

# Chapter 2

## Public Outreach and Involvement

### Process for Outreach and Public Involvement

One of the foundations common to all successful heritage areas is an informed and engaged community that is committed to the long-term sustainability of the regional project. Active participation and strong support from all facets of the community are essential to cultivating partnerships and collaborations. This support is particularly important to leverage resources for the conservation and interpretation of the natural, historic, and cultural resources. The Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study Team developed a transparent community engagement process that addressed the following objectives:

- Promote public understanding of heritage areas and how they are managed.
- Inform members of the public about the Western Reserve Heritage Study and how they can become involved in the process.
- Assess public support for the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area.
- Determine if there is local capacity and commitment to coordinate a Western Reserve Heritage Area.

### *Stakeholder Committee*

In order to achieve these objectives, the study team developed a variety of diverse community engagement methods to involve the public in the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study. One of the first tasks was the creation of a Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Stakeholder Committee with representation throughout the 14-county region. Members of the committee included elected officials and representatives from regional nonprofit organizations, planning agencies, park agencies, community and economic development organizations, and historical organizations. Represented on the committee were many of the existing regional organizations within the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area, including the Western Reserve Historical Society, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, The Fund for our Economic Future, and the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition. Committee members met quarterly throughout the planning process and provided input and feedback regarding the development of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study.

### *Civic Engagement Tools*

A variety of community engagement methods was implemented throughout the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study process, including town hall meetings (public meetings), community and elected official leadership meetings, radio and cable television interviews, newspaper articles, flyers, Western Reserve Heritage newsletters, and articles in regional organizations' newsletters. In addition to traditional methods of public involvement, the study team incorporated a variety of social networking tools, including the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study Facebook group, Twitter, and an interactive web site at <http://westernreserve.ning.com>. This website had 2,567 visitors and 92 users who registered as members to receive updates.

United States Congressman Tim Ryan met with members of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Stakeholder Committee and shared information about his vision for a proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area. Judy Billings from

Freedom Frontier National Heritage Area also spoke to committee members regarding her region's experience in designation and management of a nationally-designated heritage area.



Town hall meetings were key community engagement methods.

## Town Hall Gatherings, Public Meetings, and Presentations

	Date	Location	Venue	Number
2009	June 1	Peninsula	Cuyahoga Valley National Park (stakeholder committee)	30
	August 27	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	15
	September 30	Cleveland	Western Reserve Historical Society (historic interests)	35
	September 30	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	20
	November 4	Kirtland	Lake Metroparks Farmpark	25
	November 4	Sandusky	Lake Erie Shores and Islands Welcome Center	23
	November 5	Rootstown	NEOUCOM	27
	December 2	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	12
2010	January 5	Canton	Adventures in NE Ohio	30
	January 7	Liberty	Liberty Township Trustee Meeting	40
	January 27	Burton	Geauga County Historical Society	45
	January 28	Akron	Public Library	24
	February 2	Norwalk	Huron County Job & Family Services	10
	February 3	Painesville	Morley Library	20
	February 4	Amherst	Lorain County Visitors Bureau	20
	February 9	Cleveland	Positively Cleveland offices	15
	February 9	Cleveland	Cleveland Zoo (snow storm)	2
	February 10	Jefferson	Ashtabula County Courthouse	20
	February 11	Sandusky	Sandusky City Hall	15
	February 16	Ravenna	Reed Memorial Library	10
	February 17	Warren	Kent State Trumbull Campus	35
	February 18	Cleveland	Hale Farm (historic interests)	30
	February 22	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	12
	February 25	Medina	County Library	20
	March 21	Huron	Friends of Erie Metropark *	100
	March 31	Medina	Partners in Tourism Meeting	21
	April 20	Cleveland	Northeast Ohio Inter-museum Council	56
	April 22	Sandusky	Sandusky Rotary Presentation *	75
	April 27	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	15
	April 29	Geneva	Ashtabula Economic Development Summit *	200
	May 12	Ravenna	Portage County Regional Planning Commission	18
	June 15	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	15
	June 17	Ravenna	Reed Memorial Library	10
	June 21	Jefferson	Jefferson Historical Society	30
	June 22	Brecksville	Sleepy Hollow Golf Course	10
	June 23	Medina	County Library	14
	June 24	Huron	Public Library	40
	June 25	Akron	Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition	12
	July 1	Youngstown	Eastgate Regional Council of Government	23
	July 22	Medina	Medina Breakfast Kiwanis *	25
	August 4	Wadsworth	Downtown Wadsworth Organization *	18
	August 10	Warren	Congressman Tim Ryan's Office	3
	September 8	Medina	Partners in Tourism Meeting *	18
	September 9	Norwalk	Norwalk Chamber Board Meeting	21
	September 15	Cleveland	Happy Days Visitors Center (tourism interests)	15
	September 15	Cleveland	Stakeholder Committee Meeting	12
	October 26	Akron	Summit County Mayors Association	19

\* Presentations by stakeholder committee members and others that included a discussion of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study

Total Number of Participants—1,305

### *Special Interest Meetings*

Meetings were held with representatives of the region's tourism industry, as well as representatives of museums and historical societies. These meetings gathered specific information related to the study and perspectives about the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study.

