



BIG SKY COUNTRY

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA FEASIBILITY STUDY



JUNE 2020
DRAFT

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BIG SKY COUNTRY

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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Cover Image

*When the Land Belonged to God, by
C.M. Russell, 42.5 x 72 inches, oil on
canvas, Montana Historical Society
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NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

JUNE 2020

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The Board of Directors of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. (BSCNHA) is pleased to release our draft Feasibility Study for public review. This document represents the culmination of more than four years of coordinated research and conversation in communities around central Montana. Our journey to becoming Montana's first National Heritage Area (NHA) began in January 2015 with a public meeting at the Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts in Great Falls. Over 100 people attended that first meeting, heard about the positive benefits NHAs have made in communities across our nation and learned the steps needed to receive Congressional designation. When asked, those in attendance enthusiastically supported pursuit of NHA designation for our region. As the saying goes, the rest is history, but not really. The release of this Feasibility Study is certainly a milestone, just one of many on the path to designation.

We are proud to reveal the collective results and input from many people throughout Big Sky Country who had a hand in the making of this document. We thank those who attended a presentation or contributed ideas at a public meeting; the mayors of our incorporated cities and towns who have supported this endeavor from the beginning; and other city, county, state and federal officials who have offered opinions; as well as the representatives from our local history, recreation, and economic development organizations who made suggestions because they understand the positive effect an NHA can have in Montana.

The BSCNHA, Inc. Board of Directors is indebted to the private donors who invested in this Feasibility Study, enabling us to secure our consultants from Point Heritage Development Consulting, LLC who steadfastly guided us through the process. Please note those generous donors listed on the inside cover of the document.

And finally, we dedicate this Feasibility Study to two former board members, Ruthann Knudson and Nicholas Vrooman, who embraced the vision and advanced our endeavor with their wisdom and positive energy. They now channel their spirit through a higher power.

Sincerely,

Jane Weber, Chair
Big Sky Country NHA, Inc.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA FEASIBILITY STUDY

A National Heritage Area in Montana

Welcome to Big Sky Country National Heritage Area! This Feasibility Study, developed by the citizens of the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana, is the culmination of a six year effort to plan cooperatively, and gain congressional designation for, the creation of a National Heritage Area in Cascade County and a portion of Chouteau County. The chapters that follow represent the tireless work of a wide cross-section of individuals, community groups, non-profit organizations, businesses, industry, and governmental bodies and agencies. The report summarizes these stakeholders' ideas, goals, and desires for what a National Heritage Area can be for the people and communities of central Montana. The study process has been guided by Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. (formerly the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation), which is willing to serve as the coordinating entity and lead this effort into the future.

This Feasibility Study amasses the rationale for celebrating the stories and places that make our part of Montana so special — special to our residents; special to our traditions, our work, and our ways of life; and special to our visitors all while protecting property and individual rights.



The plains first meet the mountains in Big Sky Country. *Courtesy of Norman Anderson*

Big Sky Country – A Place of National Significance

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area is a place of transitions, a place where nationally significant events occurred that shaped this region, the western states, the nation, and the North American continent. As the Statement of National Significance leads, “[t]he vast Upper Missouri River landscape is where a pivotal transition occurred from the lifeways of Indigenous peoples to the settlement of an expanding American nation.” Taking a phrase from the Lewis and Clark journal, our story “proceeds on” from there.



Explorers at the Marias in Fort Benton is the state memorial to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Artist Bob Scriver, courtesy of Ken Robison



Members of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana share cultural traditions at an annual powwow. Courtesy of Gayle Fisher

It is a story of the mighty Missouri River that carved the landscape and shaped the ecological environment of a region. It is a story of the First Peoples’ ancient cultures and traditions carried on in the region for thousands of years. It is a story of the expansive reach of a new and growing nation, its explorers, and the transformational change brought to this land. It is the story of the frontiersmen and settlers, and the influx of people into undeveloped territory. And finally, it is a story of the upper Missouri River region of today, our lives and livelihoods, and this magnificent place we call Big Sky Country.

We tell this story with the words and images handed down to us, and through the historic and natural places that surround us – landmarks of the past and a canvas for our future. First People’s Buffalo Jump, the Great Falls Portage Route, Fort Benton, and the C.M. Russell Home and Studio—all National Historic Landmarks — anchor the region’s historical trajectory. In addition, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail traces through the region the Missouri River passage and the portage route of the nation-changing expedition. The landscape itself, memorialized first in the Lewis and Clark journals and later in Russell’s paintings, is distinctive as butte-dotted plains rise to meet the great Rocky Mountains. Across this landscape, westward expansion is marked by historic forts and trails, as well as the community, transportation, industrial, and agricultural resources that supported the region’s growth over time. The Missouri and its tributaries contain pristine natural settings and the hydro-electric dams on which Great Falls’ economy was built. Together, the region’s resources combine to tell a story that is undoubtedly nationally significant.



In 2019, the State of Montana purchased the Birdtail Butte conservation easement, preserving 3,980 acres of wildlife and public access to the significant geologic landmark. *Courtesy of Ellen Sievert*

This is Big Sky Country National Heritage Area

The Big Sky Country National Heritage Area of central Montana in Cascade and part of Chouteau counties includes the incorporated cities and towns of Great Falls, Fort Benton, Neihart, Belt, and Cascade. Most of the land within this proposed National Heritage Area is privately owned, with rights retained by the respective owners. Those private property rights shall remain unchanged. Nothing within this Feasibility Study, nor any recommendation or outcome from the designation of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area will change the current rule of law. Nor shall the actions of the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area coordinating entity ever influence any outcome on property, zoning, land use, hunting, fishing, water rights, or other rights on the land. Participation in National Heritage Area projects is voluntary and only those projects acceptable to land management agencies or private property owners shall be pursued .



The Railroad Historic District is one of five National Register districts in Great Falls that trace the transportation, commercial, and residential history of the community. *Courtesy of Ellen Sievert*

Since 2014, citizens of our communities have gathered together to discuss the concept of creating a National Heritage Area for the upper Missouri River region of central Montana. Over the last six years, nearly 100 meetings have occurred – public community conversations, planning workshops, and presentations to local governments, units of tribal government, business groups, and organizations. This process has been widely publicized in e-newsletters, news articles, and via television, radio, and social media. From the start, the goal has been, and will remain, to engage interested individuals regardless of their positions or views. Some of the community conversations included people who expressed concerns, raised questions, or demonstrated opposition. All of these positions were noted and discussed. Accordingly, all opinions and ideas were taken under consideration and formed the recommendations of this Feasibility Study.



The J. C. Adams Stone Barn near Sun River is the only Romanesque Revival stone barn in the United States located west of the Mississippi River. *Courtesy of Norman Anderson*

In addition to public involvement and comment, the development of this Feasibility Study was conducted to incorporate concurrent plans developed by local governments, organizations, and other entities that make recommendations of programs and projects across upper Missouri River region. The *Big Sky Country National Heritage Area Feasibility Study* also incorporates and integrates the concepts from existing plans of other organizations, all of which are crucial to the implementation of this Feasibility Study and the recommendations contained within.

Regional Sustainability

The Big Sky Country National Heritage Area is an endowment founded on our legacy, and established to commemorate our culture and heritage, and to celebrate communities, and Montana way of life. The Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. is the nonprofit coordination entity designated to advance the National Heritage Area in partnership with the citizens, businesses, organizations, and local governments in central Montana. It is an established 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization, whose board of directors represent the region in which we live and work.

The organization's funding is derived from contributions, donations, and grants that combine to contribute to the sustainability of the organization. It is these "investments" that others make in Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc., that are reinvested across the National Heritage Area, assisting our communities and partners in the development of projects and programs that highlight the culture and heritage of the region. As other National Heritage Areas across the country have witnessed, this investment leads to job creations, revenue generation, business development, and other opportunities that ultimately result in a region's increased sustainability and improved economy. In the end, Big Sky Country National Heritage Area is investing in our communities, ourselves, and our children and their futures.



Belt Creek flows through Sluice Boxes State Park, including the canyon named after its resemblance to the boxes miners once used to pan for gold.

Courtesy of Gayle Fisher



Rangers at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center teach children how to make fire with rudimentary equipment from yesteryear – a bow and dry tinder. Learning these basic skills was a matter of survival then, but these skills can still be used today in an emergency. *Courtesy of USDA Forest Service*

The Future of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area

As we conclude this Feasibility Study, we will undertake a series of next steps to advance the recommendations of this report. We will seek congressional designation for the creation of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, as only the U.S. Congress can designate a National Heritage Area. Nevertheless, we have heard from the hundreds that participated in the report's development that we must start to act like a National Heritage Area. Therefore, the name: Big Sky Country National Heritage Area. Our board of directors will expand, furthering its reach and representation of the communities it serves. Our outreach will continue and grow as we work to raise funds to implement projects and programs that make investments in heritage development efforts throughout the region. Our public involvement will increase as we build more partnerships so that we – the community of Big Sky – can come together to celebrate our heritage and cultural assets.

Together we all have a role to play in Big Sky Country National Heritage Area as we build a future on the incredible history, vibrant culture, and beautiful landscape that define our region.

CHAPTER 1: THE HERITAGE INITIATIVE

*“O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!”*

America the Beautiful, Katherine Lee Bates

Purpose of the Study

So much has been written about Montana: landscape, cultural heritage, history, and her people. But it is these 18 words from the song *America the Beautiful* that paint a description of one of the most stunning landscapes of the United States. Central Montana is Big Sky Country! It is breathtaking, stunning, vast, rugged, romantic, and, oh, so beautiful.

The allure of endless, sun-drenched, fields of golden grain, waving in the gentle breeze moving across the vast, open land. The spectacle of the grand foyer to the foothills and front range of the Rocky Mountains. The quiet mystique of the Upper Missouri River as it cuts its path through deep canyons and roars over the falls. Antelope, deer, bison, bald eagles, coyote, wolves, and other animals mixed with the activity of farms and ranching, all at the edge of cities big and small like Great Falls, Fort Benton, Belt, Cascade, and Neihart. The history and heritage of the region are dated not by decades, or even centuries, but by millennia. The people of the region are friendly, proud, hardworking, self-reliant, independent, and respectful. They are the salt of the Earth. This is central Montana: Big Sky Country National Heritage Area.

A visitor to Big Sky Country in central Montana immediately knows there is something special about this place. Something different. There is a wonderment of the landscape, immense and powerful, yet, so pure and honest.



Charles M. Russell (1864-1926) was an artist who chronicled the West. In this self-portrait, Russell greets his friends, cowboys and Native Americans, in the Upper Missouri River region of Montana.

“Charles M. Russell and his Friends” by Charles M. Russell, courtesy of the Montana Historical Society

The story of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area (Big Sky Country NHA) is of the indigenous peoples who, for millennia, relied on the abundant bison population for sustenance and were inseparable from their cultural traditions; and of the cataclysmic change that occurred with the commissioned journey of two Euro-American men and the members of their expedition. These are just two of so many significant events in central Montana that helped contribute to the great history of the United States. Ranching, farming, wilderness, forests, rivers, industry, transportation, commerce, military, cities and towns, isolation – Big Sky Country contains it all, and more.

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. (BSCNHA, Inc., formerly the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation), with its partner organizations, the incorporated cities of Great Falls, Fort Benton, Belt, Cascade, and Neihart, and the citizens of the counties of Cascade and Chouteau, all together, prepared this feasibility study to advance the creation and formal designation of a National Heritage Area (NHA) in Montana. The effort has been years-long, and the growing partnership is focusing on heritage tourism, outdoor recreation, pride in the community, the celebration of heritage, and preservation of history as a means to help further the advancement of economic development and quality of life in this region of central Montana.

From the Big Sky Country NHA website:

Those of us fortunate enough to live in Big Sky Country know what a wonderful place it is. We want to tell those stories! To do so, we've brought together residents, multi-generational landowners, local businesses, nonprofits, and cultural organizations to find ways to capture that way of life and history. We believe in private property rights, celebrating our history, honoring our legacy, and sharing our stories with others. We believe that the stories and history of the Upper Missouri River area have national significance and that National Heritage Area designation will bring vitality and sustainable economic development to our region.

The first formal step to becoming an NHA is to create a feasibility study. This feasibility study is both analytical and promotional in its construct. The feasibility study must assess the significance of a region and its collection of historical, cultural, and natural resources and determine whether these assets possess an opportunity to tell a significant history of the United States, as well as produce a document that continues to motivate and enlist public support and cooperation to carry out its recommendations. This feasibility study also examines the capacity of the community to support the plan and answers what organization and group of partners exist to carry out the plan's recommendations. Like almost all NHA feasibility studies, the goal is to create both a final document and, in doing so, a process that, in the end, will result in a strong coalition of partners that come together to conserve and promote a region's heritage.

This feasibility study started with an ad hoc coalition of interested individuals and organizations that came together to advance the idea of a possible NHA in central Montana. To arrive at this point, the coalition set out to be fully engaged with all members of the community, to enlist support from willing partners, to be transparent and answer questions of individuals or groups concerned about NHAs, and to be deliberate in their approach to developing a feasibility study for the proposed NHA that incorporated the goals of the region.

This feasibility study contains the following elements:

- Chapter 2 presents the history of Big Sky Country, including the culture and natural environmental assets that tell the story of central Montana.
- Chapter 3 provides a detailed examination of the region's national significance, its historical themes and the resources associated with those themes, and a description of the proposed boundary for the NHA.
- Chapter 4 examines the desires of the regional partnership – what the communities want, and what initiatives they hope to accomplish as an NHA.
- Chapter 5 tests the ten criteria to be met for consideration for NHA designation.
- Appendices conclude the document, containing existing reports and other information considered in the development of this feasibility study.

What are National Heritage Areas?

The development of NHAs in the United States dates to the 1980s, and their history is a study of civic involvement at the grassroots levels of American society. The first NHAs designated by the United States Congress were experiments in new conservation efforts that involved local constituencies as the primary stewards for the protection of resources. This unique conservation strategy was a clear departure from the Department of Interior's and the National Park Service's traditional model of owning and operating the historical and natural resources of national significance. NHAs brought together the public and private sectors and challenged the norms of conservation by which everything that was nationally significant in the United States must be owned and operated by the federal government. The early successes of the first NHAs led to the U.S. Congress designating a handful of additional NHAs in other parts of the country.

By the mid-1990s, the idea of NHAs as “new” approaches to comprehensive conservation and community development strategies began to take hold in the United States. Pushed in part by the emergence of several state heritage programs, local efforts sprouted, with the most in the eastern United States. Of these, several sought congressional designation as NHAs. Early attempts at program legislation were proposed to create a group of NHAs along with a structure for NHAs to exist within the National Park Service; however, after several attempts, the programmatic legislation failed. An eleventh-hour effort at the end of the Second Session of the 104th Congress saw legislation containing both newly proposed NHAs and program legislation advance in both the House and the Senate. At the last minute, the bill was stripped of the program language, and the proposed NHAs were packaged within a more massive omnibus parks bill that ultimately passed Congress and was signed into law. Thus, the failure of programmatic legislation to win support in 1996 reinforced the process by which NHAs are currently designated today. That is the process by which the BSCNHA, Inc., has followed for the development of this feasibility study.

As of 2019, the United States Congress has designated 55 NHAs in the nation. From New England to the deep South, through the Midwest and now advancing to the far West – citizens have come together to conserve their heritage, create recreational resources, and protect greenways. Individually as separate NHAs, and collectively as a non-designated “system of NHAs,” the NHAs are working to conserve, interpret, and promote their cultural heritage, to develop a sense of place, and to enhance community revitalization and improve on the quality of life in their neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions. Today, there is no question about it: NHAs are here to stay.

Not every NHA is the same. NHAs are as unique as the resources they work to conserve. Each NHA shares a fundamental philosophy to achieve four specific goals. Those goals are to:

- conserve historic, cultural, and natural resources;
- enhance the development of recreational, educational, and interpretive resources
- help stimulate heritage tourism and economic development
- establish partnerships to help steward the advancement of the heritage area

Given these goals, each NHA might prioritize them in different ways, focusing on, for example, tourism and interpretation over historic preservation and community revitalization; however, all of the goals for the NHA will be addressed in one way or another.

NHAs are extraordinary places in America, merging community resources to promote conservation and community and economic development – or heritage development. They harness a wide range of community assets and interests – historic preservation, outdoor recreation, museums, performing, craft, and visual arts, folklife, scenic and working landscapes, and grassroots community-building activities – that when combined create a sum greater than its parts.

NHAs celebrate the distinctive character and culture of landscapes and the communities within them and have a strong sense of place and identity. They are neither urban nor rural and generally include communities and sites throughout a region. Typically, NHAs work to protect historical and cultural resources while encouraging development for tourism and other economic opportunities. NHAs illuminate the history and living traditions of a region, so those people within the NHA feel proud of their heritage, and those who visit gain a better understanding of and appreciation for the region's cultures.

Few government programs can point to such broad and growing levels of success as NHAs. At the outset of their creation, few would have predicted that NHAs would be as popular as they are today. NHAs are upheld as the best examples of how government and local communities can work together as partners. NHAs are recognized for their entrepreneurial practices, encouraging private sector development while protecting significant historic and cultural resources. NHAs are clearinghouses for dialogue among a variety of divergent interests, creating opportunities for people to come together to voice their concerns or opinions over intrusive and damaging land control proposals, helping to protect private property and the landowners' interests, all the while working toward a consensus within the community for progress.

Despite this successful record of accomplishment, opposition groups to NHAs have long had the ear of some policymakers in Washington, both in various Administrations and the Congress. These groups complain that NHAs violate private property rights or constitute a drain on the National Park System by diverting funding from much-needed park projects, thereby contributing to a maintenance backlog in the National Park Service. These arguments ring hollow, and nothing can be further from the truth. Never once has any NHA committed an act, instituted a policy, or initiated any action that violated the rights of any property. Nor do NHAs have any power or regulatory authority to zone property. Many unbiased, independent studies substantiate these facts, including one by the Government Accountability Office.¹ NHAs have no such authority – as legislatively mandated, and as philosophically established.

NHAs benefit property owners by enhancing their value and reinforcing the traditional, occupational, and recreational uses and rights of individual owners in their land. They invest in historic restoration,

¹ *A More Systematic Process Establishing National Heritage Areas and Actions to Improve Their Accountability Are Needed*, GAO-04-593T, General Accounting Office, Washington, D.C., 2004.

thereby helping to increase the value of properties and land in communities. NHAs work with farmers and ranchers, assisting in maintaining traditional lifestyles and occupations across vast landscapes of our 50 great states. And, just by the designation of an NHA, the coordinating entity is often one of the earliest organizations notified of actions which may have detrimental effects on private property, and then through the network of the NHAs, notice is extended to those property owners who may be affected. If anything about individual property rights is true, it is that NHAs are property owners' best allies.

In 2006, the National Park Service Advisory Board, appointed by President George W. Bush, published a report, *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas*, in which Douglas P. Wheeler, Chairman, stated:

National Heritage Areas represent a significant advance in conservation and historic preservation: large-scale, community-centered initiatives collaborating across political jurisdictions to protect nationally-important landscapes and living cultures. Managed locally, National Heritage Areas play a vital role in preserving the physical character, memories, and stories of our country, reminding us of our national origins and destiny. This is a citizens' movement of high purpose and great benefit to the nation. We must act to ensure that it is vigorously encouraged by providing readily understood standards for the establishment of new National Heritage Areas and by better defining a mutually advantageous partnership with the National Park Service.²

The report included a series of recommendations to Congress and to the National Park Service, including creating a permanent home within the National Park system for NHAs, and making a long-term (financial) commitment to NHAs.³

NHAs are recognized as innovative and creative partnerships that extend the reach of the National Park Service by conserving the nationally significant heritage of the United States. Other governments have studied NHAs as models for conservation, preservation, and economic development. This new model of conservation was the exact reason the Reagan Administration created the very first NHA in the 1980s. Then the National Park Service recognized that the evolving history of America was approaching a point of an unsustainable future if all nationally-significant historic and cultural resources were to become owned and operated by the federal government. The concept of NHAs grew from the creation of the Illinois & Michigan Canal NHA outside of Chicago to today, with a total of 55 NHAs in the United States.

The model for all NHA management is remarkably similar – a public-private partnership where the National Park Service is one of many partners, all of which contribute to some level of funding or support for programs and projects. A nonprofit organization manages most NHAs, with boards of directors consisting of various community leaders from different sectors of the local region. NHAs vary in size and scope, all created with a designation by Congress based on an initial management plan that charts the goals for the first ten years of operations. Many NHAs, having reached that ten-year threshold, have undergone independent evaluations, testing the outcomes of the NHA against the goals established in the management plan, and enabling legislation creating the heritage area.

² Douglas P. Wheeler, forward to *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas*, National Park Service Advisory Board, National Park Service, 2006,, pg.1.

³ *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas*, National Park Service Advisory Board, National Park Service, 2006, pg. 17-18.

Project Background

In 2014, the Great Falls-Cascade County Certified Local Government (CLG), began to discuss the concept of an NHA in Montana as such entities gained more popularity in the western United States. The City of Great Falls and the Great Falls - Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission asked the community to join them for the “Grand Tour” event in January 2015 that encompassed the whole region.



