

# National Heritage Areas

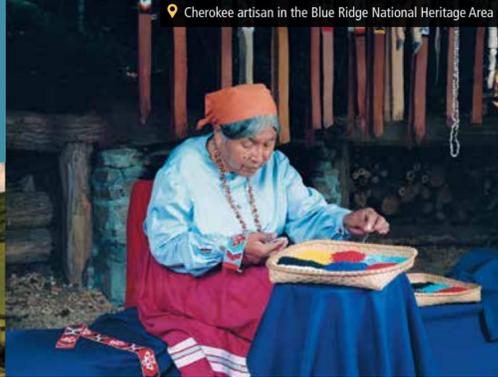
National Heritage Areas  
Program Office

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are created by Congress through federal law to promote the conservation of natural, cultural, and historic resources that combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources and communities, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our diverse heritage. NHAs provide a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships, NHA entities support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Matching federal funds and leveraging additional resources for projects, NHA partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

ABOVE MURAL: *Ward Charcoal Ovens* mural in Ely, NV, in the Great Basin NHA. Artist Chris Kreider depicts Italian immigrants building and operating the charcoal ovens that were used in the late 1870's to produce charcoal for smelting silver and copper ore mined in the area. Six ovens remain standing today and can be visited at Ward Ovens State Historic Park.



Cherokee artisan in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area



Silos and Smoke Stacks National Heritage Area



South Park National Heritage Area



Northern Plains National Heritage Area



## WHERE NATURE AND CULTURE CONNECT

### PROGRAM HISTORY

On August 24, 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed a law establishing the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor as the nation's first national heritage area – a new kind of national park that married preservation, conservation, recreation, education, and economic development. Today, the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor maintains the 97 mile towpath as a trail that is located on the same path once used by mule tenders. The area, with many historic structures, including canal locks and lock tenders' homes, draws more than a million visitors annually.

As of 2020, the program has grown to 55 areas in 34 states that celebrate and preserve the nationally important history – our industrial, maritime and cultural history and other defining stories that make us a unique country – from the rise of our nation's 16th president in Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area; to farms in Iowa's Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area; to the industrial heritage of Big Steel and Big Auto at Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area in Pennsylvania and MotorCities in Michigan, to various Native American stories in many NHAs. NHAs represent the varied history of America in lived in communities and landscapes.

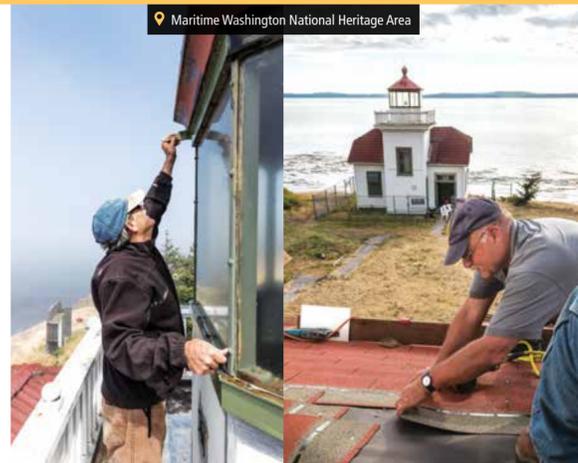


President Reagan signing bill creating the first National Heritage Area, Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Area.

### BECOMING A NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

National Heritage Areas are created by Congress through legislation. NHAs work with National Park Service (NPS) to promote the conservation of natural, historic, scenic, and cultural resources, while sustaining the areas' economic vitality. The NPS assists the NHA's coordinating organization in developing a management plan for the administration, use of federal funding, and interpretation of the heritage area.

Prior to designation by Congress, local groups may conduct a feasibility study to determine whether a heritage area is the most appropriate approach to achieving the region's goals. Congress can direct NPS through law to conduct a feasibility study. NPS feasibility study guidelines are available at: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas>



Maritime Washington National Heritage Area

### RECREATION AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

NHAs improve access to the cultural and natural resources they were designated to celebrate and protect. Granting access to recreational opportunities is important for public engagement and stewardship, which are essential to the mission of all NHAs. Many recreation projects in NHAs focus on the creation of multi-use hiking and biking trails along historic infrastructure – canals, industrial sites, and railways. Trails wind through natural and urban environments, with historic resources providing points of intrigue for hikers,

bikers, runners and walkers. Just as trails rely on partnerships within communities, they also serve to create and strengthen connections between communities. Across the country, people enjoy National Heritage Areas as destinations for hiking, biking, paddling, walking and running. NHAs support tours and other events that help towns, draw visitors, shoppers, and diners. Heritage Areas also offer school tours, camps, and other outdoor adventures that help residents get moving and connect with resources in their own backyards.



