

Chapter 1

Introduction

What is a Heritage Area?

Heritage areas are places where natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, significant landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. Through the conservation, interpretation, and promotion of these unique resources, stories, and traditions, communities experience increased community and economic development and improved quality of life for the citizens of the region. Heritage areas represent a significant advancement in conservation and historic preservation: large-scale, community-centered initiatives collaborating across political jurisdictions to protect significant landscapes and living cultures. Managed locally, heritage areas play vital roles in preserving the physical character, traditions, and stories of our country, reminding us of our national origins and destiny.

Through the cultivation of public and private partnerships, heritage areas provide regional

resource conservation strategies to celebrate the local heritage while building livable and sustainable communities. Working in collaboration and partnership with units of government, planning agencies, park agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and foundations, heritage areas promote stewardship, leverage significant resources, and inspire greater pride in the region's heritage. As a regional planning tool, a designated heritage area provides a blueprint for achieving the balance between community and economic development and the conservation of significant historic, natural, and cultural resources. Coordinated and initiated at the local level, heritage areas do not come with rules and regulations, and they do not have any impact on existing local, state, or federal regulations. Nor do they impact private property rights.

Heritage areas can be developed through local, state, and national designations, depending on the organizational capacity and goals of a potential project. The key is to find the best strategy for

implementing regional resource conservation and enhancement strategy. The first National Heritage Area designated by Congress—The Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor—was designated in 1984 to celebrate the canal era in Illinois, and currently Congress has designated 49 National Heritage Areas across the country.



National Heritage Areas export the National Park Service's mission of resource conservation to urban and rural communities across the country. Key elements of all successful National Heritage Areas, or any heritage area for that matter, include an investment and commitment of local communities, the formation of diverse community partnerships, and the creation of an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to regional planning and development.

Purpose of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study

The purpose of the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study is to determine if the area that encompasses the modern-day Ohio counties of Trumbull, Mahoning, Ashtabula, Portage, Geauga, Lake, Cuyahoga, Summit, Medina, Huron, Lorain, Erie, Ottawa, and Ashland meets the suitability and feasibility requirements for designation as a National Heritage Area. This region encompasses the original boundaries of the Connecticut Western Reserve as surveyed beginning in 1796.

Led by Congressman Tim Ryan, Congress requested the study in Public Law 109-338 (Oct. 12, 2006) under Subtitle A.



The section of the act requesting a study of the Western Reserve is found in Section 301. Within the legislative act, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior through the National Park Service to oversee the study's development. Statute pertaining to the Western Reserve Heritage Area Study is found in Appendix A.

Using the National Park Service process for analyzing potential National Heritage Areas, the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study summarizes the geography of the study area and its historical, cultural, recreational, and natural resources. It also presents a fresh interpretive framework for understanding the national importance of the Western Reserve in shaping the nation through a truly American identity. In addition, the Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study describes management alternatives and assesses the impact of proposed designation options.

The study provides an assessment as to whether the proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area meets the nine criteria outlined in Public

Law 109-338 for designation as a National Heritage Area.

These criteria are provided in Figure 1 and form the basis of Chapter Five of this study.

Environmental Compliance

This study complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which mandates all federal agencies to analyze impacts of major federal actions that have a significant effect on the environment. Guidance for addressing this act is set forth in National Park Service Director's Order 12 (DO-12), which outlines several options for meeting the requirements of the act, depending on the severity of the environmental impacts of the alternatives.



A “categorical exclusion for which no formal documentation is necessary” was selected as the most appropriate NEPA pathway for this feasibility study. The study is excluded from requiring an environmental assessment because it matches one of the categories that under normal circumstances has no potential for impacts to the human environment. The categorical exclusion selected states the following:

Legislative proposals of an administrative or technical nature — for example, changes in authorizations for appropriations; minor boundary changes and land transactions; proposals that would have primarily economic, social, individual, or institutional effects; and comments and reports on referrals of legislative proposals. (DO-12 Handbook, National Park Service 2005) Section 7.3 also recognizes that certain types of feasibility analysis may be needed before the NEPA process can begin.

The study matches this categorical exclusion because it was directed by Congress to determine if the Western Reserve meets the suitability and feasibility requirement for designation as a National Heritage Area. In essence, the study is a report on a legislative proposal. If Congress decides to designate the Western Reserve as a National Heritage Area, then a comprehensive management plan would be developed for the area. Whether an

The Western Reserve Heritage Area Study Act

Public Law 109-338; Oct. 12, 2006

The Western Reserve Heritage Area Study Act authorized a study to examine the suitability and feasibility of establishing a National Heritage Area in the Western Reserve. The legislation specified that nine specific criteria must be met in order for the Western Reserve to be considered as a National Heritage Area. The legislation requires the National Park Service to determine whether the Study Area:

- (A) has an assemblage of natural, historic, and cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed through partnerships among public and private entities and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities;
- (B) reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folk life that are a valuable part of the national story;
- (C) provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, historic, cultural, or scenic features;
- (D) provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities;
- (E) contains resources important to the identified theme or themes of the Study Area that retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation;
- (F) includes residents, business interests, nonprofit organizations, and local and State governments that are involved in the planning, have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles for all participants, including the Federal Government, and have demonstrated support for the concept of a national heritage area;
- (G) has a potential local coordinating entity to work in partnership with residents, business interests, nonprofit organizations, and local and State governments to develop a national heritage area consistent with continued local and State economic activity;
- (H) has a conceptual boundary map that is supported by the public; and
- (I) has potential or actual impact on private property located within or abutting the Study Area.