Public invitation to Grand Tour II in June 2016, when the public participated in early discussions about the proposed National Heritage Area. *Courtesy of UMRHAPC*

More than 100 people gathered from around central Montana, including regional community members, to begin collaborative efforts to establish an NHA along the Missouri River Corridor and to review the *Great Falls-Cascade County Tourism Assessment*, an in-depth study prepared by Cygnet Strategies. Support for these meetings was provided by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Great Falls Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID).

Speaking at this gathering was Charles Flynn, Executive Director of Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area in Yuma, Arizona, and Vicky Soderberg, a tourism marketing professional from Helena, Montana. Both explained the concept of NHAs and their ability to help revitalize communities and market them for tourism and business development. A significant issue raised at the Grand Tour was the inconsistency in messaging among Great Falls partners marketing the region. A vote taken at the Grand Tour resulted in overwhelming support for an NHA and to take the next steps to establish an NHA for the region's communities.

The Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation (UMRHAPC) was legally established in May 2015. The first meeting, held at the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls, included the organization of a board of directors.

In addition, a strategy was developed to advance the NHA concept within the region and to build an organization that could take the idea through the initial organizing and planning stages. The organization received official 501(c)(3) designation in June 2016.

A successful Grand Tour II event took place in April 2016 and was attended by nearly 100 members from the Great Falls community and from across the counties of the Upper Missouri River region in central Montana. Grand Tour II was also a working meeting for the UMRHAPC, its partners, and the community, as all participated in group discussions to develop an initial mission statement for the proposed NHA. The participants also had a robust conversation about the region's heritage and history, with preliminary themes and historical topics presented. A proposed project area was also discussed, and the initial area included all of Cascade and Chouteau Counties, along with the entire reach of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Participants understood that the themes, history, and project region would be reconsidered and possibly refined when the feasibility study planning officially began.

With the success of Grand Tour II, UMRHAPC undertook a number of important activities that helped move the initiative forward. The organization set out to raise money to support the organization and its work. Also, a website was created as a way for the public to follow the progress and to learn about future meetings, or to get involved as volunteers. The board invited tribal governments' participation in the process. They met with Jason Smith, Director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs. At his suggestion, Dr. Ruthann Knudson subsequently sent letters to the Chippewa Cree Tribal Business Committee of the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana Tribal Council, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the Fort Belknap Indian Community Tribal Council, the Crow Tribal Council, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council. An anthropologist who had worked in academia, federal service, and the private sector, Dr. Knudson held longstanding relationships with the tribal nations in the region, and had decades of experience with government to government consultation and repatriation. Furthermore, because of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe's historic and contemporary presence in the region, with tribal headquarters located in Great Falls, the board requested that the Little Shell provide direct board member involvement and participation in the NHA initiative. Montana State Parks added a representative to the board of directors. Federal partners at the Bureau of Land Management in Fort Benton, Montana, and the U.S. Forest Service at the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls, Montana, were identified and continue to be briefed on the project's advancement.

As described below, additional public meetings occurred in 2017 and 2018 as a part of conducting this feasibility study, with the final session in Belt, MT, in September 2019, where the participants expressed strong support for the establishment of the Big Sky Country NHA.

Generous financial support for the development of the feasibility study was given by Atlantic Richfield Company, First Interstate Bank, Fort Benton Community Improvement Association, Montana Community Foundation, Montana Federal Credit Union, NorthWestern Energy, Linda Metzger, as well as anonymous donations from a foundation and an individual.

Study Area

Montana can be described by two regions separated by the Continental Divide: the east, by the Great Plains; and, the west, by the Rocky Mountains. In Big Sky Country NHA, these two distinct landforms come together to form a landscape that is diverse, wonderful, and awe-inspiring. The study area is located in central Montana and is situated between Glacier National Park to the north, Yellowstone National Park to the south, the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. Within the study area is the Lewis & Clark National Forest.

For the most part, the land is fairly flat with slight, rolling hills. Except for the cities and towns, the land is mostly agrarian plains, consisting of expansive ranches and farms. Beyond the plains sit buttes, forests, and outcroppings of smaller mountain clusters, none forming a continuous range, but significant enough that one knows the Rockies are nearby. The entire region is linked by the mighty Missouri River

with its deep water, steep banks and canyons, providing picturesque overlooks of the land and skies. Most of the towns are small and rural, originally built and settled to support the region's developing economies – agriculture, mining, railroads, and manufacturing industries. The largest is Great Falls, a mid-sized urban area with a diverse population and economy.

Within this region is the study area – originally larger in size than the proposed boundary for the NHA. At first, the study area consisted of all lands within Cascade, Chouteau, and a small portion of Lewis & Clark counties. The study area boundary reached as far east as the National Monument and had tentacle-like extensions off of the Missouri River touching places with resources initially considered for inclusion in the proposed NHA. Throughout the feasibility study planning process, the resources of the study area, along with its boundary, were tested against the NPS criteria and the boundary criteria explained later in Chapter 4. In the end, the study area was modified and adjusted, supported by historical and cultural resources that tie together the stories of the region and support the national significance of the Big Sky Country NHA.

Private Property / Land Use

Designation of an NHA does not provide the coordinating entity or any federal agency with the authority to regulate land or land uses. Designation would have no effect on private property rights. Participation in proposed projects and programs is voluntary, with zoning and land-use decisions remaining under local government jurisdictions. In addition, the coordinating entity is prohibited from using the federal funds it receives to acquire real property.

An NHA is not a unit of the National Park System, and National Park Service involvement with NHAs is advisory in nature. No land is owned or managed by the National Park Service under this designation. When an NHA is designated by Congress, the National Park Service then partners with local communities to help plan and implement activities that emphasize a shared vision of heritage-based interpretation, conservation, and stewardship.

The issue of private property rights is of great importance to the Board of Directors of BSCNHA, Inc., and is further addressed in Chapter 3.

Concurrent Plans

The proposed Big Sky Country NHA aligns well with many other plans and initiatives currently underway in the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana. The organization, in developing its partnership network, recognized the work of its partners in identifying the history, the quality of life, the economic opportunities, and the responsibilities of the communities and governmental agencies in caring for a region that we collectively love and want to work together to make better. These documents include plans focused on education, economic development and growth, historic preservation, interpretation, land use, recreation and natural resources, tourism and marketing, and transportation. Over the course of organizing the work of the Big Sky Country NHA, these plans and documents were used as foundational studies to help evaluate the feasibility of and develop this study for an NHA in Central Montana.

Upon Congressional designation of an NHA, these plans and studies, and others that may be in development, will be critical tools in formulating a shared vision and collaborative strategy to ensure that the plans do not exist, and are not implemented, in isolation. A list of concurrent plans, including their integration with Big Sky Country NHA, is found in Appendix I.

The Feasibility Study Process

With growing community support for NHA designation and funding to pursue it, the UMRHAPC formally began the process of conducting a feasibility study. A Request for Proposals for a consultant team to lead the process was issued in August 2017, the selected team began working on the project the following October, and the first public meeting was held in May 2018. The feasibility study process followed the National Park Service's *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines* established in 2003.

The steps set forth in the guidelines help partners within a region establish whether there is a nationally significant story; the historic, cultural and natural resources and living traditions remaining on the landscape that express that story; and a partnership network that has the capacity to build and carry out a shared vision built around the region's past and present. The NPS guidelines articulate ten criteria that demonstrate these important components of an NHA, and by which any region seeking designation will be evaluated (pp. 4-5). Those criteria are:

1. An area has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed as such an assemblage through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes non-contiguous resources and active communities;
2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story;
3. Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and/or scenic features;
4. Provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities;
5. The resources important to the identified theme or themes of the area retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation;
6. Residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governments within the proposed area 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 designation of the area;
7. The proposed management entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area;
8. The proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area;
9. A conceptual boundary map is supported by the public; and
10. The management entity proposed to plan and implement the project is described.

Over the course of about 20 months, the UMRHAPC led the communities of central Montana through the process that resulted in this feasibility study report and the decision to formally seek designation. They established working committees and engaged key partners, sought guidance from consultants with strong backgrounds in NHA development and management, created a plan for public outreach, identified and interviewed key stakeholders, and sought review of their work by subject matter experts.

The Study Team

The Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation Board of Directors

From the outset, the UMRHAPC Board of Directors was created with the breadth of geographic, cultural, and professional diversity characteristic of heritage areas. The board is chaired by Jane Weber, a Cascade County Commissioner, and includes the Mayor of the Town of Cascade, as well as residents of Great Falls and Fort Benton. Board members are professionals in the fields of historic preservation, natural resource conservation, education, economic development, tourism, fundraising, accounting, and history and anthropology. In addition, the board includes key partner organizations such as Montana State Parks, the Lewis & Clark Heritage Trail Foundation, NorthWestern Energy, the Fort Benton Community Improvement Association, the Great Falls Development Authority, the Montana History Foundation, and Visit Great Falls. The board provided oversight of the feasibility study process and participated in public outreach. Appendix II provides a list of the BSCNHA, Inc., Board of Directors.

The Feasibility Study Task Force

A Feasibility Study Task Force served as the core planning group for the study process. The board created the task force to develop and review specific components of the study, ensuring that planning followed NPS guidelines. The task force included members of the board, as well as Nancy Morgan (Point Heritage Development Consulting, Inc.) and August Carlino (Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area). Morgan and Carlino, both with significant experience in heritage area planning and management, were engaged to guide the study process. With meeting the ten NPS criteria as their goal, the task force managed the process for the development of themes, the resource inventory, and the boundary; oversaw the review of those components by subject matter experts; planned public meetings and board workshops; facilitated stakeholder interviews; and, worked directly with the consultants on the detailed development of the feasibility study report.

Key Partners

In addition to the board of directors and the task force, other key partners were also engaged in the development of the feasibility study. They include:

- Alexandra Hernandez, National Heritage Areas Regional Coordinator, Intermountain Region, National Park Service
- C. M. Russell Museum
- Certified Local Government/Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission
- City and County Commissions – Cascade and Chouteau Counties
- Fort Benton Community Improvement Association
- Great Falls Development Authority
- Great Falls MT Tourism
- Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
- Montana History Foundation
- Montana State Parks
- NorthWestern Energy
- Jim Olson, Mayor of Belt
- Murry Moore, Mayor of Cascade
- Rick Morris, Mayor of Fort Benton
- Bob Kelly, Mayor of Great Falls
- Steve Taylor, Mayor of Neihart

A more detailed description of the partnership network can be found in Chapter 4, and a complete list of partners is in Appendix III.

Community Engagement

The Feasibility Study Task Force and the Marketing Committee worked jointly to develop and carry out a comprehensive community engagement strategy for the feasibility study. That strategy included a series of community meetings, engagement of professionals with expertise in the history and cultures of the region, interviews with key stakeholders, outreach to municipal, state, and legislative leaders, and consultation with Native American tribes connected to the study area. The strategy also included print and broadcast media, a website, electronic mailings to a list of over 400 people, and social media postings. Each of these activities is described briefly below. In all, 765 people participated in feasibility study activities, with about 1,500 participants engaged in the process over the last five years.

Community Meetings

Three rounds of public meetings – Community Conversations – held in communities in the study area were the foundation of the community engagement strategy. In all, there were 393 participants in these meetings. Each round of meetings was designed to inform and engage the public, and each round built upon the information and accomplishments emerging from the previous round. This meeting structure contributed to the creation of a broad partnership network consisting of residents, organizations, and communities that share a vision for the region’s future.

The first round included three meetings in May 2018 in Fort Benton, Great Falls, and Helena. The purposes of the first round of meetings were to introduce the NHA feasibility study process to the public and to get input on preliminary themes, the study area boundary, cultural traditions, and special places. The meeting included table discussions with maps that participants could mark up, as well as a question and answer session that covered the designation process and timeline, benefits of designation, and the rights of private property owners. In January 2019, a second round of meetings was held in Fort Benton and Great Falls. During the second round of meetings, the revised themes and boundary were presented to the public, and the Statement of National Significance was introduced. In addition, the public had the opportunity to discuss the reasons for creating an NHA and to share ideas for projects that could be accomplished if the region were to achieve designation. The final round culminated in a single meeting in September 2019 at the recently restored Belt Performing Arts Center in the community of Belt. During this round, all previous accomplishments were reviewed and the organization that led the feasibility study committed to becoming the proposed NHA’s coordinating entity. Finally, the proposed NHA’s name was announced to great accolade – Big Sky Country NHA. At this meeting in which no new information was presented aside from the name, written public comments were collected with a sheet handed out to participants.

Stakeholder Interviews

Among the critical components of NHA designation is the consideration of regional capacity. Regional capacity includes the capacity of the partnership and the individual organizations working together towards a regional vision, the capacity of an organization to administer an NHA, and the collective financial capacity to sustain an NHA through time. Regional capacity was the focus of interviews with 25 key stakeholders, including elected officials, regional funders, civic and planning organizations, arts coalitions, and historical, environmental, recreation, and conservation groups. Appendix IV has a listing of all interviews.

The purpose of the interviews was to build on and complement the information generated in briefings and through past public engagement, with many of the topics addressed in the interviews already having been broached during those activities. The interviews also provided the opportunity for partners that have a major role to play in a regional heritage initiative to express their support, their concerns, their priorities, and their vision for how a network can be created and sustained. This information was collected confidentially, and only the aggregate of the information was reported to the board of directors. The outcomes of this process are summarized in Chapter 4.

Subject Matter Experts

National significance and themes that can support that significance are foundational elements of an NHA. As such, it is a valuable process to have those elements reviewed by experts in the fields of history and culture who are not otherwise directly involved in the development of the feasibility study. The experts who reviewed the work of the UMRHAPC collectively have demonstrated knowledge of Montana history and culture from prehistory to the present. They include:

- Ellen Baumler, Ph.D., independent researcher
- Jay Buckley, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History, Brigham Young University
- Michael Duchemin, Ph.D., President and CEO, The Briscoe Western Art Museum
- Gerald Gray, Chairman, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana
- Robert Swartout, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of History, Carroll College
- Carroll Van West, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University and Director of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area

All six experts are supportive of the designation of an NHA based on the national significance, themes, and resources described in detail in Chapter 3.

Planning Workshops

Over the course of the feasibility study, the planning consultants led three workshops with the board. These are included as part of the community engagement process because of the breadth of the board's composition, including the many communities, partners, and interests represented on it. The first workshop, held in July 2018, focused on refining the themes and resources, redrawing a boundary that aligned with those elements, and drafting the Statement of National Significance. A second workshop, held in February 2019, focused on the management structure of the board and the proposed NHA. That meeting included the decision of the UMRHAPC to continue forward as the coordinating entity once NHA designation is achieved. A third workshop in April stepped the organization through consideration of all possible management alternatives for the region, including an NHA, a state heritage area, a local heritage area, and no change. The board unanimously supported the establishment of an NHA.

Outreach to Public Officials

The UMRHAPC Board engaged public officials at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels in the planning process. Outreach entailed special meetings with county and municipal, invitations to all public meetings, and written correspondence at key points in the process. An informational meeting and discussion was held in May 2018 at the capitol in Helena that included Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney, the Director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, the Director of Montana State Parks, the Director of the Montana Historical Society, the Director of Montana Main Street, and representatives of the Department of Commerce, the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. Presentations were given to commissioners of Cascade, Chouteau, Fergus, Lewis and Clark, and Phillips counties, as well as the Fort Benton City Council.

The mayors of all five communities within the study area and a commissioner from each of the county commissions were included in the stakeholder interview process. Finally, during the second and third rounds of public meetings, the five mayors opened the meetings by welcoming participants and voicing their reasoning for supporting the heritage area initiative.



Meeting with Lt. Gov. Cooney and Montana State officials at the capitol, May 2018. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

Tribal Involvement

The study area was the ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy, although many other tribes converged in the region to hunt the bison that were foundational for their cultures. Those tribes include the four tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, known as the Nisitapi (Siksika or Blackfoot; Kainai or Blood; Pikanii or Northern Peigan; and Pikuni or Southern Piegan), as well as the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille, Shoshone, Bannock, Nez Perce, Gros Ventre, Crow, and Assiniboine.

The board met twice with the Director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, and communicated with all of the tribal governments in Montana whose members had ancestral ties to the study area. Dr. Ruthann Knudson provided the initial contact with the tribes, as described previously. Chair Jane Weber, who had previously worked with Montana's tribes during the development of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, was the board's key contact regarding tribal involvement. Leaders indicated their strongest interest is in the study's historical interpretation, and that their need for involvement was generally limited to review of the history presented in the report. The only exception to this was the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, headquartered in Great Falls and recently accorded federal recognition. The Little Shell participated in the planning process through a stakeholder interview of Tribal Chairman Gerald Gray.

Furthermore, when asked to appoint a member to UMRHAPC Board, Gray recommended Nicholas Vrooman, folklorist and historian. Vrooman and Knudson both served on the board, and were key in bringing their strong ties to and scholarly understanding of the Native American community in Montana to the process.

Print, Broadcast, and Web Outreach

During the initiative, a wide variety of outreach methods were employed to ensure residents had the opportunity to attend public meetings and provide input. Print media included community posters, as well as press releases to Fort Benton's *River Press*, the *Great Falls Tribune*, and Black Eagle News. The online publication, The Electric, also published the press releases. The press attended all public meetings, and also published follow-up articles. A Constant Contact list of nearly 500 people was kept up to date on the initiative, including receiving online postcards for public meetings. An online survey was used to gather public input. Notices of all the public meetings were posted on the City of Great Falls Planning Department website. Broadcast media was also helpful in getting the word out, with PSAs on local radio stations, as well as live radio broadcasts about the meetings on STARadio, Cherry Creek Radio, and Montana Public Radio. In addition, board members were featured on the *Voices and Views* program in Great Falls.

Other Presentations and Meetings

In addition to the outreach described above, BSCNHA, Inc., representatives gave presentations to the Chambers of Commerce in Great Falls and Fort Benton, leadership of the Republican Party in the area, several civic groups, and a number of historical and historic preservation organizations, tourism and business organizations, and educational organizations. In addition, BSCNHA, Inc., hosted informational booths at the Little Shell Powwow, the Lewis and Clark Festival, and the Fort Benton Summer Celebration, reaching nearly 250 participants through those annual events. A listing of all presentations is included in Appendix V.

Fundraising

Another measure of community engagement is the financial support generated for the heritage area initiative. Over the last three years, UMRHAPC successfully raised over \$50,000 in support of the initiative from individual donors, organizations, and corporate foundation grants. Of this, \$13,500 was the gift of individuals and families. A list of current and potential funders is included in Appendix VI.

Results of Community Engagement

As stated above, 1,474 people have been engaged in public outreach over the last five years. This included 45 presentations and six feasibility study public meetings. The public meetings drew 393 participants, including representatives of non-profit organizations, public officials, and residents of the region. Organizations from a broad array of sectors participated in the meetings, including tourism, historic preservation, arts, recreation, chambers of commerce/economic development, businesses, civic and faith-based organizations, and the media. Invited participants also included elected officials from the counties of Cascade and Chouteau, the towns of Belt, Cascade, Fort Benton, and Neihart, the City of Great Falls, state officials along with Montana's state legislature, and Montana's United States Member of Congress and United States Senators offices. Since public officials were sometimes unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts, members of the BSCNHA, Inc., Board of Directors held several one-on-one briefing meetings with the Montana Congressional Delegation, both in Washington, D.C. and in the state, updating them on the feasibility study progress. Similar meetings were held with Montana legislative officials, both in Helena, Montana, and in their districts.

Next Steps

The completion of this feasibility study is the first step toward the designation of an NHA in the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana. Next, the BSCNHA, Inc., Board of Directors will work toward the introduction of federal legislation for the designation of an NHA. Only an act of Congress can officially designate an NHA through authorizing legislation. Concurrently, the board will continue to build a strong regional network of partners through public outreach and community involvement. One of the key ways of accomplishing this will be to begin the early implementation projects identified over the course of this study. Another important task for the board will be to incorporate new members whose background and skills complement the needs of the organization as its role evolves. Hiring staff will also be critical for the organization's evolution. Board and staff will expand fundraising activities in order to help accomplish projects, support the development of a management plan that builds upon the findings of the feasibility study, and prepare to match federal funding upon designation. Once the designation is achieved, the board and staff will work with the partnership network to ensure the completion of the required management plan that will provide guidance for the subsequent ten years.

Why a National Heritage Area in Central Montana?

From the Big Sky Country NHA website:

Heritage areas present opportunities for residents and visitors to recognize and celebrate a region's cultural and natural assets. A heritage area is both a place and a concept. Physically, heritage areas are regions with concentrations of nationally significant natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational resources.

Central Montana exemplifies Big Sky Country. Spectacular open horizons plunge into deep ravines and canyons where the Missouri River carved its path across the prairie; evidence of First Peoples marks the land and stories of historic steamboat trips and harrowing exploration escapades leap from the pages of leather-bound journals. Central Montana, where the real West captivates the imagination of archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, artists, and modern-day explorers, is poised for additional visitors and the resulting economic benefits. The region possesses significant national history, heritage, and resources, dating back to a time when North America was still a vast wilderness.

