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Charles Flynn
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My Narrative
The Administrative History of the National Heritage Areas Coordinating Office

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Heritage area work: I had a particular interest in riverfront development, and this seemed to be a good vehicle. As it turned out, in both Wheeling and Yuma the work on riverfront development would be across jurisdictional lines, state lines. Sort of like regional planning and development but on a river corridor. So that was my interest. I had previously run a resort business on a lake. I didn't quite appreciate until later on how central waterfronts were to communities. It's often why cities grew up. They were on water courses. Then, in the early part of the 20th century it became very industrialized, and people sort of turned away from it and created blockages and what has happened over the last forty or fifty years is really an amazing transformation of riverfronts back to something that's accessible and useable and enjoyable by the public. I just found heritage areas a good vehicle, and again not all heritage areas do that, but in my case, it was a great vehicle to work on it (waterfront development).

I had sold my business up in Pennsylvania. It had been a resort and tourism business. I had done that for ten or twelve years and before that I had worked for Ed Koch both when he was a congressman and when he was the mayor of New York. So, I had both political and tourism experience. I learned about this position in Wheeling when it was advertised regionally. Interestingly, at that point, even though Wheeling was not designated as a national heritage area until 2000, there was an implementation plan, and it was getting to the point in Wheeling where they had a task force of people who knew they needed to get someone to manage the plan. Peter Samuel (NPS NERO NHA Coordinator), who has been involved for a long, long time, was part of that process through the NPS to help get this moving.

The NPS Northeast regional director (Marie Rust) was very supportive. My experience was, Brenda Barrett was in Washington, but she was basically by herself. At that time and particularly during the Bush administration, I would say, the NPS was schizophrenic about heritage areas. It would sometimes depend on the leadership at the top. Definitely during the Bush administration there was a strong feeling that this was taking away from their primary task of managing the parks. It was taking money away from the needs of major parks and the maintenance backlog and so forth. Brenda was very supportive but back then in the '90s it was definitely driven by the region because there was so much money going into the Northeast Region.

Senator Byrd was an amazing guy. We went in to see him in 1994. We had already developed a plan (for a Wheeling heritage area) and wanted his approval and get authorized etc. He basically said to me, "Son, I don't want to get it authorized because then you will be limited to a million dollars." In five years in Wheeling, I spent \$25 million dollars. Not all of it was through the NPS. Some of it was through the FTA through the Intermodal Center. It was a wholesale redevelopment of Wheeling's waterfront. Lots of different sources. A good chunk from the NPS but a lot of multiple sources to make that happen.

I left (Wheeling) in 1999 and in 2000 after that \$25 million was spent, the plan went ahead and was authorized. We had written the plan and a lot of the work had been done and Senator Byrd determined that this was the time to authorize it (the Wheeling National Heritage Area). People often criticized him as a pork barreler, but he had a staff of four or five whose sole job was to go

around West Virginia and review and audit projects. He did not want to be embarrassed. He wanted to see progress. His staff was very involved at that time. They looked at the books. They looked at the projects. Wanted to know where the money was being spent and how. I think his view was the one thing that could stop him from continuing to do this would be some kind of scandal of how the money was misspent.

Twenty years after I left, they are still working on residential development, employment development, making a sustainable downtown neighborhood not dependent on tourists.

In 1999 I was interested in moving to Yuma because the city manager of Yuma (Arizona) Joyce Wilson, who later became the city manager of El Paso, was absolutely committed to getting some major things done there. Yuma had serious problems with their downtown and serious problems with the riverfront. It was overgrown with non-native vegetation. There were hobo camps. There were meth labs. There were trash dumps. The river front was a disaster. She was looking about for some vehicle to make a change happen. Not only parks and wetlands but commercial development. She realized that a heritage area would be a good framework to promote public and private investment. Not only NPS money but multiple; state agencies, city monies, private monies and so forth. So, based on that she, I guess you could say, stole me, from Wheeling. She looked at different heritage areas around the country and looked at what they did, and Wheeling looked particularly good, but you know I had Senator Byrd on my side.

So they reached out to me in January of 1999 when it was 20 below zero in Wheeling and 75 in Yuma and invited me out. Because of my experience with heritage areas, they hired me initially as the riverfront redevelopment manager for Yuma directly but one of my tasks was to work on getting legislation done and authorized. I got there in June of 1999. We worked on the legislation and were fortunately able to convince Senators McCain and Kyle to support the authorization although both of them said, "Well we'll get you authorized but don't expect us to get you any money." Back then it was an earmark program. We had support on the House side, and we got authorized in October of 2000.

