

## **National Heritage Area (NHA) Feasibility Studies**

Short Guide to Assessing National Importance, Contributing Resources, Opportunities, and a Boundary for Heritage Areas

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This short guide supplements the *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines* (guidelines) and provides a brief overview to assessing national importance, contributing resources, opportunities, and a boundary for a national heritage area feasibility study.

### ***Statement of National Importance***

In order to meet criterion 1, a study must document that there is a nationally important story or stories, resources that relate to the national story or stories and associated themes, and a boundary that relates to the resources. The guidelines, specifically *Step 3: Determination of the Region's Contribution to the National Heritage and Development of Potential Themes* and *Step 4: Natural and Cultural Resources Inventories and Integrity Determinations*, outlines a process for assessing the region's contribution to our national heritage, developing themes, and identifying resources.

To address criterion 1, develop a succinct statement of national importance that identifies -

1. The association(s) (i.e., the event, movement, cultural group, etc.) that makes the region nationally important; and
2. Why the association is important to our nation's history, as opposed to local or regional history; and
3. Why that association should be told in the proposed heritage area.

Developing a statement of national importance is the approach that is currently being used by study teams to assess and document the study area's national importance. Excerpts from the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Addendum and Muscle Shoals plan are included here as examples.

*"The Mountains to Sound Greenway is nationally important for its association with the expansion of our national transportation system and the creation of our modern timber industry. The proposed national heritage area extends east-west from Ellensburg to Seattle, encompassing the last section of a historic transportation corridor that connected the Eastern seaboard and the Pacific Northwest and established a crucial trade route between the United States, Asia and the Northern Pacific region. The north-south boundaries encompass a section of the largest land grant in American history, where the massive privatization of the conifer rainforests of the Northwest led to the development of modern timber harvesting practices...."*

*"The Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area (MSNHA) is nationally important for its association with the development of American popular music. Blues music*

*originating in the Deep South's African-American culture first became its own musical form and idiom, giving voice to the experience of slaves and freedmen. Later, the Blues accompanied freedmen migrating out of the region to cities where local musicians applied urban interpretations to the genre. Across the nation, the Blues inspired and lent itself to the development of other wholly American musical styles, including Gospel, Rhythm and Blues, Soul, Funk, Rock, and Country-Western. Coming full circle, derivations of the Blues returned to the MSNHA, expressed in the music studios as a unique "Muscle Shoals Sound." Famous American popular music artists embraced the sound and found an outlet for their creativity and independence in the music culture of the Muscle Shoals studios. From the migration of the Blues out of the region to the pilgrimage of musicians into the region, American popular music was a bridge across segregated cultures and helped break racial barriers...." (Draft Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Management Plan)*

### ***Interpretive Themes, Supporting History and Associated Resources***

Step 3 of the guidelines outlines the process for developing themes and associated resources that relate to the region's national importance. The themes and associated resource inventories enable the NPS to determine if criterion 5 has been met.

Interpretive themes are organizing tools that define the framework for a national heritage area's interpretation. For guidance on theme development, refer to the NHA Feasibility Study Interpretive Theme Primer. The themes identified should relate to and further the statement of national importance.

Associated Resources. Focus on assessing a strategic assemblage of historic, natural, and cultural resources that are associated with the national story and associated themes. The National Park Service is looking at the quality, not just quantity, of resources identified in the study. Resources that are included in the strategic assemblage should be documented. Historic and cultural resources should be listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or a state or local register.

If such an assemblage exists, identify these resources in an inventory. Ideally, the resource inventory is organized by theme and identifies the resource name, type of resource, designation (listing or eligibility for listing), and historic association or natural importance.

Supporting History. Under each theme, a narrative of relevant historical, social or other supporting information may be included. An extensive history of the study area is not necessary.

### ***Traditions, Customs, Beliefs, and Folklife***

In order to meet criterion 2, you must demonstrate that there are traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story. The information supporting this criterion enables the NPS to determine if the region shares a common

culture that is important to the national story and if that culture continues to the present day.

To address criterion 2, identify and assess ongoing traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are related to the nationally important story and themes. Festivals and other commemorative events may be considered.

If there are a collection of ongoing activities in the area related to the region's national importance, provide a narrative describing them and their connection to the nationally important story. Also, include an inventory of the traditions, customs, beliefs and folklife of the region. Ideally, the inventory is organized by theme and identifies the name of the cultural practice, the location where it continues to be practiced, and its historic or cultural association.

### ***Opportunities***

To meet criteria 3 and 4, identify and assess outstanding opportunities for improving the quality of the strategic assemblage of resources through conservation, recreation and education.

Focus your opportunities assessment on the strategic assemblage of resources. Consider if these resources are publicly accessible and if there are opportunities to improve the level and quality of the resources through conservation, recreation, and education. NPS reviewers are looking for specific opportunities for conservation, recreation, and education. Therefore, it is helpful to include stakeholders in the opportunities identification process.

### ***Boundary Justification***

Criteria 1 and 9 both relate to the identification of a boundary for the heritage area. Per our study guidelines, the boundary must be informed by 1) the resources (the strategic assemblage) that relate to your nationally important story; 2) opportunities for conservation, recreation and education; and 3) public interest in the potential National Heritage Area.

For more information please refer to the study guidelines, specifically *Step 6: Boundary Delineation*.