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National Heritage Areas Administrative History Project



John J. Reynolds
January 20, 2016

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

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Heritage Areas meeting at NPS Denver Service Center 1989: The tradition of asking for studies for the parks was of course new area studies for national parks. I don't know how long in the North Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Regions they had been working on other ideas for NPS besides the parks. That all came out of the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program folks. On one hand, the tradition of the Park Service asking for studies to do new national parks and on the other a couple of regions leading their congressional delegations to be interested in asking for new approaches. (The North Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic regions were the leaders in working on new concepts for protecting important landscapes.) People in Washington were able to see that we might be able to protect important landscapes along with the reason of saving money. In 1989 we were about a year into the new administration and a large portion of what the NPS asked for in its discretionary budget request was for construction and planning. The Congress substituted some projects that they were interested in for projects proposed by the NPS, some being heritage areas. We at the Service Center were being asked to do a lot of work, particularly in southwest Pennsylvania. I wouldn't be surprised if Deny (Galvin) asked us to have this meeting. I also wouldn't be surprised if the concerns of some of my staff at the service center would have asked for the meeting. I think Deny did ask us to do this work for him. I think Deny was trying to get some professional help on how to address this back to the Congress.

Pacific West Region lack of heritage areas: It has occurred to me before that the Pacific West Region doesn't have many heritage areas. I think because the RTCA staff in that area was not as versed in that kind of program as those back in the east, plus localities were not interested in creating heritage areas. There is so much federal land in the west already and so much antipathy, even then, about the feds. So those heritage areas that we put forward, except the Great Basin, didn't take. We tried one in the area along the gold route in California and most of the counties didn't want anything to do with it. I think they didn't want the feds telling them what to do, even though that is not the way heritage areas work. I think people out there saw conservation in the old way. They were not as attuned to having partnerships with commissions and they didn't think of partnerships with private entities and federal agencies working together.

Lack of consistency in implementation across NPS regions: One reason is the NPS is highly decentralized, and regions have a lot of power to determine the best way to operate in their areas of interest. The differences in the way that the local populations and local politicians look at federal land agencies and cooperative ventures with the federal government. I think that leads to flexibility rather than the need for consistency. Especially since there is not a congressionally authorized program for heritage areas.

NPS support for heritage areas: At the executive level of regional directors and above I think there was a lot of unanimity in the need for a heritage area system, even in the west at the leadership level. At lower levels I don't think the parks saw the relationship such a program had to them. Although I don't think the timing goes back that far, now days there is more interest in large landscape areas than heritage areas in the west. A difference in how people look at accomplishing the same kind of objectives. Large landscape areas are generally much larger than most heritage areas. The west is far more interested in large landscapes. This concept is slowly moving east, for example, the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Program legislation: Congress is reluctant to create another level of government by having a system. They seem to be perfectly happy with letting it operate on a site by site basis and make their decisions politically, as opposed to having input from an organized system.

Heritage areas as money savers: I personally never thought much about the money situation. If they were going to have \$10 million dollars over 10 years that could go into supporting a plan that had been approved by the Secretary of the Interior. It's hard to say you were saving any money, because you didn't know what it was going into. The ability to use the concept to create more conservation on important areas I thought was by far the more important piece.

Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas: This was a really well put together meeting. It was well organized, and the sessions were superb. Using Cane River for the venue was perfect to get us into the subject. I can't say enough good about the meeting. The process of the subcommittee to write this report was well organized. The report was superb and accurately reflected the recommendations of the subcommittee. It was very well done. The former director (Jonathan Jarvis) was there and he was very much in favor of the heritage areas concept. The group was very much in favor of national heritage areas. I was totally in agreement with the recommendations. I thought the recommendations were appropriate heading into the future.

Second Century Commission Report: These recommendations grew heavily out of the national heritage areas recommendations that came out of the, *Charting a Future ...*, report.

National Heritage Areas fit into the NPS mission today: Heritage areas fit into the NPS mission it seems to me, from the point of view that the NPS mission is to protect places of national significance and national importance, both alone and in cooperation with others. The national significant ones would be national parks, monuments, historical sites, and national register sites. There are many, many other important landscapes that have attributes of their own that are representative of what we are as a nation. The NPS, through its RTCA programs, can be very active in helping communities and regions to figure out ways to protect those including heritage areas; maybe particularly heritage areas. The NPS, when you gather together all the authorities, when you add them in together, RTCA, national trails, national register authorities of the NPS there is a broad expectation that the NPS as a whole will be active in helping figure out how to conserve the best of America and there are a lot of different answers that all build to a bigger whole. The NPS, because it embraces all of them, is tremendously important to doing that.

I see a need for people as they progress upward through the ranks of the NPS in leadership positions to be exposed to and have intellectual development of partnering to reach conservation objectives. As opposed to coming up through parks and having at the last moment to add those skills. So that the effect is after they become directors and park superintendents. They can look at the whole array of the NPS, not just the single approach of the national parks and bring that to bear in the region they are serving. So, if they have to go beyond park boundaries, they know who to call to assist. When Jon Jarvis was at Mt. Rainier, he worked out a position for a RTCA person paid partly as park staff. Someone who was looking at the whole. Parks like Santa Monica Mountains where the NPS owns only 1/3 of the area. People are learning that you don't

have to own it all to make it work. Yet, you have a tremendously successful program. You can even have people living inside the boundary.

I don't think there is any place you can manage these days without working with other people. It's often a hard change for people growing up in the parks to make. Owning it to manage it was so important to people growing up in the conservation movement of the 70s. There are places that at least a core is better managed that way. At the Cane River meeting we concluded that most successful heritage areas would include a piece in the heritage area that was a national park because then you gain the power of having a park and a heritage area. Cuyahoga is an example of a park and then an overlaid heritage area which brought a whole slew of authorities for more conservation, and opportunity for cooperation and inclusion, inside and outside the boundary.

I think my position on economic development vs conservation has changed. The Presidio in San Francisco is a great example. It would not be preserved today, if it wasn't for economic development. I have come to what I would call a more mature approach.