

ALTERNATIVES

for the

Management Plan

Mississippi Hills
National Heritage Area

Prepared for the:
**Mississippi Hills
Heritage Area Alliance**

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Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area Management Plan

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A. Federal Requirements for Alternatives

A1. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALTERNATIVES

The federal “Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009” created multiple national heritage areas. Section 8007 of that act created the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area. Although the inclusion of Alternatives is a standard part of heritage area management plans, there are no specific references to Alternatives within the legislation. Sub-section “(d) Management Plan” features a detailed list of the various components that are required for a management plan, and there is no mention of Alternatives. However, as the NPS “Notebook” (see more below) states on page 33, “NEPA requires the consideration and analysis of reasonable alternatives, including a no-action alternative, and the identification of an environmentally preferred alternative.” Thus, while the federal legislation creating the MHNHA may not directly mandate Alternatives, the associated required federal environmental regulations require Alternatives.

A2. NPS “NOTEBOOK’S” APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVES

Commonly referred to as the “Notebook,” the publication entitled “Components of a Successful National Heritage Area Management Plan” was prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) in 2007. The stated purpose of this manual “is to provide information to National Heritage Areas and National Park Service (NPS) staff on the management planning process and the components of a successful management plan” (pg. i). It focuses on the management planning process, as well as a plan’s contents. Page 33 of the Notebook describes the Alternatives as follows:

“Alternatives are different ways to fulfill the mission and reach the goals, and other legislative requirements outlined in the foundation. The development of alternatives is the development of options for ‘the choices that need to be made’ in order to meet the requirements of the authorizing legislation... The alternatives should be consistent with the heritage area’s purpose and significance, focus on its fundamental vision, mission, goals, themes and other important resources and values, reflect the range of interests in the area, and fully consider the potential for environmental impacts... Alternatives can reflect different resource focuses; different community focuses; different thematic plans; differences in implementation strategies, scale, partnering, resources, phasing, or their combinations; or other ways to represent different priorities or emphasize different interpretive themes.”

B. Examples of Alternatives of Other NHA Plans

As indicated above, there are many different approaches that can be taken for how the Alternatives are treated. Some Alternatives are based upon the management organizational structure, some are based upon which interpretive themes are emphasized, some Alternatives are based upon the functional focus of the coordinating entity, and some are based upon variables related to the heritage area's geography (clustered versus dispersed interpretation). As just one example, the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area's management plan, prepared in 2003, defined its Alternatives based upon the primary functions of the coordinating entity. In addition to the "no action" Alternative, the three "action" Alternatives that were considered included: Research and Interpretation Focus, Preservation Focus, and Tourism Focus. After consideration of those three options, the Research and Interpretation Focus was selected as the proposed Alternative to pursue. It is likely that the academic nature of the coordinating entity (Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation) played a large role in determining which Alternative was ultimately selected.

B1. APPROACHES TO ALTERNATIVES

Based upon a review of several Management Plans of other NHAs, below is a summary of some of the most common approaches to addressing the required Alternatives:

Theme-Based Alternatives

This approach to Alternatives emphasizes one or more themes over other themes. In the case of the MHNHA, for example, such an approach might entail emphasizing the Civil War and/or African-American Heritage over Literature and Music. Such an approach might develop a hierarchy of "primary" themes versus "secondary" or even "tertiary" themes.

Function-Based Alternatives

All NHAs should pursue the basic functions of research/interpretation, preservation and heritage tourism. However, this approach might emphasize one or more of these functions over the others. That approach was used in the Alternatives for the Tennessee Civil War NHA.

Organizational-Based Alternatives

This approach is based upon options for the organizational structure of the coordinating entity. The Muscle Shoals NHA, for example, used this approach in considering the use of technical expertise within its coordinating entity.

Geographic-Based Alternatives

This approach to Alternatives uses spatial patterns for how to locate interpretive centers, how to route interpretive experiences, and how to highlight specific sites with respect to their geographic relationships.

Below are two specific examples of Alternatives from other management plans. These two were highlighted in the NPS's 2007 "Notebook," and each is summarized on the following page.

B2. SCHUYLKILL RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area			
Alternative A: No Action	Alternative B: Places	Alternative C: Experiences	Alternative D: Layers
Alternative A would maintain operation of current programming. Because funding would remain at current levels, Alternative A would not increase the emphasis on any of the strategies identified to reach the goals of the heritage area.	Alternative B would use heritage area strategies, programs, and funding to enhance geographically based clusters of heritage attractions and resources, or places .	Alternative C focuses on market or interest-based topics that would be used to organize and guide visitor's experiences of the heritage area.	Alternative D, a combination of Alternatives B and C, would pursue development of intersecting layers in the form of 1) clusters of resources/attractions (places) and 2) area-wide topics that thematically connect the places.

Source: "Components of a Successful National Heritage Area Management Plan," NPS, 2007

In addition to the "No Action" Alternative A, this NHA's management plan created three action-based Alternatives:

Alternative B: Places would use heritage area strategies, programs, and funding to enhance geographically based clusters of heritage attractions and resources, or **places**. The word "places" is bold-faced for emphasis, and the phrase "geographically based clusters" are key here. Thus, this Alternative focuses on the spatial approach to the NHA.

Alternative C: Experiences focuses on market or interest-based topics that would be used to organize and guide visitor's **experiences** of the heritage area. For this Alternative, the word "experiences" is bold-faced and "topics" is another key word. Therefore, this Alternative is not geographically-driven in comparison to Alternative B.

Alternative D: Layers, a combination of Alternatives B and C, would pursue development of intersecting **layers** in the form of 1) clusters of resources/attractions (places) and 2) area-wide topics that thematically connect the places. This final Alternative bold-faced the word "layers" for emphasis to make the point that there is not a single layer, as in the case of the other two Alternatives, but rather a blending of those two Alternatives. It is not unusual for

at least one Alternative within any given NHA management plan to feature a hybrid of the “best of all worlds.” That hybrid is often the selected Alternative to pursue for implementation, which can make the other Alternatives appear to be more of academic exercises to illustrate extreme ends of the spectrum rather than wholly legitimate options.

B3. CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Cane River National Heritage Area		
Alternative A: Status Quo	Alternative B: Preservation Emphasis	Alternative C: Enhances Visitor Opportunities
Alternative A assumes the continuation of current trends and preservation, interpretation, and promotion of heritage area resources would be left primarily to separate initiatives by federal, state, and local governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and individuals.	Alternative B would: 1) develop and maintain a well-organized and funded partnership in research, conservation, and preservation that will ensure the long-term integrity of heritage resources, and 2) foster public support and appreciation for Cane River history and heritage area resources by providing quality educational and interpretative services for the local community and visiting public.	Alternative C would: 1) preserve heritage area resources, and 2) provide support for and effectively market a full range of heritage tourism opportunities, support services, and facilities to extend visitor stay in the Natchitoches area, maximize economic benefits, and ensure repeat visitation, while ensuring that the qualities that make the region a national resource would be protected for future generations.

Source: “Components of a Successful National Heritage Area Management Plan,” NPS, 2007

Unlike the Schuykill River Valley NHA, this NHA’s management plan provided only two action-based Alternatives. Referring to the no-action Alternative as the “Status Quo,” the other two Alternatives were as follow:

Alternative B: Preservation Emphasis would: 1) develop and maintain a well-organized and funded partnership in research, conservation, and preservation that will ensure the long-term integrity of heritage resources, and 2) foster public support and appreciation for Cane River history and heritage area resources by providing quality educational and interpretative services for the local community and visiting public. Thus, the focus here is historic preservation and interpretation.

Alternative C: Enhances Visitor Opportunities would: 1) preserve heritage area resources, and 2) provide support for and effectively market a full range of heritage tourism opportunities, support services, and facilities to extend visitor stay in the Natchitoches area,

maximize economic benefits, and ensure repeat visitation, while ensuring that the qualities that make the region a national resource would be protected for future generations. In short, this Alternative focuses most on heritage tourism.

