



BLUERIDGE

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

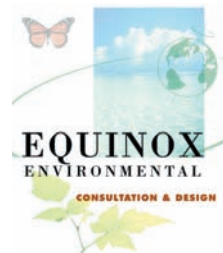


MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AUGUST 2008

*Established by Congress in November 2003,
the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
recognizes and celebrates the natural
abundance and richly varied cultural
history of the North Carolina mountains.*

**Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
Management Plan and Environmental Assessment**

**Completed by
Equinox Environmental Consultation and Design, Inc.**



**for
the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
August 2008**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) is essentially the mountains of Western North Carolina. It encompasses 25 counties and the Qualla Boundary, a reservation for the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. It is noteworthy for the significance of its natural, Cherokee, craft, music, and agricultural heritage. The federal legislation which created the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area in 2003 recognized these as distinctive themes. Through this act, a non-profit management entity of the same name was also established, qualifying the area for the receipt of funding and technical assistance from the National Park Service to help preserve, interpret, and develop heritage resources related to these themes. Enclosed is the management plan that will be used by BRNHA and its partners over the next 10 years as it works on those endeavors. It has been formulated in accordance with specifications provided by the authorizing legislation and NPS administrative requirements. The plan has also been formulated in accordance with the mission of the BRNHA, which is “protect, preserve, interpret and develop the unique natural, historical and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate increased economic opportunity in the region.” Partnerships are acknowledged as the principle means of executing the plan.

Goals, objectives, strategies and actions have been established for the preservation, interpretation, and development of each of the five heritage themes. The Heritage Area will be managed with the aim of integrating each of the heritage preservation, interpretation and development goals so that they complement, rather than compete with, each other. Furthermore, this management approach is intended to stimulate economic activity in the region using heritage resources but without compromising the qualities of those resources that make the region so distinctive. Preservation of heritage capital, both for its intrinsic value and as a means of stimulating improved economic opportunity, is an overarching theme. Successful implementation of the plan is intended to lead to long term benefit to both economic and environmental systems, and improvements in the quality of heritage resource experiences of residents and visitors alike.

The plan outlines our management structure and identifies organizational and operational guidelines and partners. As indicated above, the US Congress and the National Park Service were at the heart of the Heritage Area designation, and they will continue to play essential roles: Congress, in the provision of appropriations, and the Park Service, in the provision of technical support and administrative guidance. The federal authorizing legislation grants to the Governor of North Carolina, AdvantageWest Economic Development Group, HandMade in America, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the Education and Research Consortium the exclusive power and responsibility of making appointments to the BRNHA Board of Directors. The BRNHA will encourage those entities to make appointments which ensure that heritage preservation, interpretation and development interests are all equitably represented on the Board. The organization will be managed by an Executive Director hired by the Board, and four core Staff who are hired and managed by the Executive Director. Joining these persons at this organizational level will be five heritage tourism officers from the NC Department of Commerce-Division of Film, Tourism, Sports Development; local heritage councils in each of the 25 counties and on the Qualla Boundary; the three regional Host Groups; and various members of a Preservation Task Force. These organizational partners will assist with strategic planning, program development, and decision making in regards to programmatic activities. Some of these same organizations and individuals will also become local implementation partners at the operational level. Many other individuals and organizations, some identified, some not yet identified, are also encouraged to participate in the execution of various strategies and actions. The BRNHA Executive Director and Staff will serve as the primary points of contact and central organizing and coordinating figures of these various partners. Because of the preponderance of natural and cultural heritage elements and public lands in Western North Carolina, other state and federal agencies with management concerns in the region will be asked to provide input with regard to BRNHA management.

Additionally, there are many private organizations in the region which have an active interest in promoting and protecting heritage resources. The BRNHA will actively solicit input from these organizations as well. The Interdisciplinary Team created to help construct this management plan is a representative example of this type of collaboration with like-minded organizations which have shared interests with the BRNHA but are not officially integrated into its organizational structure. It is expected that some members of the Preservation Task Force will come from this list of other government and private partners.

A Preservation Task Force has been conceptualized as a means of helping the BRNHA address the very real threat that growth pressures in the region pose to the viability of the region's heritage capital even in the absence of BRNHA's own efforts to promote heritage-based development and tourism. The purpose of the PTF is threefold: (1) identify and help devise strategies at the organizational level that address heritage preservation needs; (2) network with, and assist in effective fundraising among, agencies, private organizations, state trust funds and others who support heritage preservation; and (3) work with local heritage councils and other local implementation partners to develop effective preservation projects that will appeal to various funders and will fulfill the BRNHA's mission. There is no interpretation or development task force, primarily due to the fact that interests embodying those goals are well represented on the Board and local heritage councils and by the regional host groups. It is expected that heritage interpretation and development will be emphasized in routine strategic planning and program development. Marketing and promotional initiatives already undertaken by the BRNHA over the last few years should also continue to cultivate heritage based tourism and economic development.

