



When the Land Belonged to God
The C.M. Russell Collection, MT Historical Society

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: April 23, 2018

CONTACT: Jane Weber

PHONE: 454-6814

Board of Directors

Jane Weber, Chair
Cascade County Commissioner

Lynette Scriver-Colburn,
Secretary
United Way of Cascade County

Jerry Lehman, Treasurer
Shareholder, JCCS Accountants

Brett Doney
President & CEO,
GF Development Authority

Gayle Fisher
Executive Director,
Central MT Tourism

Lindy Hatcher
Executive Director, Lewis & Clark
Trail Heritage Foundation

Heidi Hockett
Northwestern Energy

Tracy Houck
Great Falls City Commissioner

Connie Jenkins
Community Activist, Fort Benton

Reneé McDonald
Educator, Fort Benton

Murry Moore
Mayor of Cascade

Charlene Porsild
CEO, MT History Foundation

Ken Robison
Historian

Ellen Sievert
Cultural Resource Consultant

John Taillie
Regional Park Manager
MT State Parks

Mary Willmarth
Owner, Vision West, Inc.
Consulting

Ex-Officio Members

Carol Bronson
Community Engagement
NeighborWorks Great Falls

Legal Counsel

Bill Bronson
Great Falls, MT

Tax ID Number: 30-0924368

Community Meetings about National Heritage Area Effort

GREAT FALLS – Do you have a favorite place in the Upper Missouri River region where you always take visiting guests? Does your community have a unique story to tell about its people, places or historical events? Would you like to know more about what a National Heritage Area is and how having one can strengthen a community’s economy? If so, the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation invites you to attend one of three evening gatherings to share your stories and provide input on an effort to establish the first National Heritage Area in Montana.

The *Community Conversation* sessions are scheduled in the following three communities. Each session begins at 5:30 p.m. with social time/refreshments followed by the public discussions from 6 to 8 p.m.:

- Helena, May 1 – Montana Historical Society auditorium, 225 North Roberts Street
- Fort Benton, May 2 – Montana Agricultural Center, 1205 20th Street
- Great Falls, May 3 – Civic Center, Missouri Room, 2 Park Drive South

The *Community Conversation* sessions are designed to gather ideas from residents of the area; ideas which will help define its uniqueness and help determine whether the central Montana region qualifies for designation. Everyone - residents, business owners, tribal members, ranchers, outfitters, and community leaders - are welcomed to share stories and ideas. Jane Weber, current chairman of the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Corporation, said, “This is an exciting prospect with the potential to boost tourism, strengthen our local economies and honor our rich history and culture.” Weber added, “Who better than to ask folks who are part of the rich tradition of ranching, farming, outdoor recreation, and tribal culture and live it every day. The more voices at the tables, the better.”

The Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation is a not-for-profit organization formed in 2015 to explore the possibility and interest in pursuing designation. National Heritage Areas are places designated by the U.S. Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally significant landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. With its members from Helena, Cascade, Great Falls, and Fort Benton, the organization has independently raised funds from enthusiastic supporters around the region to finance the preparation of a feasibility study, a requirement for National Heritage Area consideration.

Currently, there are 49 National Heritage Areas across the nation. By design, all are managed by local communities, not the federal government. Local partnerships with community interest groups, businesses, educational institutions, landowners and others devise their own best practices, depending on the location of National Heritage Area. For example, the entire state of Tennessee is a National Heritage Area due to the plethora of civil war sites throughout the state. This National Heritage Area is a partnership administered at Middle Tennessee State University. Other NHAs are cooperatively managed by not-for-profit organizations or local tourism groups. The local entity develops a strategy to promote the region’s heritage and culture, and prioritize projects and programs that help maintain cultural and working traditions, interpret history and promote the National Heritage Area for business and tourism investment.

The Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation will lead the *Community Conversation* sessions with consultants, Nancy Morgan of Point Heritage Development Consulting, from Tallahassee, Florida and Augie Carlino from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Both will share their experiences working with the Cane River National Heritage Area and Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, discussing how designation can boost tourism and honor the culture of the region. Breakout sessions will allow an opportunity to encourage conversation and explore ideas with those attending the session. Weber is excited to have such experienced consultants and said, “Nancy and Augie have collaborated and helped other communities with heritage designations, economic and tourism development.” Weber added, “Their work incorporates local ideas, so we invite everyone to attend and tell us what is important to them and their community.”

National Heritage Areas were first created by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s to provide a mechanism for recognizing and supporting the nation’s history. Achieving designation requires hard work by the communities and the ability to demonstrate long-term sustainability. The feasibility study is an intensive 12-16 month undertaking that examines many factors, including significance of resources, historic themes that tell a nationally significant story, and the demonstration of partnerships among private and public entities at local and regional levels to work together to manage the National Heritage Area. The *Community Conversation* sessions start the feasibility study process.

For more information, contact Jane Weber at 406-454-6814 or go to www.uppermissouririverheritage.org.

- END -