With a National Historic Trail and four National Historic Landmarks within the proposed Big Sky Country NHA boundary, the landscape, heritage, and history are of national significance and warrant designation as an NHA.

The benefits of the creation of an NHA are known and have been experienced in other parts of the nation. States with NHAs have experienced economic growth, increased tourism, and community pride and vibrancy. The federal investment in NHAs has helped preserve historic structures, rebuild downtown Main Street communities, educating children about their heritage and culture, inform visitors of the history of the places they are visiting, and improve the quality of life for residents. These results translate into tangible benefits, including the creation of jobs, revenue growth for local governments, and a resulting improvement of the economy of the NHA. Central Montana is poised to capture this same opportunity with the designation of the Big Sky Country NHA.



Lewis was overjoyed to hear “the agreeable sound of a fall of water.” Soon after he “saw the spray arise above the plain like a column of smoke.... [It] began to make a roaring too tremendous to be mistaken for any cause short of the great falls of the Missouri.” By noon, Lewis had reached the falls, where he stared in awe at “a sublimely grand spectacle [sic]... the grandest sight I had ever beheld.” —June 13, 1805 (in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Moulton 1983)
Courtesy of Charles Fritz

To achieve national status, a group of community leaders – county officials, mayors, business leaders, nonprofit organizations, educators, historians, architects, and many others – set out to prove the cultural, historical and natural ecosystem of Big Sky Country form a cohesive, nationally significant landscape, and to prepare for the National Park Service and the U.S. Congress this feasibility study as a part of the process. The information contained within this report – the *Big Sky Country National Heritage Area Feasibility Study* – demonstrates that the region possesses nationally significant history and resources and that the proposed coordinating entity and regional partnership have the capacity to manage an NHA. These two factors together justify the consideration of an NHA designation by Congress.

An underlying, but necessary, factor in the creation of an NHA for central Montana is capitalizing on national parks in Montana – Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park – and the millions of visitors they draw each year. The counties of Cascade and Chouteau are centrally located between the parks. Most travelers to the national parks will by-pass the region between the two even though central Montana contains National Historic Landmarks, a National Historic Trail, scenic and recreational attractions, and downtown communities with arts and cultural attractions. Establishing an NHA will link all of the cultural, historical, and recreational assets of central Montana allowing the communities, the counties, and the state to harness the potential of increased tourism resulting in community revitalization, economic development, enhanced quality of life opportunities, and an overall improvement in regional pride.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCING THE HERITAGE AREA

*“Montana is still high, wide, handsome, and remote.
There are many ways of looking at it and many
ways of feeling about it. And room for all the ways.”*

K. Ross Toole

Carroll Van West, PhD

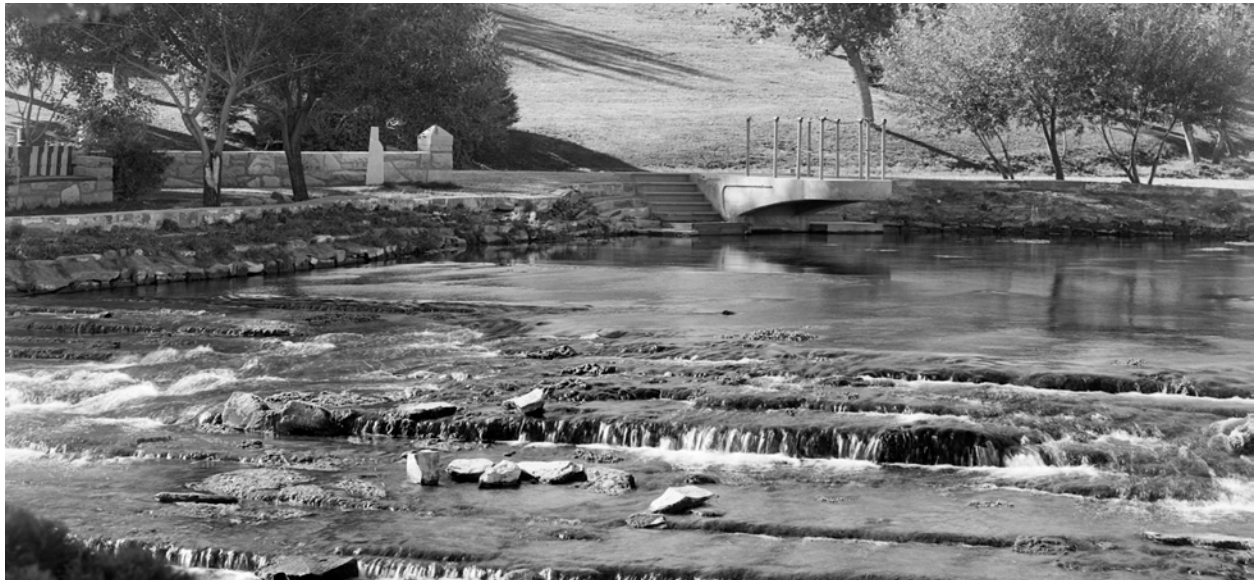
“High, Wide, and Handsome,” that’s what historian and Great Falls native Joseph Kinsey Howard called Montana in his majestic history of the Treasure State (1943). You wonder where Howard might have been when he coined that phrase. People in this part of Montana have their own idea – the top of First Peoples Buffalo Jump, where to the west the craggy peaks of the Rockies stand, or to the north, where fertile fields of grain stretch for dozens of miles, or to the east where the waters of the mighty Missouri River head downstream to its Great Falls of the river, and the industrial city that has grown along both river banks.

Threaded by the ever-widening waters of the Missouri, the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area is spectacular, enriching, certainly soul affirming. Its landscape is indelibly marked with layers of stories, traditions, and histories, remarkable places where residents carved out their daily lives and in so doing carved the story of the Big Sky into the nation’s history. Those stories, traditions, and histories are centered on the Upper Missouri River, which connects ancient places of significance, such as the First Peoples Buffalo Jump, with much later footprints of the national movement of peoples that reshaped the American West in the nineteenth century and who then built modern transportation, industrial and irrigation systems and air defense networks in the twentieth century. What they wrought shapes what we do and who we are in the twenty-first century.



The confluence of the Missouri and Marias Rivers where Lewis and Clark made their fateful decision regarding which river to follow. *Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center*

The Great Falls area – a combination of natural falls, river valley trails, and a giant fresh water spring – has been significant for centuries. A place like none other along the river, the Great Falls created wonder, beauty, and a place for reflection. Its resources lured both humans and animals, creating good hunting opportunities for indigenous peoples.



The centerpiece for Montana’s most visited State Park is the Giant Spring that pours 150 million gallons of water daily into the Missouri River. *Courtesy of M.A. McMillan*

The Giant Spring provided a fresh water source during winter’s challenging months. The varied resources of the Great Falls area, indeed, help to explain the plethora of prehistoric sites in the region. Multiple indigenous societies and languages, with their distinctive narratives, traditional arts, ceremonial calendars and rituals, customs, and lifeways survive and intersect here. Over two hundred years ago the bison culture tribes, the Assiniboiné, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Crow, and later the Sioux, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Cree, and Metis crisscrossed the Great Falls and took advantage of its ford and resources.

In the early 1800s the visitors who came from faraway St. Louis, the federally sponsored Corps of Discovery led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, saw the Great Falls differently – as an obstacle, an impediment for their mission to find a northwest passage to the west. The expedition, tied as it was to the river itself but touching on peoples and lands connected to that same mighty Missouri, is a significant thematic thread linking so many stories of the region--those of courage, of curiosity, of duty, and of commitment. Of the 37 recognized sites in central Montana associated with the Corps of Discovery, 34 are in Cascade and Chouteau counties.



First People’s tipi along the Upper Missouri River landscape. *Courtesy of Gayle Fisher*

In June 1805, Capt. William Clark and five men explored the area around the Great Falls, mapping a portage route of about 18 miles. The weather was hot, and the men complained as they carried supplies from one camp to the other, slapping at mosquitoes and worrying about grizzly bears. They built primitive wagons to make it easier, yet it was still a harrowing, physically draining experience. But they made it. The portage the expedition made around the falls, one of the true tests of endurance of the entire expedition, became the stuff of legend, and the route became a most worthy National Historic Landmark.



Left: The Great Falls Portage NHL encompasses a significant section of the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail and a landscape that remains very much like it was when the Corps of Discovery portaged around the falls of the Missouri.
Courtesy of Great Falls Tribune

Right: A reenactment of the portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri River by the Corps of Discovery.
Courtesy of USDA Forest Service

But the story of what the expedition encountered at the Great Falls filtered back to the other easterners, that the Missouri stopped at the falls, and the river traffic that would soon follow the federal excursion into the Missouri River Country would have to find a new connecting point; Great Falls's time would have to wait.

First came Loma's turn, where in 1831 near the confluence of the Missouri and Marias rivers, James Kipp established Fort Piegan. Kipp's post only operated for a year. Then St. Louis fur traders established Fort McKenzie a few miles above the confluence. It was a place of exchange, in both economics and culture. Prince Alexander Philip Maximillian, a German scientist, stayed for several months along with the artist Karl Bodmer, who painted the new world and peoples who gathered at the crossroads.

Bodmer's work launched the heritage area's tradition of being a source of inspiration of artists of all type, culminating four generations later in the art of Charles M. Russell, who also came to the region from St. Louis. Fort McKenzie, unfortunately, was also a place of death. In 1837 the post's factor Alexander Culbertson learned that a boat headed his way was carrying smallpox. He ordered the boat to stop at Judith Landing until freezing temperatures could perhaps mitigate the danger. Blackfoot Indians, eager for trade goods, did not trust Culbertson. They rode to the boat, became infected, and upon their return west the disease soon ravaged the tribe.



A 1918 painting by Charlie Russell depicting how Native Americans viewed the encroachment of settlers in the Upper Missouri River region of Montana. *Charles Marion Russell The Fireboat, 1918, oil on board, 16 x 25 inches, C.M. Russell Museum Collection, Gift of Mrs. Wade George in memory of Wade Hampton George*

The smallpox epidemic took the lives of an estimated two-thirds of the Blackfeet who had managed to survive the earlier scourges of 1781. Destructive disease brought by Missouri River boats forever changed the region's Native American history.

In the 1840s traders abandoned Fort McKenzie for a new river crossroads, named Fort Benton, a place in the river that had been used by Native Americans as a ford but for the traders it became the head of navigation on the Missouri River, a launching point for a series of nationally significant movements that transformed the American West. For the American fur trade, Fort Benton served as the end of the line for a series of St. Louis-controlled trading posts, a trade that was quickly shifting from beaver pelts to bison robes, leading to the over-killing of the one animal crucial to Native American lifeways. The turn to the bison robe trade attracted the Metis who carried robes in their culturally distinctive Red River carts from Canada to Fort Benton. Joseph Kinsey Howard observed that the carts "never sneaked up on anybody. On a still day you could hear them coming for miles, and see the great cloud of dust they raised." As a crossroads of exchange, Fort Benton of the mid-19th century also was a community where mixed-descent families could live openly and find acceptance.

The Corps of Discovery was the first federal venture into the heritage area but Fort Benton would eventually mark the permanent presence of the federal government in the region. In 1860 Fort Benton became the eastern terminus for a military wagon road that would connect the Missouri to American outposts in the Pacific Northwest. As the research of historian Ken Robison emphasizes, West Point graduate Lt. John Mullan deserves a better-known place in the pantheon of Western pathfinders. Mullan first came to Fort Benton in 1853 as part of the Stevens Survey to chart a path for the Northern Pacific Railroad. During his stay in 1854 he discovered and marked the Mullan Pass – the eventual place where the Northern Pacific crossed the Continental Divide. Six years later he returned to Fort Benton as his command and dozens of workers finished the last miles of military road from Fort Walla Walla in Washington Territory to Fort Benton by August 1860. The Mullan Road connected by land the Missouri River with the Columbia River, a military necessity completed just as the nation entered into the horrific American Civil War.

Fort Benton by the time Montana became a territory in 1864 had evolved from its trading post origins into one of the Missouri River's most important shipping and outfitting points. Many of the miners and merchants who rushed to the gold mines in the early 1860s used Fort Benton to stock up from such merchants as I.G. Baker and Thomas C. Power, and then head out to Last Chance Gulch (present-day Helena) and from there reach precious mineral fields in Bannock, Virginia City, and Butte (all three National Historic Landmarks). A second wave of miners used Fort Benton as a base to explore the silver fields of the Little Belt Mountains in the late 1870s and early 1880s, establishing camps at Barker, Hughesville, and Neihart, with the latter becoming the largest town once the Hudson Mining Company built a concentrator and smelter there in 1885-1886.

The road south of Fort Benton to Neihart was matched by another Fort Benton road that stretched north to Fort Hamilton in Canada. Known as the Whoop-Up Trail, this road was the primary connection between Montana Territory and Western Canada for two decades. At its peak, from 1874 to 1883, traders moved almost a third of the Fort Benton trade on this trail, allowing Montana Territory merchants to acquire most of the riches to be made from the western Canadian frontier. Whiskey flowed freely across the international border until the North West Mounted Police stopped most of the illegal trade in the mid-1870s.

Fort Benton's National Historic Landmark district retains many of the buildings from its time of national significance. A northeast blockhouse (1846-47) of the restored Fort Benton is one of the oldest structures in the northwest. The Grand Union Hotel (1882) provided the best in accommodations for the business class.

The I.G. Baker House – home of one of the region's leading merchants and the place where Thomas Francis Meagher last dined before his mysterious disappearance into the Missouri – is the oldest residence in the heritage area. Still today you can stand on Front Street and imagine the scene from 150 years ago when the men and women who transformed Fort Benton from a frontier trading post to a bustling territory trade center walked along the riverfront amidst mountains of freight on the levee and streets filled with wagons, oxen, and bullwhackers.

As Fort Benton attracted more and larger steamboats, and mines brought wealth to the rest of the nation, the U.S. Army spent almost 30 years establishing military posts to protect these transportation routes and the bounty in natural resources coming from Montana.



Miners on parade in 1892 along the muddy streets of Neihart, a silver mining center in the Little Belt Mountains.

Courtesy of The History Museum



Massive cargo on the steamboat levee at Fort Benton awaiting overland freighting. *Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center*

A year after the end of the Civil War, in 1866, the U.S. army transferred troops to the Missouri River to build a base to protect steamboat traffic to Fort Benton. The military chose an isolated site, named Camp Cooke, near the confluence of the Missouri and Judith rivers. With a garrison numbering about 400, Camp Cooke (1866-1870) was the first federal military base in Montana Territory.

In 1867 the army located a second, larger replacement post named Fort Shaw (1867-1891) in Cascade County's Sun River Valley. Fort Shaw served as a military bulwark against the Blackfeet to the north. The federal presence developed in conjunction with the government's steady encroachment on Blackfeet lands, forcing the Blackfeet by treaty amendments in 1866 and 1868 into an ever smaller reservation tract. Named for Col. Robert Gould Shaw, commander of the all-black 54th Massachusetts in the Civil War (a regiment made famous in the movie *Glory*), the fort has a vitally important chapter in the history of "Buffalo soldiers" in the post-Civil War history of the army as well as its role during the Sioux Campaign of 1876 and the Nez Perce/Nee-Me-Po War of 1877. Three adobe buildings – the only adobe military structures still standing in the state – remain at the fort site.

Those who passed through Fort Benton in the 1860s changed more than the economics of the new territory. Jesuit priests in 1862 left Fort Benton to establish St. Peter's Mission near Simms (Cascade County). About a decade later the Jesuits situated the mission at a beautiful place along Birch Creek northwest of Cascade. Here in the fall of 1883 the Metis leader Louis Riel had taken residence with his family to teach Metis children. Riel, a major figure in Canadian history, stayed at St. Peter's for about seven months until a Metis delegation from Saskatchewan arrived and convinced Riel to return home to lead the fight known as the North-West Rebellion of 1885.



Gustav Sohon painted this scene of the first arrival of steamboats at the Fort Benton levee in 1860.
Lithograph by Bowen & Co., courtesy of Ken Robison

That same year, another Canadian, James J. Hill, had led his company, the St. Paul, Minneapolis, & Manitoba Railway, to its western terminus at Devil's Lake (present-day North Dakota). Hill and his investors next headed west, using the Missouri and Milk Rivers once they reached Montana Territory as a pathway to the Great Falls. Due to the rails, the falls could be bypassed; the old portage route that had so challenged Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery was no longer an impediment to development.

The “Manitoba Road” (later, Great Northern) reached the Great Falls in 1887. Almost immediately Hill’s company launched a spur line to the coal deposits at Sand Coulee to ensure plenty of fuel for the trains. The coal mining era in east Cascade County was underway and would last well into the 20th century. The railroads changed everything. Fort Benton residents and investors soon learned that being the head of river navigation no longer mattered. Great Falls’ time had arrived.

At his fledgling Great Falls townsite Paris Gibson eagerly awaited the arrival of the railroad. He understood better than most that to grow his fortune he also needed to grow the city and surrounding region. A native of Maine, where he served in the state senate, Gibson made his first mark in Minneapolis where he joined the race to build successful grain mills. In 1879 Gibson headed for Montana, landing at Fort Benton, where he began a lumberyard but soon realized that the great stretches of prairie in every direction of Fort Benton beckoned a different type of lifestyle, that of the stockgrower. Granville Stuart, Conrad Kohrs, William E. Floweree, Robert S. Ford, Robert Vaughn and others had pioneered the process of replacing the wild game of the prairie, especially the bison, with endless herds of cattle and sheep. Fort Benton now became a gateway to the open range stockgrowing craze of the 1880s. Gibson chose sheep, set up a large ranch near Belt (Cascade County) and did well enough quickly enough that he became the president of the Montana Woolgrowers Association in 1883.

Gibson also had his gaze elsewhere, at the five falls of Great Falls, where he envisioned a new city grounded in electricity, the cutting edge technology of the 1880s. He viewed the Great Falls not as an impediment but as a nascent source of electric power through hydroelectric dams and powerhouses. Along the banks of the Missouri River in 1883-1884, he planned and then filed the town plat for a new industrial city, and began the endless task of promoting his town and vision.



The father of Great Falls, Paris Gibson (1830-1920) was an American entrepreneur and politician interested in promoting the area for agriculture as well as industry. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

Modern transportation would make Gibson’s vision possible. Thus, his most important convert was the Manitoba Road’s James J. Hill, who after an 1884 visit also understood the opportunity to be had – and he aimed his Manitoba Road for Great Falls where he would build his major machine shops, employing hundreds. He also sold the powerful Butte magnate Marcus Daly on the promise of Great Falls.

Hill undertook another railroad, the Montana Central, to connect Great Falls to the territorial capital at Helena and onto the lucrative copper mines in Butte. In turn, Daly's mammoth Anaconda Copper Company situated a huge copper smelter and the Upper Missouri River's first hydroelectric dam at dramatic Black Eagle Falls – so named by William Clark--immediately east of the new city.

In time, the smelter and dam produced a distinctive community known as Black Eagle. Those who lived and worked there understood that the Great Falls Reduction Works at Black Eagle were the epitome of what modern technology and industry could do in the 20th century West. The Big Stack of the copper smelter reached over 500 feet into the air. Drawing energy from all of the Great Falls dams – Black Eagle, Rainbow, Ryan, Morony, and Cochrane – the copper and wire plant, along with a huge zinc plant, helped to light the world and supply over half of the world's zinc market. In the early 1960s, over 2000 worked the factories and smelter at Black Eagle. Those same employees and their families formed a close-knit working-class, multi-ethnic place that nurtured a strong sense of work, community, and ethnic pride that has never wavered even after the demolition of the Big Stack in 1982. Located on Smelter Avenue, Borrie's restaurant, established in 1938, and the 3-D International restaurant, established in 1946, are poignant and tasty reminders of the days when copper and zinc were truly king in Black Eagle, when the banks of the Missouri hummed with industry, and the many saloons were filled with tired workers wanting a nightcap.

The impact of Great Falls industrialization spread into the countryside. To fuel his works, Daly developed coal mines in Stockett and Sand Coulee, and acquired and expanded mines at Belt, as a wholly controlled subsidiary of the Anaconda Copper Company.



The stack of the refinery at the Anaconda Copper Mining Company processing plant in Great Falls, Montana.
Courtesy of Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

FINANCIAL

Great Falls.

Montana's Great Centre.

Montana's Natural Central Point, at which
congregate her Great Resources and Industries.

Montana's Great Coal Centre.
 " Great Stock Centre.
 " Great Mineral Centre.
 " Great Railroad Centre.
 " Great Commercial Centre.
 " Great Agricultural Centre.
 " Great Geographical Centre.
 " Great Manufacturing Centre.

For further information, plats, maps, and literature, address
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Promotional advertisement for Great Falls, Montana.
Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center

During 1894-95, over 200 carpenters constructed many of Belt's buildings. By the turn of the century, Belt was Cascade County's second largest city and Anaconda had 1,000 workers there.

Around the same time of the Belt boom, James J. Hill gained effective control of the Burlington Route and Northern Pacific Railroad and connected these other major lines to his Great Falls operations by building a spur line between Great Falls and Billings, opening up central Montana for agricultural production. Later, the Milwaukee Railroad was built through southern Chouteau County to Great Falls.