### *Meetings in a Box*

The study team also developed a portable meeting-in-a-box presentation about the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area and the feasibility study process. This tool was provided to stakeholder committee members for their use in making presentations to service and civic organizations throughout the Western Reserve.

*“Our rich roots have  
been exposed, and our  
treasures unveiled.”*

### *Media*

Media releases were distributed prior to public meetings. These releases also generated additional feature article coverage. The following represent those media mentions the study team is aware of at this time:

*Tribune-Chronicle*, Warren

WFMJ-TV, Youngstown

WKBN-TV, Youngstown

WYTV-TV, Youngstown

*Youngstown Vindicator*

*News-Herald*, Lake County

*Akron Beacon Journal*

*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

*Chagrin Solon Sun*

*West Side Leader*

Ohio.com

Cleveland State University *News from Cleveland Memory* newsletter

VisitMedinaCounty.com newsletter

Clevelandareahistory.com

Medina County Public Access TV

Throughout the entire community engagement process, the study team received constructive input from citizens regarding the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the region and what they value about their community. Historically accurate input was also received on how to interpret and celebrate the unique heritage of the Western Reserve. This input is referenced throughout the

Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study to define guiding principles, values, goals, themes, and other criteria as defined by statute.

### **Guiding Principles**

Citizens throughout the Western Reserve share fundamental beliefs and values. The following guiding principles reflect those ideals identified by citizens during Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study town hall meetings, and they are principles any organization assuming coordination of a regional heritage area initiative should protect and follow.

These principles reflect what citizens believe designation of a Western Reserve Heritage Area could do and for what purpose, and they provide guidelines for how a coordinating entity might move forward. To better understand these principles, direct quotes from citizens supporting each value are also provided.

#### *The Western Reserve Heritage Area respects property rights.*

*“We value private property rights.”*

*“All landowners understand what is special. We have been able to protect land, agricultural heritage, natural areas, and scenic vistas due to successful homeowner programs, such as easements to land trusts.”*

*“Local government control is preserved.”*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area encourages, honors, and celebrates authentic and diverse stories from multiple perspectives.*

*"We respect autonomy, but encourage collaboration, among communities."*

*"We celebrate our differences. After all, it was our mix of cultures and people that created our specialness."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area focuses on authentic and engaging experiences.*

*"There is authenticity. History is as history was. The story we share was created through research and expert historians."*

*"There are living history experiences throughout the region, and our region is 'living history.'"*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area connects communities and people across the region.*

*"Integrated thinking is facilitated through 'virtual' Western Reserve town squares where we share ideas and best practices."*

*"Our communities know one another's history."*

*"We work together as a region."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area tells the region's story and raises national awareness of its distinctive natural, cultural, and historic assets.*

*"People are aware of the impact this region had to industry and culture on a national level."*

*"People know how to put the Western Reserve in the context of U.S. history."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area invests in community engagement, education, and empowerment.*

*"We have re-invented ourselves through educating youth, hard work, and dedication."*

*"Youth understand our roots."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area sustains and grows sense of place.*

*"We value renewability, sustainability, and planned growth."*

*"We've entered a new era. During the Industrial Era, we measured our growth by feet and the size of our physical footprints."*

*"We have become leaders in recovering what communities have lost: cultures, historic sites, and natural resources."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area values and protects its natural, cultural, and historic places and stories.*

*"There are contemporary uses of our resources that reflect historical use."*

*"We've preserved the beauty of the land and our traditions."*

*"Original characters of our communities are not only protected, but are restored."*

*"Our agriculture is maintained."*



*The Western Reserve Heritage Area considers future generations in everything we do.*

*"Our resources, stories, and heritage have been preserved for future generations."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area believes sustainability, innovation, and appreciation of community resources fosters a strong regional economy.*

*"We are experiencing economic development and new industry."*

*"Characteristic of our New England settlers, we are adventurous, opportunity-seeking, and have a strong work ethic."*

*"We are a heritage and cultural tourism destination."*

*"Our children stay here. There are many new jobs, and we have helped them to create opportunities. We've created an environment and quality of life that keeps people here."*

*"Our economy is built on restoration of resources and not depletion of resources."*

*"We have an innovative way of looking at economic activity that involves efficiency and integrated thinking."*

*The Western Reserve Heritage Area fosters pride within its communities and across the region.*

*"We stand tall."*

*"We believe we are unique and special."*

*"People understand 'There's no place like home.'"*