

PATHWAYS

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA



DRAFT FEASIBILITY STUDY

Carbon and Natrona Counties, Wyoming

Prepared by the Pathways National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Team
for submission to the National Heritage Area Program
National Park Service, Denver, Colorado

March 30, 2024 **DRAFT #1**

March 30, 2024

A feasibility study helps local, state, and federal decision-makers assess the merits of an area being Congressionally designated as a National Heritage Area. This feasibility study has been prepared by the Pathways National Heritage Area (PNHA) Feasibility Study Team which included:



- Mr. Vernon Lovejoy retired National Outdoor Recreation and Concessions Policy Coordinator, USDI, Bureau of Reclamation, Denver, CO.
- Dr. Glenn Haas, Emeritus Professor, Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Colorado State University.
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- Mr. Tyler Daugherty, CEO, *Visit Casper*, Casper, Wyoming.
- Dr. Travis Moore, Carbon County Commissioner, Rawlins, Wyoming.
- Ms. Connie Hall, Chairwoman, Casper Historic Preservation Commission, Casper, Wyoming.
- Mr. Craig Collins, Casper City Planner, Casper, Wyoming.
- Mr. Jon Ostling, Mayor, Town of Hanna, Hanna, Wyoming.
- Dr. Marcella Wells, Interpretation Specialist, Wells Resources, Inc, Fort Collins, CO.

Work officially began on the PNHA Feasibility Study February 21, 2024, when Natrona County Commissioners voted to join the Carbon County Commissioners in support of the project.

The feasibility study will be released for public comment in three successive drafts with each draft duly considering public comments and building upon the previous version. This strategy is intended to keep the community engaged and informed during the process. The projected release dates are:

- **Draft #1--- March 30, 2024**
- Draft #2---June 1, 2024
- Draft #3---August 1, 2024

The Final report is projected to be submitted to the Carbon County and Natrona County Commissioners by September 1, 2024.

Please visit www.PathwaysNHA.com
to submit comments and vote in support/opposition to
the PNHA designation.

You can also submit a letter of support for inclusion in the final
report by sending your signed letter to PathwaysNHA@gmail.com.



**Please
Vote!**

CONTENTS

Chapter 1. The Pathways National Heritage AreaPage 4

PNHA Orientation
Why is the Proposed PNHA Nationally Significant?
Vision, Mission, and Goals of the PNHA
PNHA’s Target Audience | PNHA Mobile App

Chapter 2. What is Heritage Tourism?.....Page 15

Definition of Heritage Tourism | Profile of Heritage Tourists

Chapter 3. Public Concerns with the PNHA.....Page 16

Trespassing and Loss of Private Property Rights | Federal Overreach
Crowding and Congestion | Heritage Resource Protection
Opt-In to Join the PNHA Mobile App

Chapter 4. Congressional Requirements for NHA Designation.....Page 20

- 1. Has an assemblage of natural, historic, and cultural resources that:**
 - Represent distinctive aspects of the heritage of the United States.
 - Are worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use and
 - Would be best managed through partnerships among public and private entities; and by linking diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities.
- 2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the story of the United States.**
- 3. Provides outstanding opportunities:**
 - To conserve natural, historic, cultural, or scenic features
 - For recreation and education
- 4. Contains resources that:**
 - Are important to any identified themes of the proposed NHA
 - Retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation.
- 5. Includes a diverse group of residents, business interests, nonprofit organizations, and State and local governments that:**
 - Are involved in the planning of the proposed NHA,
 - Have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles of all participants in the proposed NHA, including the Federal Government, and
 - Demonstrate significant support for the designation of the proposed NHA.
- 6. Has a potential management entity** to work in partnership with the individuals and entities described in item 5 (above) to develop the proposed NHA while encouraging State and local economic activity.
- 7. Has a conceptual boundary map** that is supported by the public.

APPENDICIES

- Letters of Support
- National Heritage Area Act, Jan. 5, 2023 (P.L. 117-339)
- Wyoming History.
- Natural Resource and Social/Economic Profile
- Public Engagement Process & Survey Results
- Photos Log of Heritage Assets

Chapter 1

The Pathways National Heritage Area

PNHA Orientation

In 1984, President Reagan signed into law the National Heritage Act which created what he referred to as a “*new kind of national park*.” Congress assigned the administration of the National Heritage Area program to the National Park Service (NPS). However, National Parks and Natural Heritages Areas are distinctly different.