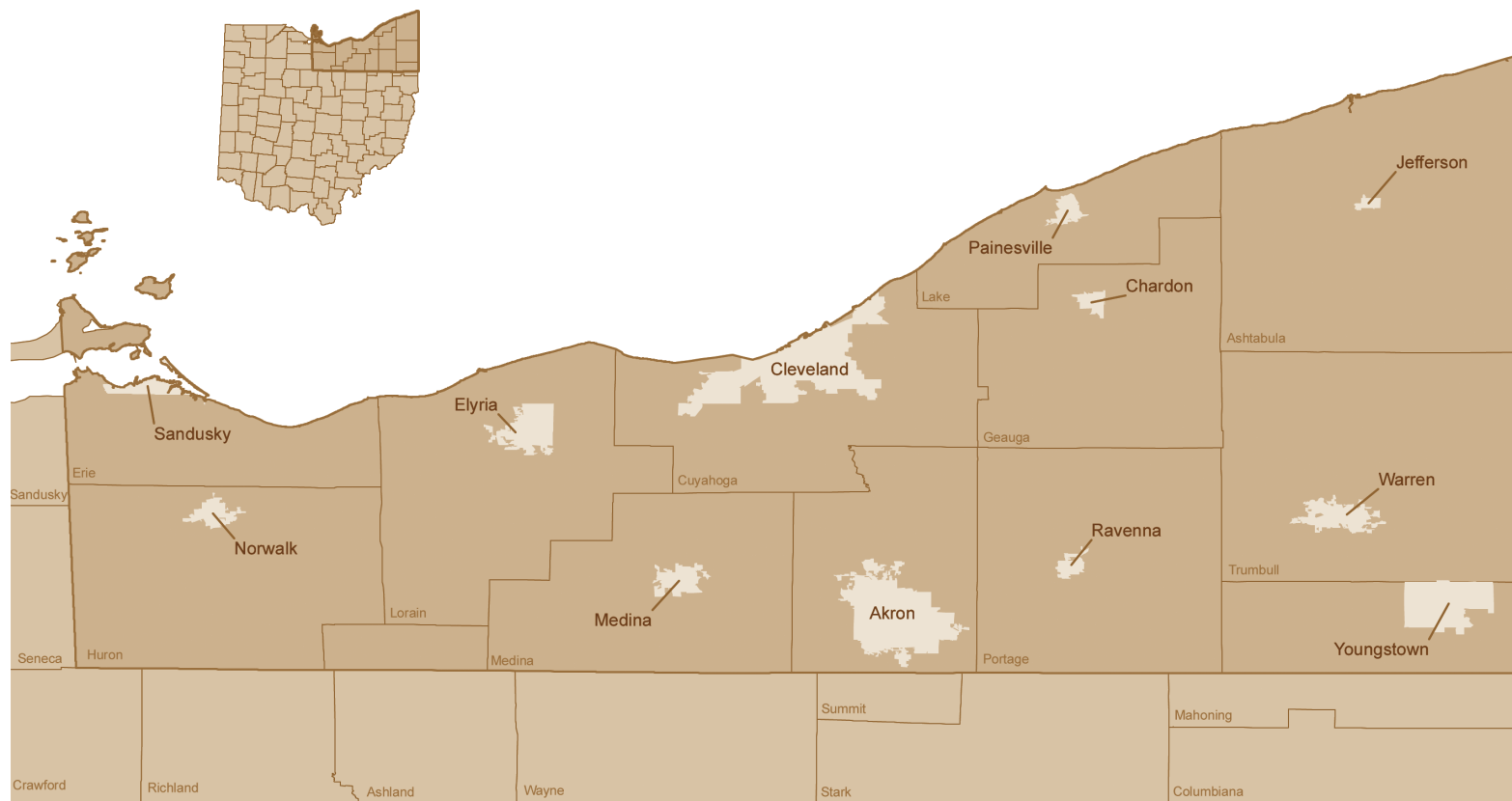
Figure 1 The Western Reserve Heritage Area Study Act



OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study Area



- Western Reserve
- County Seats
- County Boundaries

Map produced by:
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Figure 2 Map of the Proposed Western Reserve Heritage Area

environmental assessment would be required will depend on the types of projects, programs, and other actions proposed in that plan.

Boundaries of the Study Area

The study area was defined by Congress in the Western Reserve Heritage Areas Study Act (et120 STAT. 1846 PUBLIC LAW 109–338—OCT. 12, 2006) and reflects the original boundaries of the Western Reserve as surveyed beginning in 1796 (Please refer to Figure 2).