The Alternatives for the Cane River NHA are similar to those of the Tennessee Civil War NHA noted previously because they emphasize a particular focus and function for the NHA. In the case of the Tennessee NHA, the three action-based Alternatives were: 1) Research and Interpretation Focus, 2) Preservation Focus, and 3) Tourism Focus. Also similar to the Tennessee Civil War NHA is the fact that no “best of all worlds” hybrid is offered.

C. Proposed Alternatives for MHNHA

* Based upon public input, it was later decided to add "Native American Heritage" as a primary theme and to demote "Architecture" to a secondary theme.

C1. BASIS FOR THE MHNHA ALTERNATIVES

A key component of the six-step process utilized to create this Management Plan was Task 3.0: Workshop & Alternatives Preparation. This pivotal four-day task assembled the full consultant team to spend additional time in the NHA study area and to engage the public. The two public engagement sessions included the Public Workshop toward the beginning of the week and the Alternatives Presentation at the end of the week. The Public Workshop featured a presentation of the Background Report of key findings, then split the audience into four breakout groups organized by themes (Civil War, African American Heritage, Music & Literature, and Architecture)*, and then all participants reunited so that representatives of each group could present their ideas. Out of this process the consultant team created the Alternatives described below. **Because the greatest level of debate and indecision**

has related to the geographic locations and spatial relationships of potential key interpretive centers – if developed - for the MHNHA's various themes, this topic serves as the basis of the Alternatives.



The theme-based breakout groups conducted as part of the Task 3.0 Public Workshop provided an opportunity for an indepth discussion of many key topics that the Management Plan must address.

C2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

It is important to note that this discussion of potential interpretive centers should not imply that such centers will definitely occur, as the creation of any interpretive centers will hinge upon the results of feasibility studies.

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

This Alternative is required for consideration for every NHA per the NEPA requirements. This scenario is straightforward and warrants a very limited discussion. The "No Action" Alternative takes the existing situation and trends and simply extends them into the future. Thus, the many existing historic sites continue to operate and be promoted at their current levels. This plan's Background Study features an economic assessment that documents the tourism statistical trends. The No Action Alternative would simply extent those trends. Consequently, the same economic, social and environmental impacts that currently exist would continue. Also, it is acknowledged that the MHNHA has actually functioned, including being supported by two full-time staff and a board of directors, for a couple of years now. This

Alternative assumes that the Mississippi Hills Heritage Alliance would continue to exist, but would not be able to perform at a level that it would with federal support via a designated NHA.

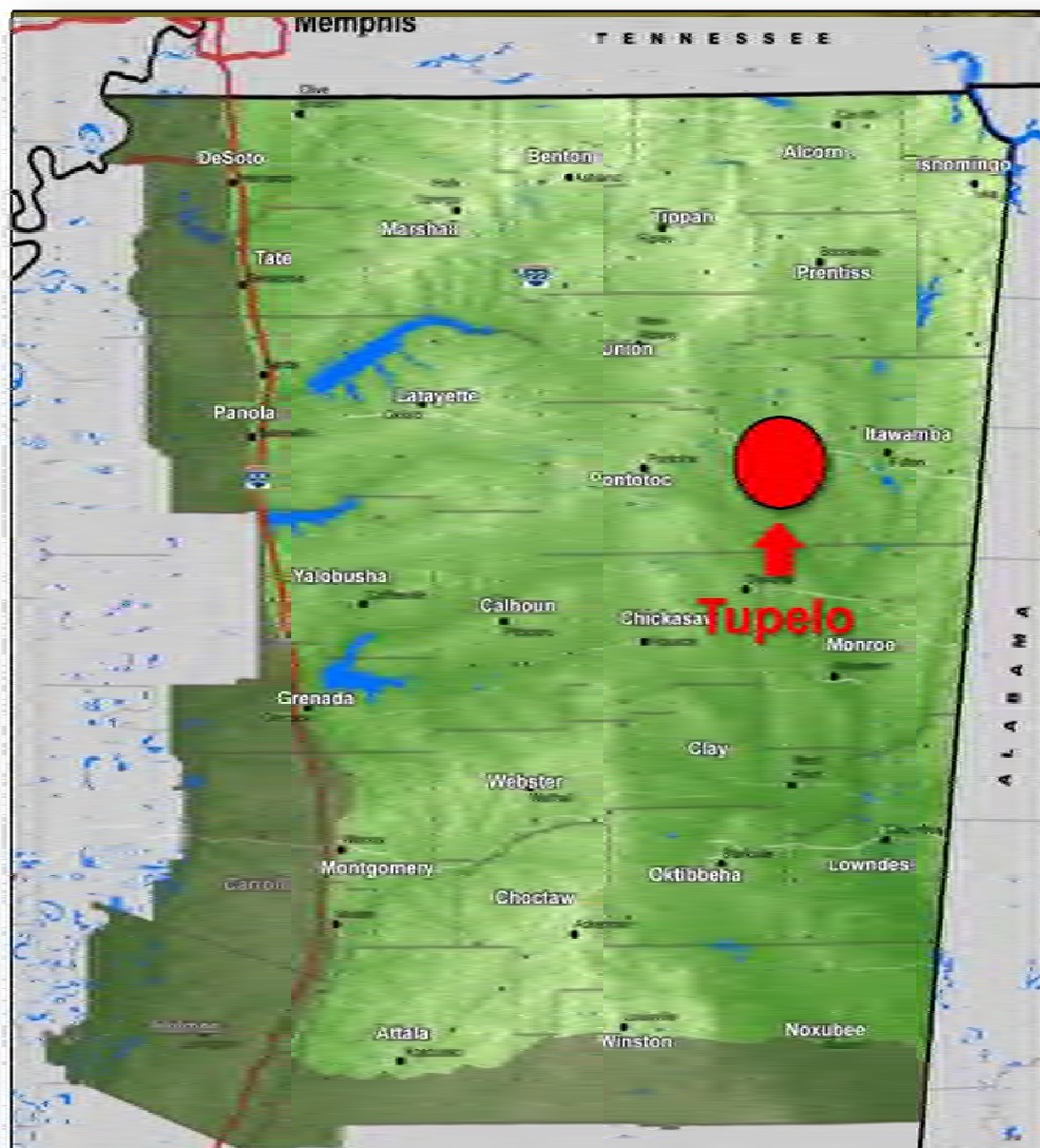


The "No Action" Alternative is required by the National Park Service as a legitimate option worthy of consideration. This Alternative simply extends the current circumstances and trends for both individual historic sites and tourism on a broader spectrum.

Alternative B: Centralized Interpretation

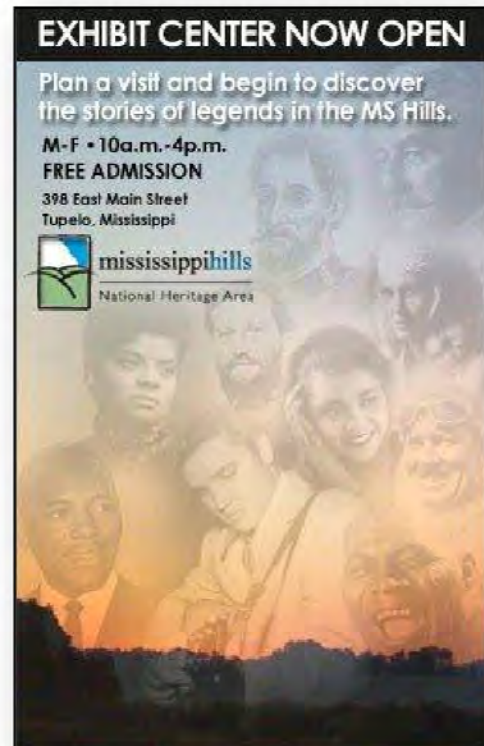
This Alternative, as illustrated in the map below, features a single primary interpretive center for the MHNHA. That center would be located in Tupelo for the following reasons:

