjoyment of important sites associated with the coastal areas of New Jersey and to recognize their importance in the nation's history. The Trail region extends along nearly 300 miles of coastline from Perth Amboy on the Raritan Bay in the north to Cape May in the south and then northwest along the Delaware Bay shoreline to the Delaware Memorial Bridge in Deepwater (Salem County). Figure 1 shows the project area and five Trail regions.

The project exemplifies partnership programs that have become increasingly important in protecting significant natural and cultural resources. Goals of the Trail include increasing public awareness of the special coastal resources through interpretation and education, creating public advocacy for resource protection through expanded awareness of the coast's significance, and ensuring that resources are not threatened or adversely affected because of designation as part of the Trail.

The Trail is designed for vehicular touring. Because of the size and complexity of the project area, five geographic regions have been defined along the main access corridors of the Garden State Parkway which runs north and south and State Route 49 which runs east and west. Each region will eventually have a Regional Welcome Center that will act as an interpretive and informational hub. Highway directional signs will be installed to guide visitors to Trail destinations, and both Trail-wide and regional brochures will be developed. Individual sites will have interpretive exhibit panels to supplement on-site interpretation. The goal is to provide for visitor needs through existing facilities or, where none exist, through cooperating groups or agencies. The interpretive goal of the Trail is to provide opportunities for visitors to learn about and experience New Jersey's diverse coastal heritage, expand public awareness of the significance of the coast, and place New Jersey's natural and cultural heritage in a state, national, and international context. The Trail will interpret the New Jersey coast through five themes. The Maritime History theme was selected as a demonstration theme and opened to the public in September 1993.

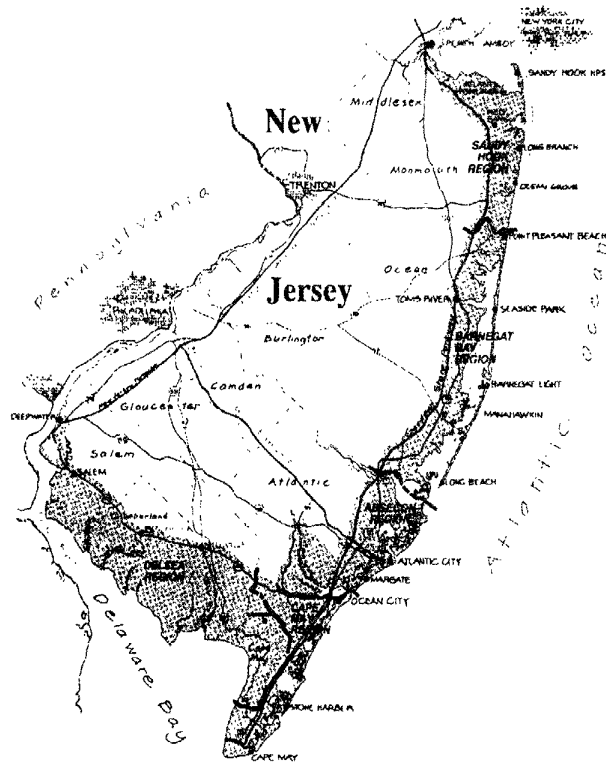


Figure 1. The New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route project area showing the five Trail regions.

Participation in the Trail is voluntary. Site owners/managers submit applications to the state of New Jersey for review and determination of the site's level of significance. Selection is based on criteria for location, significance, interpretation, access, and management.

During the initial five-year implementation period, the state of New Jersey will cooperate with the National Park Service (hereafter NPS) in managing the Trail. At the end of the implementation period, the NPS and the state will assess the Trail and the state's ability to manage it. The NPS will provide long-term stability for the Trail by anchoring it in the north at the Sandy Hook unit of Gateway National Recreation Area. A special resource study of the Delaware Bay that is underway may recommend long-term NPS involvement in southern New Jersey and provide another Trail anchor.