The BRNHA will execute this plan through four primary program areas - grants, marketing and promotions, research, and partnership. The BRNHA will strive to allocate grant funds to preservation, interpretation and development-related projects at approximately equal levels over the life of the organization. Where possible, the BRNHA will seek linkages between goals and will emphasize projects that attempt to address multiple goals. A high level of interaction

between BRNHA staff, the Preservation Task Force and local heritage councils will mean that the grants program is an intentional effort to fulfill heritage preservation priorities established in the management plan. Many marketing and promotional activities will continue as they have in the past to facilitate heritage-related development, though some activities will evolve to promote greater integration with interpretation and preservation objectives. Marketing will also be conducted with the intention of not only promoting the heritage of the region but also generating revenue to enable the BRNHA to become more self-sustaining so that, regardless of the level of federal appropriations it may receive, it can continue to fulfill its mission. Research will include assessments of the tourism industry and visitor preferences and quantification of the economic impact of tourism to the region. However, a concerted effort will be made to use the data from tourism studies to help develop strategies that not only accomplish tourism objectives but ensure that investments from tourism help fund important preservation and interpretation goals and objectives. The identification and tracking of 'threatened' or 'endangered' heritage resources will likely be a research activity. The BRNHA will be receptive to all potential partnerships that fulfill its mission, goals, and objectives and will welcome proposals from organizations and individuals not yet defined by this plan who believe they have the means to do just this. However, the BRNHA will also strategically recruit participation from among certain organizations it believes have a vital role to play in heritage preservation, development, and interpretation. Other elements of the partnership program were discussed above in the organizational framework.

A comprehensive heritage resource inventory has been compiled for this plan. Its purpose is twofold. It is intended to define the unique character of the region by including truly distinctive regional resources and excluding other assets which are essentially local or are only tangentially related to the themes identified in the BRNHA's authorizing legislation. It is also intended to serve as a reference for BRNHA decision makers and its organizational partners over the next 10 years. They must have confidence that when faced with difficult decisions about where to prioritize and allocate action, they can reference the inventory and be reminded with clear documentation

of what is most significant in the region within the context of the BRNHA's federal authorizing legislation. This inventory has direct relevance and meaning to the five core themes expressed in its authorizing legislation. A screening process was utilized to filter possible resources in order that these two objectives could be met. The screening process also helped to bound the inventory and keep it manageable in terms of its size for end users of the product. Local implementation partners are encouraged to reference the heritage resource inventory in formulating proposals that can help the BRNHA execute this plan.

A description of the socio-economic environment has been included in the plan. Macro-level trends regarding population, county building patterns, land cover changes, and economic conditions were presented in the discussion of socio-economic conditions as well as an overview of transportation infrastructure. In general, the region as a whole is experiencing a tremendous amount of growth and development. Acknowledgement of this fact led the BRNHA to create a Preservation Task Force that would identify threatened resources, facilitate collaborative efforts to preserve them, and emphasize sustainable resource development.

A discussion of other planning initiatives in the region has also been undertaken in the plan. It has helped the BRNHA understand where local capacity for managing tourism and development exists and where it is lacking. The inventory of other plans and initiatives has helped to identify partnership and project opportunities. It should also prove helpful in suggesting to local decision-makers what types of heritage development initiatives may be most needed.

A more detailed discussion of organizational partners and their roles and responsibilities is presented in the plan. An organizational chart graphically depicts these relationships and the interactions between different groups. At some point, it may prove necessary to establish interagency cooperative agreements with some organizational partners to more formally recognize expectations and to clarify roles and responsibilities.

A general business plan is also inserted into this document. It is predicated on the fact that Western North Carolina is an exceptional place with many heritage resources that hold great attraction to

people worldwide and that these resources provide the capital upon which enterprises can be established that protect, interpret, and develop them. Indeed, regional history contains many examples of public and private individuals and organizations that have already done so. We believe that the people and groups currently undertaking these efforts or thinking about undertaking such efforts in the future represent a strong potential client base that could require services that the BRNHA is equipped to provide. Our business model relies upon a streamlined, competent, and committed staff utilizing the knowledge and expertise of strategically recruited partners to identify needs and opportunities of this client base that are mutually compatible with our mission, and then to provide financial support, marketing and promotions, research, and partnership facilitation that will help them achieve their ambition. We have recognized certain challenges to this model but have identified solutions that should help us overcome them.