Indeed, the railroads brought industry to Great Falls but they also provided the pathway for hundreds of thousands of homesteaders to come to the Missouri River country and seek their fortunes in the early twentieth century. Lured by the promise of irrigation through the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 and hyped techniques of dryland farming in the extended homesteading acts of 1909 and 1912, they came from everywhere – every state along with a huge number of northern Europeans. In 1910 the Great Falls Land Office was processing over 1,000 land claims a month.

The boom was most intensive between 1905 and 1915. City boosters in Great Falls in 1904-1905 advocated for a major reclamation project west of the city along the Sun and Teton Rivers, seeing the new reclamation law as a way to add another layer of economic growth to the region, one not so dependent on the powerful monopolies of the Great Northern Railway and the Anaconda Copper Company.



The Homestead Boom of the 1910s opened winter wheat and barley production making the Golden Triangle among the nation's leaders. *Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center*

The city's founder, Paris Gibson, was now one of Montana's two U. S. Senators, and was in perfect position in the nation's capital to ensure success for the local effort to gain what became known as the Sun River Project. Once completed in the next decade, the mammoth engineering feat transformed the landscape west of Great Falls.

A huge high dam on the upper Sun River, named for Paris Gibson, stored winter snow melt for its eventual transfer into a series of diversion dams and canals that yielded the Fort Shaw division, a reclamation project of over 16,000 acres in Cascade County, and a second to the north, Greenfields, which covered tens of thousands of acres in Teton and Cascade counties.

Throughout the Big Sky the impact of the homesteading boom during the first two decades could not be missed. Railroad magnate James J. Hill sponsored his own agricultural experts to demonstrate the most effective dryland farming techniques for the newcomers. Paris Gibson used his own Cascade County farm as a demonstration of the values of dryland farming. Great Falls and Fort Benton both became important points on what federal and Montana agricultural experts called the "North Central Montana Golden Triangle." Towns sprouted where none had been before; tall grain elevators stood as sentinels on the prairie. Wheat crops flourished at first as the rain was plentiful and the prairie was freshly broken. But by 1917 drought was stalking the land, and with a drop-off in European demand once the world war was over, the bust was a harsh reality by 1920. But the boom-bust of the homesteading era made a lasting change in Fort Benton as the town became an agricultural trade center, setting its course for development for the rest of the century.

Homesteads and factories were anathema to the stockgrowing culture that still prospered among the irrigation ditches and smokestacks of modern Montana. Charles M. Russell had lived the cowboy life in Cascade County's early years but by the new century he and his wife Nancy lived in a modest, quaint Victorian house in Great Falls

Determined to remind everyone of what had been, and what was increasingly being lost, Charles M. Russell retreated across his yard to his log cabin studio and began to share through illustrated letters, sculpture, and paintings large and small a vision of the Big Sky region that has forever shaped the American perception of the "real West."

Russell painted heroes but not the types that populate the history books then, or now. His hero was the more commonplace cowpoke or rancher who etched their determination to make it in the land itself. Perhaps most importantly, he portrayed Native Americans not through a harsh scientific lens nor as a vanishing people. Rather he acknowledged the humanity of the Native Americans and reminded everyone that the Indians long ago had earned their place in the land, and that powerful lessons of bravery, dignity, and purpose were theirs to give, if whites could learn to look beyond their prejudices. His magnificent "Lewis and Clark Meet Indians at Ross' Hole," commissioned for the house chambers of the Montana State Capitol, gets it about right. The Salish dominate the dramatic scene of contact and exchange; Lewis and Clark, set to the side, are almost an afterthought, as they were in the Native American-dominated and controlled landscape of the early nineteenth century.

Russell was fighting an almost rear-guard action against the calls for progress, change, and modernization. Most were satisfied with keeping the Native American past and present on the margins, stuck away in the reservations to the northwest (Blackfeet) and northeast (the Fort Belknap Indian Community), or at white-controlled boarding schools, such as the one at Fort Shaw (Cascade County). The boarding school developed in 1892 once the military closed the fort, based on a white assumption that if Indian children could be isolated from their families, then the children might become assimilated.

Despite the discipline, curriculum, and isolation, children did not abandon their families or forget who they were. A group of young women at Fort Shaw, however, did excel at basketball and were crowned world's champions at the 1904 St. Louis World Fair.

People may have clapped for the Fort Shaw girls, but back home the federal government kept on changing the rules to open more reservation land for settlement. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, combined with the expanded homestead act of 1909 and 1912, cost the tribes thousands of acres within their own reservations. Yet the tribes never went away; their warriors fought in World War I and then the federal Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 provided the legal means that they could reassert their sovereignty and take control of their tribal affairs.

The years of the federal New Deal in fact brought all sorts of changes to Cascade and Chouteau Counties, an impact still measured today by the expressive Great Falls Civic Center, the marvelous Art Deco designs of the Northern Montana State Fairgrounds (now Montana Expo Park), or the elementary school in Fort Benton with the words emblazoned in its brick walls: "Industry is Useless without Culture." The 1930s gave rural Montanans buffeted by the earlier homesteading bust "hope in hard times" as historian Mary Murphy has written. Completed between 1934 and 1938, the Fairfield Bench Farms project in Teton and Cascade counties took 13,000 irrigated acres and carved out 129 farms for families left high and dry in the bust. Agriculture, even in the most difficult times, remained and remains central to the life and culture of the heritage area.

The Great Depression, on top of the 1920s homesteading bust, shattered Great Falls' illusion of stability and prosperity especially once the mighty works of the Anaconda Copper Company at Black Eagle began to shred production and workers. That downturn impoverished many but it proved temporary. Once the United States entered World War II the worst of times suddenly changed into the best of times in Cascade and Chouteau counties as demand for Montana copper, beef, and wheat skyrocketed and the population of Great Falls soared in particular.



C-54 practicing landing at Great Vittles Falls Air Base (today's Malmstrom Air Force Base), getting ready to deploy to participate in Operations the Berlin Airlift in 1948. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

In 1942 the Army Air Force arrived in Great Falls, introducing the latest and most influential chapter in the story of the U.S. military and the Missouri River country, one that had both international and local impacts. The U.S. Army's Great Falls Army Air Base for heavy bomber training was finished a month before Christmas, 1942, when the first B-17 bombers arrived. Training continued until the fall of 1943. At the same time, the 7th Ferrying Group established its base at the Gore air field. Its mission was to be a connecting link to Fairbanks, Alaska, thus an invaluable cog in the Lend-Lease program that supplied American aircraft and supplies to the Soviet Union during our Allied fight against the Axis powers. Once the bomber training ended, the Lend-Lease effort shifted to the army air base. By war's end, over 1.7 million pounds of cargo and 8,000 aircraft had passed through Great Falls to Fairbanks and onto Siberia.

Other places across the northern plains played similar significant roles in the American fight during World War II. But the military presence in Great Falls did not end with the Axis surrender in 1945. The Great Falls Army Air Base first served as a reserve training base for the Army and then the newly designated Air Force until the Berlin Blockade of 1948 forced the United States to fly supplies to West Berlin. The Great Falls Air Force Base was turned into a mock Berlin airport so pilots could train on how to approach and land in Berlin. Then in 1951 the base resumed its international role, as home to the 29th Air Division, defenders of the nation from possible air invasion from the Soviet Union.

The international impact was deep and lasting. The local impact proved just as profound. Of course there was a surge of patriotism, but there also was a surge in the cashbox due to military spending, and the growth of businesses and housing to serve the expanding military presence. The changes also involved race, with the arrival of hundreds of African American soldiers, who found few open doors in downtown businesses.

Before World War II, the black population of Great Falls had never been large, hovering in the low hundreds for decades. The Union Bethel AME Church, built in 1890, had long been a community center for the African American laborers and railroad workers who clustered in the south side of the city. A different type of community center for resident and soldier alike, the Ozark Club, became prominent during the war and in the Cold War years to follow.

The club began during prohibition, selling soda in the open and booze on the side, but then reorganized in 1944 to be a full-fledged nightclub with a swinging, jazzy band, in fact the only place in the entire state to feature jazz music six nights a week and to welcome everyone, regardless of race or nationality.



Owner Leo LaMarr broke racial barriers, welcoming all races at his Ozark Club in Great Falls during the 1940s and 1950s.

Courtesy of Ken Robison

The night scene in Great Falls has never been the same since. The base's greatest significance dates to modern times as a military outpost in the nation's Cold War defenses, a responsibility that continues to weigh on base commanders today.

Named Malmstrom Air Force Base in 1955, it was aligned under the Strategic Air Command, with nuclear missile launch facilities first installed in 1961 and were operational at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Within six years, Malmstrom's missile field was the nation's largest, covering some 23,500 square miles. The base has since been central to the country's nuclear missile defense system. The base's greatest significance dates to modern times as a military outpost in the nation's Cold War defenses, a responsibility that continues to weigh on base commanders today.

From buffalo jumps to nuclear missile bases, the peoples of the heritage area have shaped the nation's history and culture in subtle and in profound ways. What happened along the Missouri River between Fort Benton and Great Falls is not just an Old West story even if such famous names as Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Sacajawea, Karl Bodmer, Mountain Chief, Bull Lodge, Running Eagle, Louis Riel, James J. Hill, Marcus Daly, and Charles M. Russell dominate the history books. The stories of the heritage area also shape the New West story with individuals such as Paris Gibson and civil rights activist Alma Smith Jacobs (who led the effort for Great Falls' public library) serving as powerful models of how engaged citizens influence the course of history in their towns, state, even the nation. With the railroad system as the anchor, and the Air Force providing men, women and technological innovation, the Great Falls to Fort Benton region became a central place in the modern West and in the defense of the western world. The heritage area thus blends the best traditions of the Old and New Wests into a special place worth commemorating, celebrating, and preserving so all can learn of its beauty, diversity, heroism, determination, and commitment to the ideals and events that still motivate us as a nation.

CHAPTER 3: NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, THEMES, RESOURCES, AND BOUNDARY

“The bond that ties Montanans to the state is woven of many strands. But, before all else, it involves our personal feelings and our pride, as citizens of the state, for its beauty, history, and people.”

Mike Mansfield

Introduction

Across the vast network of places that comprise our nation, some regions are nationally distinctive landscapes. They possess a special character, an intangible sense of place arising from the history, living traditions, and cultural and natural resources found there. One of the goals of this feasibility study is to consider whether the Upper Missouri River region is one such landscape. The study process accomplished this goal by incorporating the identification and articulation of the region’s powerful sense of place and substantial collection of historical, cultural, and natural resources.

The Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation (UMRHAPC, now Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc.) worked collaboratively with the public and a panel of subject matter experts to develop a Statement of National Significance summarizing the region’s contribution to American history; this is supported by five interpretive themes, the core stories that connect the region. In addition, an Inventory of Resources (Appendix VII) was developed containing significant places and events that tangibly express this history.

This chapter complements the historical narrative in Chapter 2 with the development of a framework to organize the region’s shared stories. The following pages include a description of this process, the Statement of National Significance, interpretive themes and subthemes, and the key resources associated with the region’s history. The chapter closes with a proposed boundary that encompasses the shared stories and places that define the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area (Big Sky Country NHA).

Identifying Stories and Resources

The *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines* (National Park Service 2003) require a determination of a region’s contribution to the national heritage and development of potential interpretive themes. The process to identify themes emerged from the Grand Tour II meeting in 2016, with the preliminary drafting of six themes that captured the history of the region. These preliminary themes were refined with input from three public meetings, a workshop with the UMRHAPC Board, and review by a panel of historians, ethnographers, and other individuals with expertise in the region. Ultimately, the region’s history was expressed through five interpretive themes and the overarching Statement of National Significance.

Also, in accordance with National Park Service guidelines, the study team developed an inventory of historical, cultural, and natural resources to recognize the special places that underpin the region’s important stories. The inventory’s primary purpose in the feasibility study is to demonstrate that the region has sufficient resources with integrity that combine to share the stories that give the Upper

Missouri River region its significance. The inventory demonstrates that the region's collection of special places can be used to share its history. It also helps identify resources that could benefit from heritage designation through potential projects in interpretation, education, tourism, conservation, preservation, and economic development. The inventory, presented in abridged form in the feasibility study, lays an essential foundation for future research and should always be considered a work in progress.

The resource inventory currently encompasses 148 historical, cultural, and natural resources, including 99 historic and natural resources, 19 museums and interpretive centers, and 30 events and programs. The inventory also specifies the resource type, its relationship to the interpretive themes, and listing in the National Register of Historic Places, among other information.

The inventory for the proposed Big Sky Country NHA catalogs four National Historic Landmarks (First Peoples Buffalo Jump, Great Falls Portage, Fort Benton, and the Charles M. Russell House and Studio). It also includes 43 properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places (10 districts and 33 individual resources), including two nationally significant sites, 25 with state significance, and 16 bearing local significance. In addition, the region contains the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, River's Edge National Recreation Trail, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, five state parks (First Peoples Buffalo Jump, Giant Springs, Sluice Boxes, Smith River, Tower Rock), and two federal interpretive facilities (Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center). All of the resources listed in the inventory are related to the region's national significance and/or five interpretive themes. While the region does not include reservations of any of federally recognized tribes in Montana, the inventory includes resources important in the history and living traditions of many of the tribes. Furthermore, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, which recently received federal recognition, is headquartered in the region.



Charles M. Russell's depiction of Native Americans watching the Corps of Discovery travel up the Missouri River captures a moment that would forever change the West. *"Indians Discovering Lewis & Clark," Charles. M. Russell, courtesy of the Montana Historical Society*

The subsequent pages set forth the Statement of National Significance and the five interpretive themes for the region, each followed by a summary of resources that best support Big Sky Country NHA's history and culture.

Statement of Significance

The vast Upper Missouri River landscape is where a pivotal transition occurred from the lifeways of Indigenous peoples to the settlement of an expanding American nation. Following 12,000 years of human history in the region, the vanguard of this transformation was the Corps of Discovery, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, who followed the Missouri in search of a Northwest Passage to the Pacific. North America would never be the same. The Great Falls of the Missouri created a physical barrier to river navigation, resulting in the historic portage for the Corps. This natural impediment resulted in Fort Benton becoming the head of navigation on the Missouri. Fort Benton emerged as an outpost of the American nation in this still-contested land, a hub for overland trade and new settlement. In less than a century, the Upper Missouri River region witnessed the transformation from millennia-old tribal society to a landscape that supported the rise of a New West.

The vast Upper Missouri River landscape and its collection of natural and cultural resources underpin the region's national significance. Four National Historic Landmarks and a National Historic Trail clearly trace the transition that occurred in little more than a century from the millennia-old bison cultures to a region defined by agriculture and industry.

- The First People's Buffalo Jump National Historic Landmark, designated in 2015, was used as a pishkun – the Blackfoot term for a cliff kill site for bison – for thousands of years prior to Euro-American intrusion into the area. This sacred landscape remains a part of Native American living traditions in the region.
- The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, stretching 4,900 miles from Point State Park at the headwaters of the Ohio River in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to the mouth of the Columbia River, passes through the heart of the proposed National Heritage Area (NHA). The Lewis and Clark Expedition spent more than two months in the region between their westbound journey in 1805 and their eastbound journey in 1806. As such, the region contains many landscapes and sites identified in their journals, including six that are recognized in trail planning for their historic integrity and their interpretive potential – Decision Point, the Upper Portage and Lower Portage sites, Rainbow Falls, Giant Springs, and Tower Rock.
- The most significant sites associated with the National Historic Trail are within the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark. The landmark designation commemorates the Lewis and Clark Expedition's 12-day, 18-mile trek around the five waterfalls on the Upper Missouri in the summer of 1805, with the boundaries encompassing the non-contiguous Upper Portage and Lower Portage sites.
- The Fort Benton National Historic Landmark District, the furthest navigable point on the Upper Missouri River, represents the 19th century opening of the West by the traders, miners, stockmen, and settlers who arrived in the area in the wake of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
- The Charles M. Russell House and Studio National Historic Landmark honors the chronicler of this history. Russell, a profoundly gifted artist, was a firsthand witness of the final transformation from native cultures and the open range to the hydroelectric powered industry of Electric City and the farms and ranches that spread out under Montana's big sky.

While the resources above most succinctly tell the story of cultural convergence and historical transition in the region, the Big Sky Country landscape holds numerous historic trails, districts, sites and structures, natural landmarks, and interpretive facilities whose existence and integrity support the region's nationally significant story. Furthermore, the past and present remain connected in the region, as the choices made over this century of transition helped create today's living landscape.

Interpretive Themes

Five interpretive themes underpin the compelling history of the transformation of the American West. The thematic framework below presents the significant stories of the Upper Missouri River region and the natural and cultural resources that best express those stories.

Theme 1 – The Missouri River

The Missouri River flows from its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains to the plains past the cataracts at Great Falls, a major source of water power, down to the head of steamboat navigation at Fort Benton, and on through the Upper Missouri River Breaks. For more than 12,000 years, the Upper Missouri River, its tributaries, and landscapes provided the ecological environment which supported the lifeways for First Peoples, fur trappers, miners, settlers, ranchers, and homesteaders.

The NHA boundary encompasses a segment of the Upper Missouri River from Tower Rock State Park – where the waters of the Missouri come out of the Rocky Mountains onto the Great Plains of the American West – to the river's confluence with the Marias River near Loma, Montana. Along this magnificent American waterway, the Great Falls of the Missouri present a natural feature with cultural significance. The Falls are a natural pivot point, and the Upper Missouri River provides a



geographical thread for the NHA that encompasses four National Historic Landmarks – the First Peoples Buffalo Jump, Charles M. Russell House and Studio, Great Falls Portage, and Fort Benton.

"I have not been on any river that has more of a distinctive personality than does the Missouri River. It's a river that immediately presents to the traveler, 'I am a grandfather spirit. I have a source; I have a life.'"—William Least Heat Moon. *Courtesy of PointHDC*

The passage of time is etched on the landscape, as Pre-Ice Age geological period depositions and orogeny shaped the watershed. Among the most significant geological features that remain, Tower Rock stands tall as it marks the transition of the Missouri River from the plains to the mountains. The Pleistocene Ice Age left glacial remnants from the Laurentide Ice Sheet as far southwest as the Rainbow Falls on the Missouri River. The Laurentide Ice Sheet wrapped itself around the Bears Paw and Little Rocky Mountains, leaving an ice-free landscape in the White Cliffs area. The ice sheet dammed the river at Rainbow Falls, creating Glacial Lake Great Falls that extended upstream to modern Holter Lake. Eventually, Glacial Lake Great Falls burst through three outlets creating Lost Lake and the Shonkin Sag, effectively rerouting the Missouri River.

Early Native Americans utilized the river for navigation, travel, and to create stone tools derived from glacial gravel deposition. Also crucial for the people that lived near the region were the river fords at Fort Benton and above the Falls of the Missouri. The fords allowed animals and humans to cross the Upper Missouri River, and both were places where game was sure to congregate.

The Missouri River also provided the means to navigate, explore, and seek a northwest passage by the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which helped shape the course of our nation. Not only did the Expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase and search for a northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean result in unparalleled scientific discoveries on the North American continent, but immense political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental changes followed in its wake.

The Missouri River played a crucial role in the settlement of Fort Benton – the birthplace of Montana. The community at the edge of the Upper Missouri Breaks was the hub of an international trail and trade network and the head of navigation on the river.

The river carved its way through a landscape that enticed renowned artists to capture the beauty of the West and the cultures who lived here. Karl Bodmer, John Mix Stanley, and Gustavus Sohon came to the Upper Missouri River region in the nineteenth century to paint and document native cultures and the spectacular scenery around and adjacent to the river corridor. Charles M. Russell made the Upper Missouri River region his home, and his art captured a people, a landscape, and a way of life “When the Land Belonged to God,” as well as the change he witnessed firsthand.



The Missouri River drops over 550 feet in just 21 miles, which provided an opportunity for hydroelectric development unique in the world. Five dams were constructed within a 12-mile stretch, including Ryan Dam built in 1915. *Courtesy of Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission*

Finally, the river has been, and still is, a source of hydro-power generation provided by a series of five dams in the region, supporting industrial and residential development over the last 130 years. The development opportunity that Paris Gibson saw in the tremendous volume of water thundering over the five waterfalls redefined the region in the 20th century. That power initially processed area silver and ultimately helped to mine, transport and process the minerals produced by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, one of the largest single industrial customers of any American utility, leading to the electrification of communities large and small across the United States.

Theme 1 Resources

The region’s landscape is defined by the Missouri River, one of the United States’ most significant natural resources. The river and its related resources highlight the natural forces that created the landscape across geologic time, setting the stage for the way in which people used this region over the

past 12,000 years. The river is the thread that connects the cultural stories that played out across the landscape over time. Today, four National Historic Landmarks demonstrate the chronology of these stories – First People’s Buffalo Jump NHL, the Great Falls Portage Route NHL, the Fort Benton NHL, and the Charles M. Russell House and Studio NHL. Each of these is described in further detail in the subsequent themes.

