

Chapter 6

Designation Alternatives and Impact Assessment

Review of Designation Alternatives

This section fully evaluates two management alternatives including no action and implementation of the heritage area concept as a regional initiative, and discusses a third alternative – national designation - that was initially considered but set aside.

Alternative 1: No Action

The no-action alternative implies that no attempt would be made to further consolidate interests for a unified Western Reserve heritage area. Local initiatives would continue to recognize, protect, and develop community resources individually.

Although many individuals, organizations, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government entities are working to preserve and enhance significant Western Reserve resources, a lack of coordination could have a negative impact if resource managers continue to compete for funding and visitors. Marketing in competitive

fashion would pit resources against each other rather than working together. This lack of coordination and un-unified effort could have a negative impact on significant cultural and other resources as there would not be a focused region-wide effort to develop common direction on resource protection policies, programs, marketing, and promotion. This could result in a loss of historic structures, archaeological resources and other significant resources that preserve and tell the Western Reserve story.

Uncoordinated planning and land use regulation could result in communities developing in ways that may diminish the natural and recreational resources of the Western Reserve. Natural resources, such as wetlands, could become further fragmented reducing the region's value as a wildlife migration route and eroding aesthetic qualities. The connection and enhancement of region-wide recreational opportunities might not be as easily realized.

Each community's individual potential for cultural, natural, and recreational resource conservation and the collective potential of a region working together to preserve and enhance these important resources might not be realized. Funding to support resource protection in the Western Reserve would continue to be challenging. If no action is taken, resource recognition, protection, and promotion within the region would be fragmented as no additional mechanism for working together would be provided.

There would be no technical assistance offered through the National Park Service's National Heritage Area program or associated federal funding. Other federal programs to expand protection of Western Reserve resources, such as the National Register programs, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program, and National Historic Landmarks program would continue on a competitive basis.

Alternative 2: Implementation of the heritage area concept as a regional initiative

In order for a regional initiative to work, a focal point or framework is necessary to coordinate the efforts of Western Reserve partners and to provide a forum where different interests can network, share, and have a voice. Several possibilities exist for an organization or framework to facilitate the protection and management of the corridor's resources. One example is the Plus Works, self-described as the following:

"Partners in building a more vibrant Northeast Ohio are collaborating to tell a consistent, clear story within the region about the people, places and efforts that make Northeast Ohio great. Our objective is to increase awareness, support and participation in the work that is building a vibrant region. Our target audience is community influencers across Northeast Ohio – defined as 17 counties."



Other current regional initiatives to unite the northern Ohio include:

- JumpStart, the region's entrepreneurial assistance organization
- BioEnterprise, the region's bioscience advocacy and assistance organization
- NorTech, the region's high-tech advocate
- MAGNET, the region's manufacturing advocacy organization
- Greater Cleveland Partnership and other chambers of commerce, who are the founders of Team Northeast Ohio
- The Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance
- Team Northeast Ohio (the region's business attraction organization)

This is a sample list of regional initiatives and does not reflect all regional activity within the Western Reserve. Most of the initiatives identified above do not include all 14 counties represented in the Western Reserve, but there may be opportunities to expand their geographic focus.

The Fund for Our Economic Future is a collaboration of philanthropic organizations and individuals that have united to strengthen the regional economic competitiveness through grant-making, research, and civic engagement. As such, it is in a position to provide funding and other support for many of these regional initiatives.

Another option to consider is coordination through the Western Reserve Heritage Area Feasibility Study Stakeholder Committee, a mix of agencies, organizations, and individuals brought together to assist with the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study (described in more detail in Chapter 2). If this group chose to stay engaged, they could be that regional coordinating forum for communities, organizations, agencies, and individuals who come together around their common story and begin to implement the vision and goals identified in Chapter 1.

