

# The Background and Value of Establishing a National Heritage Area for Central and Southern Wyoming

## June 1, 2023

### Purpose

The purpose of this document and presentation is to provide a forum for discussion to consider the establishment of a new national heritage destination for central and southern Wyoming.

Specifically, the proposal is to designate a new heritage tourism destination in Wyoming known as *“Pathways National Heritage Area (NHA).”*

The goal is to create a new permanent economic sector between northern Natrona County and southern Carbon County by using existing resources, developing new opportunities, promoting existing facilities and services, all for the common economic good.

### Discussion

In the United States (US) national parks, monuments and other similar type areas are managed by a single federal agency. NHAs deviate from a federal authority to those that are managed by county, local public agencies, private parties, or nongovernment organizations (NGO) as part of a formal NHA structure.

### Overview

#### 1. Managing the NHA as a Destination

Focusing on this proposed NHA as a destination, brings nation-wide visitors. This results in tourists having to stay multiple days and spending more. The goal is to keep visitors in the NHA as long as possible by providing diverse opportunities based on the substantial number of cultural, heritage and natural sites as well as an immense variety of outdoor recreation activities. It takes a large geographic area to reach this goal.

#### 2. Local collaboration

By linking locations together under one umbrella, it makes marketing to a national audience much easier, more inclusive, and cost effective. The Lewis & Clark trail’s state by state guide gives a notable example.

<https://www.nps.gov/lecl/planyourvisit/state-by-state-guide.htm>

Together, the agencies and private parties would be a formidable force for a single straightforward national campaign message, in lieu of dozens of smaller media outlets. This would create a national audience, which is required for a successful outcome and sustainable visitation. Therefore, the proposed NHA must have the **“National”** label.

An example is the South Park National Heritage Area, Colorado.

[South Park National Heritage Area, Colorado \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/southpark/) was designated by Congress in 2009. The Park County Department of Heritage and Tourism works with the Park County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (PCHPAC) and the South Park National Heritage Area Board and Office of Recreation Development to responsibly manage the heritage area.

These counties contains both historic and prehistoric resources. A large part of the region's heritage is deeply connected to agriculture and ranching, but the heritage area also features historic railroad sites, historic mining structures, and historic hotels along with natural and recreational areas. The South Park National Heritage Area features an abundance of opportunities for outdoor recreation and welcomes naturalists, artists, equestrians, mountaineers, cyclists, anglers, and life-long learners. The stated mission is to:

- Conserve and enhance natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- Facilitate partnerships between local, regional, and national parties.
- Provide interpretation and access for the public.
- Promote South Park's resources to generate sustainable economies.

Nationwide, there are significant increases in outdoor recreation users relocating their entire lives (amid the work from home movement) to be closer to outdoor recreation opportunities. For example, Beattyville, Kentucky. This was the top twenty poorest county and top ten poorest town by population in Kentucky five years ago, with a massive backlog of empty houses. Today, all those houses have been bought by outdoor recreation users wanting to be closer to the Red River Gorge. Moreover, they brought with them new businesses and retail sales and tax revenues. Freemont Canyon near Casper and Red River Gorge have similar geographical recreational opportunities.

A similar impact could happen in Wyoming by creating an NHA brand. The “**Pathways**” image or brand can gain significance from both the routes established by the pioneer trails and transcontinental telegraph line on the north end, to the origins of the first transcontinental railroad and highway and pioneer trails on the south end. These historical events have much more value when combined under the same NHA brand and provide a theme for the project. The Wyoming Public Broadcasting System documentary *Is but one example*. See <https://www.pbs.org/video/wyoming-pbs-documentaries-100-years-lincoln-highway/>

### 3. Options from hectic and highly controlled National Parks

The recent pandemic caused people to realize the importance of leisure travel and being outdoors and search for less crowded places. However, this also resulted in the unplanned overuse of all parks and recreational venues across the country. Thus, the need for new opportunities was highlighted.