The Great Falls of the Missouri includes five waterfalls. From upstream to downstream, they are Black Eagle Falls, Colter Falls, Rainbow Falls, Crooked Falls, and Great Falls. The natural fords above and below the falls were critical for the migration of massive bison herds and Native American hunting and survival. The falls were the impediment that forced the Corps of Discovery to undertake their historic portage, spending significant time in the region on both their outbound and homeward-bound trips. The falls also contributed to the development of Fort Benton as the head of navigation on the Missouri River and a hub of international overland trade.

Later, the power of the falls was harnessed for 20th century industry with a series of hydroelectric dams, including Black Eagle Dam, Rainbow Dam, Cochrane Dam, Ryan Dam, and Morony Dam. The falls and the dams are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and offer interpretive opportunities, while the River’s Edge National Recreation Trail combines recreation and interpretation for almost 60 miles along both sides of the river.

Belt Creek, and the Marias, Roe, Smith, Sun, and Teton rivers – tributaries to the mighty Missouri within the study area – offer current and future opportunities for natural resource conservation and education, as well as interpretation at public access points. Similarly, the Carter Ferry provides an unusual visitor experience for crossing the Missouri, while historic bridges in Fort Benton and Great Falls are another way for people to get out over the river.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, both overlooking the Missouri River, provide excellent interpretation of the river and surrounding landscapes. Fort Benton is the primary access point for those floating the Wild and Scenic Missouri River.

Finally, the Beyond the Dam Bike Race and Missouri Breaks Triathlon are annual events that combine heritage and recreation for residents and visitors alike.

Theme 2 – First Peoples

The First Peoples of the Upper Missouri River region include the ancient bison (buffalo) culture tribes world-renowned as the Mystic Warriors of the Plains. Their very names – Assiniboiné, Blackfeet, Plains Chippewa & Cree, Cheyenne, Crow, Gros Ventre, Little Shell Chippewa, Metis, and Sioux, with leaders such as Red Stone, Mountain Chief, Little Dog, Big Bear, Bull Lodge, Louis Riel, Rocky Boy, Dull Knife, Plenty Coups, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse – arouse immediate recognition globally for the cultural geography and history of the Upper Missouri.

Evidence of human community in central Montana dates to 12,700 years ago when Anzick Child – the oldest known burial in North America – and his relations flourished in the region. The ancient presence of today’s ancestors can still be read on the landscape and seen in the unbroken lineage of archeological and material culture artifacts protected, displayed, and archived in the region’s museums, libraries, and sites. The most significant of these is First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park, a National Historic Landmark.

The Upper Missouri River region has long had a symbolic, sacred, cultural significance to the First Peoples – the nature of the landscape created by the river and falls also led to places such as First

Peoples Buffalo Jump National Historic Landmark, the Giant Springs, and the river fords that opened the Sun River Valley and the Judith Basin.

Some of the nation's founding stories of undaunted courage, rugged individualism, and self-reliance hold meaning only in relationship and contrast to the First Peoples of this region. Primary images of a collective American identity, such as Little Dog and Mountain Chief, are rooted in the Upper Missouri River region of Montana.

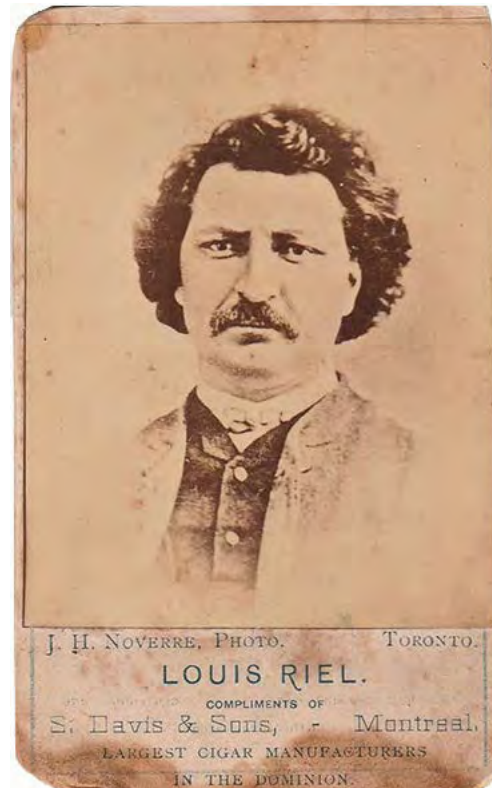
Furthermore, this Upper Missouri River region embodies the places, artifacts, documents, and surviving memory of the mountain man and fur and robe trade era, Lewis and Clark and the history of national expansion, the Indian Wars and military presence, the epic occupations of mercantilism, mining, logging, ranching, farming, and the globally recognized historic, traditional, and contemporary tribal and Western art. Each of these threads woven into the national fabric is replete with insights for understanding the transformative history of Euro-American incursion upon native life as they succeeded in maintaining their status as indigenous sovereign nations.

One story that touches this region is that of Metis leader, Louis Riel, who was teaching at St. Peter's Mission when he was recruited to lead a rebellion in the Canadian Red River. The story of Riel and the Metis is integral to the history of western Canada and to present-day Metis who live in Central Montana.

The Upper Missouri plain supported millions of bison, which provided a plentiful resource for indigenous peoples. In a region with the most extensive indigenous bison culture population in North America, the Upper Missouri is still Indian Country. Multiple indigenous societies and languages, with their distinctive narratives, traditional arts, ceremonial calendars and rituals, customs, and lifeways, survive and intersect throughout this region. Because of the significance and influence of modern indigenous cultures, Montana and the Upper Missouri River region led the nation through a constitutionally-mandated *Indian Education for All*, a statewide educational ethic for openness and truth and reconciliation between the state and national societies and indigenous sovereign nations.



The First Peoples Buffalo Jump, a National Historic Landmark and Montana State Park, is the largest bison jump in North America. The site was used by the Blackfoot Confederacy and many other tribes for millennia. *Courtesy of Montana State Parks*



Louis Riel taught at the St. Peter's Mission boys school before he left to lead the Metis and Cree in the 1885 Red River Rebellion.

Courtesy of Ken Robison

Theme 2 Resources

Although only the Little Shell of the Chippewa have their headquarters in the region today, all the tribes identified above shared the Upper Missouri region as a hunting ground throughout the prehistoric and historic eras. The Missouri River and the fords that gave access to the lands on both sides were critical resources for the tribes, but First People's Buffalo Jump National Historic Landmark, part of Montana's state park system, is the most significant remnant of this past. The site was used by four tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, known as the Nisitapi (Siksika or Blackfoot; Kainai or Blood; Pikanii or Northern Peigan; and Pikuni, Southern Piegan, or Blackfeet), as well as the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille, Shoshone, Bannock, Nez Perce, Gros Ventre, Crow, Assiniboine, and Little Shell. Initially listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Ulm Pishkun in 1974, the site was designated an NHL in 2015. The site is one of the oldest, largest, and best-preserved cliff jump locations on the North American continent, and serves as a window into nearly 6,000 years of indigenous culture. It includes stone surface architecture that helped channel bison to the cliff's edge, stratified bison bone deposits, several tipi ring concentrations, and substantial evidence of ceremonies. Together, all of these nationally significant archaeological resources underscore the paramount position of this site among Northern Plains bison culture.

Many sites in the region provide an opportunity to understand the impact of Euro-American incursion upon native life. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, described in more detail under Theme 3, follows the route that resulted in opening the West to American trade and settlement, setting the stage for a convergence of cultures. The old fort within Fort Benton National Historic Landmark and Fort Shaw, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as well as the trails and trading networks they protected, were established as the nation moved westward. The Fort Benton Trading Post, including the historic original blockhouse, is well-interpreted under the management of the Rivers and Plains Society. While some interpretation exists for the other sites and trails, there remains a significant opportunity to expand education and interpretation. With the exception of the monument to the 1904 World Champion Girls' Basketball Team and five new interpretive signs, Fort Shaw, especially, has substantial preservation and interpretation needs.



The St. Peter's Mission and Ursuline Complex thrived between the early 1870s and the early 1900s. The remaining church still holds services. *Courtesy of the Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission*

Jesuit priests ultimately launched their Christianizing campaign among the Blackfeet at St. Peter's Mission near the Mullan Military Road in 1874. The mission evolved into a school for indigenous children with the help of the Ursuline nuns, who established Mt. Angela at the site in 1884. The school for girls opened in 1885 with 11 pupils (all Blackfeet) and grew to over 200 students between 1890 and 1896. St. Peter's Mission Church and Cemetery – both of which are listed in the National Register – and

the remains of Mt. Angela serve as reminders of the transformative meeting of cultures in this region. The Ursulines moved their motherhouse and boarding school for girls to Great Falls in 1912. The Ursuline Academy is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and contains a significant archive containing records from area Missions.

Historic, traditional, and contemporary tribal and Western art in the region comprise another class of significant resources. The continued creation of tribal art is critical for the intergenerational sharing of centuries-old practices. The artwork created by native and non-native peoples also plays a role in documenting the tribes' traditions and histories. Internationally renowned artists like Karl Bodmer, John Mix Stanley, and Charlie Russell captured on canvas a bison culture that was fast disappearing by the time they bore witness to it. Russell's art often portrayed historical events from the point of view of native cultures. The C. M. Russell Museum, which includes the artist's home and studio NHL, is the most important repository of paintings, drawings, sculpture, and traditional native arts in the region, and is recognized as one of the nation's best Western Art museums.



Members of the newly federally recognized Little Shell tribe at their annual powwow at First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

Blackfeet Elders, led by Chief Earl Old Person, participated in the 150th Anniversary of the Lame Bull Treaty at Old Fort Benton. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

Today, the Little Shell Chippewa, who received federal recognition in December 2019, is headquartered in Great Falls in Cascade County. Their annual powwow, which draws several hundred native and non-native people each August, is the region's most important event for sharing and perpetuating living traditions. The museums in Fort Benton, as well as Summer Celebration held each June in the community, with thousands commemorating the fur and robe trade era of shared culture among native, Euro-American, and Canadian peoples.

Theme 3 – The Lewis and Clark Expedition

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806, was a U.S. military expedition tasked by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase and the Pacific Northwest. The Expedition left a rich written record of the flora, fauna, ethnography, and geology of the lands through which they traveled, and served as the vanguard of exploration and settlement in the American West. The Missouri River was the highway for the Lewis and Clark Expedition and offered the best hope of locating a northwest passage. At the Marias River confluence, the Expedition correctly chose to follow the true Missouri. Then, they faced the daunting challenge of portaging around the Great Falls. The Expedition's experiences in this region proved crucial to the success of their journey.



Portraits of Captain Meriwether Lewis (1807) and William Clark (ca.1810) by Charles Willson Peale.
Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park

Clark's hand drawn map of the Great Falls of the Missouri.
The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Moulton
1983

The 1804-1806 mission of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, formally known as the Corps of Discovery, was to follow the Missouri River to its source, documenting the landscape, collecting flora and fauna, and meeting indigenous peoples. The members of the Expedition left the first written description of the Upper Missouri River region as part of the journey through the lands of the Louisiana Purchase - the most significant land acquisition in the history of the United States. The party had 33 people, including soldiers, civilians, Metis, Clark's slave York, and two interpreters – French Canadian Toussaint Charbonneau and his Shoshone wife Sacagawea, and their infant son Jean Baptiste.

The Expedition navigated along the Upper Missouri River and tributaries, following today's Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail through the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument. The expedition's first critical challenge was successfully determining the course of three prairie rivers – the Missouri, the Marias, and the Teton. A wrong decision would have jeopardized the entire Expedition.



While the Lewis and Clark Expedition represented the first Euro-American presence in the region, they encountered commonly used indigenous trails and a geography marked by shifting political alliances, trade, raiding, and warfare. The Expedition followed the Missouri River through this area, but the lack of contact with natives was a growing concern, as the Expedition needed horses to cross the Rocky Mountains.

The Shoshone interpreter Sacagawea, the only woman among the 33 members of the expedition, played an integral role in the success of the Expedition. In addition to her language skills, her very presence contributed to the Expedition's success, as having a woman and child in the party helped assure native people they encountered of the Expedition's peaceful intentions. Moreover, her ability to recognize landmarks from her childhood was critical for navigation at key points in the journey, and her familiarity with edible plants and roots helped feed everyone. When she became sick at Lower Portage Camp, curing her illness became paramount, so she could resume her duties as mother, wife, and aid in the necessary task of obtaining Shoshone horses. Men were dispatched to a nearby sulphur spring to bring back its healing waters.

When the Expedition encountered five waterfalls on the Missouri River, they portaged the 18-miles around the Great Falls of the Missouri in about two arduous and back-breaking weeks. The portage was made even more difficult by broken terrain, prickly pear cactus, hailstorms, and numerous grizzly bears. Because of this portage and the Expedition's resulting in-depth knowledge of the region, they spent a month along this stretch of the Missouri River on their outbound trip and returned again to the region on their journey home in the summer of 1806. The portage route the Expedition followed around the falls is now designated the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark and is a part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. According to the revised NHL nomination (August 1984), the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark consists of two discontinuous sections of the trail that remain largely as Lewis and Clark might have known them.



The mouth of Portage or Belt Creek and the Missouri River at Sulphur Springs, where Lewis found healing waters for Sacagawea, is part of Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark and a High Potential Historic Site along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

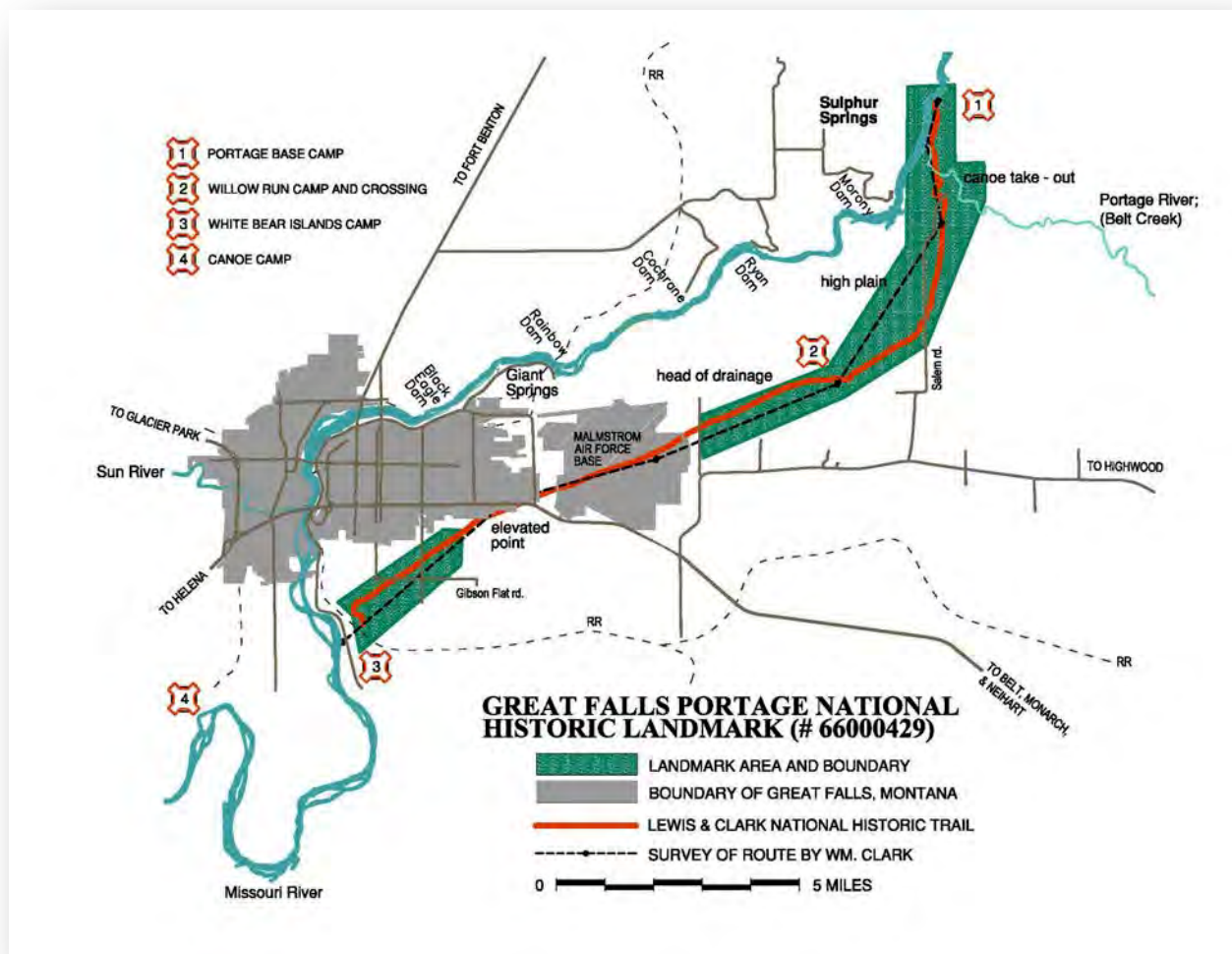
Courtesy of Ken Robison

After their return to St. Louis in 1806, the Expedition's account was widely circulated in the media throughout the country, and enticed additional explorers to seek out the Upper Missouri River region. That, in turn, led to the expansion of the beaver fur and bison robe trade in the area, as well as further exploration and eventual settlement. The Lewis and Clark journals and the stories of the Expedition inspired artists like Charles M. Russell, and developers like Paris Gibson, the founder of Great Falls.

Even today, the Lewis and Clark journals lure thousands of visitors to walk, ride or canoe in the footsteps of these explorers.

Theme 3 Resources

The proposed NHA contains the most concentrated group of sites in the nation that are associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, including several of national significance because of their critical importance to the journey. The western and eastern journey routes both cross through the region, part of the 4,900 mile Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail designated in 1978 to commemorate the exploration of America's newly-acquired Louisiana Territory and beyond. The trail, which stretches from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Astoria, Oregon, highlights the scientific knowledge and the political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental changes that followed in the Corps of Discovery's wake. The trail is part of the National Trails Program of the National Park Service, one of the first such designated routes in the country. Per the amended National Trails System Act (1983), management plans for national historic trails identify High Potential Sites, which are sites related to the route that provide an opportunity to interpret the historic significance of a trail during its period of use. Historic significance, scenic quality, relative freedom from incursion, and the presence of historic remnants contribute to a particular place being designated as a High Potential Site.



The Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark was designated to honor the undaunted courage of the Lewis & Clark Expedition for their portage around the falls of the Missouri. *Courtesy of Ken Sievert*

Along the National Historic Trail, the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark commemorates the arduous portage around the falls in the summer of 1805. According to the revised NHL nomination (1984), the Great Falls Portage National Historic Landmark consists of 7,700 acres in two discontinuous sections, which remain primarily as Lewis and Clark might have known them; both sections are identified as High Potential Sites. Significant events occurred at sites within the NHL Boundaries.

One such site in the Lower Portage section is the sulphur spring whose waters helped Sacagawea recover from a serious illness.

The Upper Portage section contains the remains of a camp where the Expedition stayed in July of 1805 and again in July of 1806. Lewis cached botanical samples there so he could retrieve them on his return. He also left behind the experimental iron frame boat built to his specifications in Pittsburgh. The Great Falls Portage NHL is among the few sections of the historic route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail that can be identified and mapped using William Clark's original survey notes. The designation as an NHL was based upon the national significance of the event and the high integrity of the resource – the largely unimproved landscape within which the event took place.

Decision Point, the confluence of the combined Marias-Teton and Missouri rivers, is also recognized by the National Park Service as a High Potential Historic Site along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, and lies just within the western edge of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument under the Bureau of Land Management. The site marks a decision the outcome of which may have made the difference between success and failure for the Expedition – choosing the wrong route would have cost the expedition valuable time, potentially derailing it completely if the delay resulted in a winter crossing of the Rocky Mountains.



Designated a Montana State Park and a High Potential Historic Site, Tower Rock caused Lewis to write “At this place there is a large rock of 400 feet high which stands immediately in the gap which the Missouri makes on its passage from the mountains... this rock I call the tower.” (July 13, 1805) *Courtesy of Montana State Parks*

Tower Rock, a Montana state park, is also listed in National Park Service planning as a High Potential Historic Site. It stands at the visual boundary where the Missouri River flows from the rugged terrain characteristic of the Rocky Mountains to the broad, flat plains where bison roamed. Meriwether Lewis' trek up the landscape landmark is another iconic moment in the expedition. Not only did this site provide the first glimpse of the mountainous territory ahead, but it also represented the expedition's leave-taking of the bountiful plains they compared to the Garden of Eden.

Three other places within the proposed boundary are listed as High Potential Sites. Rainbow Falls was dubbed Handsom Falls by Lewis in his admiring description in June 1805; today, it is overtopped by the hydro-electric producing Rainbow Dam. Giant Springs is a first magnitude freshwater spring that adds 150 million gallons of water to the Missouri River each day from the Madison Aquifer. It was visited by both Lewis and Clark and is the origin of the Roe River, which flows 200 feet before emptying into the Missouri. The National Register site of the spring is within Giant Springs State Park, from which an extensive network of recreational trails are accessible. Square Butte, a highly visible natural landmark that Lewis wrote about on both directions of his journey, is a laccolith that was formed millions of years ago by an intrusion magma through weaker layers of rock. Privately owned, the butte retains strong visual integrity on the landscape.