Potential roles for partners include ownership, jurisdiction/authority or management of resources, funding, advocacy for one or more resource themes, and responsibility for developing plans that impact the Western Reserve. This alternative would rely on communities getting together to establish a regional framework to plan and implement the area vision. Resource protection and management would still occur through local action, but a regional authority would coordinate planning, facilitate information exchange, seek funding, and provide the vehicle for a unified marketing effort.

This alternative could increase state or federal support while creating a regional identity that could formalize the relationship among

communities working for a common cause. Existing regional organizations could assume this role with minor modifications. A regional coordinating body could prepare multi jurisdictional funding requests, or assist groups with limited staff or expertise to prepare better funding requests, thereby improving chances for additional state and federal funding.

Although regional partnerships are common, the Western Reserve has not worked as efficiently as it could as a region in the past. The major urban counties have viewed each other as competitors for economic development and state funds. One project's definition of a "region" is seldom of the same boundary as another, so an overlapping of regionalism occurs, minimizing the ability to leverage and creating confusion internally and externally. Dynamic local politics could undermine the stability of a regional authority, causing it to dissolve at any time, but creation of a regional forum for coordination and cooperation could minimize these issues.

Working together as a region in preserving and enhancing the shared story of the Western Reserve will increase both the marketability of the corridor in a national and international marketplace and the ability to leverage dollars.

A regionally organized initiative does not necessarily increase the capability to address natural resource issues that extend beyond local government jurisdictions. Water quality is an example of an issue that a voluntary regional organization would have difficulty addressing. A regional coordinating body could improve the consistency of natural resource planning and protection throughout the participating jurisdictions.

Although several communities have local preservation ordinances, they are faced with growing development pressure; many local preservation initiatives lack the capability to adequately protect important historical structures, archeological sites, and cultural landscapes. A regional approach that recognizes that the Western Reserve story is told through preservation and enhancement of all of the supporting resources in every community will have a positive influence on policy and funding at the local level.

Strong support of the private sector, although critical to each alternative, is most important for the success of a regional initiative. While this alternative would improve coordination of resource management over the No Action alternative, it requires voluntary participation and



strong coordination of the efforts of Western Reserve partners and a forum where different interests can network and have a voice.

Federal programs to expand protection of Western Reserve resources, such as the National Register programs, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program and National Historic Landmarks program, would be better competed for as the region works in unity.

Alternative initially considered, but set aside

Alternative 3: National Heritage Area

Under this alternative, enabling legislation would define a coordinating entity, outline the role of the Department of the Interior and other federal entities and authorize appropriations to be matched by local funds.

Designation of national heritage areas do not entail federal acquisition of land, or federal management of heritage area resources.

If this had been a viable alternative, new programs and activities to support heritage resource protection likely would have been developed and technical assistance provided by the NPS National Heritage Area Program.

Successful heritage areas are led by a strong coordinating entity who can marshal the resources and partnerships to protect and properly develop important resources. The coordinating entity would become an information clearinghouse, coordinating efforts that would increase public awareness and stewardship of local resources.

Part of the coordinating entity's responsibility would include recreation planning and regional economic development. The coordinating entity would create the forum for resource users, landowners, industry, and communities to work together to identify, protect, and appropriately develop area resources, and collaborate with others. The coordinating entity would be responsible for raising funds or in-kind donations to implement the heritage area vision and goals described within this study and to match the federal financial assistance.

As indicated in the analysis of a coordinating entity in the National Heritage Area criteria, there is currently not a singular entity within the Western Reserve that has the willingness, capacity, and acceptance to be recognized as the coordinating entity if the Western Reserve were to be designated a National Heritage Area. Because the Western Reserve does not

meet suitability or feasibility criteria for National Heritage Area designation, this alternative was set aside.

The mix of skills and geographic representation of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study Stakeholder committee is recommended as a model for creation of a coordinating entity. Members of this committee have expressed interest in developing the capacity and working toward establishing a plan for obtaining feasibility readiness.