Legislative History

The concept of the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route was introduced by Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey who was concerned that the rich history of the New Jersey coast and the role it has played in the nation's history were not being adequately acknowledged. The organizational structure of the Trail idea was based on the premise that neither the federal nor state government could afford to protect and interpret all of the special places that can be found along the coastal region of New Jersey. Authorizing legislation (Public Law 100-515) sponsored by Bradley, Senator Frank Lautenberg, and by Congressmen William Hughes and James Saxton was passed by Congress in October 1988. The legislation directed the Secretary of the Interior acting through the Director of the NPS to designate a vehicular tour route along existing public roads linking such natural and cultural sites in New Jersey.

The legislation defined the Trail region and called for an inventory of all natural and cultural resources in the legislated project area. The inventory was to include the location and description of:

1. significant fish and wildlife habitat and other natural areas;
2. unique geographic or geologic features and significant landforms;
3. important cultural resources, including historical and archaeological resources; and
4. migration routes for raptors and other migratory birds, marine mammals, and other wildlife.

The legislation called for a general plan to include proposals for a comprehensive interpretive program and alternatives for appropriate levels of protection of significant resources. The resource inventory and general plan were to be prepared in consultation with other Federal agencies, the state of New Jersey, units of local governments, and public and private entities. Ample opportunities for public involvement were to be made available in the preparation of the inventory and interpretive plan. The Secretary of the Interior through the NPS was authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with federal, state, and local non-profit or private entities to provide technical assistance in the development of interpretive devices and conservation methods. In addition, the legislation gave the authority to erect road markers along the Trail in conjunction with the state or local entity having jurisdiction over the roads designated as part of the route. By working cooperatively--not only with other governmental agencies but also with local non-profits or private entities--the coast's unique stories could be highlighted for the traveling public.

Initial Research and Project Planning

In December 1988, the NPS began development of a resource inventory and general plan for interpreting and protecting selected resources. During the spring of 1989, the NPS study team held meetings with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Energy (hereafter DEPE) and researched resources in the project area. In April and June 1989, the project was officially launched with a series of public meetings. An inventory representing 267 entries and over 7,000 individual sites and structures was distributed for comment in November 1989.

The alternatives document was finalized as the "Study of Alternatives" and distributed in November 1990 along with the "Resource Inventory." A series of six workshops was held between November 1990 and February 1991 to gather public comments. A preferred alternative was presented to the NPS director in April 1991, and a decision was made to develop a final plan based on this alternative and to implement the project through the development of five trail themes.

Maritime History with its focus on aids to navigation, coastal defenses, fishing villages, maritime trade, and other aspects of the interdependence of people and the sea was selected as the demonstration theme. Subsequent themes will include two other historical subjects and two natural history themes. Coastal Communities will focus on the role of natural resources in shaping the economies of communities within the Trail region. Relaxation and Inspiration will address the traditions of the Jersey Shore as a destination for those seeking fun in the sun, a quiet rest, religious inspiration, and hunting and fishing activities. Coastal habitats will consider the variety of ecological habitats from sandy beaches and salt marshes to freshwater bogs and dense maritime forests that all support a wide variety of plant and animal life. Finally, Wildlife Migration will look at the international significance of the New Jersey coast as a vital stop in the global migration of many birds and sea mammals.

Workshops were held in 1991 to develop cultural and natural history themes and to develop site selection criteria. Those attending included natural and cultural resource staffs from federal, state, and local agencies and non-profit organizations. The planning team and representatives of several state agencies also reviewed formal agreements (memoranda of understanding)

for use between federal and state partners. Three types of sites will be included in the Trail--those that have national or state significance and offer a full range of visitor services (level 1 sites), those that have the national or state significance but offer only limited services (level 2 sites), and those that do not have national or state significance but provide information not available elsewhere on the Trail about one of the themes (associated sites.)

Level 1 sites must be fully operational and accessible, have the necessary services to support public use (including parking, restrooms, and water fountains), be staffed and open on a regular basis (at least five hours a day five days a week, including one weekend day), provide educational programs and information to the public, and protect site resources adequately.

Level 2 sites must meet the same significance and resource protection standards as level 1 sites, but do not provide all of the same support services. They may have restricted access, limited educational programs, and/or be open fewer hours. Managers of these sites will be encouraged to upgrade services to qualify for level 1 status.