- It is located somewhat central to the MHNHA
- It has good access via Hwy. 45 and I-22.
- It is the location of the existing MHNHA offices and interpretive center
- Tupelo is already a major tourism hub for the region



Alternative B

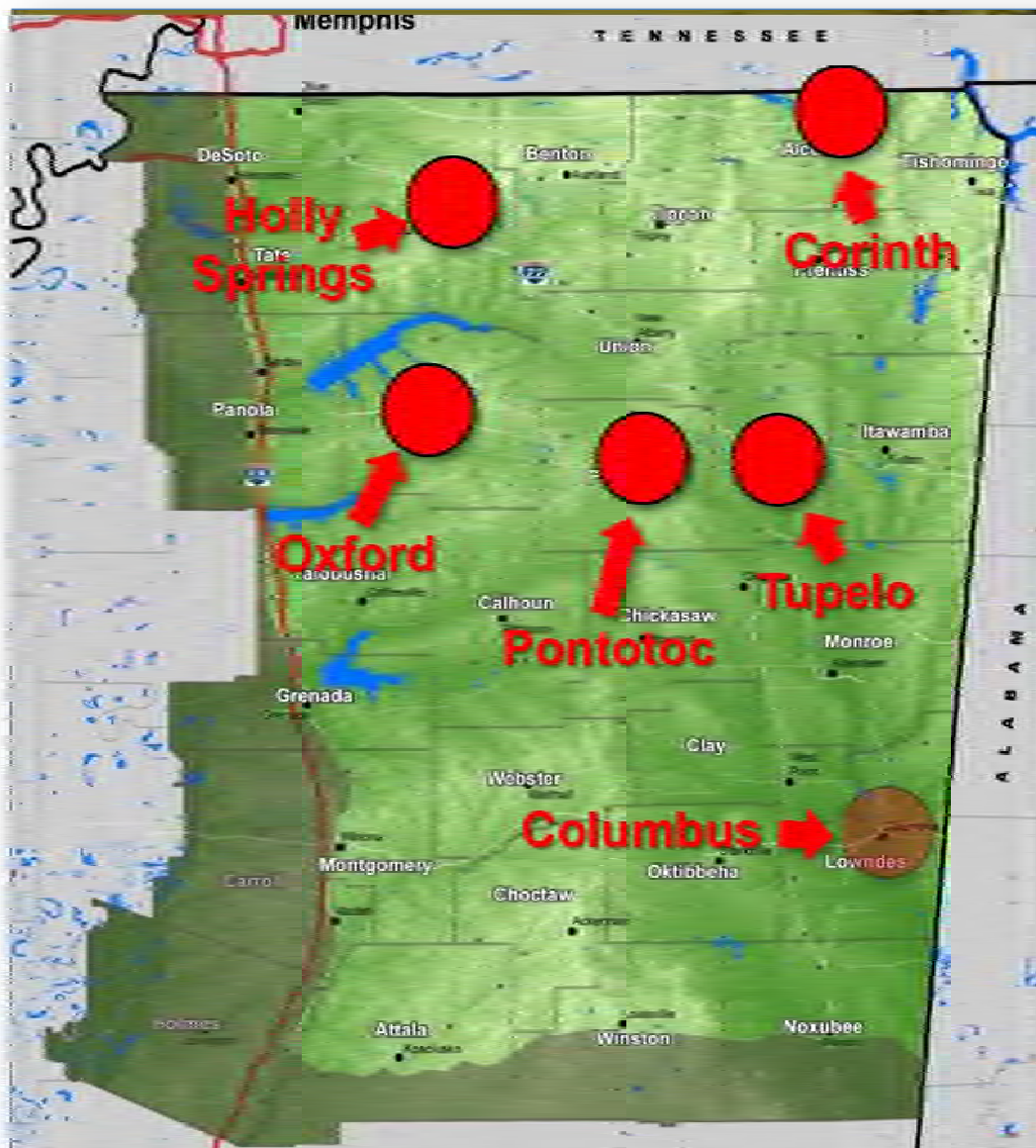
As in the case of the other Alternatives in this plan, it is not intended that visitors spend most of their time in Tupelo and fail to explore the entire MHNHA. However, Tupelo would serve as the central location for interpretation and fill the role of a “jumping off point” for trips elsewhere in the MHNHA. This Alternative could either utilize the existing small interpretive center where the offices of the Mississippi Hills Heritage Alliance are housed, which would be a conservative approach, or a larger and more extensive interpretive center might be developed. That center could either expand upon the existing center or be developed elsewhere in town. If the latter option is pursued, an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be required prior to development if it is determined that there is the potential for significant environmental impacts.



The “Centralized Interpretation” Alternative would make Tupelo the primary interpretive anchor for the MHNHA. It could either utilize and/or expand the existing interpretive center or entail an new center developed elsewhere in Tupelo.

Alternative C: Thematic Multi-Anchored Interpretation

This Alternative, as illustrated in the map below, features multiple interpretive centers linked to heritage area themes in selected towns in the MHNHA. This approach is explained below.

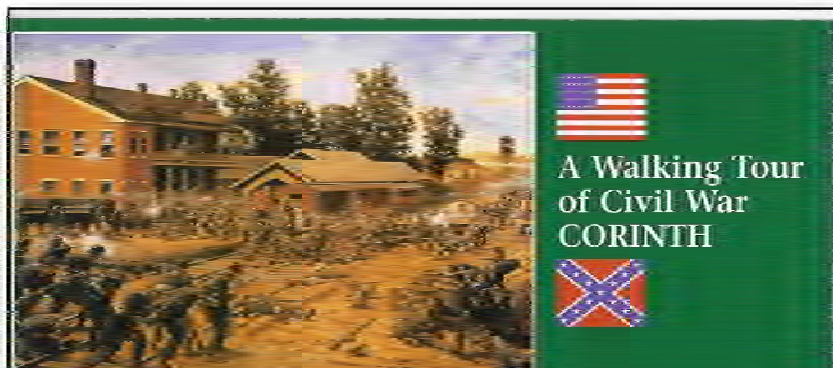
**Alternative C**

In Alternative C, the following interpretive themes would be conveyed through interpretive centers in the following communities:

- African American: Holly Springs
- Civil War: Corinth
- Music: Tupelo
- Literature: Oxford
- Native American: Pontotoc

A potential alternative to Pontotoc for the proposed Native American Interpretive Center would be to utilize the proposed Chickasaw interpretive center to be located on the Natchez Trace near Tupelo. Also, it is noteworthy that Architecture was originally considered as a “primary” interpretive theme for the MHNHA. However, after further public input, it was decided to make it a “secondary” theme that may or may not warrant its own interpretive center (as illustrated on the map on the previous page with a lighter colored red dot). Also, the topic of architecture is one that supplements some of the other primary interpretive themes.