Yuma Heritage Area organization: In 2002 after we began getting some money directly from NPS, we formed a non-profit corporation and had an independent board of people from the city. The city committed or provided staff for ten years: a grant writer, a planner, a construction project manager, myself, and administrative support staff. That meant that any NPS money I got was already matched by the city. I was then to not only work on commercial development for downtown where I was working directly on behalf of the city but to amass 22 acres of riverfront land as well as parks, trails, and wetlands. We were all city employees. In July 2015, I retired from the City and then worked directly for the heritage area corporation. The city puts about a half million dollars a year into operational costs and staffing. That's been a critical component of our success. From 2000 to 2010, we were primarily a project management group, working on building riverfront parks, and trail, wetlands restoration, and economic development projects. With the major capital projects completed and with the onset of the major recession, we have evolved to more of an operations and management team, now managing the two state historic parks in Yuma which were slated for closure by the state.

I give credit to the entire community, in that through four mayors, four city councils, four city administrators it has never been a political football. There might be other issues in which council or mayor may disagree, but the riverfront was something that everyone agreed on. There has been a steady support for the riverfront.

Assistance from the NPS: Interestingly NPS heritage area work was so heavily concentrated on the east coast that when we were authorized in October 2000 and I went to the NPS in Denver no one really knew about heritage areas. They were not a thing in the Intermountain Region. For the first six months to a year they (the NPS region) asked RTCA to work on it, Cate Bradley out of Tucson. Then there was the suggestion to work with a superintendent close by. In the east you've got national parks within heritage areas or very close to heritage areas so it's easy to work together. Our closest National Park or Monument was Organ Pipe Cactus, more than 100 miles away. Bill Wellman was the first one, and there has been a succession of superintendents who have been extremely supportive. Being on the border they have had just tremendous demands placed on them. And yet, despite that, they were always very supportive. Initially the administrative funds would flow through the superintendent's office, but that was a strain on Organ Pipe and could slow reimbursements, so later funds came through the Intermountain Regional Office. Greg Kendrick, NPS Intermountain Region Heritage Area Coordinator, who I have worked with for 15 years, was instantly supportive of heritage areas and very open about the fact that at least in the Intermountain Region I knew a lot more about it than they did. Greg consistently, as more heritage areas have come down the pike in the Intermountain Region, has asked me to visit new areas and encourage them on how to proceed.

I have had a tremendous experience with the regional office, and I'd say the major transformation was in 2007-8-or 9, somewhere around there. There are two things that happened that has really totally transformed the relationship of the NPS to the heritage areas. Before that it was hit or miss. If you got the right guy you were fine, but you never felt certain that the organization (NPS) as a whole was really supportive of heritage areas. One, Jon Jarvis came in and it became extremely clear that he understood that for the NPS to be relevant in the next century it had to reach beyond its enclave boundaries. He understood that this was an incredibly inexpensive way of doing it and engaging communities with the NPS in a light-handed way. The other thing was, we've had a lot of meetings between the NPS and the Alliance of National Heritage Areas. A decision was made at some point that of its appropriation, which was usually somewhere between \$16, 18, 20 million, a million would be set aside for NPS staffing. That was difficult for us to do because it meant that all the heritage areas would get less money. But we made that decision because the level of technical assistance and support from the NPS was often minimal, if not non-existent. I mean there was no committed staff etc. And, frankly, we felt that that was one of the problems. Why would the NPS pull money away from other things in order to support this? We thought that if we could get staff within the NPS who are hired specifically for the purpose to assist and manage heritage areas both regionally and in the central office then it would change the dynamic. Those two things together have dramatically changed the relationship between NPS and the NHAs. Not that we always agree, but I think with the Director and dedicated employees we no longer questioned the commitment to the importance of heritage areas. That has been an extremely important change. Going back to 1994 I was fortunate that Peter Samuel saw the value of heritage areas in the Northeast Region but beyond that I sensed that Brenda Barrett never really had any major support for the program, and she was sort of

battling it on her own. The transformation has been considerable since then. You have in every region dedicated staff and you have more than one person. You have a staff in the central office that is truly committed to heritage areas.