Western Reserve Heritage Areas Study Act
... (c) BOUNDARIES OF THE STUDY
AREA.—The Study Area shall be comprised
of the counties of Trumbull, Mahoning,
Ashtabula, Portage, Geauga, Lake, Cuyahoga,
Summit, Medina, Huron, Lorain, Erie,
Ottawa, and Ashland in Ohio.

Vision of the Study Area

The vision of a regional heritage area celebrating the Western Reserve was crafted following input from citizens at Town Hall Gatherings, online discussions on a social media website, Stakeholder Group meetings and leadership discussions. Please note that in this context, citizens were specifically addressing the vision for National Heritage Area designation of the Western Reserve, so the language

included here assumes designation. These functions could represent visions should designation at any level occur—national, state, or local.

In the spirit of a town square, which so typifies its landscape, the Western Reserve continues the area's rich legacy of innovation and advocacy by serving as a catalyst, convener, and construct for regional engagement, resource protection, and interpretation of community resources and economic progress within northern Ohio.

As a *catalyst*, the Western Reserve Heritage Area motivates and encourages awareness, discussion, and action, energizing partnerships and empowering existing organizations and individuals to develop solutions to regional problems and opportunities.

As a *convener*, the Western Reserve Heritage Area encourages people to come together. Distinct in their own customs and landscapes, Western Reserve communities and cultures are united by the common stories and ideals, steeped in tradition, that define the region—those of innovation, sustainability, and a desire to act on their beliefs. Bonding through similar modern cultures, heritage, and

landscapes, participants bridge differences and celebrate diversity.

As a *construct*, the Western Reserve Heritage Area goals and strategies are empowered through place, both physical and psychological. Linked by natural landscapes, heritage, and cultural commonalities, the Western Reserve prioritizes authenticity and sustainability. Through this common landscape, heritage, and culture, a Western Reserve Heritage Area provides a virtual space for civic engagement.

“This history of the Western Reserve is much like a quilt—each segment with its own interest and intrigue but collectively illustrates an engaging cultural heritage that should be preserved and appreciated.”

—Steve Madewell, Lake MetroParks

“The Western Reserve is diverse, but unified; urban linked to rural; natural environments protected and connected; a place where the future is determined in the square. The mission is to continue to empower individuals to guide the public and civic institutions that govern our futures.”

—Chris Thompson,

Fund for our Economic Future

“The Western Reserve is a place that looks to the future while recognizing its past.”

—Dennis Mersky, Floyd Browne Group, Inc.

“The Western Reserve has shaped the world in which we live and will continue to foster success, growth, and enlightenment for future generations.”

—Mark Winchell, Ashtabula County
Visitors Bureau

“The Western Reserve Heritage Area would create a capacity to have town square dialogues, a modern view of a ‘virtual’ town square.”

—citizen of the Western Reserve at
Jefferson Town Hall Gathering

(Additional information about the role of virtual town squares originated from the Walker Art Center’s Education and Community Programs Development document “Art and Civic Engagement: Mapping the Connections.”)

Goals for a Designated Western Reserve Heritage Area

Heritage areas are grassroots efforts, led by those living and working in a designated area’s communities. As such, goals for designation should evolve from the communities as well. To identify goals for designation, surveys were distributed at Town Hall Gatherings, and more than 72 people responded to the question about what benefits they hope to achieve with national designation. In order of importance as identified by residents of the Western Reserve, the goals for working united as a heritage area are as follows. Also included are several objectives for achieving these goals.

Goal 1: Increase resource protection and conservation, including historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources in your community.

- Enhance understanding of heritage areas and ways to leverage these regional collaborations to enhance quality of life for future generations
- Encourage and facilitate community-based plans and visions for retaining and restoring their unique intrinsic qualities
- Recognize excellence
- Support richer investigations of our heritage and lessons that can be applied today

Goal 2: Enhance and promote economic development.

- Identify best practices where economies are successfully built upon a community’s assets
- Encourage exploration of ways goods and services can be enhanced and/or developed through recognition of place and its unique qualities
- Explore ways industry sectors can enhance and support one another throughout the region
- Enhance direct spending and tax revenues through providing quality experiences for visitors
- Support economic vibrancy by sharing a positive image of the region with the nation

Goal 3: Enhance community pride and involvement in civic discussion.

- Facilitate town square discussions, supporting community gathering and facilitating discussions in communities where opportunities do not exist
- Empower citizens in civic, economic, and social issues
- Educate, in both formal and informal settings, about the significance of the Western Reserve as well as the role of citizens in shaping communities and their priorities
- Recognize local heroes who have made a difference

Goal 4: Revitalize a neighborhood or district.

- Build capacity for community empowerment
- Investigate and support sustainable methods for adapting and re-using community assets

“Celebration, Florida, has spent a lot of time and money in creating a sense of place built around community. We have these places around every bend.”

—A Western Reserve Heritage Feasibility Study stakeholder group member