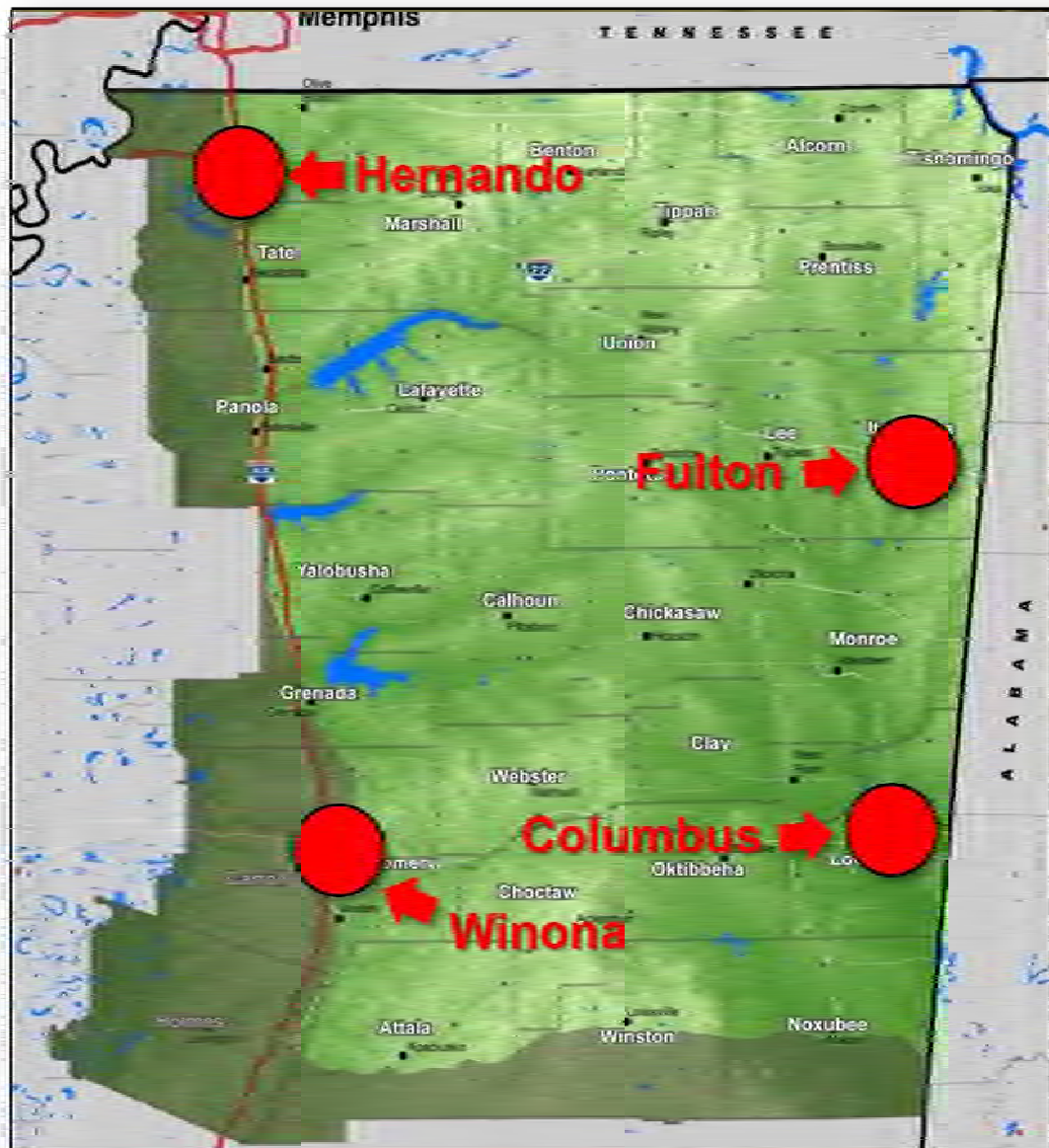
Each of the communities proposed for their respective interpretive themes has perhaps the greatest concentration and quality of resources and stories related to that particular theme. For example, Oxford was the home of Faulkner and is associated with other writers, a university, and an iconic bookstore. In some cases, these communities already have existing interpretive centers that can be leveraged to avoid the costs of the development of new centers. For example, the state-of-the-art Civil War Interpretive Center in Corinth, which is managed by the National Park Service, might be able to accommodate very minor adaptations to serve as the interpretive center for the MHNHA’s Civil War theme. Another NPS-owned property having potential for adaptation is the Curlee House, a downtown historic house used as a headquarters by both Northern and Southern generals. The NHA would not have to be the developer/operator of these themed centers, but instead serve as a catalyst for them to happen.



Corinth's existing Civil War interpretive center and numerous related historic sites makes it the obvious interpretive anchor for the MHNHA's Civil War theme in the Alternative B scenario.

Alternative D: Non-Thematic Multi-Gateway Interpretation

This Alternative, as illustrated in the map below, proposes that four interpretive centers would be located at four different gateway locations into the MHNHA. Below is a description for what that scenario might look like.

**Alternative D**

In Alternative D, four interpretive centers would be located as follow:

Northeast gateway - Fulton: I-22 (Hwy. 78)
Southeast gateway - Columbus: Hwy. 82

Southwest gateway - Winona: I-55
Northwest gateway - Hernando: I-55 & I-22

This Alternative is based on the concept of four interpretive centers that are not associated with any one individual interpretive theme. Instead, each would interpret all aspects and themes of the entire MHNHA. Each is located at a key transportation gateway into the heritage area.

Because these centers would be general to the MHNHA's themes rather than each center focusing on a particular theme, the MHNHA would need to develop and operate these centers. In other words, there would be no entities to spearhead centers lacking a particular interpretive focus.

The only potential location that would require further analysis and a firm location decision would be the Southwest gateway. While locating it on I-55 is an obvious approach, the daily traffic counts along the stretch of I-55 in the MHNHA's southwest corner are relatively low (approximately 12,000 per day at Vaiden). Winona is being preliminarily suggested as a gateway location for an interpretive center in the southwest portion of the MHNHA, but it might make sense to locate it further south, perhaps even just south of the actual MHNHA boundary, closer to the large population base in Jackson. One option might be at the intersection with Highway 12 at Durant, as it connects with Kosciusko to the east and the nearby access to the Natchez Trace Parkway.

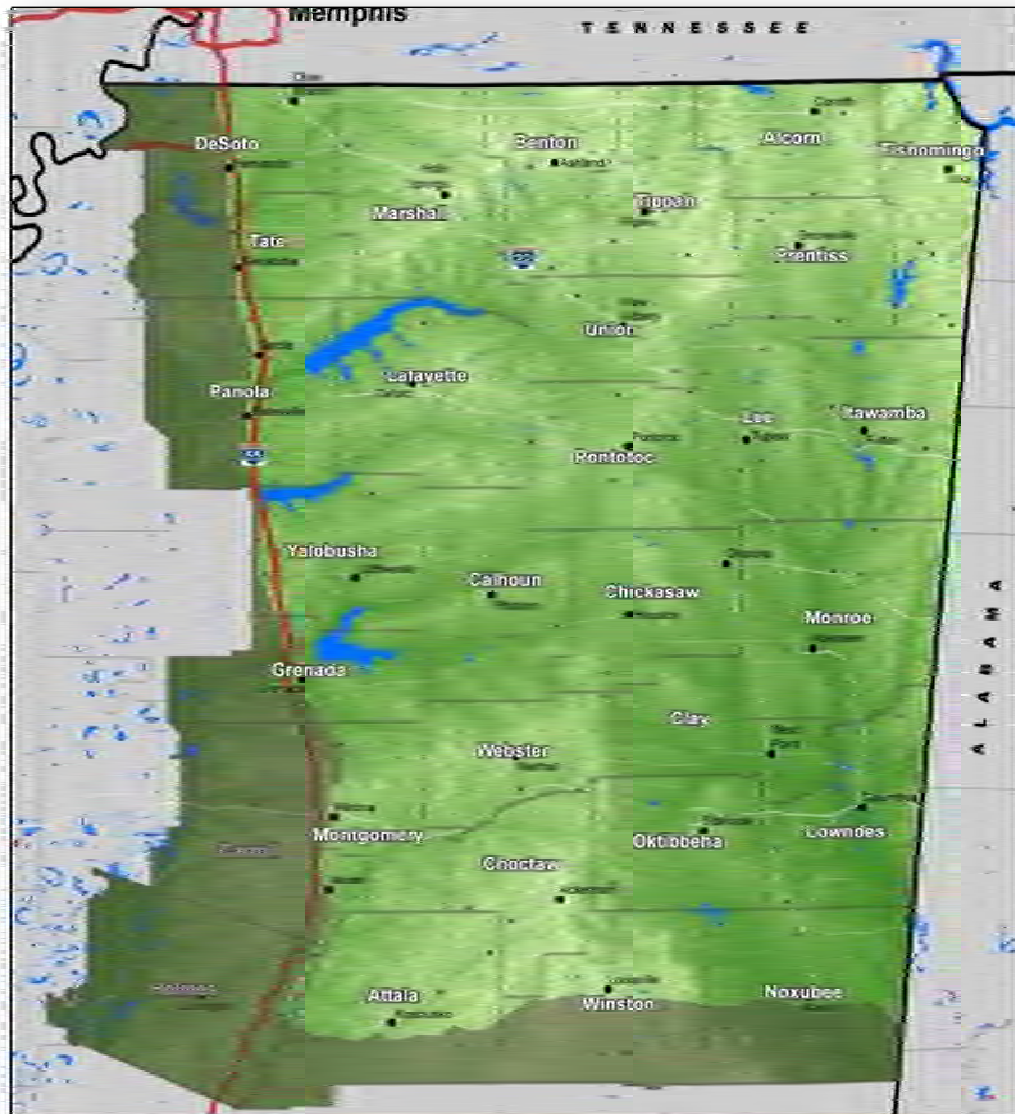
With respect to the Northwest gateway in Hernando, that location is in both the MHNHA and the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA). Furthermore, this gateway sees the highest number of vehicle trips into both heritage areas because it is so close to Memphis and on a major interstate. Consequently, there may even be an opportunity for a joint interpretive center for both NHAs if the coordinating entities of both agreed and the details could be negotiated. Such an approach could offer a unique national model for a partnership between two NHAs.