Associated sites do not meet the significance standards but effectively explain information not available elsewhere on the Trail. They must provide the same kinds of educational programs, information, and level of services as level 1 or level 2 sites. Museums not in register-eligible facilities and with important collections relating to Trail themes would be likely candidates to be associated sites.

In addition, a category of Points of Interest has been established for destinations that are primarily scenic views or sites with limited or no staffing and services but that contribute significantly to one or more of the interpretive themes.

All Trail destinations will be evaluated in an application process that verifies location of the site within the project area boundaries; accessibility from public rights-of-way; relationship to at least one of the themes; availability of or plans to implement educational/interpretive programs relating to Trail themes; presence of adequate support facilities (including parking, restrooms, and water fountains) that meet local, state, and federal regulations for health safety and physical accessibility; and significance according to one of the following criteria:

1. listing or eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or New Jersey Register of Historic Places;
2. status or eligibility for status as a national or state natural resource protection area; and
3. determination that a site is critical in representing a particular aspect of a Trail theme.

In addition, site owners or managers are required to sign an official memorandum of understanding between the site owner/manager, state of New Jersey, and the NPS; agree to operate and maintain their trail facilities; and demonstrate community endorsement of their application through municipal, county, or other governing body approval. They must periodically review the condition of Trail signs, provide information for development of a Trail annual report, promote the Trail, distribute and install interpretive materials, attend interpretive training sessions conducted or approved by the state, and educate the public about the need for protection of natural and cultural resources.

Because the Trail project area covers nearly 300 miles of coast-line, it has been divided into five regions to simplify touring and make it more convenient for visitors. A map/brochure will be developed for each region showing all of the Trail-related sites by theme. A Regional Welcome Center will be established within each region near the Garden State Parkway (hereafter GSP) or State Route 49 which delineate the Trail area. The Regional Welcome Centers will provide orientation to the entire Trail and to its themes, but will highlight destinations within the region. In addition, they will also offer in-depth interpretation of one or

more Trail themes. Regional Welcome Centers must meet specific criteria regarding access, location, public services, hours of operation, and space available for audiovisual presentations and exhibits. Currently, three Interim Regional Welcome Centers have been established with an orientation video about the Trail, orientation exhibits, and Trail literature available to visitors.

To supplement the Regional Welcome Centers, a series of Local Information Centers will augment information distribution efforts. These Local Information Centers will distribute general brochures on the entire Trail and regional brochures for the region in which the center is located. They will be located in facilities such as chambers of commerce and local visitor bureaus and should assist in stimulating local interest in Trail sites and resources. Participation as a Local Information Center is voluntary and is initiated by an application to the state Division of Travel and Tourism that will review qualifications and make recommendations to the NPS. Information centers will be approved for periods of three years at which time re-application will be required. All of the Regional Welcome Centers and Local Information Centers will be located in existing or already proposed facilities that are managed and staffed by others and demonstrate the ability to support Trail activities.

The Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (hereafter HABS/HAER) was contracted to write overview histories of the Trail project area as well as more specific maritime and agricultural histories. The first volume in the series entitled Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail was released in 1991 as Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay: Cape May, Cumberland and Salem Counties. The second volume was published in 1992 as From Marsh to Farm: The Landscape Transformation of Coastal New Jersey. Additional volumes are in development on maritime history and on the Atlantic coast region.

A trailblazer (logo) received approval in November 1991 from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (hereafter NJDOT) for use on highway signs. The logo was then sent to all counties, the Garden State Parkway Commission, and the Atlantic City Expressway Commission for approval.

Trail office staff continued to meet with various agencies and the public during the fall of 1991 to review reaction to the development alternatives and proposed themes. A newsletter was published and a series of open houses was held. The congressional delegations were briefed, and meetings were held with the staff of NPS Harpers Ferry Center to discuss development of interpretive materials.