A National Heritage Area (NHA) is a congressionally designated geographic area which can encompass rural and urban communities with all their built amenities, services, and features. A NHA has no formal entrance gates, park fees, rangers, or NPS law enforcement. It has no on-site NPS management, authority, or responsibility. NHAs are not units of the NPS but rather are administered by a local community entity.

An NHA is a “*museum without walls*” spread out across many acres and even miles. Within its boundary, an NHA, such as the one proposed here, is an assemblage of significant heritage assets that may include historical evidence such as: homesteads, train depots, river crossings, military fortifications, tombstones, historic trails, markers, local museums, interpretive displays, and original in-place artifacts. These expansive historic landscapes may also include facilities and locations for hosting events and activities such as reenactments and guided tours.

What distinguishes an NHA is the combination of unique, cohesive, and unifying heritage assets that tell a significant American story -- a story compelling enough to share with future generations and in a location consequential enough to benefit from preservation.

This type of national designation has become popular with communities who take pride in their heritage resources and want to preserve and share their stories with others from outside the area. Today there are 62 Congressionally designated NHAs across 36 States. This Pathways Natural Heritage Area (PNHA) would be the first NHA in Wyoming.

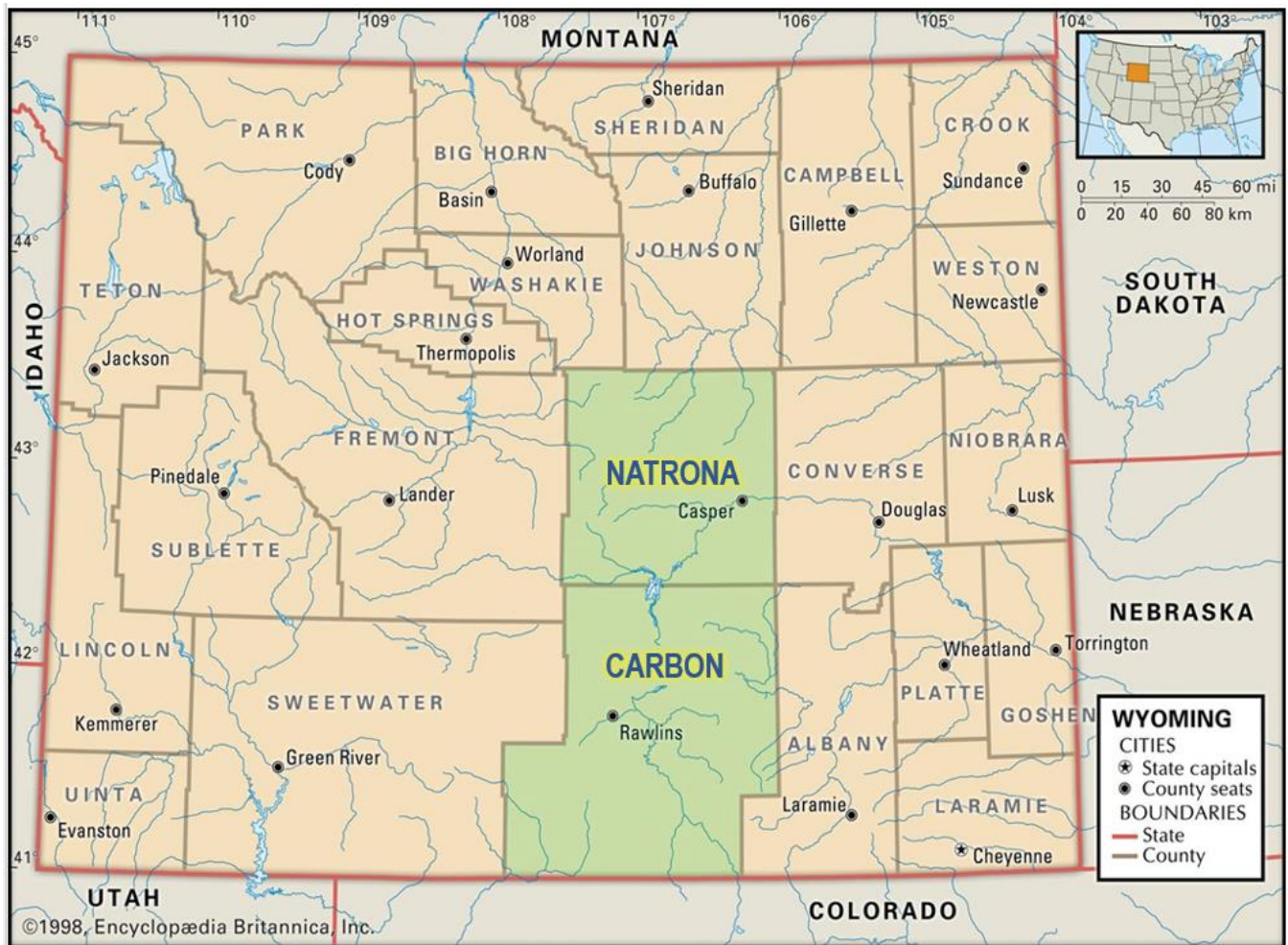


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Map 1

A National and State Locational Map of the Proposed PNHA

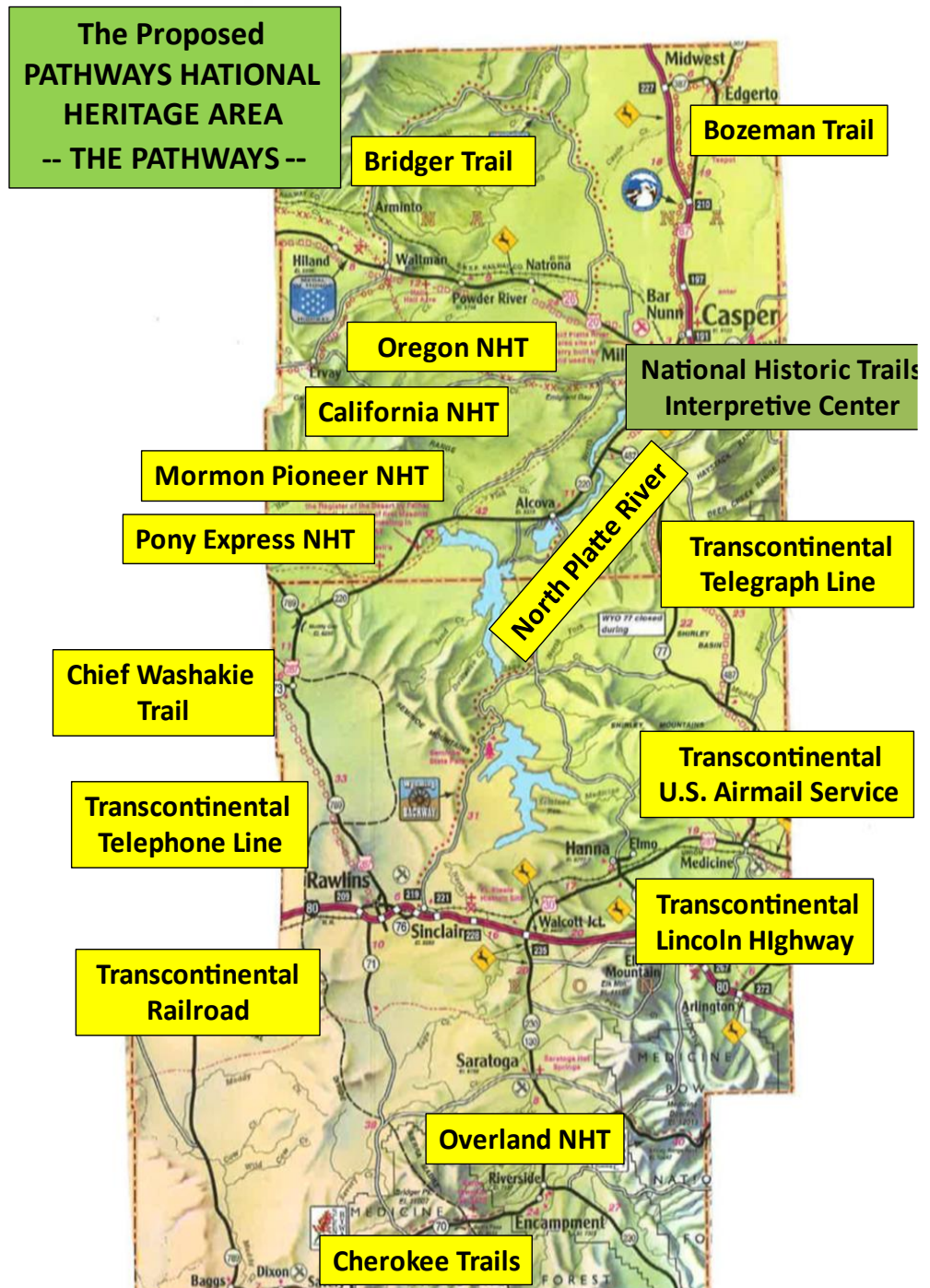
Map 1 shows the location of the proposed PNHA encompassing Carbon and Natrona Counties in south-central Wyoming. The two counties comprise 13,246 square miles or 8,477,440 acres of public and private land, with a 2021 population of 94,204. The PNHA is sparsely settled with an average of ninety acres per person and 71% of the residents clustered in Casper and Rawlins.