Because Hernando's downtown square is less than a mile from I-55, it makes a strong candidate for a gateway interpretive center location in the northwest corner of the MHNHA.

Alternative E: Decentralized Interpretation

Alternative E, illustrated on the map below, offers a decentralized approach to interpretation. In short, there would be no specific interpretive centers for the MHNHA. That includes no general interpretive centers and no theme-based interpretive centers. Although the MHNHA office in Tupelo does currently have a small interpretive center, because of its modest scale, it would not be considered to constitute a significant interpretive anchor for the heritage area.

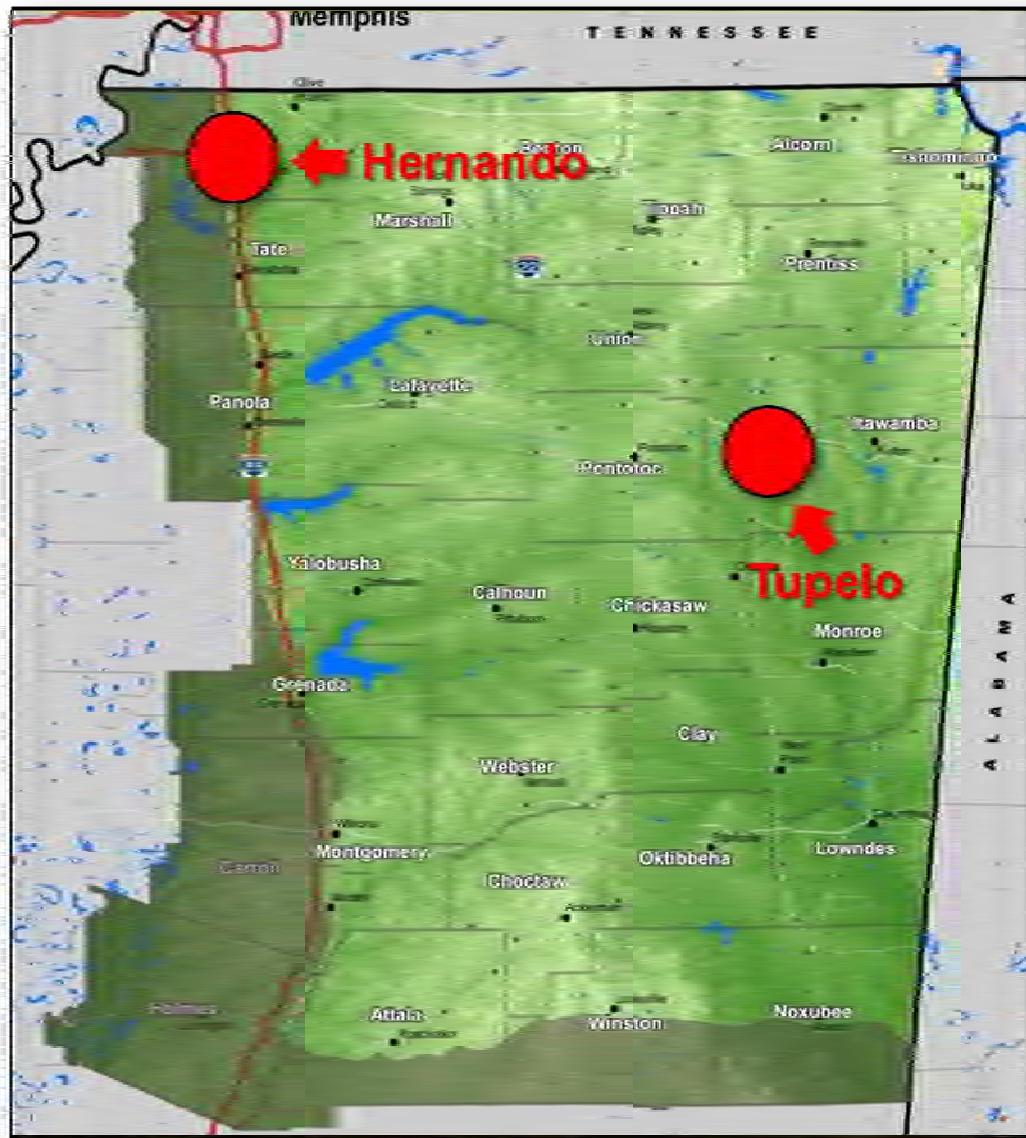


Alternative E

Despite not including a key MHNHA interpretive center, Alternative E would still feature all of the various existing cultural sites and attractions within the heritage area, such as Elvis Presley Birthplace in Tupelo, the Howlin' Wolf Museum in West Point, the Civil War Interpretive Center in Corinth, and the many other similar sites and attractions.

Alternative F: Centralized & Northwest Gateway Interpretation

As illustrated in the map below, this Alternative combines the centralized interpretation approach of Alternative B and a component of the non-thematic multi-gateway approach of Alternative D. Specifically, the centralized interpretive center would be located in Tupelo and the one gateway center would be on I-55 in Hernando.