I don't know the specifics but the \$ million gets divided between the regions and I'm sure it has something to do with how many they have to deal with. Pacific Region has only two (heritage area). Peter (Samuel in the NPS Northeast Region) certainly has the most. It tended to beef up staffing where it didn't exist, that's certainly the case in the Intermountain Region. Or, where there was already existing staff it provided some flexibility for technical assistance.

One of our main projects was to undertake major wetlands restoration along the Colorado River. We used some of the NPS heritage area money to acquire grants from the Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, EPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I was able to bid out and get a tremendous environmental consultant who over the last 15 years has become the expert on southwest area difficult wetlands development. We invested about \$10 million in restoration of which perhaps \$1 million was from the NPS.

It wasn't so much that level of technical assistance it was what happened, and I return to this issue of the administrative support. Getting reimbursed in the early years was tough. Initially we would get advanced monies and then things tightened up and it was all reimbursement and would take a while. And when those funds for admin support within the NPS became available, the staff in Denver took over the management of all the reimbursements. Then it went much more smoothly. Just from a nuts-and-bolts logistical bases, it has been a blessing.

We got additional help when we took over the two state parks. There were a lot of adobe buildings in a bad state of disrepair. The Intermountain Region managed to bring in Vanishing Treasures which is a program to assess historic buildings with adobe experts. The Intermountain Region was able to call on other folks to help us do assessments. That was extremely helpful.

Relationship of Alliance and NPS: There has certainly been a dialogue between the Alliance and the NPS and I think there has been a lot of progress in listening to us. On the other hand, I think because of the ongoing demand for higher and higher levels of accountability the program has become more bureaucratic, in terms of what is required. Some of this is not the NPS, I think it's OMB. There are requirements being placed on probably all federal programs and it has become more cumbersome. The heritage areas were the most flexible program I've ever seen of a federal program. The Alliance has accepted it. I appreciate that there is ongoing dialogue but there will always be disagreements.

Useful functions of Washington Coordinating Office: Number one advantage is constantly communicating to the highest levels of the NPS administration, NPS Directors, Deputy Directors etc. what is going on with heritage areas, the successes of heritage areas. We feel that through the coordinating office someone is listening to us from the highest level. We would do that individually as part of the Alliance but to have it embedded in the NPS is very important. The annual reporting and the fact that it generates a good deal of data. That people can be assured that it's documentable and so forth. That can then carry forward the story of why heritage areas are so cost effective and leverage funds and so forth. I think that's extremely important.

Challenges: I'm sort of torn on this issue because I am not sure what should happen, but the fact that different regions operate differently is a problem. I'm very happy with the Intermountain Region. They are flexible. They move quickly. They process cooperative agreements quickly. They are responsive and when there is an issue we respond and when they are satisfied, they get reimbursed. But there is definitely a considerable difference among regions of how they are operating. The (Washington) coordinating office, I think, has only an advisory role to the regions because there is a structure in each region, and they report to the regional director. On the one hand it would be nice to have more uniformity; on the other hand, some things are just frustrating because of how long it takes. For example, the combination of Congress' delays in passing appropriations bills and then getting the new assistance agreements online. If you asked all 40+ heritage areas, it would be interesting to know today, most would say that it is not until almost July that assistance agreements are in place and money flowing. Again, NPS says sometimes that heritage areas are not providing the information that is needed. The fact that we could be sitting almost three quarters the way through a fiscal year and there isn't an assistance agreement in place in some areas, it would be nice to have more uniformity.

In some cases, you cannot do a year work plan because you don't know how much money you are going to get. If there was a way that while the NPS is waiting for money (to be released for the fiscal year) they could tell us, "The range of your money will be between \$320 -350 thousand. We don't know exactly how much but we think that's the range." We could then go back and develop a plan so when the money is finally ready for disbursement, we are ready to go. Part of it is, I think, there are so many NPS contracts that it is a big effort to get these assistance grants to us. And I'm not blaming the NPS, I'm just saying multiple combinations of delays through multiple places and varying so greatly by region causes a problem.

One of the challenges for the coordinating office is knowing you don't have line authority over these people in the regions. I've never had an issue with getting money in place, but if I did and I went to Martha (Raymond) what authority would she have? She doesn't have line authority so she could only try to do something. I'm not sure I think that is a bad thing. I don't think you'll ever get that changed. Regional directors want to have control over their staff. It's a challenge for the (Washington) coordinating office.