Atchafalaya National Heritage Area



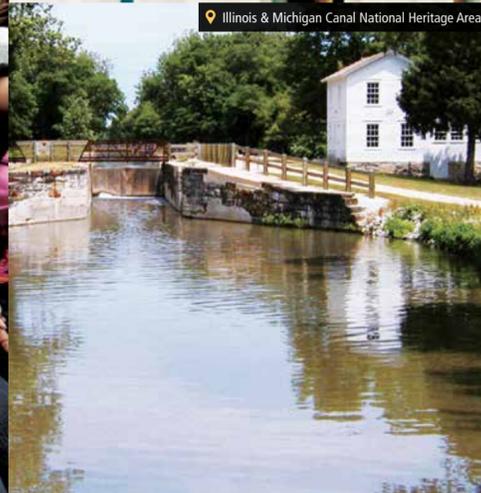
Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor

### PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE WHILE FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The benefits of historic preservation are as varied as the resources that make up the NHAs program. National Heritage Areas work to affirm and reinforce connections between the American people and our past in all its richness and diversity, build on the linkages between our natural and our cultural heritage by working with partners, historic sites, parks, and citizens to reinvigorate buildings and economies, while instilling pride in local history and traditions. They attract visitors who support local businesses, increase job opportunities, revitalize both urban and rural communities, and encourage the reuse of historic buildings.

Through use of historic preservation tax credits, grants, archeological excavations, adding sites to the National Register of Historic Places, and National Historic Landmarks, NHAs are preserving important historic buildings and districts. Because of these efforts, landmarks in our nation's engineering and labor history have been reclaimed and repurposed by leveraging resources and the support of local communities.

Rivers of Steel NHA shares our industrial heritage by restoring historic sites and rivers into attractions by offering unique tours, workshops, exhibitions, and festivals. Sites open to the public include the W.A. Young & Sons Foundry and Machine Shop, a National Historic Landmark built in 1900, that made parts for steamboats, coal mines, and railroads. Augusta Canal NHA's renovated the historic Enterprise Mill into offices, apartments, a theater, and Discovery Center. Restored hydroelectric generators provide power to the mills while excess power sold to Georgia Power, generates revenue for programs.



Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Area



Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area

### CONSERVATION

Conservation is a hallmark of NHAs. By conserving natural resources and cleaning polluted resources, NHAs in partnership with the NPS protect the character of place for the benefit of communities who live and work in the area. Conservation efforts lead to improved air and water quality, healthy ecosystems, beautiful places to live, and countless other benefits to once polluted areas. Throughout the country, NHAs are working with partners to restore polluted areas. Through innovative planning and outreach strategies, the NHAs promote creative and comprehensive approaches to conservation. These efforts have resulted in the type of holistic development and community engagement that National Heritage Areas were created to achieve. Yuma Crossing NHA restored wetlands along the Colorado River.