Map 2

The Pathways of the Proposed National Heritage Area

Map 2 depicts a 30,000-foot view of Carbon and Natrona counties and the fifteen pathways of national distinction which together provide the credentials and American story of the PNHA.



Why is the Proposed Pathways NHA Nationally Significant?

The proposed PNHA is unique and significant because it tells a compelling and wholistic story of our Nation’s westward expansion, settlement, and development in the 1840s to 1920s era. The term “Pathways” was chosen specifically because it is an inclusive term and allows for the story to embrace a variety of trails, routes, paths, roads, and rivers, as well as several technological advances in transportation and communication.



What follows describes why the proposed PNHA is an area of national significance.

1. **The proposed PNHA embodies the “pathways of progression” of America’s transportation and communication systems during the westward expansion era from the 1840s to the 1920s.** Figures 1 and 2 below graphically depict these pathways of progression.

Figure 1

Pathways of Progression – Early Transportation



Figure 2

Pathways of Progression – Early Communication



2. The proposed PNHA includes a unique concentration of major historic trails consequential to western migration.

The two counties involved with the proposed NHA were the center of westward expansion where travelers first encountered the formidable Rocky Mountains. Nine historic trails traversed the area (see box below), five of which have been distinguished by Congress as National Historic Trails. The national distinction of the area is further evidenced by the location of the world-class National Historic Trails Interpretive Center high on the bluff overlooking the location of the early pathways in the City of Casper, Wyoming.

Most early travelers followed the famed North Platte River across Nebraska and into Wyoming up to its northernmost point in Casper, Wyoming. From there some travelers continued north on the Bozeman and Bridger trails to seek a new life in Montana and beyond. The majority, however, turned south from this northernmost point and travelled south to Independence Rock before turning west to follow the Sweetwater River.

Some travelers departed the North Platte route earlier at its junction with the South Platte River in Nebraska and travelled southwest toward the Colorado Front Range. Some settled in that area while others continued west to the central Colorado mountains to search for precious metals like gold and silver. Still others continued their westward journey on the Overland and Cherokee Trails into the southern portion of the proposed PNHA.

3. Collectively, the nine historic trails included in the proposed PNHA provide a significant chapter of American expansion, but the story does not end there.

Technological advances in transportation and communication shifted the human migration from water-dependent trails in the north and south to more direct, shorter, and equally notable historic pathways.

Historic Trails included in the Proposed PNHA

Bridger Trail

Bozeman Trail

Cherokee Trails

Chief Washakie Trail

California National Historic Trail

Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail

Oregon National Historic Trail

Overland National Historical Trail

Pony Express National Historic Trail

North Platte River



The construction and completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 dramatically shifted the path of western expansion to the lower central part of the proposed PNHA. The “iron horse” ended the wagon train era as it was faster, could travel further per day, and was less dependent on water sources. Springs fed by the ground water of the North Platte River watershed enabled railroad steam engines to travel through the central part of these vast arid landscapes of southern Wyoming, which could not otherwise have supported wagon, horse, or foot travel.

The proposed PNHA also had vast coal deposits necessary to fuel the steam engines. This included the Hanna Basin coal mines which began operation in 1868 while the railroad was under construction and continued for 122 years until 2012.

The railroad was a game changer for Wyoming, western expansion, and the American story. Not only did the western frontier become more accessible, but the railroad also provided a supply line for the growing agricultural industry. Ranching and farming flourished on the vast western landscapes because there was now a means to transport cattle, sheep, and other farm products to large eastern markets.