An educational planning brief is included in this plan. It stresses the importance of simultaneously achieving heritage preservation and development goals while pursuing interpretive activities. Interpretation and education for their own sake will not be enough - tangible outcomes associated with heritage preservation and development will be expected from interpretive projects.

The entire management planning process was subjected to an environmental assessment driven by the National Environmental Policy Act. The assessment examined five possible management approaches that could be used to guide BRNHA management for their potential to cause adverse and beneficial impacts to the heritage area environment. The management alternatives included:

- Status Quo or No Action Alternative (Alternative A)
- Alternative B: Management With a Preservation Emphasis
- Alternative C: Management With a Development Emphasis
- Alternative D: Management With an Interpretation Emphasis
- Alternative E: Management With Goal Integration

The status quo refers to the approach to management that BRNHA had been operating under over the last few years. The other alternatives were hypothetical constructs. The analysis focused on the adverse and beneficial impacts likely to be produced from these different management approaches on natural resources (land, water, biology, recreational/scenic); cultural resources (Cherokee, craft, music); landscape identity (agricultural landscapes, land resources); the socio-economic environment (transportation infrastructure, socio-economic indicators); and visitor use and experience categories. Alternative B was identified as the environmentally preferred alternative. Alternative E was selected by BRNHA as the management approach to guide its next 10 years.

The approach presented is not the option which has the least potential for environmental disruption; Alternative B would best serve that purpose. However, Congress has given the BRNHA the responsibility not only of managing, preserving, protecting and interpreting cultural, historical, and natural resources, but also of “continuing to develop economic opportunities” and “encouraging economic viability” in the Heritage Area. Alternative E best enables the BRNHA to accomplish all these goals. It provides a level of environmental benefits, with minimal environmental disruptions, which is second only to Alternative B. It represents an approach to management that helps ensure that the resources upon which heritage development and education activities are built can be sustained over the long term. Furthermore, it ensures that goals and objectives related to heritage preservation, development, and education receive equitable treatment over time. The selected approach is also intended to help local partners build and sustain their capacity to manage expected increases in heritage related tourism caused not only by BRNHA’s activities but other groups’ efforts. These outcomes should minimize the potential for adverse environmental impacts while maximizing the potential for BRNHA to facilitate long term sustainable economic development.

This is not a charismatic or dramatic management approach, but it is sound. It does not produce terrific short term gains, but neither does it risk the heritage capital that serves as the base upon which heritage development can occur. Significant benefits for the Blue

Ridge National Heritage Area should be expected, however, as 10 years of methodical execution of management intent unfold over time. With patience and deliberation, this management approach will help the BRNHA do very good things for Western North Carolina while keeping its diverse heritage constituencies intact and supportive.



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

AUG 06 2008

Ms. Janice Brumit
Chairperson, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, Inc.
Blue Ridge Parkway Destination Center
195 Hemphill Knob Road
Asheville, NC 28803

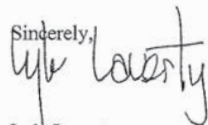
Dear Ms. Brumit:

In accordance with Public Law 108-108, which designated the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, I am pleased to inform you that I have approved the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Plan. Please accept my congratulations on the very successful planning process that the heritage area partners have accomplished.

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has developed a plan that I believe will promote the continued appreciation and protection of the natural, historic, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina, a place important to our Nation's history and heritage. I commend you for completing this well conceived plan, and for involving the interested citizens and organizations of the 25 counties and the Qualla Boundary in the planning process. You have clearly demonstrated the advantages of the continuing partnership between the Department of the Interior and the congressionally designated National Heritage Areas.

As we go forward in our partnership endeavors, please be assured of our desire to work closely with you and associated organizations in the region to effectively implement our mutually held resource protection objectives. This nationally distinctive landscape, which communicates the rich heritage of our early musical traditions, native and early American cultures, artistic hand artisanship, and early agricultural practices, deserves our continuing respect and protection.

Please feel free to contact Mr. Chris Abbett, Chief, Division of Park & Partnerships, who administers the National Heritage Area Program for the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, at 404-562-3175, ext. 522, should you need assistance in the implementation of programs and projects resulting from the management plan.

Sincerely,


Lyle Laverty
Assistant Secretary for
Fish and Wildlife and Parks

cc: Honorable Michael F. Easley, Governor of North Carolina