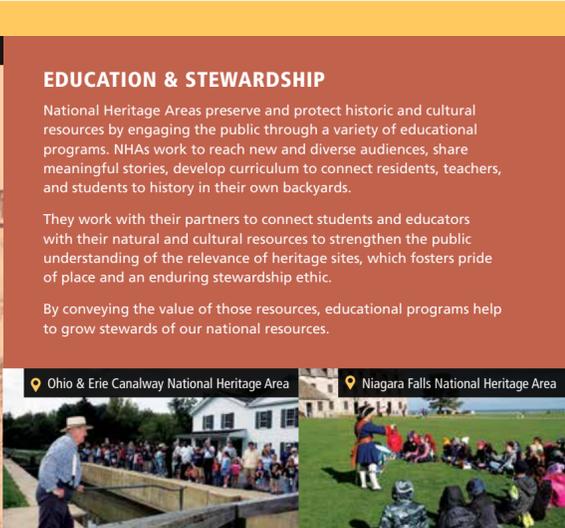
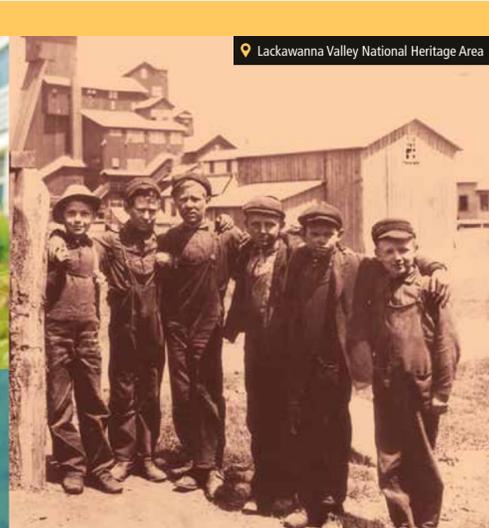
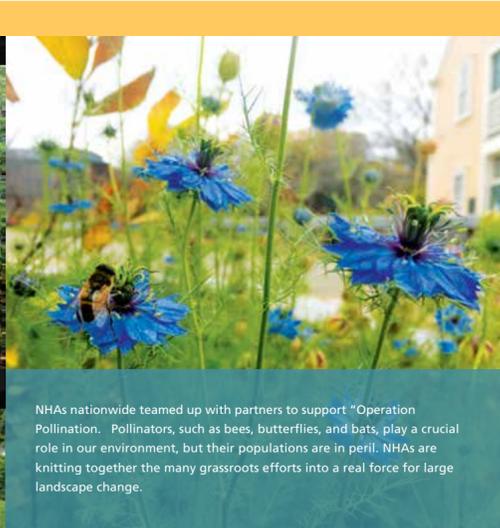
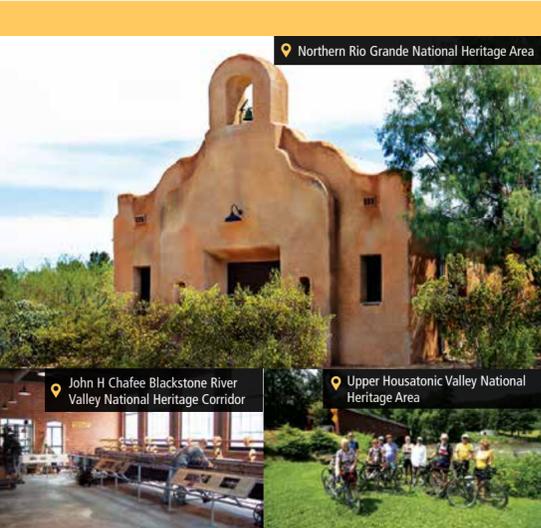
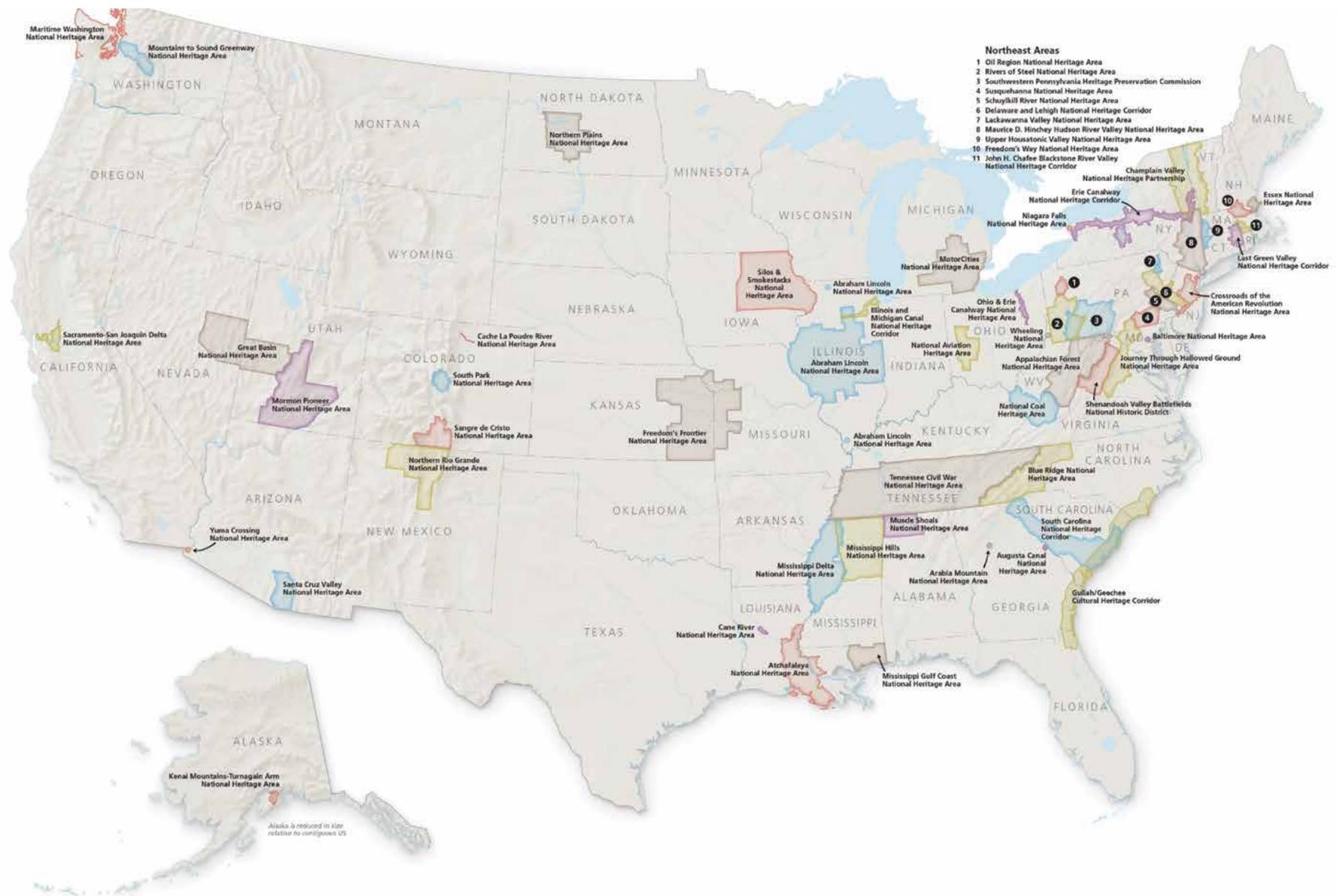


Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area



Baltimore National Heritage Area

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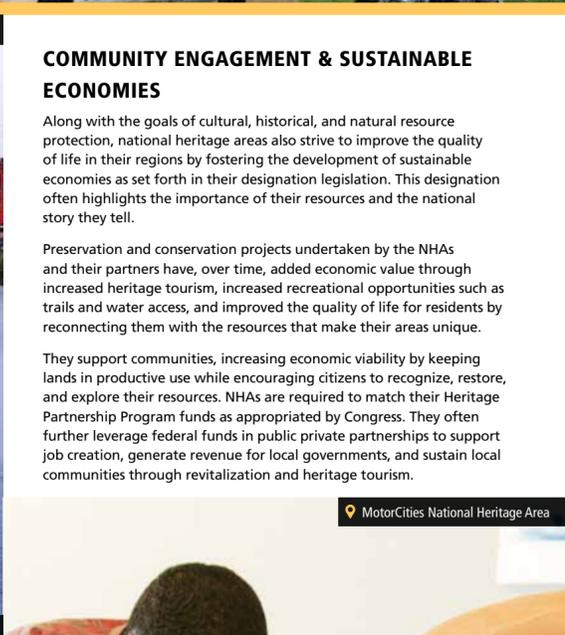
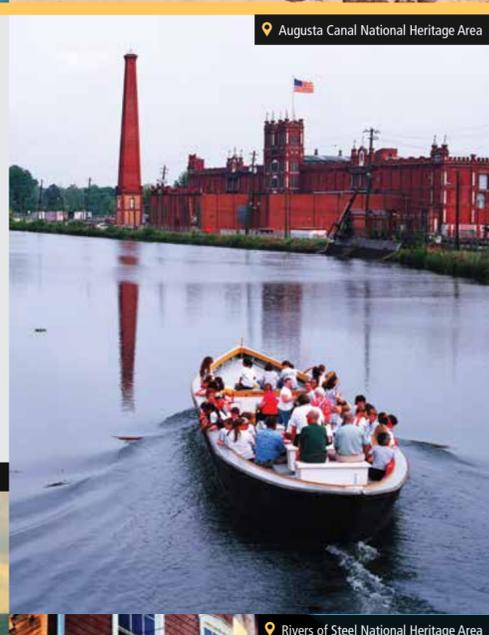
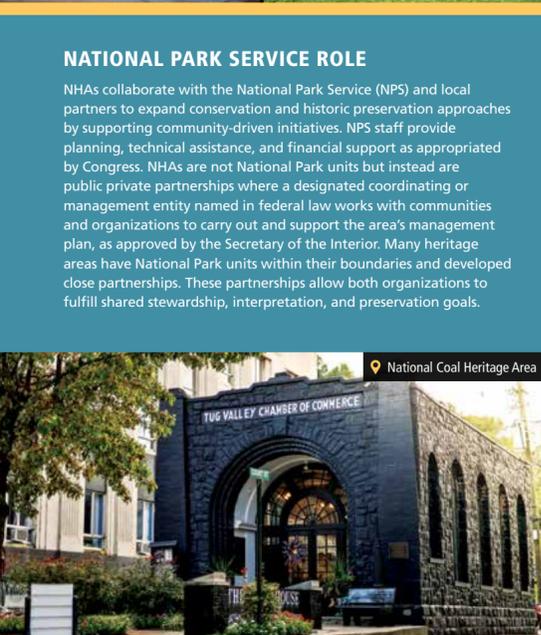


