



## Håfa ådai and Welcome to the Guam National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Newsletter

### Håfa Adai

Heritage sites preserved across Guam reflect the history and living traditions of the CHamoru people. Other sites tell the story of the island's colonial history, the impacts of World War II, and the evolution of modern Guam's landscapes and communities. Guam's richly layered past and diverse ecosystems exist today in a variety of locations managed by community organizations, local and federal governments, and private landowners.

The National Park Service (NPS) was tasked by the US Congress to prepare a feasibility study to understand whether Guam's cultural and natural heritage sites may be suitable for inclusion in a national heritage area (NHA). Guampedia, the Guam Preservation Trust, and the University of Guam are supporting the study by leading public outreach and providing research on Guam's heritage resources. Ultimately, the study will

document the unique characteristics to determine whether the landscape has the distinctive resources associated with a nationally important story and local capacity necessary for designation as a national heritage area. To learn more about existing national heritage areas and their work, visit [go.nps.gov/nhas](https://go.nps.gov/nhas)

In partnership with the community, the National Park Service will explore whether a national heritage area could help meet local goals for preservation, education, and recreation. We would like to hear your thoughts about a potential national heritage area on Guam and answer any questions you may have about the study process. This newsletter provides background information about the study and describes the various ways you can be involved.

**Si Yu'us ma'åse'!**



## What is a national heritage area?

A national heritage area (NHA) is a place designated by the US Congress where natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources combine to form a nationally distinctive landscape. Continued use of national heritage areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscape enhances their significance.

- National heritage areas are also lived-in landscapes where conservation is community-driven.
- Each heritage area is managed by a local organization (called a local coordinating entity) that collaborates with the community to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.
- The National Park Service serves as a partner to each heritage area, providing technical support and limited financial assistance.
- Decision-making remains in the hands of local people and organizations.
- A national heritage area is not a unit of the National Park System, nor is any of its land owned or managed by the National Park Service, unless such land was previously set aside as a national park.



### What Could it Mean for Guam if a National Heritage Area were Established?

Some long-term benefits of NHA activities reported by stakeholders include:

- **sustainable economic development** – NHAs leverage federal funds to create jobs, generate revenue for local governments, and sustain local communities through revitalization and heritage tourism.
- **healthy environment and people** – Many NHAs improve water and air quality in their regions through restoration projects and encourage people to enjoy natural and cultural sites by providing new recreational opportunities.
- **improved quality of life** – Through new or improved amenities, unique settings, and educational and volunteer opportunities, NHAs provide additional opportunities for local groups to improve connectivity, accessibility, and the physical environment.
- **education and stewardship** – NHAs connect communities to natural, historic, and cultural sites through educational activities, which promote awareness and foster interest in, and stewardship of, heritage resources.
- **community engagement and pride** – By engaging community members in heritage conservation activities, NHAs strengthen sense of place and community pride.



Fort Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, Humãtak Village

The Guam National Heritage Area Study was authorized by the US Congress in Public Law 117-339 (<https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ339/PLAW-117publ339.pdf>), which directs the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to evaluate sites on Guam for potential designation as a national heritage area. Nationwide, there are currently 62 designated national heritage areas in 35 states and one territory that support a diversity of conservation, recreation, education, and preservation activities. To date, there are no national heritage areas designated on Guam or elsewhere in the Pacific Islands. To learn more about national heritage areas and the National Heritage Area System, visit [go.nps.gov/whatsanha](https://go.nps.gov/whatsanha)

### **Study Purpose and Process**

During the feasibility study, the National Park Service will assess several questions in collaboration with community stakeholders, local experts, and the public:

- Does the landscape have historic, cultural, and natural resources that tell the stories of indigenous history and lifeways, as well as other nationally important stories?
- Are there opportunities for enhancing the quality of resources through conservation, recreation, and education?
- Is there a local organization that has the financial and organizational capacity to manage a national heritage area?
- Is there public support for designation of a national heritage area?

Studies are typically completed within three years. This study is in its first year, and during this time, the National Park Service and local partner organizations will focus on information gathering and public outreach. This public comment period is the first opportunity to learn about and share your thoughts about a potential NHA designation on Guam. The feasibility study will rely heavily on public input and the engagement of local stakeholders to support its findings.

After this first public outreach phase concludes, the National Park Service will analyze comments and continue work on the study. In a second study phase, the study team will collaborate with local scholars and other community experts to identify whether nationally distinctive resources and heritage themes are present within the study area. An additional opportunity for public outreach will occur toward the end of the study process.

Upon completion, a study report will be transmitted to the US Congress describing the study findings, recommendations from the Secretary of the Interior, and any correspondence received demonstrating support for, or opposition to, establishing the national heritage area. The National Park Service will publicly release the study report on the project website after it has been transmitted to the US Congress. Ultimately, it is up to the US Congress to determine whether a national heritage area is designated. For more information on national heritage area feasibility studies, visit [go.nps.gov/1pfs40](https://go.nps.gov/1pfs40)

**Question:** Is a national heritage area a unit of the National Park System?

**Answer:** A national heritage area is not a unit of the National Park System, and the National Park Service does not assume ownership of land inside heritage areas or impose land use controls, unless such land was previously set aside as a national park. A national heritage area may collaborate with a nearby national park. Designated by the US Congress, national heritage areas are managed by local coordinating entities that accomplish the goals of interpreting the heritage area history and traditions through partnerships with governments, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

**Question:** Who designates an area to become a national heritage area?

**Answer:** Only the US Congress may designate regions of the country as national heritage areas. However, the National Park Service may be requested by the US Congress to testify whether a region has the resources, national importance, public support, and local financial and organizational capacity to carry out the responsibilities that come with designation.