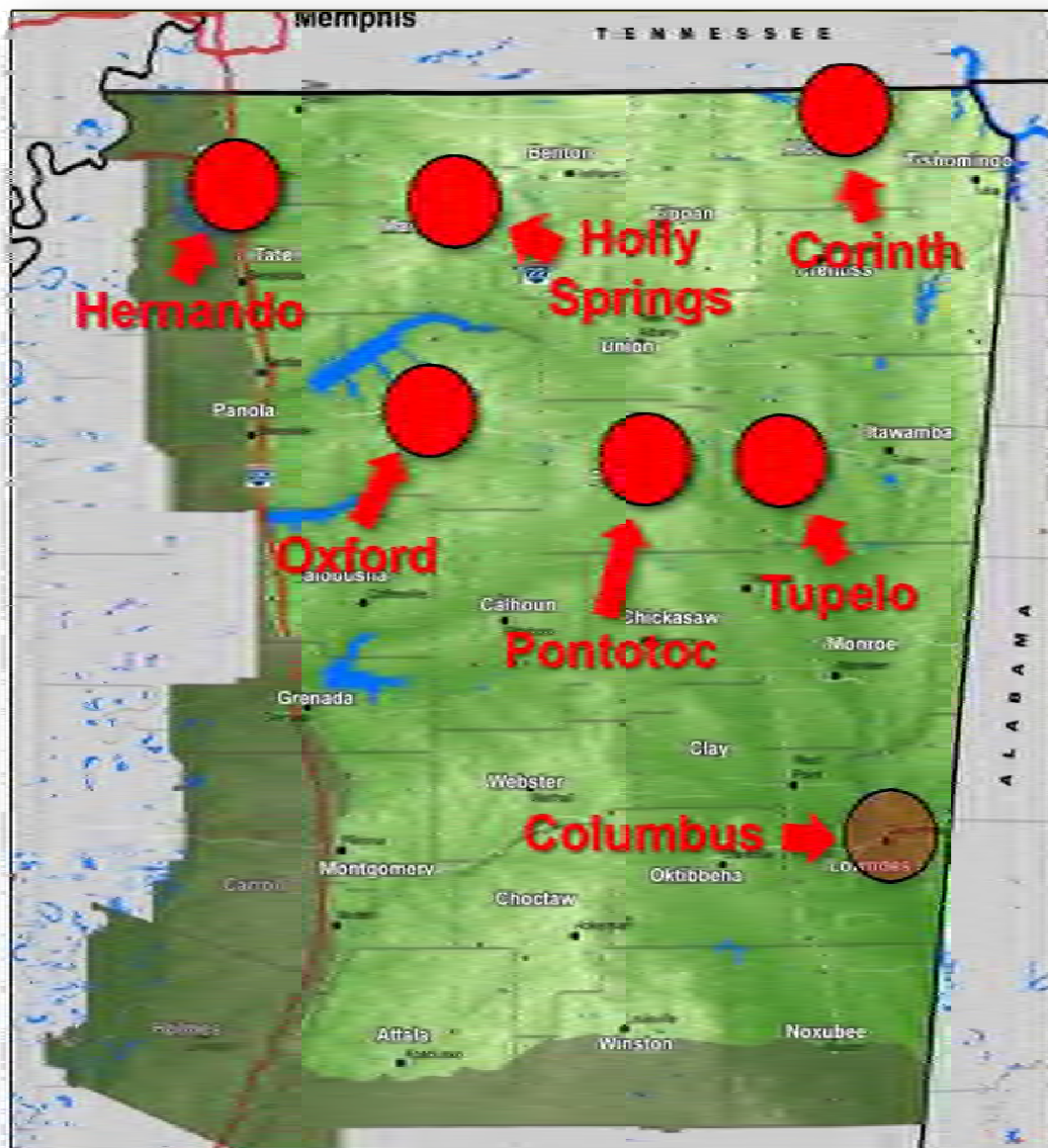


Alternative F

While both interpretive centers in Alternative F would interpret all facets and themes of the MHNHA, it is likely that the Hernando center would not go into the same level of depth as would the Tupelo center. Instead, the Hernando center might serve a bit more as a “teaser” to lure visitors further into the heritage area, including to the Tupelo center. Both centers would be developed and managed by the MHNHA, unlike theme-based interpretive centers.

Alternative G: Multi-Anchored & Northwest Gateway Interpretation

Another hybrid, this Alternative proposes the full menu of thematic multi-anchored interpretive centers of Alternative C, but also includes the single gateway center on I-55 at Hernando borrowed from Alternative D. In any scenario with only one gateway center, the northwest center would be the most effective given its proximity to Memphis and the relatively high traffic counts on this segment of I-55.



Alternative G

* As only a "secondary" theme, an interpretive center for Architecture at Columbus may not be warranted.

As previously described for Alternative C, the pairing of communities with interpretive center themes would be as follow: African American: Holly Springs; Civil War: Corinth; Music: Tupelo; Literature: Oxford; Native American: Pontotoc; Architecture: Columbus.*

D. Comparison of the Proposed Alternatives

D1. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN EVALUATING THE ALTERNATIVES

As discussed in this plan's Background Study, when an Environmental Assessment (EA) is required by the National Park Service (NPS) as part of a NHA Management Plan, the required Alternatives must be carefully evaluated based upon their potential environmental, social and economic impacts. However, when a Categorical Exclusion (CE) is approved by the NPS, such an analysis is not required. While it is still useful to evaluate the Alternatives with respect to their various benefits and detriments to help decide which Alternative is best, the CE does not require the same level of analysis. Based upon the Background Study prepared as part of this Management Plan, a CE has been requested for the MHNHA. Because it is believed at this point in time that a CE will indeed be applied to this Management Plan, an evaluation of the Alternatives at a commensurate level will occur. Below is a summary of the considerations that will be evaluated:

Factors to be Considered

The following four factors are considerations in weighing the pros and cons of the seven Alternatives posed in this plan:

Economic Benefits

Economic benefits considered here include job creation, increased incomes, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, diversification of the local economy, and business spin-off benefits. With regard to the various geographic patterns suggested for the location of interpretive centers, the following benefits have been identified:

Increased Tourism

The following principles have been applied to this consideration:

- The Alternatives that will most significantly increase the overall number of visitors to the MHNHA are those featuring gateway interpretive centers (Alternative D). Those centers might draw visitors into longer and/or more geographically extensive visits to the heritage area than they would have otherwise. In such scenarios, the proverbial "economic pie" actually grows slightly in size.
 - The Alternatives featuring interpretive centers that are not peripheral
- "gateway" locations, but more central to the MHNHA, will also attract more visitors than scenarios without such interpretive centers. These scenarios include Alternatives B and C. However, their drawing power will be slightly less than the gateway interpretive centers.
- The Alternatives featuring both gateway interpretive centers and more internal centers will have the greatest visitor attraction of all of the scenarios. Such scenarios include Alternatives E, F and G. Those Alternatives featuring the greatest number of interpretive centers will have the greatest positive impact on visitation to the MHNHA.

Also, interpretive centers should be strategically located within downtowns to leverage economic spin-off and help with revitalization to the extent possible. Exceptions might include instances when a particular theme lends itself to having an interpretive center located in a more natural setting. An issue such as Native American Heritage could fall into this category of such themes.

Social Benefits

Two potential social benefits were identified in considering the various optional geographic patterns for interpretive anchors within the MHNHA. One benefit relates to gains in health, safety, community, and similar factors that are tied directly to the financial well-being of residents within the heritage area. When considered, it was concluded that this factor would mirror the Economic Benefits category of potential impacts from the Alternatives. For example, the multi-gateway interpretation Alternative (D) would have a moderate-to-high overall economic benefit because it might draw more visitors into the heritage area, thereby providing a slightly greater social benefit than some of the other Alternatives. Although these kinds of social benefits might mirror the economic benefits, the Alternatives being considered do offer distinctions when the specific topic of educational opportunities is considered.

Educational Opportunities

This consideration is based on the principle that *the more interpretive centers the MHNHA can provide near concentrations of population, the greater the educational opportunities that are achieved*. For example, by locating interpretive centers in key communities within the heritage area, such as Corinth, Tupelo and Oxford, more people can be educated by them because of the relatively greater population densities

when compared to more remote areas of the MHNHA. The same principle would apply to key gateway interpretive centers, such as the potential northwest gateway on I-55 at Hernando. However, gateway centers would likely provide a greater educational benefit to non-MHNHA residents relative to MHNHA residents given the more transient nature of those who would visit the gateway interpretive centers.

Financial Benefits

This issue considers which of the Alternatives will be the most cost-effective for the MHNHA and its partners. As noted previously, the proposed interpretive centers that are more general and that interpret all of the MHNHA themes would likely be developed and operated by the MHNHA, including the “gateway” interpretive centers and the scenario with a single “centralized” interpretive center. Conversely, those that are theme-specific would most likely be developed and operated by partner entities that focus on that particular theme, such as the proposed Native American interpretive center being contemplated for development by the Chickasaws near the Natchez Trace.