Developing Trail Partnerships

The top destinations nationwide for the escorted tour industry are national parks, natural areas, and historic sites. In New Jersey, tourism is the number two industry generating an estimated \$18 billion in travel expenditures. The state's travel industry supports 346,000 jobs and provides \$7.6 billion in payroll and \$2.6 billion in taxes. In 1993 there were 158.5 million trips made to or within New Jersey, of which 20 million were overnight trips.

As the Trail's planning began, two options became apparent. One was to consider the Trail as primarily a federal NPS activity that focused on existing nationally significant resources--perhaps 12-15 sites. The second option was to respond to initial public input by expanding the project to include sites of state and regional significance. This second option would require the establishment of a variety of partnerships. The goal was to look for groups already engaged in related activities that had similar or complementary agendas and for which participation would be to their advantage.

Some obvious potential partners quickly emerged. These partners were agencies already involved in tourism and the management of the state's natural and historic resources. They were the New Jersey Department of Commerce and Economic Development's Division of Travel and Tourism (hereafter T&T), the Pinelands

Commission (hereafter Pinelands) which oversees the Pinelands National Reserve, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Energy's (hereafter DEPE) Division of Parks and Forestry (hereafter DPF) which was designated as the lead coalition partner.

A conscious decision was made to involve these agencies in planning and review from the beginning so that the resulting development plan became everyone's plan and not just that of the NPS. A formal memorandum of agreement was signed with the state of New Jersey designating the responsibilities of each partner.

The NPS agreed to provide the core staff for the initial project development; assist in the resource inventory and evaluation; produce wayside and visitor center exhibits, brochures, and other interpretive materials; seek financial assistance for DPF's management of day-to-day Trail operations; prepare final implementation documents; and make final determinations for site eligibility. The DEPE agreed to provide team members and input from DPF, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife, Office of Green Acres, and Office of Natural Lands Management; explore potential joint use of visitor centers by DEPE and the Trail; assist in devising a long-term funding and management plan; solicit site applications and participate in field reviews; and review sites for National Register eligibility.

T&T also agreed to provide a staff representative for planning purposes, supply travel and economic statistical data, locate and evaluate potential Local Information Centers, and assist in development and distribution of Trail literature. The Pinelands was to designate a representative, identify areas of cooperation for interpretive programs and visitor centers, and assist with determinations of significance for Pinelands resources.

The state partners also provided access to other groups able to assist with the development or implementation of the Trail. The Governor's Recreational Travel Committee with representation from DPF, T&T, as well as NJDOT and county engineering departments expedited the process of obtaining official approval for the logo or trailblazer to be used on highway signs. Through this committee, contacts were made with NJDOT and individual counties regarding both the storage of highway sign inventories at two locations accessible to the six participating counties and subsequent sign installation. A series of meetings was held with representatives of the Trail, NJDOT, and individual counties to verify proposed locations for installation of road signs and to determine the party responsible for sign installation.

The partnership with T&T resulted in the Trail being the focus of state tourism conferences and an agreement to handle brochure distribution through the existing state contract to state parks and tourist information centers. In addition, T&T agreed to allow centralized storage of Trail literature at its Trenton, NJ, warehouse. Agreements were also reached for the installation of orientation wayside exhibits and distribution of brochures at most service areas on the Garden State Parkway (hereafter GSP.)

The three existing interim Trail Welcome Centers are located in facilities managed by others. Two are in state parks (Cheesequake and Fort Mott) operated by the DPF. The third is in a staffed tourist information center in the Ocean View Service Area (milepost 18.3) on the GSP. T&T operates the information center in a GSP facility leased to Marriott and Mobil. Recently Mobil gave up half of its office space for an expanded Trail Welcome Center, and GSP funded and made renovations to the new space. Options are also being explored at Double Trouble State Park for joint facilities to serve DPF, Pinelands, and the Trail as a Regional Welcome Center.

For all of these Interim Welcome Centers, the focus is building on existing systems, services, and infrastructure, not on creating new ones. The NPS brings technical assistance for exhibit design and installation, while the site provides the space and staffing. In

many instances, the NPS is able to provide technical assistance to improve the site's own exhibits in addition to the exhibits relating to the Trail.

