

Frequently Asked Heritage Tourism Planning Questions

Many people have asked what a National Heritage Area in our region would be called, and about its boundaries. Do we know?

No, this is getting ahead of the process as it stands today. The name and boundaries of an NHA in our region should not be imposed by a handful of project organizers. They should evolve from the community's conversation about how an NHA could help us better organize and promote our fabulous tourist attractions, as well as helping local build pride and confidence that is rooted in our heritage. For the time being, we are generally referring to this project as a "Missouri River heritage tourism planning project." It is possible, after all, that an NHA will not result (at least not anytime soon), but that we may still find better ways of working together to promote our region as a heritage tourism destination.

Some people have wondered why there is an emphasis on the Missouri River. What's the reason?

The Missouri River is the dominant natural feature of the north-central Montana landscape as it flows from the Gates of Mountains northeastward to the Missouri Breaks. And while some of our most interesting attractions (Fort Shaw, downtown Belt, the Sluice Boxes, and others) are located nearer to tributary streams, the river offers the logical theme for explaining our region's history and heritage tourism promotion.

Many existing NHAs are organized around a river, but include attractions that are not near that river's banks. The Blackstone River Heritage Corridor, which recently became, in part, a National Park, offers one of the earliest examples, dating back to 1986. It encompasses the entire river valley, including numerous tributaries. You can learn more about this NHA at <http://www.blackstonevalleycorridor.org/>.

A western example is the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, which is named for the river (which is dominant in that landscape and its history, just as the Missouri is in ours), but includes three entire counties. You can learn more about this NHA at <http://www.riograndenha.com/>.

What steps are involved in creating an NHA?

The National Park Service lists four steps in its 2003 draft guidelines for National Heritage Area Feasibility Studies.

1. Completion of a suitability/feasibility study.
2. Public Involvement in the suitability/feasibility study.
3. Demonstration of widespread public support among heritage area residents for the proposed designation.
4. Commitment to the proposal from the appropriate players which may include governments, industry, and private, non-profit organizations, in addition to the local citizenry.