- 4. Alongside the completed railroad, small “company camps” and communities began to appear and offer services, supplies, and lodging to early travelers.** This more direct pathway to the West, with its attendant development and new military presence, prompted the 1861 transcontinental telegraph and the 1915 transcontinental telephone lines to parallel this pathway. These innovations in communication further propelled the Western expansion, settlement, and development.



Technological Advances Shifted the Western Expansion

1st Transcontinental Railroad

1st Transcontinental Telegraph Line

1st Transcontinental Telephone Line

1st Transcontinental “Lincoln” Highway

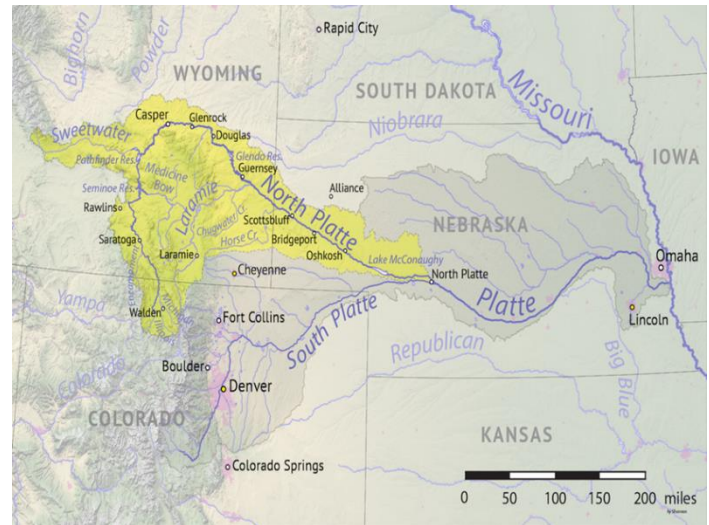
1st Transcontinental U.S. Air Mail Service

5. Another feature of national significance in the proposed PNHA is the North Platte River, also known as the “Great Platte River Road.”

While well known as a beacon and provider of needed subsistence and safety for early western wagon trains, its contribution to western expansion evolved to another role.

From its headwaters in the northern Colorado mountains the river flows north through the center of the proposed PNHA. The North Platte and its tributaries in the Encampment and Saratoga areas of Wyoming were a vital transportation means bringing needed wood for railroad ties and poles for the transcontinental telegraph and telephone lines. The forest products industry flourished as did settlement.

Furthermore, it was the ground water of the North Platte River watershed which fed the fresh-water springs necessary for the railroad and for the homestead wells early settlement, and development which followed the railroad.



- 6. The railroad dominated the interstate transportation of people and goods into the 1900s. However, the miles of roads with improved surfaces were also quickly moving westward.** The famed transcontinental Lincoln Highway was officially dedicated in 1913. It traversed the proposed PNHA near Interstate 80. Today, the original Lincoln Highway (Route 30) still provides travelers with an opportunity to travel west. There are large sections of the historic road one can drive and reflect on the vast landscape, early travel, and visit historic hotels such as the Virginian Hotel in Medicine Bow and Parco Hotel in Sinclair.



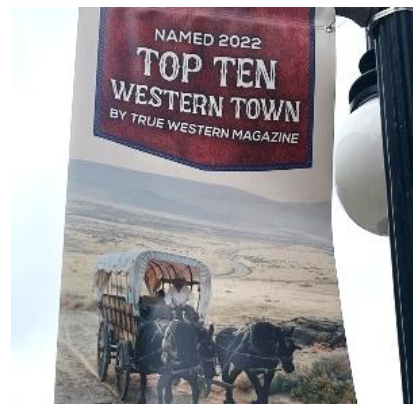
7. **The least known pathway in the proposed PNHA is the transcontinental U.S. Air Mail route established in 1918.** The route generally followed the transcontinental railroad to provide pilots with a visual reference. Today, the landing strip at Medicine Bow is home to the original emergency airport complete with concrete direction arrows on the ground that were used by the early bi-plane pilots who delivered air mail between Salt Lake City and Kansas City.



8. **Casper, Rawlins, and the many other small rural communities in the area embrace their heritage.** Wyoming residents take pride in their history and work hard to preserve the culture, folklife, dress, and customs from a century ago. The proposed PNHA features many vestiges of the old west such as local museums, mercantiles, stage stops, train depots, history re-enactments, wayside exhibits, interpretation, regional festivals, rodeos, living history, and other educational programs for residents and travelers.