Knowing that there are people in DC who believe in the program and who in every opportunity convey that to the powers that be is very important. With each change of administration who knows what changes will be made. So, it's good to know we have NPS institutional support.

Program Legislation: Again, I'm sort of torn. One of the great experiences I had was having great flexibility to do things in the early years. I think there has been one scandal in 32 years in the heritage areas so it's not like that flexibility has been abused. For example, we developed our work plan and in the middle of the fiscal year the state announces that it's going to close two state parks in Yuma, 2009-10. Fortunately, I hadn't spent all the money I had for the current year and I said I needed to do an immediate amendment (to my plan) because we are going to take over management of these parks. So, we moved \$50 thousand to each of the state parks the first year. Greg (Kendrick) facilitated that and got it done because it was part of our overall management plan. The fact that we could do that so quickly was a godsend. Having flexibility

and maneuverability is very important. But the reality is there is so much consternation within Congress about a lack of standardization, that the Alliance has accepted that fact and supported Congressman Dent's legislation (H.R. 581 National heritage Areas Act of 2015).

It would have made us a part of the NPS family, it would have created criteria, that have been instituted over the last several years, assessments done that look at criteria and whether the heritage area is meeting its mission. All of that accountability has been important to the success of the program and I think institutionalizing that in legislation is important. It will get the opposition off our back that we are not worthwhile. Creating that accountability and making us a legitimate part of the NPS is important. I think we will lose some of that ability to be flexible, but I think that's the price you pay. Now we have 49 different bills, 49 different authorizing matches. It's chaos. I think we are going to have to accept standardization and just hope that the genius of the heritage area program can still continue. The combination of a clear criteria, a more standard entry and creating responsibility at the local level to be an equal partner from the beginning should be an important part of program legislation.

The major stumbling block to Alliance acceptance of program legislation has been the funding formula. It is clear that the Alliance members as a whole, do not think that the higher funded national heritage areas should be radically cut by 30—40% in one year. But coming to common position is a challenge, but I think, I hope, the Alliance is up to it.

Funding: Up until 2007 you had individual senators pushing for earmarks for certain heritage areas. And some not. I've lived with both feast and famine. I went to work in Wheeling and that was one side. Essentially, we (Yuma) stayed at \$250,000 a long time because there was no one fighting for us. We've only slowly gone up to \$341,000 recently. So, there is an historical legacy of these powerful senators of ten or eleven heritage areas that used to get a million or close to it and have come down over time to \$550-700,000. And then, you've got 27 heritage areas which are either newer or didn't have support from their senators who are in the \$300-350,000 range. What I will tell you is that there are individuals that disagree, but the vast majority of the Alliance believes two things. 1. the solution is not to immediately and radically cut the ten for the benefit of the twenty-seven because you never get there if you keep the same pie. You know, for every dollar you take away from a heritage area its split three ways, so you never get a major improvement. 2. The only way to improve it is higher appropriations and I think that is going to be our focus. Those higher appropriations should go to the ones with the lower number. I think there is general agreement on those two items and going forward I think you'll see that's sort of the focus of the Alliance.

Criteria: I think the criteria that have evolved over the last 30 years works. Is it nationally significant, a nationally significant story? Is there grass roots support? Funding and commitment from communities to be an equal partner or even greater than equal partner with the NPS? Interest and ability to develop key partners for the work going forward. I think those are the key elements. I'm comfortable with everything I've seen. The way feasibility studies have been done. I think the NPS has gotten it right. I'm satisfied with the process that has evolved.

Elements for a successful heritage area: A community that is committed to transformation revitalization across boundaries; jurisdictional, economic, racial, tribal, whatever. Build

partnerships to do things. Probably the best description I had for a successful heritage area is, don't think you are going to get a million dollars from the NPS. Start acting like a heritage area which means build those partnerships locally and with state and private and other federal (involvement). Show you are working in partnership and beginning to get things done. The NPS money is important because it helps to leverage other sources but that commitment to transform your community or revitalize your community is number one. It's got to be through partnerships. Everyone is different. There are urban ones. There are rural ones. But the elements of partnership, bridging historical divides make partnerships in order to get things done. Partnerships are not a partnership for its own purpose. A partnership is to do something that both parties want. The NPS money makes such a difference. For example, in the Yuma East Wetlands we restored 400 acres and some of the money came from the NPS, but the vast majority came from the city, the state, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife, lots of different agencies. It was an expensive restoration project. Then we had to maintain it. We ended up in an agreement between the local partners which included the Quechan Indian tribe, Arizona Game and Fish, City of Yuma, heritage area which were the property owners and stakeholders with the Bureau of Reclamation which pays 70% of the maintenance cost. The city, the Quechan, and the heritage area each put in 10%. We manage it on behalf of the partnership. The key there is you've got to bring something to the table.

