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Ray Murray
December 13, 2016

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

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Interview conducted and transcribed by
Antoinette J. Condo

This transcript was reviewed by Ray Murray

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I have a long history with partnerships going back to the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service which was merged with the NPS in 198. Always working at different levels to protect habitats and resources. We also did a lot of work on economic impacts. Heritage areas seemed like a really good compromise where people don't want to have the area designated under NPS management. They want to see their values protected and derive some economic impact from that designation.

In some cases, there are state programs too. California has a state heritage designation, but they haven't chosen to use it. They have a large state park system with 277 units but haven't exercised the heritage area designation, which they could, and we have had some discussions with them regarding why not.

NPS interest in heritage areas: It has varied a lot. We started talking about them when Stan Albright was our regional director, and this was in about the mid to late '80s. I remember at one point looking at potential areas within our region. I had a list of about 18 possible heritage area names that could be developed. Of course, some of the heritage areas that are currently in front of Congress weren't on that list. There were a lot of historic themes and landscapes to base heritage areas on. He (Albright) was not overly enthused about it. I think this was the initial perception of the NPS proper. If they didn't manage them, why should they spend much time thinking about them. Like any large organization you have a range of thinking about what's appropriate, and what should be a priority.

Some people in the NPS have worked in heritage areas and definitely embrace the idea and others still look at them as a second-class designation. After Stan Albright left, John Reynolds came to be regional director and he was definitely more interested. He came with a landscape architect background and he saw things a bit differently.

We have tried to get heritage areas established in the Pacific West Region. There are at least four pending in designation legislation, and we have had a couple of others that haven't quite caught fire. We have one group in Santa Cruz County and Monterey County for a Monterey Bay Heritage Area and that would possibly include Pinnacles National Park in Ana Benito County and that had support from a just-retired Congressman Sam Farr. But we never could get a critical mass to come together around that to actually get to the point where we had a fully complete feasibility study that could be a basis for legislation. Most recently, a group has come together around a Silicon Valley Heritage Area in Santa Clara County and that one is getting fully resourced. I think we will get a strong feasibility study out of that in a timely manner.

There was an East to West focus of the NPS activities involved with heritage areas. We have focused on what areas we might have in our region. For a while we had a task force of state and local agencies in California focused on heritage and cultural resources. Initially it was set up partly at the instigation and financial intervention from John Nau who is now on the National Park Foundation Board. Prior to that, he was involved with a national advisory committee on historic resources. He has a real passion around cultural resources and had tried to work with us looking at California and activating us. We were active for a number of years but then when

budgets really tightened up the other federal agencies and state couldn't pay their dues. So, we got disbanded. It coalesced around heritage tourism under the California's Tourism Organization - Visit California.

The feasibility studies: Out here they are done through the communities. We coach them through the process. Linda Stonier is our heritage area person on my staff, and she closely reviews them and gives them advice on where they need to be improved. She tries to coach them through the point where we have a fully satisfactory feasibility study.

The primary thing is to have the feasibility study to determine if they are truly nationally significant and can be designated a national heritage area. That's the bottom line first of all. Second, is that if you get an organization up and running, are they going to be able to function and adequately manage the heritage area and find the financial support they need to be effective.

Economic impact of heritage areas: What they do get (the Trump administration) is economic impact and the parks have a huge impact as do the heritage areas. We have been trying to get more documentation on national parks and I know Martha Raymond has gotten some work done on heritage areas economic impact profiles. They probably need to do more of that.

We have had some economic impact studies done by outside folks that specialize in that and then the question is do we have the right information. What we have done with the parks over the years is that we have developed a model where they can plug in economic factors. They don't fully measure all the secondary benefits and multiplier effects benefits, but they do, based on our budget, get basic information and accumulating that can measure a Service-wide impact. Legislation just passed Congress that instructs the Commerce Department to do an economic impact study of natural resources and parks and protected lands. I think they will build on what we have developed but be more comprehensive. Outdoor Industry Association had a recent release, *Outdoor Recreation Economy*, of a full spectrum of economic indicators coming especially from the outdoor industries.

The Partnership Council: I have been involved with that since the very beginning. Martha Raymond is currently the co-chair of the Partnership Council. That is relatively recent, but she has always been at the table. Heritage Areas is one of the programs that fully engages partners and functions through partners. The heaviest focus of the Council has been on basic park philanthropy. I don't know of specific impacts it has had on heritage areas. Recently with the Centennial there has been focus on partnerships with corporations around marketing. Prior to that, maybe ten-fifteen years ago, the National Park Foundation had their Proud Partner Program which involved major corporations, e.g., Eastman Kodak, American Airlines, Ford Motor Company, leaders in five or six different business fields and they were major contributors, mainly in-kind contributions.

We also have partners within parks that help us maintain structures. Most good concessioners are also partners in a lot of different ways. We all have this common interest on how to provide quality visitor experiences and obviously that's how they make their money. Partnerships allow us to provide better visitor experiences in parks.

Policy changes: I'm glad that we have the portfolio of heritage areas we have across the national park system. One of the things we have been trying to do is treat them with the same visibility and promotion and awareness as we do national parks. I like to think of them as part of the national park system, just managed by other entities. Gradually that's coming around to more people.