These costs are distinguished between on-time development costs of interpretive centers and on-going costs to support the centers. This Management Plan proposes that, to the greatest extent possible, interpretive centers should be developed by adapting and/or expanding existing centers to conserve funding. The best example would be, under the Alternative C scenario with multiple theme-base interpretive centers, utilizing one of the NPS-owned Civil War sites in Corinth to interpret this same theme for the broader MHNHA.

Development Cost Efficiencies

One-time development costs would include the acquisition of property, in those cases when required, and any associated development costs (building, parking, etc.). They would also include the design and construction of interpretive exhibits. Development costs could include either a new building or the adaptation of an existing building. It is noteworthy that federal funding acquired through the NHA cannot be used for property acquisition. Thus, such an acquisition would need to be achieved through another funding source, such as the State government, a local government, a CVB, some other entities, or a combination of one or more of these sources. Generally, the Alternatives featuring the greatest number of interpretive centers will incur the greatest

one-time development costs and, thus, the lowest cost efficiencies. As indicated previously, the interpretive centers that are more general in their interpretation are more likely to be developed and operated by the MHNHA, while those that are theme-specific are more likely to be done by the heritage area's partners.

On-Going Cost Efficiencies

This category of costs relates to those such as the physical maintenance of interpretive centers, utility costs, and their staffing. It would also include exhibit design and construction to the extent that exhibits might change over time. These types of costs that do not entail the acquisition of property could be funded through a variety of sources, including federal dollars acquired through the MHNHA.

As the chart on page 21 reveals, *the level of expenditure that will be required for the one-time development costs essentially mirrors the costs of on-going support costs. That trend is driven by the number of interpretive centers.* In other words, the Alternatives that feature very few interpretive centers would have relatively high cost efficiencies for both one-time development and on-going support. On the other hand, the Alternatives featuring several interpretive centers will reflect relatively low cost efficiencies for both categories of costs. It is noteworthy that, when comparing the one-time costs of interpretive centers and on-going costs of interpretive centers, the on-going costs are most closely aligned with the on-going financial sustainability of the MHNHA, which is a key issue for most NHAs across the country.

Interpretation Benefits

This fourth consideration examines which Alternatives will be the most effective in achieving one of the MHNHA's most significant core values. While the key mission of any NHA is to research and inventory resources, preserve and enhance resources, interpret historic themes and their related resources, and promote history and resources through heritage tourism initiatives, the function most relevant to the set of Alternatives being considered here is interpretation.

Interpretation Effectiveness

This issue recognizes that there are numerous potential methods for interpretation, including the use of telecommunications technology that is independent of the need for interpretive centers. Despite all of the interpretation options, this management plan is

premised upon the idea that interpretive centers offer a unique and highly effective experience that cannot be substituted in whole by alternative methods of interpretation. Thus, *this consideration of benefits follows the principle that the more extensive the system of interpretive centers, the more*

effective the interpretation can be. For example, the Decentralized Interpretation Alternative (E) would be much less

effective than the Thematic Multi-Anchor Interpretation Alternative (C).

Factor Not Considered

Because of the nature of the specific Alternatives created for this NHA Management Plan, the following factor is not considered a valid consideration in weighing the pros and cons of the seven Alternatives posed in this plan:

Environmental Factors

Within the overall context of NHA management planning, environmental impact considerations are critical. In accordance with NEPA requirements, numerous steps must be taken to insure that environmental considerations are factored into planning. One of the first steps in the planning process is to conduct a series of public scoping issues to identify any environmental concerns, and an inventory of environmental resources must be conducted. There are many heritage area management plans in which the considered Alternatives would be evaluated based, at least in part, on potential impacts to the natural environment. However, in looking at the seven Alternatives being considered for the MHNHA, there are no clear differences with respect to their potential environmental impacts. The two most obvious potential impacts based upon the Alternatives considered here would be the physical development of interpretive centers and the vehicular transportation of heritage area visitors, as considered below:

Environment Impacts of Interpretive Centers Development

As noted previously, this Management Plan proposes that most MHNHA-related interpretive centers either utilize and/or expand upon existing interpretive centers or be developed within downtowns. “Greenfield” development, in which natural lands having environmental value would be disturbed for the development of an interpretive center, is not encouraged. As indicated earlier, the exception to this concept could be a center interpreting a theme that is strongly related to the natural environment, such as Native American heritage. However, even that theme could still be interpreted through a center located in an urban environment. Regardless of a proposed interpretive center’s context, if environmental impacts were likely, environmental reviews would

occur at the time that detailed plans were created. That time would occur sometime after this Management Plan is completed.

Environment Impacts of Vehicular Transportation

Despite the various geographic patterns for interpretation that this plan’s Alternatives pose, none stand out as generating more vehicular travel (and associated air pollution) than the others. For example, the Decentralized Interpretation Alternative (E) would entail visitors traveling throughout the MHNHA. Likewise, the Alternatives with one or more interpretive centers would also entail the visitors traveling throughout the Heritage Area rather than only traveling to the interpretive center communities. Therefore, no particular Alternative would clearly generate more air pollution than another.



The protection of environmental resources is central to NHA management planning. However, the particular Alternatives developed for this MHNHA Management Plan do not offer distinctions between the Alternatives with respect to their potential environmental impacts.

D2. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION

Below is a matrix that attempts to summarize the relative benefits of the seven Alternatives. A numeric point system was initially considered, but that approach was ultimately not utilized because it would either: A) assume that each consideration is evenly weighted in importance; or B) require a numeric weighting approach that would add to the complexity of the evaluation, while still falling short of a perfect methodology. Neither situation was considered desirable. Therefore, the following ratings were applied with respect to each Alternative's potential benefits: None, Low, Moderate, High, and variations between ("Low / Mod.", etc.). Below is a matrix summarizing the results of the evaluation, and a description is provided in the text that follows.

Alternatives Evaluation Matrix

ALTERNATIVES	Alt. A	Alt. B	Alt. C	Alt. D	Alt. E	Alt. F	Alt. G
CONSIDERATIONS	No Action	Centralized Interpretation	Thematic Multi-Anchor Interpretation	Non-Thematic Multi-Gateway Interpretation	Decentralized Interpretation	Centralized & NW Gateway Interpretation	Multi-Anchor & NW Gateway Interpretation
Economic Benefits							
Increased tourism	None	Low	Moderate	Mod. / High	None / Low	Low / Mod.	Mod. / High
Social Benefits							
Educational opportunities	None	Low / Mod.	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low / Mod.	Mod. / High
Financial Benefits							
Development cost efficiencies	None	Mod. / High	Low	Low	High	Moderate	Low
On-going cost efficiencies	None	Mod. / High	Low	Low	High	Moderate	Low
Interpretation Benefits							
Interpretation effectiveness	None	Low / Mod.	Mod. / High	Mod. / High	Low	Moderate	High
Composite Benefits	None	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low / Mod.	Moderate	Mod. / High

There are two repeated patterns illustrated in the matrix above that allow some generalizations to be made. First, there are no benefits derived by the No Action Alternative (A) since the

MHNHA would not exist in that scenario. Secondly, there is a direct correlation between the number of interpretive centers proposed for a given Alternative and the extent of impacts, either positive or negative. For example, the Alternatives featuring several interpretive centers (C, D and G) provide strong benefits with respect to economic benefits, social benefits and interpretation effectiveness. However, those same Alternatives feature low cost efficiencies because of their associated expenses. With those generalizations in mind, the following is an explanation of the evaluation of each consideration in the matrix comparing relative benefits:

Economic Benefits

Increased Tourism: As noted previously, the scenarios that most significantly increase the overall number of visitors to the MHNHA are those featuring gateway interpretive centers that could draw in visitors into longer and/or more geographically extensive visits to the heritage area. Second in effectiveness would be interpretive centers that are more geographically internal to the Heritage Area. Consequently, Alternatives D and G would have the greatest increase in tourism because they combine one or more gateway centers with multiple theme-based centers internal to the MHNHA. The next most effective Alternative in this regard would be C because of its several internal theme-based interpretive centers, despite it lacking any gateway centers. Alternatives B, E and F would have relatively low economic benefits because of their general low number of proposed interpretive centers of any kind.