This proposed NHA would spread across two counties. This means users can veer away from high use areas and explore less-used areas that are historic, remarkably geologic interesting, scenic, accessible, and located in central and southern Wyoming.

As for the Greater Yellowstone Area, expect more public venues to switch to permits and limits on tourism. This is a critical selling point for creating this NHA. Limitations on visitors in US parks and forests will pull visitors from one location and encourage them to seek another. Wyoming must have other viable options and this proposal would help fill that void. Otherwise, visitors will quickly leave the state. Staying in an area multiple days is the key to the tourism economy and this proposal exceeds that criterion.

Even though visitation is increasing across the state, overall Wyoming is losing ground to other regional states that are going full throttle in developing new national and state and local opportunities. The last meaningful national legislation that continues to produce an enormous and increasing beneficial impact on the outdoor economy in Wyoming was the Wyoming Wilderness Act of 1984, 40 years ago. **There has never been a national heritage area proposal submitted to Congress for Wyoming. Carbon and Natrona counties have the resources to fill that void.**

This NHA will have an enormous appeal to anyone willing to roam and visit new areas with multiple opportunities. Some examples of available activities in addition to the many heritage sites include boating, fishing, camping, hunting, visiting unusual geological features, high plains, desert sightseeing and much more. These range from urban visitor attractions to remote hiking and exploration. **Accommodating visitors with different physical abilities and interests is required.**

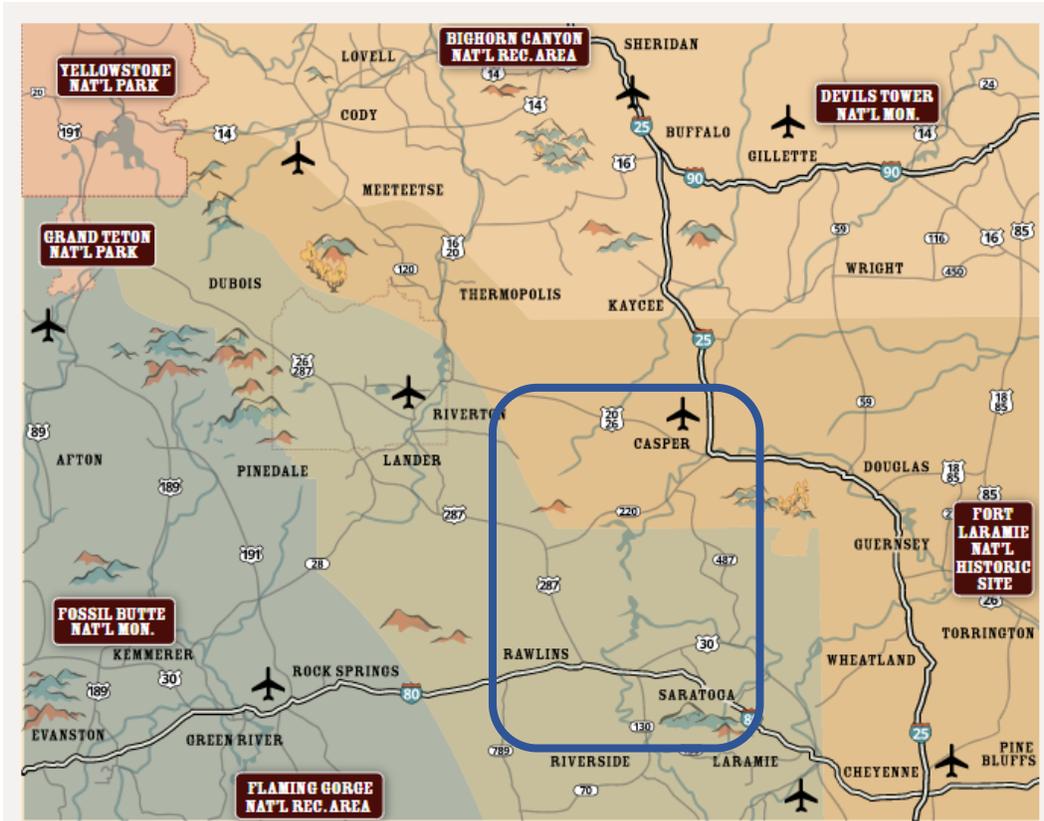
#### 4. Changing from particular use (water oriented) National Recreation Areas to a much more diverse National Heritage Area.