The nationally significant history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is currently that which enjoys the most extensive interpretation in the region. Meaningful public-private partnerships are built around sharing this story. In 1998, the Lewis and Clark National Forest and local partners opened the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, a facility that houses the National Historic Trail's largest interpretive center, the headquarters of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, and the William P. Sherman Library and Archives. Annually in June, the Lewis and Clark Festival held here includes the Portage Route Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, the National Forest Service, and other local partners, drawing more than a thousand participants. At Decision Point and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center, the Bureau of Land Management plays a role in interpreting the Lewis and Clark expedition. Despite the thorough treatment of the Corps of Discovery's history, the density of expedition-related sites in the region leaves many opportunities for conservation and interpretation.

Theme 4 – A Far Distant Land

The remote landscape of the Upper Missouri River region is etched with the history of an expanding and developing nation. Fort Benton opened Montana Territory to evolving fur and bison robe trade, transportation, commerce, settlement, and ranching.

The successful return of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and circulation of their richly detailed and widely published journals enticed other exploration in the Upper Missouri River region. By 1831, St. Louis based fur trading firms established Fort Piegan, the first of a series of trading posts on the Upper Missouri facilitating contact between traders and indigenous peoples. Settlement could not happen until immigrants learned to live with the nomadic indigenous peoples of the area, mainly the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Driven by the extremely lucrative fur and bison robe trade, construction on Fort Benton began in 1846, and the fort came to life with the first residents in 1847. Due to this auspicious beginning, the community of Fort Benton is the oldest continuing settlement in the state. The fort catered to traders, hunters, adventurers, land-seekers, desperadoes, and others mixing with indigenous peoples. On the river beside the fort, heavily loaded mackinaws and keelboats transported hides and furs to the "states."

Some fifty years after the Corps of Discovery expedition, the U.S. Congress authorized four surveys to determine a route for the Pacific transcontinental railroads. Isaac Ingalls Stevens, the first Governor of the newly established Washington Territory, was selected to serve as Commander of the Pacific Railroad Survey's northern route between the 47th and 49th parallels.

His duties also included serving as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the region. Stevens was the architect of the Lane Bull Treaty in 1855 between indigenous tribes and the U.S. government, which led to annual Indian annuities and establishment of the Blackfeet Indian Agency in Fort Benton and a Government Farm at Sun River Crossing. Stevens enlisted John Mullan to explore much of the land along the proposed route for a railroad, and as a result of his work on the survey, Mullan was chosen in 1857 to begin construction of a 624-mile military wagon road through the region, connecting Fort Benton on the Missouri River with Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River.

The first military use of the new road was Major George Blake's First Dragoons in 1860. The Mullan Military Wagon Road completed the Northwest Passage through the Rocky Mountains, the Northwest's first interstate highway.



By 1878, Fort Benton was a bustling community where steamboats carried miners and supplies to the Montana Territory. *Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center*

The steamboat Josephine at the Fort Benton levee, one of many steamers that plied the Missouri to the head of navigation. *Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center*



Gold strikes in southwest Montana Territory (1864) fueled the Upper Missouri River steamboat era (1860-1890), bringing a surge of activity leading to the establishment of the town of Fort Benton. Steamboats transported thousands of passengers and massive cargo from St. Louis up the Missouri to Fort Benton. As settlement and commerce increased in the region, military protection became necessary. The 1st US Volunteer Infantry (Galvanized Yankees) arrived at Fort Benton in the spring of 1865, becoming the first U.S. Army unit stationed in Montana Territory. A series of posts followed along the upper Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, including Fort Shaw (1867) in the Sun River valley, to protect commerce and settlers along the Mullan Road.

Settlers, miners, and soldiers embarked on roads and trails from Fort Benton. Like spokes on a wagon wheel, transportation routes radiated from Fort Benton in every direction. The Mullan Road evolved into the Benton to Helena Road, while the Whoop-Up Trail led to the settlement of western Canada.

Theme 4 Resources

During the roughly 80 years between Lewis and Clark’s passage through the region and the arrival of the railroad in the 1890s, the regional locus of activity for the expanding American nation was Fort Benton. From fort and trading post to steamboat town and trail hub, the city lived up to its nickname as the “Birthplace of Montana.” The majority of sites in the region associated with this era are located in or near the modern-day community of Fort Benton. The Fort Benton National Historic Landmark District was designated in 1961 under the “Western Expansion” theme, with “Transportation” as a subtheme; the listing was updated, and the boundary clarified in 2012.



The Fort Benton National Historic Landmark District lies along the Missouri River waterfront.
Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center

The Grand Union Hotel stands as a landmark in Fort Benton, offering the finest accommodations to travelers past and present. *Courtesy of Ken Sievert*



Its period of significance stretches from the 1840s to about 1890, after which occurred a shift in transportation from steamboats to rail. The NHL district includes 13 contributing resources related to trade, settlement, and commerce during the steamboat era – the original Fort Benton Blockhouse and Fort, City Hall/The Old Engine House, the levee and bridge, the Grand Union and Pacific hotels, banking and mercantile establishments, and the home of prominent citizen I.G. Baker, who began a grocery and mercantile store in Fort Benton that lives on in today’s Hudson Bay Company, Lord & Taylor, and Saks, Inc.

Another class of resources associated with the expansion into a far distant land are the trade and military trails that extended from Fort Benton.



Wagons on Baker Street headed out on the trails that began in Fort Benton.
Courtesy of Overholser Historical Research Center

These include the Mullan Military Wagon Road (a portion of which was listed in the National Register in 1975 as part of the Old U.S. Highway 91 Historic District), the Whoop-Up Trail, and the Fort Benton-Fort MacLeod Trail. International collaboration to market these and connect them to other significant western transportation routes through the Old Forts Trails initiative is underway, but more preservation, interpretation, and coordination are possible. Furthermore, the Upper Missouri River Breaks Interpretive Center in Fort Benton interprets the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail, serving as a National Park Service passport location along the trail. Other opportunities exist to expand the story of this transportation network, such as the presently unmarked Riplinger Trail, which begins in Sun River and stretches north to Fort Whoop-Up.

Northwest of the Great Falls of the Missouri, in the Sun River Valley, a third group of resources is clustered. Fort Shaw was established along the Mullan Road by the United States Army in 1867, guarding that route until 1891. Following the Army occupation, Fort Shaw served as the Indian Industrial School for Native American children from 1892 to 1910. The Fort Shaw Historic District and Cemetery were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Other sites in the region reflect the earliest days of ranchers and stockmen. The homestead belonging to rancher and businessman Robert Vaughn is one such place. Listed in the National Register, Vaughn's ranch was the first homestead in what was then Chouteau County (1869). The stone barn built by J.C. Adams, a Fort Benton wagon boss who became a rancher to supply Fort Shaw's beef, is another. The only Romanesque Revival stone barn west of the Mississippi, the barn was built in 1882 and listed in the National Register in 1974. The magnificent structure presents an opportunity for preservation, interpretation, and economic development. Finally, the Sun River Crossing had been in use since prehistoric times before it was surveyed as part of the Mullan Road. The site served as a trading post reliant on exchange with the Blackfeet, a stagecoach stop, and a busy toll bridge over which passed goods heading for southwest Montana's gold camps.



A re-enactment featuring Capt. Charles Rawn, 7th Infantry, at the Regimental Commander's Quarters at historic Fort Shaw on the 150th anniversary in 2017. The Commander's Quarters, one of three adobe buildings remaining today, was constructed in 1867. *Courtesy of Ken Robison*

Finally, the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center is a modern facility, a public-private partnership among the Bureau of Land Management, the City of Fort Benton, and the River and Plains Society, and situated on the banks of the Missouri in Fort Benton. Overlooking the striated natural features characteristic of the Breaks, the center contains information on steamboating, trade and trails, cultural conflict, native species, and recreation.

Theme 5 – The New West

The 1890s saw dramatic growth in commerce, settlement, and industrial development fueled by coal mining and new electrical power from dams near the fledgling city of Great Falls. The arrival of railroads sparked both industrial development and an agricultural homestead boom.

The century of change rolled on, and as transportation moved from the water to rails, the way in which people used the vast landscape of the Upper Missouri River region continued to evolve. Commerce, the government, the military, miners, and settlers all followed separate paths in their exploitation of the vast resources of the West. Sometimes those paths overlapped, sometimes they came into conflict, but always they left cultural, economic, and environmental change in their wake.

The discovery of coal in massive layers from Belt to Stockett to Sand Coulee fueled new railroads, which in turn opened land and communities to industrial growth. Similarly, the discovery of silver in the Little Belt Mountains brought stampedes that led to mining camps at Barker, Hughesville, and Neihart, bringing new demands for Fort Benton commerce.

Drawn by Lewis and Clark's description of the Great Falls of the Missouri River, Paris Gibson visualized a community as an industrial mega-power. He called on a Minneapolis friend, James J. Hill, to partner in the enterprise, with the vision of Gibson and the finances of Hill. By the end of 1884, the population of the newly platted town was approximately 200. James J. Hill's St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railroad arrived in Great Falls in 1887.

The Great Falls Water Power and Townsite Company (GFWPTC) was incorporated in 1887, basically to take over the lands and power sites held by Hill. At the first annual meeting held in late 1887, Hill held 49,980 shares of the total 50,000. The main business of the corporation was selling lots and by 1890 there were 3,979 people in residence. Around the same time Gibson organized the Great Falls Electric

Light and Gas Company which provided electricity from a small steam plant for a few downtown businesses and some city arc lights.

The big breakthrough for the GFWPTC came when the the Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company purchased nearly 500 acres for a smelting operation on the north bank of the Missouri to be powered by a dam immediately above Black Eagle Falls to be built by the GFWPTC.

The townsite, electrical and refining/smelting companies grew, merged and changed over time until by 1900 Great Falls population was nearly 15,000; the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACM), where some of the great metallurgical advances of the 20th century occurred, occupied the smelter site; and the Montana Power Company of New Jersey, powered what had become one of the largest single industrial customers of any American utility, the ACM Company. By harnessing the power of the Mighty Mo', Great Falls developed the electrical power to mine, smelt, and transport Butte's copper and other regional minerals.

Town and countryside continued to develop in tandem. Growing settlement and overhunting in Montana contributed to the near-extinction of bison, a major factor in the region's transition from bison to beef. During the open range ranching era from the 1870s to the early 1900s, massive cattle herds in the tens of thousands roamed the open range, followed by large flocks of sheep. Charles M. Russell captured the "West that Was" in stories and "word pictures," chronicled by a vast collection of more than 4,000 works of art.



Russell captured one of the many challenges of hauling freight overland, that of controlling a team of horses with a single "jerkline." *Charles Marion Russell, "The Jerkline," 1912, oil on canvas, 24.25 x 36 inches, C.M. Russell Museum Collection, Gift of Fred Birch*

Farming followed the open range era. Wheat flourished in years with good moisture as the land was plowed, and the railroads provided fast and reliable shipment of the harvest to markets. The land's geomorphology was and is exceptional for wheat, earning the region between Great Falls, Havre, and Conrad the distinction of being Montana's Golden Triangle. The first flour mill in the Great Falls area was the Cataract Mill, built in 1885.

When the Homestead Act of 1862 was enlarged by the U.S. Congress in 1909, it caused a tsunami of settlement in the Upper Missouri River region. The Great Falls Land Office, which served North Central Montana, processed between 1,000 and 1,500 filings a month, and the Great Northern Railroad transported over 1,000 immigrant train cars in the spring of 1910. The Great Northern Railroad led the promotion of the area with a vigorous campaign extolling the virtues of dry-land farming and offering immigrants low fares.

Agriculture required consistent hydration of the land. In 1907, the United States Reclamation Service approved the development of the Sun River irrigation system to water vast agricultural production on the plains. The system was seen as necessary to support agriculture that could, in turn, sustain the growth of Great Falls as major city. One of the most unique engineering feats in the country at the time, construction began in 1908 and continued in phases over several decades. Dry-land farmers were less supportive of the system than the region's industrialists. However, the region underwent severe agricultural depression 1917-1923 during years of drought, convincing residents of the system's importance.

The 20th century saw continued growth of all aspects of the region. Great Falls grew exponentially as the "Electric City" became the "powerhouse" to refine and produce copper wire, cable, ball bearings, and more.

The expanding industries made Cascade County a magnet for immigrants looking for mill, industry and mining jobs. Many nationalities with their visible ethnic difference melded to create the community of Black Eagle, immediately adjacent to the ACM Company smelter site on the north bank of the Missouri. By 1920, ACM at Black Eagle also contained the largest zinc plant in the world, producing half of the world's zinc. Down to the present, the falls have been a continuous and renewable source of hydroelectricity.



A high speed grain loader on the rail line starts Chouteau County wheat on a journey across the globe.

Courtesy of Gayle Fisher

Agriculture – farming and ranching – remains a mainstay of the regional economy and an essential component of cultural identity. The Golden Triangle continues to produce quality grains that have spurred the development of numerous mills and agricultural manufacturing facilities (pasta, malting, biofuels, and heritage grains). The region is a national leader in grain production, including hard red winter wheat and malt barley, as well as production of beef cattle and seed stock capital for registered cattle breeding.

Agriculture is also central to the culture and economy of the Hutterites, an Anabaptist religious movement whose people fled Europe to escape persecution. Cascade and Chouteau counties are home to seven Hutterite colonies, and an eighth colony is situated along the northwestern border of Cascade and Teton counties. The first Montana colony was established in 1911. Today, men wearing traditional black trousers and hats and women in their brightly colored aprons and matching kerchiefs are a common sight in local stores and farm implement businesses in the area. Their longstanding relationship with the land and the Germanic language and heritage they have retained has created a unique blend of new and old traditions throughout the Big Sky Country NHA.

Farming and ranching provide Hutterites' primary source of income. Using modern technology, they produce and sell meat, milk, and vegetables to local grocers, and men hawk these items along with homemade noodles and baked goods at the local summer farmers markets in Cascade and Chouteau counties. A recent economic study prepared by the University of Montana's Business and Economic Research and Montana State University's Department of Economics and Agricultural Economics found Montana's Hutterite communities collectively contribute \$365.3 million annually to Montana's economy and provide 2,200 permanent jobs. Hutterite agricultural operations produce 90% of Montana-grown hogs, 34% of the state's dairy, and 16% of the state's poultry. The Lehrerleut Hutterite colonies in Cascade County produce 95% of the state's eggs. In September 2017, a partnership of 30 Hutterite communities opened a \$9 million egg grading facility in Great Falls, processing more than 280 million eggs annually for national markets through Costco and Alberstons, among other retailers.

Later in the 20th century, the Upper Missouri region became a place of great strategic value to national security with Great Falls Lend-Lease and bomber training airbases during World War II, and nuclear missile sites as America entered the Cold War and the atomic era. Today, Malmstrom Air Force Base is one of the most important strategic military defense sites in the nation.

Theme 5 Resources

The arrival of the railroad in the late 1880s permanently changed transportation and settlement in the region. The railroad could move people, stock, and goods overland quickly and economically in all seasons, supplanting river transport and opening previously inaccessible land. The harnessing of the falls for industry ignited development in Great Falls. The towns of Belt, Cascade, Monarch, and Neihart followed. Across the region, numerous properties and districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places stand testament to this era of dramatic development. Because so many of these late 19th and early 20th century resources are extant, the potential for projects in preservation, interpretation, and economic development is substantial.

The Charles M. Russell House and Studio National Historic Landmark is significant to the history of the United States for the contribution made by the art of Russell in establishing the image of the West and is the most significant resource associated with this theme. Charlie Russell's art beautifully portrayed big sky landscapes, at the same time chronicling the whole history of the Upper Missouri River region and the cultures that lived here. The landscape of the Upper Missouri River region is ever-present in his works. Russell began painting right around the birth of this New West. Russell arrived in Montana in 1880, when first peoples still depended on the bison hunt, and cowboys herded cattle and sheep on the open range. He witnessed the end of this way of life, expertly capturing, celebrating, and critiquing through his art. A tiny cottage in Cascade, where Charlie Russell and his wife Nancy lived at the beginning of their marriage, contributes to his story, as does the NHL house (1900) and log cabin studio (1903) that is now part of the C.M. Russell Museum.



Nancy Russell reported that Charlie never finished a picture anywhere else after his studio was completed in 1903. Today their home and Russell's studio are a National Historic Landmark owned by the C.M. Russell Museum. *Courtesy of Ellen Sievert*

The series of five dams captured water's power to transform raw materials from Montana's mines into industrial treasures and expanded production to meet the demands of further development in the state, including municipal growth, railway electrification and large irrigation projects. The dams, powerhouses and transmission lines have the potential to add significantly to the history of the industry that "wired the world." The Anaconda Company and Black Eagle community depended on the copper wire produced with hydroelectricity, leaving behind a strong legacy of community pride. This industry catalyzed development throughout the rest of the Great Falls community, including the Central Business Historic District, with many commercial and public buildings among its 99 contributing resources. Also significant is the Great Falls Railroad Historic District, including towering twin depots from the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad and the Great Northern Railroad, along with the Arvon Block and three dozen other contributing properties. The copper-domed Cascade County Courthouse is the centerpiece of the 257 contributing properties in the Great Falls Northside Residential District. The Eastside Neighborhood Historic District has 36 primarily craftsman-style residential contributing properties that date to the first half of the 20th century. The much smaller West Bank and Great Falls High School districts are also part of this era's expansion.

The rise of ranching and farming, including the homestead boom, is reflected in resources such as the North Montana Fairgrounds Historic District in Great Falls, the Sun River Reclamation Area/Greenfields Irrigation District in the Sun River Valley, and the Korpavara Finnish homesteads. Today, the living traditions of both ranching and agriculture are seen in the large farms and ranches still in operation in the region, the Golden Triangle that produces some of the nation's highest quality wheat, and mills such as Montana Flour and Grain, whose extremely high-quality flour is in demand around the world.

In Belt, the Commercial Historic District dates to 1896. Among its 15 contributing resources, the crown of Castner Street is the Belt Performing Arts Center, the old Knights of Pythias Theater, restored in 2019. Other development in Belt is following. To the south, along King's Hill Scenic Byway, the mountainous terrain rises toward mining territory in Monarch and Neihart. In Monarch, a community-based group is leading preservation of the Monarch Depot, which is under consideration for National Register listing.



The Monarch Depot, under restoration by the Monarch-Niehart Historical Group, represents the opening of the West through rail transportation. *Courtesy of Ellen Sievert*



The Belt Performing Arts Center, restored in 2019, is home to the Belt Valley Shakespeare Players and hosts numerous other cultural arts and educational activities throughout the year. *Courtesy of Amy Olson*

A Conceptual Boundary

The proposed Big Sky Country NHA boundary defines a landscape that encompasses the history and significance described in the previous pages. The boundary includes all of Cascade County, as well as the Missouri River corridor in Chouteau County to Decision Point at the mouth of the Marias and Teton rivers.

Elements to Consider in Defining a Boundary

The process of establishing this conceptual boundary for the Big Sky Country NHA has been a work in progress from the conception of the idea to create an NHA. Initially, the project's study region was broader in size than the proposed area, taking in all of Cascade and Chouteau Counties; the part of Lewis and Clark County along the Missouri River to the Gates of the Mountains; and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Partly due to public input and internal discussion among the UMRHAPC Board, a narrower project area was proposed that followed the Missouri River corridor from Fort Benton to the Gates of the Mountains and also took in tributaries Belt Creek and the Sun and Smith Rivers. As the feasibility study unfolded, themes and resources were more clearly articulated first through a management workshop, and subsequently with review by the subject matter experts. Based on these developments, as well as feedback on the narrow boundary presented at the first public meeting, the UMRHAPC proposed another revised boundary. The new, revised boundary took in not only the river and key resources but also the landscape features captured in Russell's art and the vast spaces in between where today's Montanans live their daily lives imbued with the history and heritage of the region. The proposed boundary and the rationale behind it were shared with the public at the second and third rounds of public meetings. This process of carefully examining, and then layering upon each other the region's traits, traditions, and activities that are important to the region's heritage, resulted in a boundary that is comprehensive, easily defined, and defensible.

Consideration was taken into account for historical, cultural, natural, and recreational resources, the story and historical narrative as it relates to these resources, the pattern of human activity on the landscape, and natural and physical features that may create obvious limits for the study area when drawn on a map. As stated earlier in the Feasibility Study, private property rights are not impacted by land's inclusion in an NHA boundary. The board emphasized the importance of private property rights by passing a resolution in 2017, acknowledging their respect of landowners' rights to make all decisions about their own property (Appendix VIII). In the end, the determination for the proposed boundary, resulted from the examination of the function of human activity that defined central Montana, both historically and in the current day, establishing the rationale for its delineation.

Historical and Functional Elements of Central Montana

The spatial complexity of Big Sky Country NHA in central Montana includes the prehistoric and historic bison culture of Montana's indigenous peoples, historical events from the Lewis & Clark Expedition, industry including mining and smelting, agriculture and ranching, across a vast region that initially required the study area to be inclusive enough to reflect the historical and functional interrelationships of the study area. These relationships, when overlaid with the results of the resource assessments, helped narrow the scope of the region during the planning for the feasibility study. The entire region was studied, however, to ensure that the predominant history and unique sense of the place were not diffused or lost.

