

FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR AN OZARK NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

AN INTRODUCTION

What is this all about?

We live in an incredible country filled with incredible stories. The American experience has been told in many different ways, but the story of being an American is wonderful and complex. There are particular areas, such as the automotive history in eastern Michigan, or the Civil War history in Tennessee, that have unique stories that can be told there and nowhere else. The Missouri Ozarks, with its incredible landscape, history, and people, could also be one of those regions. This area includes Carter, Dent, Douglas, Howell, Iron, Oregon, Ozark, Reynolds, Ripley, Shannon, Texas, Wayne, and Wright counties. The National Heritage Area program is a unique effort led by the National Park Service to celebrate these unique parts of the country. But, the core of the National Heritage Program is grassroots citizen leadership.



National Park Service?

A National Heritage Area is not controlled from Washington DC. It is also not a National Park, not a National Monument, not a National Forest, nor even an administered unit of the National Park Service. No land is owned or managed by the National Park Service under this program. Their involvement is as an advisor to an independent group that is in the region. Every new National Heritage Area has included this Private Property Protection Clause:

“Nothing in this Management Plan shall be construed to require any private property owner to permit public access (including Federal, State, or local government access) to such private property. Nothing in this Management Plan shall be construed to modify any provision of Federal, State, or local law with regard to public access to or use of private lands.”

In short, this means that the National Heritage Area cannot force people into the program and can't take private property in any way. The program is intended as a voluntary partnership. You don't have to participate if you don't want to.

What's in it for me? Why should it matter to my community?

A big part of this program is about heritage: too often the Ozarks region has been defined by others. Now, through this program, residents can define *themselves*. This can be through

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heritage preservation to save local stories, heritage education to make local residents proud of their common experiences, and through heritage tourism which allows outsiders to see the “real” Ozarks and brings in economic development dollars. The economic impact of tourism in a region can be significant, but there must be a balance.

Heritage isn't just museums and landmarks—it's about celebrating local culture and stories: a restaurant might include stories of the region on the back of a menu, a retail store may display local artwork that interests visitors—the store owner can relay a story of the region through the piece. It offers both the benefits of economic development and lets local residents feel like they are in a special place that they and their families will care for a long time.

A National Heritage Area is not a set experience like Colonial Williamsburg, nor are residents a “cast” of characters that all think the same way. They are citizens, voters, and volunteers in a living region.

How does this process work?

A National Heritage Area isn't just created, there is a multiple-stage process and it must be acknowledged by Congress and signed into law. Our office, Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company, is working with Ozark Action, Inc. to create an official Feasibility Study document that the National Park Service will review. We are a small landscape architecture office in Missouri with no affiliation with the National Park Service (NPS), but we have worked on National Heritage Area projects in the past. The NPS does have specific criteria to follow, including *resource inventories* that document the significant features in a potential National Heritage Area.

In a traditional approach, the “outside experts” come, tell people how do to things, then leave. We feel this is inappropriate. Instead, we believe in citizen engagement: you know your stories, your sites, and your values. We would rather you define yourselves than the other way around. If this process takes hold, you will be the ones continuing this process and celebrating your stories. We are here to help you with tools and direction to realize your efforts—civic engagement training is one of those methods.

If you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact Kathleen Morrissey at Ozark Action at 710 E. Main Street, West Plains, MO 65775, 417-256-6147, or kmorrissey@oaiwp.org.

If you have any questions about our office, please feel free to contact us.

Thanks,

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HERITAGE TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The Travel and Tourism industry generated \$740 billion in the US economy in 2006 and over eight million jobs. Since then, tourism has bucked economic trends and grown to \$770 billion in 2009 as people stay in the United States instead of travel overseas. Missouri's share of tourism is \$10.1 billion. (Source: US Dept. of Commerce, 2009)
- 81% of US adult travelers in 2005 considered themselves “cultural travelers” as they include historical or cultural activities on their trips, an increase from 68% in 1996. Heritage tourism grew at twice the rate of general tourism. (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation)
- The Department of Commerce also reports that heritage travelers tend to spend more money per day (\$623 compared to \$457) and travel longer on average than those with different travel agendas (5.2 nights compared to 3.4 nights).
- The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism found that the most popular months for heritage travel are July and August.
- The Kansas Department of Commerce records that heritage tourists desire to visit places for “nostalgia, patriotism, and education.”

Heritage Travel in Missouri (*findings from Missouri Division of Tourism survey*)

Missourians Want to Travel in Missouri. Of six states from which to choose for cultural/heritage travel, Missourians overwhelmingly choose Missouri (75% total, 86% culturally motivated), more than double the next closest states (Tennessee: 34% total, 35% culturally motivated; Illinois: 33% total, 33% culturally motivated).

Non-Missourians Show Interest in Missouri. Among total out-of-state residents, Missouri (34%) places among the leaders (Texas 37%, Tennessee 36%, Illinois 33%). However, culturally motivated travelers (who have been to Missouri) position it at the top (Missouri 61%), Tennessee ranks second at a distant 49%).

Consistent Reasons Cited When Missouri Is Not Preferred. “Been there/done that” ranks at the top for not choosing Missouri as the preferred state for both in-state and out of-state residents. Missouri must also fight images, both internal and external, that other states have superior attractions and are more beautiful and scenic. Non-residents add that there is not much to do in Missouri.

The Missouri Eighth Congressional district employed 8,900 people and generated \$164 million in travel payroll in 2006—ranking 8th out the nine congressional districts.

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Heritage Tourism and Natural Resources

- 20% of the travel market is now classified as adventure travel--of which 81% travel to “experience people, lifestyles, and cultures different from their own”, and a similar number “visit small towns and rural areas.” (National Geographic and TIA, 2002)
- The AARP indicates that the top ten adventure activities for Baby Boomers includes freshwater fishing, biking, hiking, camping, motorcycling, and kayaking—all of which can be experienced in the Ozarks region.

How do you Promote Regional Heritage Tourism?

- Much like commercial sites like to gather around one another to improve business, heritage sites and locations can better improve their economic environment if they provide multiple close options to one another. Few people will travel six hours to visit a single site and return home, but many more will visit a half-dozen sites over a long weekend. Connect your stories.
- As it states in the introduction, heritage tourism isn’t just museums and landmarks, its restaurants, retail stores, hotels, and support businesses. There are number of places and locations that can cross-promote to create a “real” experience of the Ozarks.
- If this area becomes a full-fledged National Heritage Area in the future, it can provide signage, marketing, and branding to promote the region and its heritage resources—as well as provide grants to assist sites in improving their resources.