9. **The proposed PNHA is more than an assemblage of historic sites but is a large historical and natural landscape over millions of acres** – not restored or “built” but virtually the same landscape as 150 years ago. Travelers can drive along paved roads and step back in time to see, hear, smell, and feel what early travelers experienced. One can pause at a vista and smell the sage, view the majestic clouds, watch the antelope, sense the quiet serenity, feel the brisk winds, and otherwise experience an historic landscape in stark contrast from the more urban environments where most Americans reside.



In conclusion, the proposed PNHA is nationally significant and worthy of NHA distinction. It is a museum without walls where one can be immersed in the past, providing opportunities for heritage tourists to learn, study, experience, and contemplate yesteryear. It brings together numerous heritage sites which are themselves significant and noteworthy, but together as a National Heritage Area creates a more complete and wholistic American story of our Western expansion, settlement, and development.

The proposed PNHA is a museum without walls where one can be immersed in the past, providing opportunities for heritage tourists to learn, study, experience and contemplate yesteryear.

Vision, Mission, and Goals of the PNHA

Vision: The PNHA inspires heritage interests, engagement, and enlightenment.

Mission: The PNHA promotes heritage tourism to procure its economic and social benefits, strengthen communities, and conserve its heritage resources.



Goals: The specific goals of the PNHA are to:

1. Increase national and international recognition, curiosity, and interest in heritage tourism in the State of Wyoming;
2. Inspire local and State pride, understanding, and engagement in the PNHA story;
3. Support heritage conservation, protection, interpretation, and restoration efforts through collaborative grantsmanship endeavors with heritage partners;
4. Expand the economic and social benefits of heritage tourism to Carbon and Natrona counties by increasing the number of heritage visitors, their length of stay, and amount of expenditures;
5. Communicate the PNHA story and its heritage assets through an effective and efficient mobile app.



PNHA's Target Audience

There are two primary target audiences:

- One primary target audience are the **local residents, landowners, schools, businesses, industry, civic organizations, and other local entities**. Heritage conservation is dependent on an informed and engaged community of stakeholders. Without a keen understanding and sense of pride at the local level, long-term protection and restoration will be a challenge. Special attention would be directed to engaging K-12 programs and young people in educational tours, interpretive and living history programs, class projects, and internship opportunities
- A second primary target audience are **heritage tourists** with several days of leisure time, resources, and curiosity for visiting the many heritage assets in the PNHA while also experiencing the culture, customs, festivals, and folklife of the local Wyoming communities. Given the national-level notoriety provided by a National Heritage Area designation, special attention would be directed to non-resident or out-of-state tourists given their potential economic impact on the State and region.

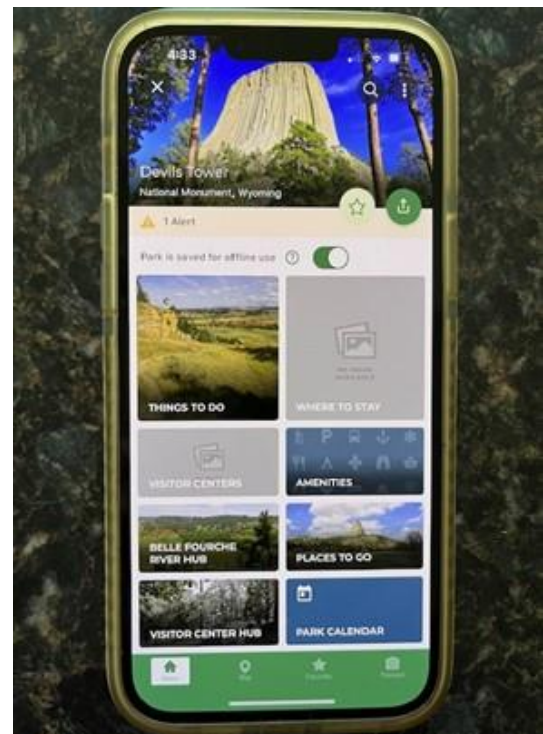
PNHA Mobile App

Tourism marketing and promotion continues to evolve. Transitioning away from costly 4-color brochures, magazines, and highway signs, and towards digital sources of information is a priority. Today, digital resources can be accessed anytime across most of the Nation and world. Although there will always be a place for printed materials, tourists increasingly expect information that is readily accessible, current, and comprehensive.