Geophysical and Topographical Aspects of Central Montana

The physical complexity of central Montana is a single vast landscape comprised of different geological features – prairies, canyons, buttes, rivers, mountains – and dotted with communities that range from rural agrarian villages to towns and urban areas. The region is interconnected by a system of roads, rivers, and other land-based features. It was determined, early in the feasibility study planning process, that to base the boundary solely on a physical resource – such as a road or a river – may or may not work. Therefore, a proposed study area that followed the Missouri River and its nearby watershed did not include all of the critical historical resources or human activity within the region. The Missouri River, therefore, became a structure – a spine – from which the resources of the region were plotted, creating a skeletal framework that supported the rationale for the refinement and redrawing of the study area.

Culture – The Human Dimension of Central Montana

People define the places where they live, and it is this pattern of human activity upon the landscape that creates the cultural identity of a region. It is often their view or their association with a locale that makes them incorporate their home or community into a more extensive physical delineation.

In the Big Sky Country NHA, the interconnected relationship of people to the land has existed for thousands of years. Indigenous people were the first to live and work the lands of central Montana, as seasonal residences, hunting grounds, and sacred sites. The interaction between native peoples and the land continues to help shape and define the unique characteristics and traditions and unique cultural characteristics and traditions of central Montana.

Historically, specific cultural groups were drawn to settle the lands of Montana, adapting to a landscape and environment drastically different from eastern North America. The advancement of a growing nation created an intersection of native cultures with those from other parts of the world, sometimes coexisting, sometimes clashing, setting off a chain reaction of events throughout modern history that forever changed the land of Big Sky County NHA and the peoples that live there today.

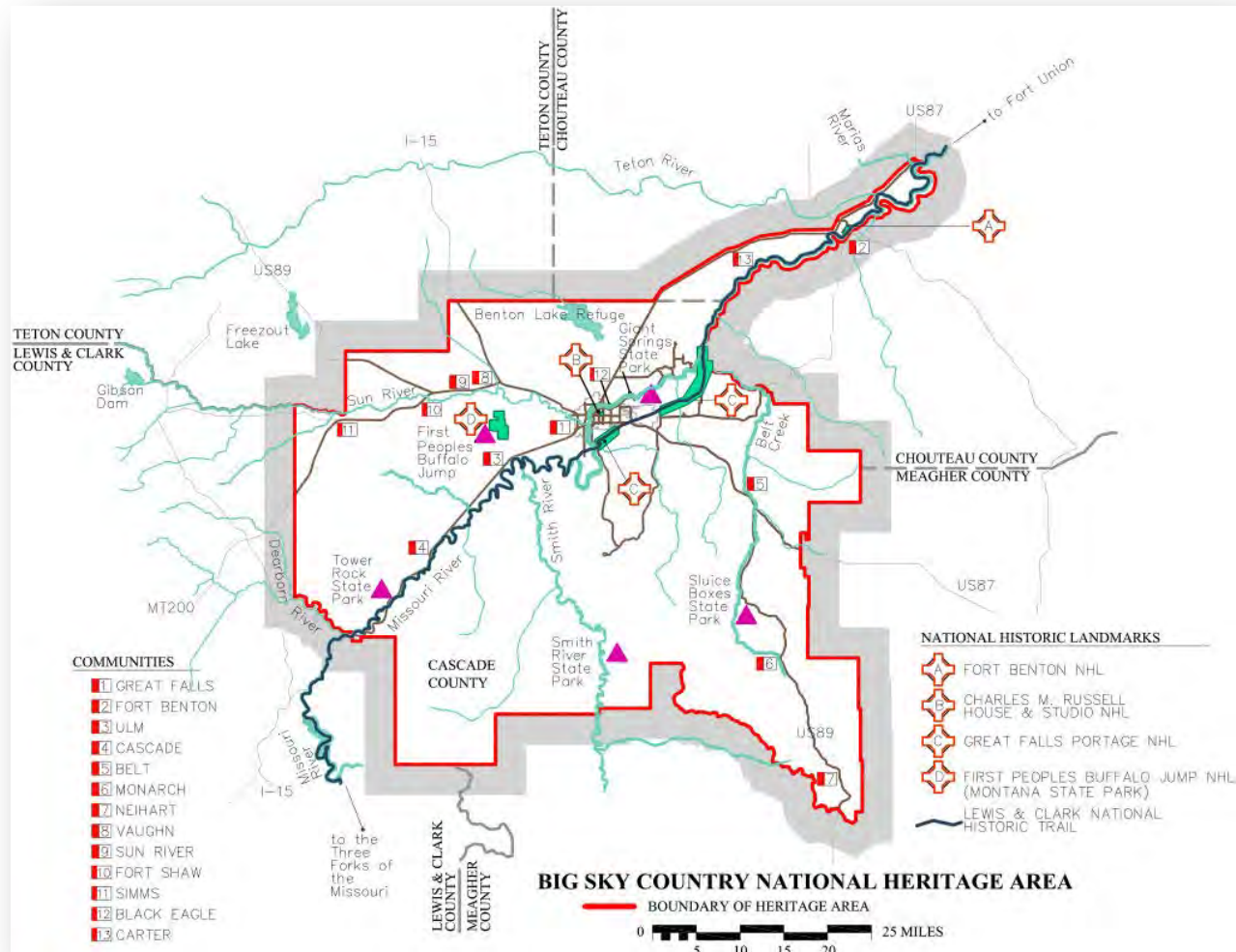
The traditions of people have co-mingled and been handed down over generations, contributing to a sense of community and place that characterizes the distinct identity of Big Sky Country NHA today. An examination of how people associate with each other within the region, historically and currently, helped define the interrelationships of human activity and define a boundary based on cultural traditions, settlement patterns, and work.

The Political Demarcations of Central Montana

Political boundaries are often the most convenient demarcations for NHAs. They are not ideal boundaries, however, because they are drawn for purposes other than interpreting historical events or stories, and they do not necessarily recognize the importance of culture in defining a place or uniting a region. The boundaries of Cascade, Chouteau, and surrounding counties were used to help locate resources on a map, and community participants at public meetings were asked to help develop a resource inventory. In the end, political characteristics of the boundary were helpful to understand the limits of the study area; however, the study area boundaries were redrawn to include only Cascade and parts of Chouteau counties, as those lines represent the concentration of the resources and significance to the heritage of Big Sky Country.

The Boundary of Big Sky Country National Heritage Area

The final determination in the construct of a boundary for Big Sky Country NHA incorporates the varying compositions of each of the elements described above. Some features undoubtedly will be of more consequence than others. In the end, the boundary selected was one that, on a practical level, can be managed, hinges with the story that resonates throughout the region, and defines a region capable of being served. The final boundary for Big Sky Country NHA is one that reflects the capacity of the organization and its partners as stewards to develop, administer, maintain, and promote a unified region.



Map of the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area.
Courtesy of Ken Sievert

CHAPTER 4: THE FUTURE OF BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

*“Won’t you meet me in Montana,
I want to see the mountains in your eyes.
I had all of this life I can handle.
Meet me underneath that big Montana sky.”*

Dan Seals and Marie Osmond

Regional Goals, Needs, and Opportunities

In 2015, the gathering partnership of citizens, organizations, and local governments in central Montana initially looked at storytelling as a way to enlist public support to celebrate the region’s history and culture. While the early organizing efforts around this form of heritage conservation did succeed in establishing the partnership, many felt that limiting the potential of the outcome to only storytelling was insufficient, and more could be accomplished that could bring significant benefits to the communities and the region. The partnership realized there were many possible approaches to commemorate the heritage of a region – interpretation, education, historic preservation, community revitalization, tourism – all built upon the stories of the people and the place where they live and work.

As the partnership matured, there was a growing desire of many others in the region to join these community conversations. It was becoming more evident that central Montana’s core history and heritage, its living cultural traditions, and distinctive landscape all could be brought together under a single strategy based on a regional vision. The term “heritage development” began to be injected into the conversations and, specifically, more attention paid to National Heritage Areas and their successes across the United States.



The second public meeting in Fort Benton, held at the Montana Agricultural Center.
Courtesy of PointHDC

This chapter examines the approaches advanced by Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. (BSCNHA, Inc.), and their partners to achieve regional goals, identify a preferred management alternative, and construct a strategic plan for the realization of that alternative.

Considering Alternatives for Heritage Development

A compelling story resonates across the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana. It is a story of Native Americans, the expanding nation, the support of modern development by the taming of a river and the land through which it flows, and the current lifeways of the communities today. The region is also centrally located between two of the most visited parks in the National Park system. Despite these assets, central Montana has struggled to capture its benefits, and few visitors know the significance of the region and its contribution to the development of the United States. Some organizations collaborated to promote specific elements of the region's heritage – more than a dozen local partners worked with state and national entities on a national signature event for the 2005 Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. However, until 2015, no coordinated entity took on the broader scope of a citizenry united under a strategic vision.

The formation of the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation (UMRHAPC, now BSCNHA, Inc.) brought together these varying partners with a goal to create a plan for the region that tied together all of the rich heritage assets of the region, realizing that collectively – as a regional partnership – more could be achieved than any individual effort. Plans previously developed by partner organizations were identified and considered, and the commonalities of those plans and the regional partnership formed the core goals for the heritage effort, including to:

- foster a sense of pride in the central Montana community
- commemorate and conserve the region's nationally significant historic and cultural resources
- increase opportunities for education and stewardship of heritage assets
- increase awareness of central Montana and the Upper Missouri River region as a destination
- use "heritage development" as a driver for community revitalization and economic development
- respect the rights of private property while promoting and developing heritage tourism opportunities

A coalition of funding partners came together to support a feasibility study that would explore all options for central Montana and its potential for heritage development within the region. These options included:

- No Action – to continue as a region with individualized efforts to conserve and promote the heritage of the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana
- State Heritage Area – to work with (state agency/department name) and the Montana Legislature and Governor to create a state heritage area for the region
- National Heritage Area (NHA) – to pursue the development and designation of an NHA
- Combined State and National Heritage Areas – to create a State Heritage Area, to win designation for an NHA, and to integrate those strategies to the benefit of the region

Starting in 2017, the partnership, led by the then-named UMRHAPC, started working on a feasibility study for the region, with the core goals for the heritage area to be considered. The resulting collaboration on the feasibility study between residents, organizations, businesses, ranchers and farmers, local governments, and state agencies resoundingly agreed that an NHA for central Montana was best to help accomplish these core goals.

The regional collaboration helped to further the awareness and understanding of the power of an NHA as a strategy to unify people around a regional vision centered on a shared heritage and the historical and cultural assets that are the foundation to the identity of central Montana.

Any of the alternatives might contribute to the successful accomplishment of one or some of the goals mentioned above, but only the NHA designation provides the best possible outcome to achieve all of the goals for the region. A State Heritage Area designation could result in some success; however, unlike other states, such a program does not currently exist in Montana, and the time it could take to create such a designation by the legislature may result in the collaborative partnership to fade away as it waits. Similarly, a combined State and National Heritage Area designation could provide the best outcome for the region, and it was not ruled out for future consideration, but at this time it is not feasible with no existing state program.

The “No Action” alternative is simply not an option and was ruled out by the partners, stakeholders, and the participants at the feasibility study meetings. No Action would leave in place the status quo for central Montana and individual organizations, businesses, and local governments. While outstanding programs and projects currently in place will continue, they would continue to exist in isolation from each other. No Action would result in the loss of collaboration and connection possible under an overarching national designation and its benefit of a multi-county, multi-organizational partnership.

An NHA is the only alternative that affirms the *national significance* of central Montana’s heritage and raises the region to the same level as the other existing NHAs in the United States. An NHA designation unifies the story of communities across the region and helps bring them together in a way that points to shared identity and regional pride. An NHA designation will place the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana on the same map with Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park, enabling cross-marketing and promotion for visitors seeking nationally significant destinations, and further validating the region’s historical and cultural heritage and the living landscape as significant to the nation. Of all the alternatives that currently exist, only an NHA will help to achieve all of the core goals.

The Preferred Alternative: A National Heritage Area for Central Montana

A public partnership process was used to develop this feasibility study and has resulted in strong support for the establishment of the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area (Big Sky Country NHA). The concluding public meeting held in Belt, Montana, in September 2019 brought together more than 100 citizens, public and elected officials, ranchers, farmers, business leaders, community organizations, nonprofit groups, and others to:

- hear the findings of the feasibility study planning
- review and approve the themes, resources and statement of significance
- confirm the proposed boundary for the NHA
- reveal the new name for the NHA – Big Sky Country NHA
- concur on a list of early implementation projects and other projects that can be completed by the partnership
- volunteer their time as community leaders to help advance the NHA
- support the transformation of the UMRHAPC to become BSCNHA, Inc., as the coordinating entity for the proposed NHA

Managing the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area

The concept of an NHA is one that is as much a place as it is a regional strategy. With the designation of a region comes a network of partners, often as diverse as the living landscape in which they exist. This heritage partnership becomes the wheel to the operations, management, and implementation of the NHA. Critical to any wheel is the hub, and for an NHA, that hub is the coordinating entity. NHA coordinating entities shoulder many responsibilities in the management of the heritage area. They are the convener of the constituency, the facilitator, the glue in the partnership, and the keepers of the regional vision that was created with the feasibility study. The responsibility vested in them came through the confidence and blessing of the broader partnership. The coordinating entity's effectiveness rests with the ability of the partners to trust them as much as the partners trust each other. Any successful NHA shares responsibility and work; their influence is gained not by force or authority in law, but instead by nurturing relationships, convening diverse, sometimes opposing groups and their views; and creating an environment where all sides can work together for the betterment of each other and the region as a whole. It is this collaborative alliance that often starts with a shared vision that, in the end, produces the most powerful, transformative results in an NHA.

The selection or creation of an organization to manage the NHA is not the most critical issue for federal designation. It may be, however, the single most important factor in what makes NHAs sustainable and successful. Too often, burgeoning NHAs with outstanding cultural and historical significance have struggled or floundered because the long-term management question was not given enough consideration or the issues that partners raised concerning capacity were left unaddressed. Often, the coordinating entities with the most success are the ones that recognize the needs of the region and the partners and build coalitions that support and have confidence in the coordinating entity.

In the best world, the identification of a coordinating entity would usually occur during the management plan, but the National Park Service and the U.S. Congress place more emphasis on this question, not just being explored but being finalized in the feasibility study since an NHA is not a government-administered or -managed program. The confidence in, the trust of, and ability of the coordinating entity are crucial.

The formation of the UMRHAPC organized with one primary purpose: to help lead the regional partners through the feasibility study planning phase for an NHA in central Montana. Its by-laws were drafted, and its mission was limited, raising the necessary funding for, and managing the steps required to produce, a feasibility study. The board understood that part of the process of the feasibility study would include the assessment of regional capacity and the identification of an organization that could manage the new NHA.

Throughout the feasibility study planning process, the consultant team was tasked to explore all viable options for future management, including those existing or one that might be created in the future. This question became central to the stakeholder interviews conducted as a part of the feasibility study and was also explored and tested with each phase of public meetings. Central Montana is blessed with a vast array of capable organizations with reliable track records in tourism, preservation, culture and the arts, recreation, natural resources, education, economic and community development, and other fields. These partners all currently contribute to the region through their work, and a large number of them are involved in the feasibility study planning.

The primary functions for the coordinating entity are to:

- design and implement the feasibility study and management plan for the NHA
- hire staff to carry out the responsibilities of the programs, projects, and operation/administration of the NHA
- lead the fundraising efforts and coordinate the financial affairs necessary for the sustainability of the NHA
- design a governance structure that integrates the variety of interests of central Montana into the NHA
- partner to build on opportunities, lead when required, and develop stewardship to ensure continuance in the regional programs and projects in the NHA

A mix of existing organizations were identified that could be the coordinating entity if the UMRHAPC was determined, or chose, not to be the lead. While issues were expressed of the need for UMRHAPC to build out its board representation, the partners were unanimous in their support for UMRHAPC to continue, and for their organizations to continue with their involvement.

Coordinating Entity and Management

In 2015, the UMRHAPC organized to take the initial steps to advance the concept of an NHA for central Montana. The newly formed nonprofit organization was responding to the broader interests of the Upper Missouri River region citizens, recognizing that their heritage and history of the upper plains and the Missouri River are significant to the history and development of the United States.



Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation board members consider historical themes in a July 2018 workshop
Courtesy of PointHDC

The UMRHAPC led the effort with the understanding that a determination would be made during the feasibility study process to create an NHA and identify its coordinating entity. UMRHAPC's outreach was extensive as it initiated the effort, and organized the communities and partners, during the early years of its work (2015-2017). During this period, a total of 35 meetings and presentations were held across central Montana, including state, county, and city governments, civic organizations, nonprofits, educational organizations and groups, preservation organizations, and Native American tribes. UMRHAPC's outreach included organizations and groups that were suspicious of NHAs, ones that are concerned about federal government overreach, private property rights, and hunting and fishing regulations.

As part of the feasibility study (2018-2019), UMRHAPC directed the consultants to conduct a series of confidential stakeholder interviews with these representative governments and organizations to determine the support for an NHA. If a stakeholder supported the NHA concept, the discussions would move to the issues of regional capacity, management, and the partnership base of support for the NHA. Twenty-six stakeholders were interviewed between June and August of 2018, and the results were overwhelmingly in favor of creating an NHA for central Montana. Some organizations did suggest their willingness to step up as the NHA coordinating entity if UMRHAPC chose not to advance the work, or if the broader partnership did not support their leadership. Nevertheless, the board partnership of the stakeholders was strongly supportive of UMRHAPC, continuing its leadership role in a future management capacity as the coordinating entity for the proposed NHA.

With the results of the stakeholder interviews, in February 2019 the board members of UMRHAPC convened a special two-day workshop with the consultants to answer themselves whether the current board should become the management organization for the newly proposed NHA.

The discussion revolved around several key factors. A diverse board is needed to play the convener role of an NHA, and no other existing entity in the region shares the diversity of UMRHAPC. While the board will continue to change as different skill sets become necessary to meet evolving needs, there currently is value in continuity. Once the feasibility study is complete, new board members will be engaged to help the organization through designation, early implementation projects, and to look ahead to planning. The governance procedures for the organization must be updated, including the creation of a formal nominating committee, establishing a route to board membership through committee service, and an orientation process for all new board members.

A recommendation was made and unanimously supported naming UMRHAPC as the coordinating entity for the proposed NHA. A formal vote at the board meeting in late February affirmed the decision made in the workshop.

Mission and Vision

At that same February 2019 management workshop, the board of directors took up consideration of the then existing mission and vision statement for the proposed NHA. After much discussion, it was concluded that neither the mission or vision statements were representative of what the organization currently does and will be doing in the future in its role as the coordinating entity for the proposed NHA.

The original mission statement was, “We exist to tell the Upper Missouri River story,” and the original vision statement read, “We formed to initiate a collaborative effort to establish an NHA because we believe in the national significance of the Upper Missouri River heritage, in the power of partnerships, and that NHA designation will bring vitality and sustainable economic development to our region. We are residents, multigenerational landowners, local businesses, and cultural organizations. We believe in private property rights, celebrating our history, honoring our legacy, and sharing our stories with others.”

Examination and review of mission and vision statements were conducted of other NHAs and organizations, as was consideration of the long-term goals of Big Sky Country NHA. Several commonalities with other NHAs were immediately recognized, including how NHAs create partnerships to conserve components of their heritage. Like other NHAs, Big Sky Country’s partners work in tourism, economic development, historic preservation, education and interpretation, and recreation, all with a goal of quality of life and community revitalization and enhancement. The result is a shared heritage that connects communities and regional interests. These bonds help residents, businesses, and local governments to more fully understand and appreciate their heritage and their communities, that help strengthen the economic and cultural fabric of a region.

The result is the following Mission Statement:

We, the Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, develop and foster partnerships to recognize, preserve, and interpret the historic, scenic, and natural recreational resources and living landscapes of the Upper Missouri River region. We strengthen the economy and cultural fabric of our region by promoting and facilitating the enjoyment of these resources.

A “constitution” of guiding principles to accompany the mission statement was also adopted. These are:

- Respect private property rights
- Foster collaborative public-private relationships
- Work together as a region
- Support intergenerational education
- Value truth and reconciliation in interpreting our shared heritage
- Recognize the customs and traditions of the people of Montana

In May 2019, the board adopted the following Vision Statement:

The Big Sky Country National Heritage Area is a respected partner building alliances throughout the Upper Missouri River region of Montana. Together we recognize, conserve, and instill community pride in our people, places, and stories. Our heritage resources strengthen the economy, attracting visitors seeking special places and memories.

The Partnership Network

BSCNHA, Inc., has developed a robust and vibrant partnership network that has come together to support the feasibility study planning process and the establishment of an NHA in the Upper Missouri River of central Montana. This partnership network crosses all sectors, including government, businesses, non-profit organizations, educational and interpretive institutions, and residents. As described in Appendix III, there are 21 “Key Partners,” organizations that have a consistent daily working relationship with BSCNHA, Inc. In addition, eight “Current Partners” are engaged with the organization on specific, but not daily, projects and programming. Finally, the “Potential Partners” identified through this process include 29 entities that have capacity and have expressed interest in future projects and programming.