The increase in visits correlates with an increase in economic impacts. In the US, typically National Recreation Areas (NRAs) such as Big Horn and Flaming Gorge in Wyoming, are large tracks of public lands surrounding federal reservoirs. This has allowed Congress to draw a line around these public lands and call them NRAs. They have been successful, but most large NRAs are primarily water-based recreation. In this case the proposed NHA could have cooperating county, local government land and facilities along with private property as the NHA. In doing so, the NHA brings in a new era of cooperation based on what each entity offers visitors. No such arrangement on this scale exists in Wyoming. Nor does Wyoming have a National Heritage Area despite the abundance of sites that had a major impact on U.S History.

It would be beneficial to apply expenditures and visitation comparisons to economic growth. However, the fact remains there are six million people residing within three hundred miles of the proposed NHA and they will provide sustainable tourism growth. Projections of visitation in terms of economic impacts can be predicted, but the overall actual results can only be measured over time (5 years) and after initial build out and promotion of new tourist facilities.

#### 5. Setting the Stage

Below is an excerpt from a 2023 map on the Wyoming Office of Tourism website (<https://travelwyoming.com>). For your convenience we have inserted the general area of the proposed NHA on their map. **The boundary shown will change as this proposal is refined.**



This clearly demonstrates the value of the geographic location that this proposed tourist destination has. Likewise, the links on the website should be reviewed as to what the NHA could contribute to statewide tourism.

Quote from the website.

“Wyoming is broken into several regions, all of which lead to the state’s most-visited destinations: Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. These regions are meant to guide you through parts of the state that should not be missed, including state parks, unique attractions, outdoor recreation opportunities and more. There are many ways to arrive at your destination, but planning a road trip through one of these regions is a great way to discover Wyoming.”

The site says all roads lead to Teton and Yellowstone Park and tourists can **pass through** and visit other places. The message could be changed to say there are other destination opportunities besides these national parks. Keep in mind that the roads also **lead away** from

the parks. The proposed NHA must also be considered as an option for visitors before they go to the parks as well as when they leave.

### Conclusion

Creating the “*Pathways National Heritage Area*” will ensure for the first time that Wyoming heritage assets are promoted nationally which help ensure that this part of the state will receive a permanent share of tourism. The primary benefit will be the preservation and enhancement of sites that might otherwise be lost over time. This directly translates to the need for more local goods, services, lodging, and other amenities. The multitude of heritage sites and an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities create a substantial and sustainable new economic benefit for central and southern Wyoming. In addition, recent events and issues have created an exodus of businesses from states to another. One of the important criteria that companies on the move look for is relocating to new areas that offer employees a better quality of life, which includes close-by publicly available educational opportunities.

Multiple recommendations to help ensure the economic success of this proposal have been identified during the research phase of this proposal. Fulfilling the needs for a diverse population is an important part of the public involvement process that identifies attributes that can become NHA assets.

Potential collaborating partners that want to be part of establishing a NHA must become known and start a robust organizational plan to guide the process towards a successful conclusion. It should be noted that the success of this proposed project depends on full involvement and cooperation with maximum support from all government agencies, interested private businesses, NGOs, and the public residing around the opportunity and the region.

This proposal has been a multi-year effort to independently determine if there is a potential viable tourist industry that would be additional to agriculture and minerals. The simple purpose is to help provide a stable economy for the benefit of the people in central and southern Wyoming, through the use and preservation of the regional heritage assets.

Many organizations and citizens have already commented on the proposal and their input is included. As the process continues current information will be included.

“The best way to predict your future is to create it.” Abraham Lincoln

### **Document and PowerPoint**

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