## EDUCATION & STEWARDSHIP

National Heritage Areas preserve and protect historic and cultural resources by engaging the public through a variety of educational programs. NHAs work to reach new and diverse audiences, share meaningful stories, develop curriculum to connect residents, teachers, and students to history in their own backyards.

They work with their partners to connect students and educators with their natural and cultural resources to strengthen the public understanding of the relevance of heritage sites, which fosters pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

By conveying the value of those resources, educational programs help to grow stewards of our national resources.



## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ROLE

NHAs collaborate with the National Park Service (NPS) and local partners to expand conservation and historic preservation approaches by supporting community-driven initiatives. NPS staff provide planning, technical assistance, and financial support as appropriated by Congress. NHAs are not National Park units but instead are public private partnerships where a designated coordinating or management entity named in federal law works with communities and organizations to carry out and support the area's management plan, as approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Many heritage areas have National Park units within their boundaries and developed close partnerships. These partnerships allow both organizations to fulfill shared stewardship, interpretation, and preservation goals.

## LANDSCAPE & PRESERVATION

As lived in landscapes, NHAs conserve resources on a large scale. NHAs offer the NPS a strategy to expand stewardship beyond park boundaries. Examples of this connection: The 550-square-mile Essex NHA is a cultural landscape that commemorates 400 years of maritime history with Salem Maritime National Historic Site. Silos and Smokestacks NHA, in the heart of Iowa's tallgrass prairie, tells of American agriculture's global significance through partnerships to celebrate the land, people, and communities of the 37-county area. Freedom's Way NHA includes the homes and landscapes of noted authors, such as Orchard House, home of Louisa May Alcott when she wrote *Little Women*, the Ralph Waldo Emerson House, and Walden Pond, made famous by Henry Thoreau. Sangre De Cristo NHA encompasses more than 3,000 square miles, showcases the rich history of south-central Colorado's San Luis Valley. The massive area includes Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, national wildlife refuges, national forests, forest wilderness areas, wildlife areas, many sites on the National Register of Historic Places and the headwaters of the Rio Grande River system.

## NHA PROGRAM FACTS & FUNDING

After Congressional designation, NHAs are eligible for Congressionally appropriated funds through the National Park Service Heritage Partnership Program (HPP) funding. The amount of HPP funds each NHA receives annually currently ranges from \$150,000-\$700,000. NHAs match the federal funds with in-kind or nonfederal Funding sources. The financial assistance component of the program is secured with legal agreements, accountability measures, and performance requirements for NHA entities. NHA designation does not affect private property rights or impact local zoning. While a National Heritage Area designation is permanent, funding from the NPS is authorized for a limited number of years, and the roles and responsibilities of the NPS vary over time to meet the needs of the region and law.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES

Along with the goals of cultural, historical, and natural resource protection, national heritage areas also strive to improve the quality of life in their regions by fostering the development of sustainable economies as set forth in their designation legislation. This designation often highlights the importance of their resources and the national story they tell.

Preservation and conservation projects undertaken by the NHAs and their partners have, over time, added economic value through increased heritage tourism, increased recreational opportunities such as trails and water access, and improved the quality of life for residents by reconnecting them with the resources that make their areas unique.

They support communities, increasing economic viability by keeping lands in productive use while encouraging citizens to recognize, restore, and explore their resources. NHAs are required to match their Heritage Partnership Program funds as appropriated by Congress. They often further leverage federal funds in public private partnerships to support job creation, generate revenue for local governments, and sustain local communities through revitalization and heritage tourism.