People that argue that this should be a temporary program and then the federal money should go away don't understand that what we are trying to create are sustainable projects, not a self-sufficient heritage area. There is a big difference between sustainable and self-sufficient. We have the good example where we have leveraged the money. It's made a difference. It would be difficult to ask other partners to kick in if you weren't kicking in.

Evaluation: The NPS has done eight or nine. The NPS previously didn't have a clear idea of how to do this. The evaluation process has evolved over time and gotten better. I'm quite satisfied with the evaluation process they have in place. Westat has been doing them. Mine was done and signed off by me and the consultant. The questions it evaluated are: 1. Based on its authorizing legislation and general management plan has the heritage area achieved its proposed goals and accomplishments? 2. What have been the impacts of investments made by federal, state, tribal, local government, and private entities? 3. How do the heritage area's management structure, partnership relationships, and current funding contribute to its sustainability? The independent evaluation contractor (Westat) has a whole process that they go through with interviews of all stakeholders. Although the Alliance and NPS disagree on a lot of things I think they agree that the evaluation process is fair, is pretty thorough. To the extent that it can subjectively document something, it does, but it also reaches out to get a sense of those partnership relationships and how all that works. How key that is to success in the long run.

Internal evaluation: We do an annual review. That is something else the NPS requires but we take advantage of and review it with our board and our partners. Many of our projects are structural but in more recent years we partnered with the Arizona Historical Society which has a local museum. It was in really bad shape. The state simply didn't have the resources and through the leadership of one of our board members we helped bring together community members who reenergized the local chapter of the Society. We helped develop a plan and brought multiple partners in. We moved the records and all the archives that were in deplorable

shape, to the Historical Society in Tucson who digitized them and then the local library here provided a climate-controlled area and much better management. That allowed us to redevelop their small period house. We developed the plan, and our goal was to make sure we didn't take over another site; we already had two state parks. We jump started the historical society to hire someone who could manage and market the site, and they have had tremendous success.

What we have in terms of measurements, we have three ongoing commitments in which we need to invest some of our NPS monies and leverage it to manage the East Wetlands and the two state parks. We have \$60-70,000 we can use for smaller projects. Due to the recession and cutbacks our local and state partners just don't have the kind of resources they had previously. We have had to go much more slowly on projects. We have been forced to put off many of the projects we had in our plan. Our flexibility to do things is compromised by how little money we get.

Benefit to NPS: If indeed the NPS wishes to emerge from its enclave mentality in major national parks, its mission for the first 50-75 years, its existing structure is not attuned to reaching beyond its borders. The heritage areas are mechanisms through which, with very little money, and some light-handed assistance, NPS can show that it is reaching out beyond its borders to a different evolving America. If it wishes to connect with communities, this is a mechanism for further outreach and growth.

Future of NHA: I think it depends on future administrations. OMB hates heritage areas and thinks they should go away. Jon Jarvis was a tremendous advocate for us. But did he bring enough institutional awareness within the NPS that it'll continue beyond him? I certainly hope so. It could go one of two ways. If OMB and certain members of Congress had their way we would go away, or, alternatively a hundred years from now you could have 500 heritage areas (and perhaps less new costly national parks to run). I've often thought that instead of congressmen constantly asking for new national parks which are extremely expensive to operate, the future growth of the NPS in engaging communities and getting local resources brought to bear along with federal resources is the best way for the NPS to meet the needs of the future. It doesn't always have to be a national park. I suspect there are some national parks that shouldn't have been national parks in the first place because that was the only way to go. The NHA vehicle might be much better if joint responsibility for finances and management, responsibility and a sense of ownership is shared by the NPS and the community. I think it depends both on the leadership at the very top, and how the 48 advocate for the concept. You have a lot of senators and congressmen who are represented by those 48. There are no heritage areas in California. Growth into that area will make a difference.