Social Benefits

Educational Opportunities: Educational opportunities are greatest when interpretive centers are close to either population concentrations or have good access to key transportation corridors. In evaluating the seven Alternatives, the No Action Alternative (A) would obviously provide no educational opportunities, while Alternatives B, E and F would have low benefits for education because they feature either no centers, one center, or two centers. The other three Alternatives (C, D and G) would provide moderate educational opportunities because they would each include four or more interpretive centers.

Financial Benefits

Development Cost Efficiencies: As noted previously, federal funding acquired through the NHA cannot be used for property acquisition, so that function would need to be performed by some other level of government or entity. Not surprisingly, the Alternatives featuring the greatest number of interpretive centers will incur the greatest one-time development costs. Consequently, Alternative E (Decentralized Interpretation) would incur no development costs, giving it the highest relative cost effectiveness, Alternative B would have a moderate-to-high cost effectiveness because only one interpretive center would exist. The other Alternatives would have either moderate or low cost efficiencies because of their number of associated interpretive centers.

On-Going Cost Efficiencies: As with the one-time development costs, the on-going support costs would be determined by the number of proposed interpretive centers. As a result, the

on-going support costs for each Alternative would mirror the relative costs of the one-time development costs as described above.

It must be remembered that the entities incurring the costs from these various Alternatives will vary by the type of interpretive center. As noted throughout this plan, it is proposed that the interpretive centers that interpret all of the MHNHA's interpretive themes within any given center, such as in Alternatives B, F, and G, would be developed and operated by the MHNHA. On the other hand, those that would be theme-specific, as in Alternatives C, F, and G, would be developed and operated by MHNHA partner entities. To avoid confusion, it is recognized that Alternatives F and G are repeated above because they would share both types of interpretive centers.

Interpretation Benefits

Interpretation Effectiveness: Despite the acknowledgement that there are numerous potential methods for interpretation, this consideration recognizes that interpretive centers offer a unique and highly effective experience that cannot be substituted by alternative methods of interpretation. As the chart on page 21 reflects, there would be no interpretation effectiveness in the No Action Alternative (A) and a low level of effectiveness for Alternative E because of the decentralized interpretation approach with no MHNHA interpretive centers. Alternative B would have a low-to-moderate level of effectiveness because it would feature only a single interpretive center, while Alternatives C, D and F would enjoy moderate or moderate-to-high levels of interpretation effectiveness. Alternative G would result in the highest level of interpretation effectiveness because of its several interpretive centers.



There are multiple limitations encountered in evaluating the Alternatives under consideration. For example, while it can base the potential effectiveness of interpretation of the MHNHA's themes based upon the number of centers provided, it cannot factor in the quality of those centers in a constructive and predictable manner.

E. Recommended Alternative for the MHNHA

E1. SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION

In examining the comparisons matrix on page 21, the following composite rankings occur:

Composite Benefits Ranking

Moderate / High - Alternative G: Multi-Anchored & Northwest Gateway Interpretation

Moderate - Alternative B: Centralized Interpretation
Alternative C: Thematic Multi-Anchor Interpretation
Alternative D: Non-Thematic Multi-Gateway Interpretation
Alternative F: Centralized & Northwest Gateway Interpretation

Low / Moderate - Alternative E: Decentralized Interpretation

None - Alternative A: No Action

It must be reiterated that the ratings for each consideration were not scientific and the composite ratings assume that each consideration is equally important, while they are not. Also, it cannot effectively weigh the quality of interpretive centers, which can greatly impact their development costs, interpretation effectiveness and other considerations. With those caveats in mind, based upon the federal legislation creating the MHNHA, the research conducted to date, and the extensive public input solicited throughout this planning process, the following order of priority is offered in ranking the four considerations factored in the evaluation of the seven Alternatives:

Priority Order of Considerations

- 1) Interpretation Benefits
- 2) Economic Benefits
- 3) Financial Benefits
- 4) Social Benefits

It is noteworthy that ranking evenly with interpretation benefits in relative importance would be preservation benefits. However, because that issue is not impacted by the number and location of interpretive centers - the basis for the seven Alternatives - it is not factored here.

E2. RECOMMENDATION

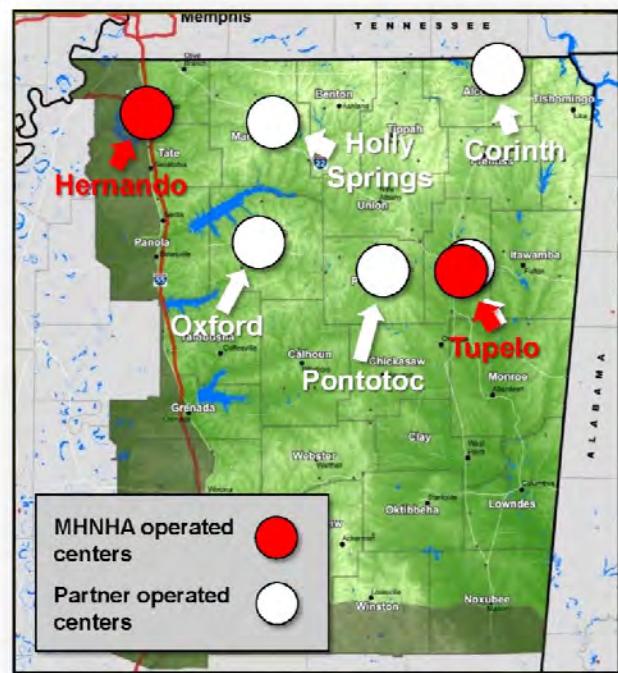
It is recommended that a hybrid Alternative combining “Alternative C: Thematic Multi-Anchor Interpretation” and “Alternative F: Centralized & Northwest Gateway Interpretation” be pursued for the MHNHA as the “Preferred Alternative.” This hybrid would charge the MHNHA’s coordinating entity with *exploring the development and operation the two interpretive centers featured in Alternative F* (northwest gateway center in Hernando and the main center in Tupelo), while the theme-specific interpretive centers featured in

Alternative C would be the responsibility of MHNHA partners. *The MHNHA would function as a catalyst and technical supporter for the Alternative C theme-specific centers. The ultimate decision on whether to develop any of these potential interpretive centers will hinge upon the results of feasibility studies, which are beyond the scope of this management plan.* A map illustrating what this hybrid approach might look like is provided below. In summary, the following reasons are provided for this recommendation:

- The Preferred Alternative offers a potential primary interpretive center (Tupelo) that addresses all of the MHNHA's themes in one location.
- Tupelo is the largest community in the MHNHA and has the largest volume of hotels, restaurants and similar components of "tourism infrastructure."
- The Preferred Alternative capitalizes on the relatively high traffic volumes on I-55 traveling south from Memphis with the "gateway" interpretive center.
- The Preferred Alternative's potential gateway interpretive center on I-55 offers the possibility for a joint MHNHA/MDNHA interpretive center.
- The Preferred Alternative provides the many economic, social and interpretation benefits that come with having multiple theme-specific potential interpretive centers throughout the MHNHA.
- The Preferred Alternative takes a relatively conservative financial approach for the MHNHA's coordinating entity by sharing the burden of developing and operating potential interpretive centers with the MHNHA's partners.

One important caveat to this recommendation for the Preferred Alternative

hinges upon the extent to which some of the MHNHA's key communities and partners are willing to secure funds for the development of theme-specific interpretive centers. While there is no question that it would be nice to have several interpretive centers as proposed in the Preferred Alternative, it will rely on the communities/partners proposed for the various potential interpretive centers to be willing and able to secure the required funding for both short-term development and long-term sustainability.



Recommended Preferred Alternative:
Hybrid of Alternatives C & F