

Washington State
NATIONAL MARITIME HERITAGE AREA
Feasibility Study



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION



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Feasibility Study Overview

The feasibility study is involving state, local, and tribal governments, heritage organizations, ports, tourism organizations, landowners, and the general public to evaluate whether a National Heritage Area designation makes sense to support Washington's maritime resources. If you have additional questions or would like an opportunity to comment on the proposal, please contact:

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A National Heritage Area

Celebrating and Supporting Washington State's Maritime Culture

OVERVIEW

Beginning with coastal canoe cultures and continuing to superferries and superfreighters, Western Washington's community and commerce has grown on our saltwater shores. The story of our maritime heritage is a key to understanding ourselves as a region. It is also a story of national importance, reflecting a unique way of life in a place like no other.

A variety of groups—from heritage societies to ports to Native American tribes and intertribal organizations—have worked diligently to protect and celebrate our living maritime heritage. However, many of those groups have also struggled to maintain volunteer support, raise funds, and build sustainable organizations.

Today, Washington's maritime heritage community is working towards a new partnership throughout the region. Individual groups believe that telling a bigger story—one that brings together old and new, the Pacific and Puget Sound, large craft and small—will engage more of the public and better share the history, drama and excitement of our maritime stories.

Local organizations are considering a new designation for Washington's maritime resources as a National Heritage Area—the first National Heritage Area in the country to be focused on maritime heritage. This designation would raise awareness of our heritage resources with a national audience and support expanded cooperation among the maritime heritage groups working in Washington.

At this stage of the process, the State legislature has provided seed funding to complete a feasibility study for a National Heritage Area. Our heritage resources are of exceptional quality and interest. However, supporting a National Heritage Area requires more than great ships, museums, and events. It also requires strong grassroots support, a stable organization, and reliable funding. These are the critical issues the feasibility study is addressing.

Developing the proposal for a new National Heritage Area will require new and strengthened partnerships among heritage groups, local governments, and coastal tribes. The feasibility study is focused on reaching out to those groups, as well as the general public, to understand whether a National Heritage Area designation makes sense for Western Washington's maritime resources.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a National Heritage Area?

National Heritage Areas are places designated by Congress to recognize nationally important natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources. Today, there are over 40 national heritage areas throughout the United States.

There is no increased federal regulation associated with National Heritage Areas. Instead, the designation supports local citizens to preserve, share and promote our own heritage, with full local control.

How do communities benefit from National Heritage Area designation?

National Heritage Areas provide a range of benefits to local communities:

- Designation as a National Heritage Area can raise awareness of the quality and importance of local history, helping communities preserve their historic resources and share the story of their past
- Increased heritage tourism provides economic benefits to heritage organizations, as well as restaurants, lodging, and other community businesses.
- Better coordination between heritage groups strengthens the ability to compete for grant funding.
- National Heritage Areas receive technical assistance from the National Park Service to support development and operations.
- In the past, National Heritage Areas have received some federal funding, although future funding of the program is uncertain.

What would the boundaries for National Heritage Area include?

The feasibility study includes Washington State's saltwater shoreline north from Willapa Bay, through the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and around Puget Sound to the Canadian border. In addition, the study area extends into Seattle to include Lake Union. Pacific County's shoreline is not included.

The proposed boundary will not be finalized until outreach is completed and stakeholders have voiced their opinion. Because the feasibility study is focused only on maritime heritage, the boundaries will likely include resources like vessels, specific sites such as lighthouses and maritime-related facilities, and visitor facilities with a maritime theme.

Local or tribal government must support any land or facility within their jurisdiction being proposed as part of the National Heritage Area designation.

How are National Heritage Areas managed?

First, it's important to emphasize that "management" does not imply that the National Heritage Area has any authority over land use, public lands policy or privately owned resources. Management is focused on coordinating the activities of voluntarily participants in the National Heritage Area. Typical management activities might include:

- Maintaining communication between museums, ports, owners of historic vessels and other heritage-type organizations;
- Developing marketing programs to encourage heritage tourism;
- Applying for and managing grant funds;
- Sponsoring events, festivals, or other heritage-oriented activities.

National Heritage Areas have a range of options for management organizations. Around the country National Heritage Areas are managed by non-profit organizations, state or local agencies, or a specially appointed commission.

At this time, the study team expects that a private non-profit organization is the most likely type of management group for a National Heritage Area in Washington. Designation does not provide the management organization or any federal agency with the authority to regulate land. The management entity is also prohibited from using any federal funds it may receive through enabling legislation to acquire property.

Who is leading the feasibility study?

The feasibility study is being managed by the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, with guidance by a steering committee assembled for this project. The steering committee includes representatives from tribes, local and state government, heritage organizations, and other interested stakeholders. The steering committee's ultimate recommendations will be guided by the results of the public outreach from the feasibility study.

What happens next if the Steering Committee requests designation of a National Heritage Area?

If stakeholders support moving forward, the state would request our federal congressional delegation to introduce legislation authorizing the development of the new National Heritage Area.

If this legislation is successful, the management organization for the National Heritage Area would then create a management plan for the heritage area, and would be authorized to receive federal funds if funding is available. The management plan would typically include an education plan, the rehabilitation of historic sites or vessels, a tourism enhancement strategy, a strategy for improvement of local museums, and similar activities.

The authority to implement the management plan would be local, resting in the hands of willing local officials and the actions of local organizations.