The tourism industry has realized that trip planning is an important part of a total visitor experience that may begin months before the actual trip. The industry also realizes that trip planning has a direct impact on travel decisions such as where to go, how long to stay, what experiences are available, and what is the desired route of travel.

Whereas Google searches can provide detailed information quickly for many heritage sites, it does not easily facilitate viewing and planning across multiple destinations, does not make connections between sites, and does not provide information about ancillary amenities and services. Also, most Google information is not real-time or near-real time.

In 2021, the NPS launched an innovative mobile app which includes all 440 NPS units. This app is easily modified and can post travel alerts in near real-time. Also useful for travelers to any NPS unit is the supporting information provided on the app -- things to do, lodging options, nearby



amenities and services, visitor centers, park news, calendar of events, weather, and road conditions. One of the revenue streams for the local coordinating entity could be from advertising on the PNHA app.

PNHA will develop and launch a separate stand-alone app that is similar in nature to the NPS mobile app. The PNHA mobile app could post information about the nearly two hundred heritage sites that relate to the theme of western expansion, settlement, and development between 1840s -1920s. Because each heritage site has a legal owner (e.g., private rancher, business, trust, cooperative, civic organization, non-governmental organization, community, county, state, or federal agency), the mobile app would only be populated with heritage sites with willing opt-in owners.

Willing owners would opt-in to the app by signing an agreement that their heritage site may be included as part of the app, and that the site would be available for public access under appropriate terms and conditions (e.g., operating hours, mode of travel access, size of party, closed times, areas or seasons). If an owner opts-in but later changes their mind for whatever reason, they can opt-out and easily be removed from the app.

There are some areas of the proposed PNHA without internet connection. Users of the app will be advised to download the app information prior to travel or arrival so information can be accessed where there is no internet connectivity.

Chapter 2

What is Heritage Tourism?

Definition of Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism embodies the goals of increased visitation, economic enhancement, and heritage preservation. These three goals are interrelated and build a cycle of community benefit – increased visitation leads to increased economic prosperity which leads to increased historic preservation and restoration which leads to increased visitation and so forth.



Heritage tourism does not require the expensive purchase, construction, or maintenance of modern built structures. Rather, it relies on existing historical and cultural assets be they wagon trails, stage stops, homesteads, river crossings, encampments, travel routes, museums, early military forts, artifacts, reenactments, festivals, stories, and other historic evidence.

At the individual level, a heritage tourist seeks a more cognitive and intellectual experience as opposed to a more physical experience typical of outdoor recreation (e.g., fly fishing, backpacking, motorized off-road travel). Heritage tourism provides opportunities for people to learn and experience a different time and place. For a few moments or days, heritage tourists can be transfixed into a state of wonderment, curiosity, intrigue, and profound awe and exhilaration of yesteryear.

Profile of Heritage Tourists

Compared to the average outdoor recreationist, a heritage tourist tends to be older, have more years of formal education, and a higher income. They tend to travel by auto, stay longer, participate in more activities, stay in hotels or B&Bs, enjoy shopping, and spend more money. They seek opportunities to learn, experience, reflect, and contemplate. They are not active outdoor recreationists who wish to test their skills (e.g., fly fishing, paddleboarding), challenge their stamina (e.g., wilderness treks, rock climbing), or explore remote off-road wildlands. By their very nature, heritage tourists and traditional outdoor recreationists do not often share the same interests or spaces,

Chapter 3

Public Concerns with PNHA

In the spirit of transparency, the PNHA Feasibility Study Team acknowledges that some residents, albeit very few, have expressed a concern with the proposed NHA designation. Questions about a new national designation are to be expected and most can be clarified with full information and an open discussion. Several of these public concerns are discussed below.



Trespass and Loss of Private Property Rights

Trespassing on private ranches, farms, and private property is a historic problem in the West. The concern is that a national designation might exacerbate the situation (e.g., private land trespass, resource destruction). The PNHA proposes four actions to help control trespass and infringement on private property rights from a PNHA designation.

a. **Strong Federal Law Protections:**

National Heritage Area Act of January 5, 2023 (P.L. 117-339) Section 120104 stated:

In general, nothing in this section (including an amendment made by this section)--