The process of building and maintaining these partnerships extends to the individual sites participating as Trail destinations. In the agreement signed with sites, the NPS agrees to provide periodic interpretive training opportunities for site employees, to supply directional trailblazer signs, to accept requests for technical assistance in the areas of interpretation and conservation of resources, to provide trail-wide orientation brochures and regional brochures, and to develop interpretive/orientation exhibits on the Trail.

In return, the sites agree to the continuing preservation of the resource covered by the agreement, to provide employees with the opportunity to attend training offered by the NPS, to make space available for the distribution of Trail literature, to display Trail interpretive exhibits, to maintain directional and trailblazer signs for the site, to provide space for the distribution of other local area tour brochures, to supply information on visitor use and Trail-related activities for an annual report, and to obtain a statement of support from the local governing authority for participation in the Trail.

Future Development of the Trail

One effective tool in maintaining support for the Trail has been a conscious effort to keep the Trail project and its partners in the public eye and to maintain a sense of progress and success through such things as periodic newsletters, giving credit to the partners, and holding mini-events at the sites. The official ceremonies opening the Trail in September 1993 involved both recognition of--and participation by--representatives of the key partners at the federal, state, and local levels. Annual meetings have been held with the Trail's official partners to review progress and solicit input for future priorities and development. Partners are also encouraged to attend and participate in Trail briefings with Congressional staff. As the Trail continues to develop, the partners will play a central role in cooperatively defining the Trail's vision as well as the long-term role of each participant.

The NPS Trail staff is constantly alert to opportunities for using the partners as a network to reach out to other individuals and organizations that can contribute to the Trail's development. The partners have been critical in successful efforts to raise additional funds through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) for interpretive wayside exhibits. The Trail has also received support from the New Jersey Historical Commission by applying for publication grant support through the non-profit support group for one of the Trail sites. The partnerships provide the Trail with essential credibility and legitimacy that is critical in efforts to generate additional financial and political support.

State and local organizations have also used the Trail as a means of leveraging support for their own projects. Participation in the Trail has affected priorities for both staffing and capital projects at Trail sites. Groups such as bed & breakfast associations, city redevelopment groups, and county development organizations have seen the potential of the Trail in supporting their own agendas including efforts to develop eco-tourism initiatives.

Summary and Implications

The success of the Trail and its future depend on the building and nurturing of a broad range of partnerships, some formal and many informal. Like volunteers, such partnerships require a good deal of time, effort, and a certain amount of money to maintain. However, the potential benefits from such relationships far exceed what would be possible if each agency acted independently. Part of the success comes from the realization that the project can only be effective if it is based on support from the bottom up rather than being a project imposed from above. It also depends on establishing a common agenda that addresses the self interests of the partners and keeps them involved.

The Trail is a new type of partnership venture for the National Park Service. It provides a mechanism for working within existing administrative structures to bring together a broad range of established facilities managed by a variety of groups throughout coastal areas of the state of New Jersey. Selection criteria and a formal review process for applicants guarantee a certain level of staffing, state and national significance, public access, and quality of facilities and exhibits. Assistance is provided to participants wishing to improve exhibits and other educational and interpretive efforts. The Trail's interpretive themes and statewide promotional effort provide broad recognition to each facility. At the same time, interpretive exhibits at each site relate one destination to others and provide a broader context than would be possible at an individual site.

From a statewide perspective, the Trail provides a framework for recognizing and bringing to public attention the significance of the natural and cultural resources that can be found along the coast of New Jersey. By providing tourism alternatives to traditional beach activities, the Trail provides a mechanism to extend the travel season, to provide rainy day activities, and to promote additional travel activities. At the same time, it is hoped that the Trail will encourage a broader awareness of the importance of protecting the natural and historic resources of the New Jersey coast and their context within nationally and internationally significant resources.

With only the first of five interpretive themes in place and still in its first year of being open to the public, the development of the Trail is far from complete. Nevertheless, the Trail is being watched as a possible model for similar partnership ventures proposed for other regions of the country. It recognizes the inability of any single agency to preserve, protect, and interpret a region's resources and provides a possible mechanism for successful partnership efforts that can be expected to become increasingly important in the future.