**Question:** What makes national heritage area designation different from a local designation?

**Answer:** National heritage area designation occurs through an act of the US Congress. If achieved, the designation requires the local coordinating entity to assume new responsibilities, including developing and implementing a management plan and operating the NHA under performance and accountability standards connected with the receipt of federal funds.



Malesso' Belltower, Malesso' Village

**Question:** How do national heritage areas affect private property?

**Answer:** The federal government does not assume ownership or management of lands within a designated national heritage area, unless such land is already owned or managed by the federal government. As stated in the National Heritage Areas Act of 2023, NHA designation will not infringe on private property rights. National heritage areas do not require property owners to allow access or use of their property to support the national heritage area. Designation does not restrict private property owners from participating in any plans or modifications to their property. Additionally, designation does not convey any land use or other regulatory authority to the local coordinating entity.

**Question:** Why are feasibility studies important?

**Answer:** National heritage area feasibility studies provide a means to inventory, assess, and document the nationally important resources and stories of a potential national heritage area. These studies examine tangible and intangible resources for what is unique, important, and/or endangered about them; what is underutilized; who may be involved; and what potential new opportunities could be created by establishing a national heritage area.

**Question:** How is a boundary for a national heritage area determined?

**Answer:** Through Public Law 117-339, the US Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to conduct a study “to assess the suitability and feasibility of designating sites in Guam as a National Heritage Area.” Therefore, the legislation provides the National Park Service and the community with an opportunity to consider any appropriate NHA boundary on the island. Village or territorial boundaries, watershed boundaries, and geographic boundaries may help define the NHA boundaries. However, the most appropriate boundaries confirm and illustrate an area’s national importance, themes, and resources and have the support of the public and partners. Based on community feedback, the study may recommend an appropriate boundary for the heritage area. However, heritage area boundaries are ultimately determined by congressional legislation if a heritage area is designated, and the US Congress may or may not follow study recommendations. To ensure that the study is informed by the local community, the study team would be interested in your thoughts about what might make sense for a potential NHA boundary in Guam.

**Question:** Who manages national heritage areas?

**Answer:** During the feasibility study process, the study team will assess whether a local entity exists to coordinate heritage area activities. Coordinating entities for other national heritage areas in the system are varied and include nonprofit organizations, alliances of organizations, coalitions, local or state governments, and public universities/colleges. A coordinating entity is generally identified in the establishing legislation. The coordinating entity is authorized to manage the federal funding allocated to carry out the purposes of the legislation.



Kiosko at the Plaza de Espana, Hagåtña



Atantãno landscape, Piti & Sãnta Rita-Sumai Villages

**Question:** What kind of financial and human resources are necessary for national heritage area success?

**Answer:** One of the critical components necessary for success is demonstrated support and commitment from a variety of partners in the form of staff time, supplies, money, and subject matter expertise. The National Park Service asks potential local coordinating entities to complete a “conceptual financial plan” as part of the feasibility study process. In the event a national heritage area is designated, the local coordinating entity completes a management plan that dives deeper into financial and business planning.

**Question:** How does federal funding support a national heritage area?

**Answer:** If a national heritage area is designated by the US Congress, the local coordinating entity identified in the legislation is initially eligible to receive federal funding. However, federal funding is dependent on actual appropriation by the US Congress. Most national heritage areas are required to provide a one-to-one nonfederal match to the federal funding. However, the local match has not been required of NHAs located in US territories (under 48 USC §1469a and current Department of the Interior policy). The National Park Service will share any updates that may occur to this policy guidance during the study process. In the event that a local funding match is required, the cost share/nonfederal match may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, including staff hours.

View of Historic District of Hagåtña from Ft. Santa Agueda, Agana Heights



## How to Share Your Thoughts

You can participate in the study process by attending a public meeting to learn more and by sharing your comments directly with the study team. For more information on meeting dates, locations, and times, please visit [parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA)



Project Website QR Code

### Ways to Comment

Send us your thoughts and comments in any of the following ways:

- Online (preferred):  
Visit [parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA) and click “Open for Comment.”

- By mail:

National Park Service  
Attention: Guam National Heritage Area Study  
One Denver Federal Center, Building 50  
Denver, CO 80225

General questions about the study can be directed to [Guam\\_NHA\\_Study@nps.gov](mailto:Guam_NHA_Study@nps.gov).

## Questions

We are also interested in hearing your thoughts about the questions listed below. While all comments are welcome and appreciated, comments that address any or all these questions will be most helpful to the study process.

1. What are the most important cultural and natural heritage sites on Guam, in your opinion?
2. Which heritage sites do you think would be appropriate to include in a national heritage area, and why?
3. What stories are most important to the history and culture of Guam, and where can these stories best be experienced?
4. Are there ongoing cultural traditions and practices that are connected to these important sites and stories?
5. Do opportunities exist to enhance heritage sites and resources through conservation, recreation, and education?
6. Is there a trusted local organization that might have the capacity to coordinate management of a national heritage area for the long term and in partnership with the National Park Service?

***Yu'us ma'åse' for your time and participation!***



Atantano Heritage Preserve, Piti and Santa Rita-Sumai Villages. All photos courtesy of Guam Preservation Trust.