- (A) abridges any right of a public or private property owner, including the right to refrain from participating in any plan, project, program, or activity conducted with the National Heritage Area;*
- (B) requires any property owner to permit public access (including Federal, State, Tribal government, or local government access) to a property;*
- (C) modifies any provision of Federal, State, Tribal, or local law with respect to public access or use of private land;*
- (D) (i) alters any applicable land use regulation, land use plan, or other regulatory authority of any Federal, State, or local agency or Tribal government; or (ii) conveys to any local coordinating entity any land use of other regulatory authority;*
- (E) authorizes or implies the reservation or appropriation of water or water rights;*
- (F) diminishes the authority of a State to manage fish and wildlife, including through the regulation of fishing and hunting within a National Heritage Area;*
- (G) creates or affects any liability---(i) under any provision of law; or (ii) of any private property owner with respect to any person injured on private property.*



b. Embellishment of the Legislation Creating the PNHA

The Wyoming congressional delegation will be instrumental in preparing the legislative drafts for the PNHA designation. If there are issues or concerns that need stricter interpretation or clarification, providing legislative clarification would be one avenue for doing so.

c. Local Coordinating Entity

The local coordinating entity with administrative responsibility for the PNHA could establish Bylaws which dictate that Board selection will include the seating of one or more private property owners to ensure their concerns are known. Alternatively, an Advisory Committee to the Board could be established with private landowner representation for the same purpose.

d. PNHA Mobile App.

The mobile app will not include any information about private property unless the owner willingly opts-in to the program, and then only when the owner approves the information to be posted. This information could include nearby backroads, trails, or other attractions which may be the cause of inadvertent trespass. Likewise, private property warnings and regulations would be made clear on the app.

Federal Overreach

It is understandable that when one mentions a new national land use designation, some people become concerned about federal control, imposition of new rules and regulations, and loss of local authority and property rights.

There is evidence to the contrary. The Bureau of Land Management has been exceptional in their support of the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center and a number of well-managed historic sites. The National Park Service has five units in the proposed PNHA; that is, four National Historic Trails in Natrona County and one trail in Carbon County. Two of these trails were Congressionally designated in 1978, two others in the 1990s, and one in 2023. During this 50-year span of time the relationship between the NPS and the communities and counties has been compatible and benign.

The historic relationship between federal agencies and the heritage assets of the proposed PNHA is evidence of no federal overreach, eminent domain, loss of private property rights, lawsuits, devaluations, or control of heritage sites.



Furthermore, since National Heritage Areas are not units of the NPS, there is virtually no chance of overreach. The National Heritage Area Act of 2023 is also clear on this issue. The role of the NPS is solely to assist National Heritage Areas with national recognition, financial support, and technical assistance.

Crowding and Congestion

Some residents expressed concern that they did not want more people at their favorite campground or lake, or fishing in their favorite blue-ribbon spots.

As stated in Chapter II, heritage tourists are different than outdoor recreationists visiting the area today. Heritage tourists do not typically go to the same places as outdoor recreationists such as state park campgrounds, wilderness areas, remote reservoirs, or gold medal trout streams.

Crowding and congestion has been reported to be a problem on some holidays/weekends at some outdoor recreation sites in the area, but there are no known similar situations at the area's heritage sites. Furthermore, current lodging occupancy rates in the 50-60% range would suggest that ancillary food or lodging services would welcome more heritage travelers.

However, at some point in the future crowding and congestion did become a problem at specific heritage sites. the mobile app could provide near real-time information encouraging visitors to other places and/or times.

Heritage Resource Protection

A few people expressed concern that more visitors will harm the archaeological efforts currently underway or in the future.

There is agreement that tourists can do harm and damage a heritage site, and that tourists should not be allowed to go anywhere and do anything. A heritage site needs active management with signage, trails, rules, sanitation, and enforcement. While the proposed PNHA will not directly own or manage any heritage sites, the local coordinating entity should establish minimum management requirements to be in place before a site could be included on the mobile app.

Where the proposed PNHA would be very helpful for heritage resource protection is partnering with local heritage site managers to solicit grants and gifts to support heritage resource protection and restoration. The distinction as an NHA will add credibility and access to funding programs that individual heritage sites usually do not typically have.

Opt-In to Join the PNHA Mobile App

The PNHA mobile app will require a signed *opt-in* agreement from the heritage site owner who wants to be included in the app. The PNHA will not oblige or require any managing entity to participate in the NHA program. Thus, there is no interest in or need for an opt-out approach.

Chapter 4

Forthcoming in Next Draft

To be available June 1, 2024