The NPS is a hierarchy of park managers and some think within the park boundaries, and some think broader. The ones that think broader obviously embrace the idea of heritage areas and the further reach that's possible through heritage areas. Others are preoccupied with pretty much keeping the parks going. In terms of leadership in Washington right now, I think probably Jon Jarvis understands the value of heritage areas.

Regional office responsibility to heritage area: Great Basin National Heritage Area (the only one in the Pacific West Region as of 2018) took a while to get their sea legs. They are in a relatively remote part of Nevada. They have struggled a bit to get their feet on the ground to what they can effectively do. At the same time, because they are as remote as they are, some of the change agents of development have not been moving so quickly. They haven't been under quite the pressure as some of the other heritage areas with urban pressures.

The thing that has happened there is they are adjacent to Great Basin National Park, so we have that co-management relationship. That is different than the stand-alone heritage areas without a national park unit. We (regional office) have not had to focus quite as much.

I come from a background of doing feasibility studies trying to get new parks established. I strongly believe that we should be advocating and enabling and assisting rather than strictly reacting. Linda Stonier takes a little bit more of an approach of we are going to help, and we are going to assist but we are not going to bend over backwards to trouble shoot and try to bring some of these (those that want to apply to be) heritage areas into being. We are going to objectively do a study and we'll see how it is and we'll be objective about making the determination rather than in the background encouraging and nurturing.

Our regional heritage area coordinator also spends her time on rivers and trails. We are limited right now by how much budget we get for heritage areas. Until we get more heritage areas officially designated, we are not going to get a larger budget. Our regional national heritage area allocation from Washington is based on how many heritage areas we have in our region.

Benefit of NPS to heritage areas: I think it is a natural association with what we manage in the NPS, national historic sites and battlefields and that sort of thing. They are based in Washington under the Cultural Resources Program and a lot of the heritage areas blend well with cultural resources and cultural stories. It is good for them to be under Cultural Resources because it has more cred within the organization than strictly partnerships, although we talk a lot about partnerships with our parks. Cultural Resources gives them more gravitas within the NPS.

From another standpoint I don't think we have enough collaboration between the national park units and the heritage areas. The NPS is a much better alliance than if they were under Commerce Department or some other economic development program.

Heritage areas contribution to the mission of NPS: Heritage areas extend our goals. We are not going to get many new large-scale park units. A lot of new park units that we are getting, unless they are on federal lands, Presidential appointed national monuments from other federal lands. We are not going to get large landscapes protected anymore. It's going to be small national historic sites, homes and things like that. Heritage areas as they are defined do protect much larger landscapes, giving more context and story of places in America. I think they are really essential in getting areas protected and expanding the historic themes that can be interpreted and make them a place that can become a real destination. They will also focus more of the public on the value of what they have and why it should be protected. I think (heritage areas) are a huge benefit to the NPS in terms of their reach. That's why we are trying to count all our programs under *One NPS*, including our grants and certification programs.

One of the things that we are really wrestling with is the idea of how we increase the relevance of the national park system. What's in the national park system? We have this concept of One NPS and it's not just the national park units. It's also all of our partnership relationships and programmatic relationships, grants programs and national register sites and things like that. So, NPS programs reach every American basically where they live, in their communities. We are 81% urban across the country now and in California it's now 95% urban. We have a much stronger relevance if we count everything versus count just the national parks.

I think heritage areas help a lot with that extension. They need to be at the table and get the same kind of consideration that we give other national designations even if they may get limited financial support. There is a huge issue of whether they should continue to get ongoing support from the NPS as opposed to being financially independent. Obviously, it takes more than five years to get these National Heritage Areas up and running and fully self-supporting.

Program legislation: There has been a long stall. Basically, Deny Galvin in the '90s who was the deputy director (of NPS) was a huge champion of heritage areas and he is the one who initially tried to get the basic framework legislation for the NPS through for heritage areas. It still hasn't gotten through after all these years. It's really ironic to me.

I look at it like I look at the national park system basically. We have all this rhetoric and when economic times get tight, we can't operate what we have. We can't afford to add new units to the national parks. You get areas protected when the politics make that possible. You take advantage of those opportunities and you gradually build the system. The national park system wouldn't be the system it is today if we'd always been bound by economic realities. But because it is what it is today, the National Park System is a huge economic force in our economy.

I see a lot of possibilities for new heritage areas. They really inspire people in the community. They motivate people in the community to protect what is unique about their community, their history and their landscapes. I think they are crucial at the rate we have developed and the pace of development transforming of our landscapes.

Visiting protected areas, experiencing a sense of place is important in peoples' lives and heritage areas do this in an encompassing landscape. They are really important in protecting our heritage.

One thing we haven't brought up. We had the Second Century Commission and Jon Jarvis was the regional director who was the liaison to that group. They had their meetings around the country on different topics. I mentioned to him that they had not been looking beyond the national parks and we have all these other community assistance programs. The last meeting that they had was at Great Smoky Mountains National Park and they did a deep dive on those programs. We had a panel of presentations and they got the idea that the NPS is more than the national park units. I think Jon definitely embraced that. It was a real eye opener for the Second Century Commissioners. Mike Reynolds was the deputy regional director in both Northeast Region and Mid-West Region and both of those have a large inventory of national heritage areas.