Residents of the town of Cascade celebrated the marriage of Charlie and Nancy Russell with a re-enactment near their restored Honeymoon Cottage.

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area and its Management Partnership

To properly advance the Big Sky Country NHA, the current board of directors recognizes its need to add more board members to their organization. As part of a management workshop conducted with the consultants, the board identified areas of expertise and need from which future board candidates could be sought, including finance, business, arts, and education. The plan to add new board members will commence with the completion of the feasibility study so that the new board member can immediately participate in the next stages of planning and development.

Staffing will grow over the first five years as funding is acquired for use beyond planning. Staff funding is often the most difficult to raise, and it is where the funds from federal appropriations for the NHA will be of great assistance.

While the staff will have primary responsibility for the operations and administration of the NHA organization, the board will continue to share in some of the duties in the early years, eventually transitioning the majority of operational responsibilities to the hired professional staff. These responsibilities, both those of the staff, of the board, and those which are shared, are detailed in the chart that follows, below.

Staff and Board Responsibilities Operations & Management

BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA	STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES	BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES	SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES
Years 1 - 5	• Grant writing • Social media communications • Website management • Building contact list(s) • Contract and grant administration • Project/service development & management • Development and diversification of revenue streams/earned income	• Support and counsel to staff • Governance of board & board responsibilities	
Years 1 - 2		• Serving as the public face • Coalescing partnerships (business, tourism & civic organizations, etc.) • Definite, clear, ongoing media presence • Travel • Accounting and auditing • Financial Oversight • Maintain organization databases and records • Advocacy (DC, Helena, local)	• Establishing and maintaining regular communication with partners and allies • Administration & organization function • Face-to-face communications/relationship building • Fundraising
Years 3 - 5	• Serving as the public face • Definite, clear, ongoing media presence • Travel • Maintain organization databases and records • Establishing and maintaining regular communications with partners and allies • Administration & organization function • Oversight of management planning		• Face-to-face communications/relationship building • Fundraising • Advocacy (DC, Helena, local) • Accounting and auditing • Financial management • Coalescing partnerships (business, tourism & civic organizations, etc.)

Note: Assumes Years 1 and 2 awaiting designation as an NHA, and with designation starting in Year 3.

Conceptual Financial Plan

A five-year operating and administrative budget for BSCNHA, Inc., is proposed for the coordinating entity as it establishes and advances a designated NHA. BSCNHA, Inc., must be able to raise sufficient funding to match the potential National Park Service funding. The current minimum levels of NHA allocations are \$150,000 for designated NHAs without approved management plans and \$300,000 for NHAs with approved management plans. Therefore, budget assumes the receipt of National Park Service funding of \$150,000 for Year 1 through Year 4 and \$300,000 in National Park Service funding in Year 5. These allocation amounts could change in the future, and an over-dependency on National Park Service funds as a part of an annual budget could put the NHA at risk if National Park Service funding were ever reduced or eliminated by Congress.

The projected budget reflects an organization with a goal of financial sustainability, with a dollar-for-dollar match of projected National Park Service funding in each year. With sustainability as a goal, there is a diminishing reliance on in-kind match from partners, and an equally proportional actual cash match, as part of each year's annual total. Also considered in this budget are yearly totals for the anticipated costs of conducting "early implementation projects" and the expenses related to conducting a management plan.

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area Five-Year Operations and Administration Budget						
Expense	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Notes
Executive Director	\$ 70,000	\$ 72,100	\$ 74,263	\$ 76,491	\$ 78,786	1
Program Manager	\$ 35,000	\$ 36,050	\$ 37,132	\$ 38,245	\$ 39,393	1
Development Director	0	0	0	\$ 30,000	\$ 60,000	1
Fringe 25%	\$ 26,500	\$ 27,295	\$ 28,114	\$ 36,184	\$ 44,545	2
Operations	\$ 40,000	\$ 51,200	\$ 52,736	\$ 54,318	\$ 70,000	
Travel	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,300	\$ 10,609	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	
Planning	\$ 67,000	\$ 67,000	\$ 67,000	\$ 25,000	\$ -	
Promotion & Marketing	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,300	\$ 10,609	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,500	
Projects	\$ 41,500	\$ 50,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 200,000	
Total Expense	\$ 300,000	\$ 324,245	\$ 340,463	\$ 362,238	\$ 520,224	
Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Notes
Appropriations	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 300,000	
Grants	\$ 50,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 70,000	\$ 80,000	\$ 85,000	
Donations	\$ 80,000	\$ 85,000	\$ 85,000	\$ 86,000	\$ 90,000	
Sponsorships	\$ 15,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	
Earned Revenue	\$ 5,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000	
Total Cash	\$ 300,000	\$ 325,000	\$ 340,000	\$ 361,000	\$ 520,000	
<i>In-Kind Contributions</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>\$ 5,000</i>	<i>\$ 20,000</i>	<i>\$ 30,000</i>	<i>\$ 80,000</i>	
Total Income	\$ 300,000	\$ 330,000	\$ 360,000	\$ 391,000	\$ 600,000	
Reserve Balance	0.00	\$ 5,755	\$ 19,537	\$ 28,762	\$ 79,776	3
Notes:						
1 - Staff positions reflect a 3 percent annual increase						
2 - Includes accounting, audit, insurance, legal, board development, printing, equipment, etc,						
3 - Reserve balance will be used to offset any unexpected, necessary, future expense(s).						

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FEASIBILITY

“I’m in love with Montana. For other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, even some affection. But with Montana it is love. And it’s difficult to analyze love when you’re in it.”

John Steinbeck

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area

For the past six years, Big Sky Country National Heritage Area, Inc. (BSCNHA, Inc.), has led a process for the establishment of a National Heritage Area (NHA) involving hundreds of citizens and dozens of community groups within Cascade and Chouteau counties. The study process has considered all aspects of community input, including the benefits of and concerns for the creation of an NHA. Over the course of the planning process, the following questions have been tested: Is the idea of an NHA feasible? What is the nationally significant story of the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana? Are there historic, cultural, and natural resources in the region that could help tell this story? Is there a framework and capacity to develop and carry out a regional vision based on the story and resources?

The National Park Service developed ten criteria for evaluation of emerging NHAs. Each criterion is listed below, followed by a description of how this study has demonstrated the feasibility and suitability of NHA designation for the Upper Missouri River region, Big Sky Country.



With its big sky and distinctive landscape, the upper Missouri River region of Montana holds the story of the transformation of the western United States. *Courtesy of Andrew Finch*

1. An area has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed as such an assemblage through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities.

Big Sky Country National Heritage Area (Big Sky Country NHA) has a nationally significant story supported by an assemblage of nationally significant resources that tell the story of the transformation of the western United States. Within the space of a century, the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana went from a bountiful bison hunting ground for 13 indigenous tribes to a landscape that supported Western expansion through agriculture and industry. The Lewis and Clark expedition was the vanguard of this change, and later, Charlie Russell was its greatest chronicler. Four National Historic Landmarks and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail anchor this story, highlighting the region's history through an indigenous buffalo jump, the portage route of the Lewis and Clark expedition, the head of navigation on the Missouri, and the home and studio of an artist who brought the history to life. In addition to these nationally significant resources, the region holds an additional 143 historic, cultural, and natural resources identified by engaged residents and organizations. This includes 33 sites and 10 districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Appendix VII contains a listing of all resources related to the region's national significance and five interpretive themes.

2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story.

NHAs are living landscapes, and Big Sky Country NHA exemplifies that standard. Still visible is the distinctive landscape where bison once roamed, drawing 14 indigenous tribes whose lives depended upon that sacred animal, including the four tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, known as the Nisitapi (Siksika or Blackfoot; Kainai or Blood; Pikanii or Northern Peigan; and Pikuni or Southern Piegan or Blackfeet), as well as the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille, Shoshone, Bannock, Nez Perce, Gros Ventre, Crow, and Assiniboine. Today, the legacy of the bison culture is found in annual celebrations such as the Little Shell Powwow at First Peoples Buffalo Jump, a National Historic Landmark and Montana State Park. Cultural continuity is also evident in the recent federal recognition of the Little Shell Chippewa tribe, a people who have sought this status since the 1880s. Where Lewis and Clark once traveled, modern outdoor enthusiasts and amateur historians follow the historic route enjoying the Missouri River corridor and its tributaries, as well as the River's Edge National Recreational Trail that offers a bicycling and pedestrian route along the river. The massive change that followed in the wake of Lewis and Clark's epic exploratory expedition culminated in today's economy, with agricultural lands stretching as far as the eye can see and hydropower generated from the Great Falls of the Missouri fueling industry and homes for more than a century.



Fishing is among the most popular outdoor recreational pursuits enjoyed by residents of and visitors to the region. *Courtesy of Gayle Fisher*

Since Euro-Americans first arrived in the region, artists have captured both the beauty of the landscape and the intricacies of the region's people. Art remains both a cultural value and an important economic driver in the region, as demonstrated by the annual Western Art Week featuring the works of many nationally known and local artists, as well as events dedicated to art, and the communities' numerous private art galleries and five art museums – three in Great Falls, and two in Fort Benton (Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, C.M. Russell Museum, Galerie Trinitas, Starr Gallery of Western Art, and the Dean & Donna Strand Western Art Gallery). Hutterites have been a force in Montana's agriculture, producing 90% of the state's hogs, 34% of the dairy, 16% of the poultry, and more than 95% of Montana's eggs. Rodeos, farmers markets, and festivals that celebrate the region's heritage also are important traditions. Living cultural traditions that reflect the region's historical significance are reflected in the places and events listed in the resource inventory.

3. Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and/or scenic features.

The region is one of breathtaking beauty of open prairie land that runs into the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains, carved by the mighty Missouri River and its tributaries. The landscape consists of large-scale working cattle ranches and grain farms, flat-topped buttes, and craggy mountain outcroppings. Historic small towns dot the landscape and the historic character of their original townsites is celebrated and honored. Opportunities to assist in maintaining the region's agricultural commerce and traditions; to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, especially along the water corridors; to document and preserve the region's wealth of historic resources; and to expand interpretation of the transformation of the West are endless. In carrying out these opportunities, the region has the potential to entice the hundreds of thousands of visitors that travel between Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park each year to take this sidestep to learn about life on the plains. Increasing visitation will continue to build the local economy on the region's nationally significant heritage, enhance the sustainability of the NHA, and to work with partners to invest in the stewardship of the natural, cultural, and historic features.

4. Provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities.

Outdoor recreation is a significant socio-economic sector in Montana. The state is second in the nation in outdoor recreation as a percentage of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as reported by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2019.¹ Moreover, 96% of Montanans believe outdoor recreation is important to the state's economic future, and 95% say it is important to their own quality of life. Guided tours, outfitter-guided travel, boating, angling, hunting, hiking, skiing, and cycling bring in millions of dollars and support more than 16,000 jobs across the state.



A National Scenic Byway provides easy access to winter sports in the Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest, including snowshoeing and downhill and cross-country skiing. *Courtesy of Gayle Fisher*

¹ Hawaii is first at 5.4%, and Montana is second at 5.1%.

According to a 2018 report from the University of Montana's Institute on Tourism & Recreation Research, those jobs, along with \$1.3 billion in economic output, are supported by nonresident travelers spending nearly \$800 million on outfitted or guided experiences. From "floatin' the Mo'," to securing a coveted pass to float the Smith River to bicycling or jogging over 57 miles of the River's Edge National Recreation Trail, driving the Kings Hill Scenic Byway or hiking and skiing in the nearby Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, to walking the historic levy along the Missouri River in Fort Benton, Big Sky Country already boasts many outstanding recreational activities and resources. Nonresident tourism and recreation in Cascade County, alone, supports over 2,100 jobs, and nearly \$150 million in economic activity, directly (Institute of Tourism & Recreation 2019). Many opportunities exist to enhance outdoor recreation in the Upper Missouri River region – with abandoned railroad lines along the Missouri River and within the National Forest – especially given the region's location between two of the nation's most visited national parks.



Re-enactors teach families about the most important tool of the Lewis and Clark Expedition – firepower to hunt and put meat in the bellies of 33 grown members of the Corps of Discovery. Today's conveniences make life easy compared to the rigors of survival along the Missouri River, over 200 years ago.

Courtesy of USDA Forest Service

The region is also full of exceptional educational resources. Over a dozen interpretive centers and museums across the Big Sky Country NHA highlight different elements of the region's history; among the largest facilities are the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, the C.M. Russell Museum, the First People's Buffalo Jump State Park, Old Fort Benton Trading Post, the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center, and the Montana State Agricultural Museum. Educational partnerships to benefit K-12 students may contribute to the regional goal of retaining young people. Similarly, educational programming aimed at lifelong learners will enhance quality of life in the region.

5. The resources important to the identified theme or themes of the area retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation.

As noted in Criterion #2, the story of the transformation of the West is succinctly expressed in the region's nationally significant resources – the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, First Peoples Buffalo Jump NHL, Great Falls Portage NHL, Fort Benton NHL, and the C.M. Russell Home and Studio NHL. These resources merit their national designations by virtue of their integrity, and together trace the region's journey in less than a century from a land dominated by indigenous peoples, to western exploration and expansion, to the establishment of modern agriculture and an industrial economy.

Not only do these resources encapsulate the Statement of National Significance, but they also reflect the themes supporting that statement. The First Peoples Buffalo Jump NHL is one of the oldest, largest, and best-preserved cliff jump locations on the North American continent, and serves as a window into nearly 6,000 years of indigenous culture.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail bisects the region, following the 1805-1806 passage of the Corps of Discovery. The trail segment within the proposed NHA includes seven sites recognized by the National Park Service as having significant potential for future interpretation of the expedition due to their historic significance, scenic quality, relative freedom from incursion, and the presence of historic remnants. Those High Potential Sites include the upper and lower sections of the Great Falls Portage NHL, Decision Point, Rainbow Falls, Giant Springs, Square Butte, and Tower Rock.

The fort and original blockhouse, the historic bridge, and the commercial and residential structures that comprise the Fort Benton NHL reflect the mid- to late-19th century opening of the West, “A Far Distant Land,” by Euro-American settlers. The NHL’s 13 contributing resources help tell the story of the fur and bison robe trade, transportation, commerce, settlement, and ranching along the banks of the Missouri River. Finally, as the region transitioned from indigenous homeland to the open range, and then to the “New West” marked by agriculture and industry, Charlie Russell chronicled the change with art that was at once a beautiful depiction of the region and a poignant social commentary. The C.M. Russell Home and Log Cabin Studio NHL anchor the C.M. Russell Museum as a place to tell this story.

Finally, the Missouri River is a critical resource that links the region both physically and thematically. All of the themes have a tangential relationship to the Missouri. Moreover, the river is integral to modern life as a natural, recreational, educational, interpretive, and economic resource. The river is literally the spine of the skeletal structure of the Big Sky Country NHA.

The resources described here are highly capable of supporting interpretation in the region. They are complemented by the 43 resources listed in the National Register of Historic Places that are found in the inventory in Appendix VII.



Buffalo hides, elk antlers, and powder horns fill the Fort Benton trading post, much as they would have in the early 19th century. *Courtesy of PointHDC*



In 1890, Black Eagle Falls became the site of the first hydroelectric dam on the Missouri River. It was replaced in 1926 and still generates power today. *Courtesy of Gayle Fisher*

6. Residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governments within the proposed area 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 designation of the area.

The partnership network that exists in Big Sky Country NHA is diverse, engaged, energized, and capable of sustaining an NHA in the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana. This network includes 29 key and current partners, and the potential for dozens of others (see “Partnerships” in Appendix III). Leading this effort is the non-profit organization, BSCNHA, Inc., which formed to help advance the effort to plan for the NHA. Over the last five years, this organization has gained the respect of area partners to direct the NHA’s operations, administration, and programming. At the same time, BSCNHA, Inc., has developed capacity to raise the necessary funds to support the planning effort, attain its goal of the completion of this feasibility study, thereby gaining the respect and confidence of its funders as future investors in the NHA. A five-year conceptual financial plan is found in Chapter 4.

7. The proposed coordinating entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area.

Similar to the private-sector partnership coalition described in Criterion 6, BSCNHA, Inc., has demonstrated strong support from state and local governments in the NHA. With strong support from the cities of Belt, Cascade, Fort Benton, Great Falls, and Niehart within Cascade and Chouteau counties, and the State of Montana and its agencies, BSCNHA, Inc., is endorsed as the coordinating entity of the NHA. These partners have demonstrated a willingness to come together to discuss projects in the NHA, participate in meetings, assist with in-kind support, and support grant applications. They have been willing to work across jurisdictional boundary lines in order to develop a shared vision, as depicted in this feasibility study, and eliminate obstacles to the completion of mutually-beneficial projects.

8. The proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area.

The residents, governments, organizations, and businesses of the Upper Missouri River region of central Montana and the Big Sky Country NHA are poised to attract greater numbers of tourists, as the region is situated between two of the most popular and highly visited national parks in the National Park system – Glacier and Yellowstone. The region also contains a portion of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, along with four National Historic Landmarks. The regional partnership looks to further capitalize on these destination assets and to build the NHA, thereby generating more tourists, tourism dollars, and the related economic benefits, including jobs and tax revenues that result from these activities. The Big Sky Country NHA has already collaborated with the *Visit Great Falls, Montana*, the local tourism organization, on promoting historic sites in the region.



Montana’s agricultural tradition continues on the Robison farm in Chouteau County.
Courtesy of Ken Robison

Furthermore, consistent with the goals of NHAs, Big Sky Country NHA celebrates and conserves the region's agricultural heritage as an essential living cultural tradition and economic mainstay. This industry is a key economic driver for the people who live in Montana today, generating \$2.4 billion annually.

9. A conceptual boundary map is supported by the public.

A boundary that incorporates the nationally significant resources of Cascade and portions of Chouteau counties has been studied, vetted, and finalized with the communities and the broader partnership. This boundary supports the nationally significant story and themes, includes nationally significant resources that express those themes, is one that can be managed, and is also respectful of the rights of all private property owners. The public process by which the conceptual boundary was established is described in detail in Chapter 3. That process included carefully examining, and then layering upon each other the traits, traditions, and activities that are important to the region's heritage, led to a boundary that is comprehensive, easily defined, and defensible.

As described in Chapter 3, a broad boundary was presented to the public prior to the beginning of the feasibility study. Based on initial feedback that the boundary was too large, a much narrower boundary was introduced at the first feasibility study public meeting. Over the course of the study, themes and resources were articulated through a management workshop and review by subject matter experts. This input, as well as feedback on the narrow boundary presented at the first public meeting, led to a boundary revision that ultimately became the preferred boundary. The new, revised boundary encompassed the Missouri River and its tributaries, key resources, the landscape features captured in Russell's art, and, as stated in Chapter 3, "the vast spaces in between where today's Montanans live their daily lives imbued with the history and heritage of the region." This final boundary proposal and the reasoning behind it were shared with the public at the second and final rounds of public meetings.



Kayaks for "floatin' the Mo" line the banks of the Missouri in front of the bridge in Fort Benton. Built in 1888, the bridge was the first to span the Missouri River in Montana. *Courtesy of Gayle Fisher*

10. The coordinating entity proposed to plan and implement the project is described.

BSCNHA, Inc., accepts the mantle to lead the NHA, including administration, operations, joint fund-raising, programming, and projects. This determination was reached through a process that involved key partners and stakeholders, all of whom agreed that BSCNHA, Inc., should continue as the coordinating entity. Throughout the planning process, the organization has exercised transparency, and demonstrated leadership and diplomacy to build the capacity of the partnership network to develop and implement a shared regional vision.

Study Conclusion

In the upper Missouri River region of central Montana, the story of the transformation of the western United States is etched on the region's distinctive landscape in the physical features and living traditions that remain. Due to the importance of the cultural change that occurred in little more than a century, as well as the number, significance, and integrity of the resources related to this story, this region meets the necessary criteria for designation as an NHA. Furthermore, through participation in public meetings and events over the last four years, through letters received in favor of an NHA, as well as through financial donations for the effort, the public has expressed strong support for designation of the Big Sky Country NHA. Finally, the proposed coordinating entity and its partnership network have demonstrated the expertise, will, and capacity to support an NHA in central Montana.

Recommendations on Next Steps

Given the conclusion that residents of the region, under the leadership of BSCNHA, Inc., should pursue NHA designation by Congress, the organization has considered the next steps that must occur. A set of recommendations came out of the discussions with stakeholders, community members, regional leaders, and the board of directors of BSCNHA, Inc., over the course of the feasibility study. These are described in Chapter 1, and are summarized here, as follows:

1. Pursue federal legislation by which the U.S. Congress would designate the Big Sky Country NHA.
2. Carry out early implementation projects identified in this planning process.
3. Work toward the completion and implementation of a management plan.
4. Continue to build the NHA partnership network.
5. Build the staff and board to meet the evolving needs of the organization.
6. Grow fundraising to ensure a sustainable organization and NHA.

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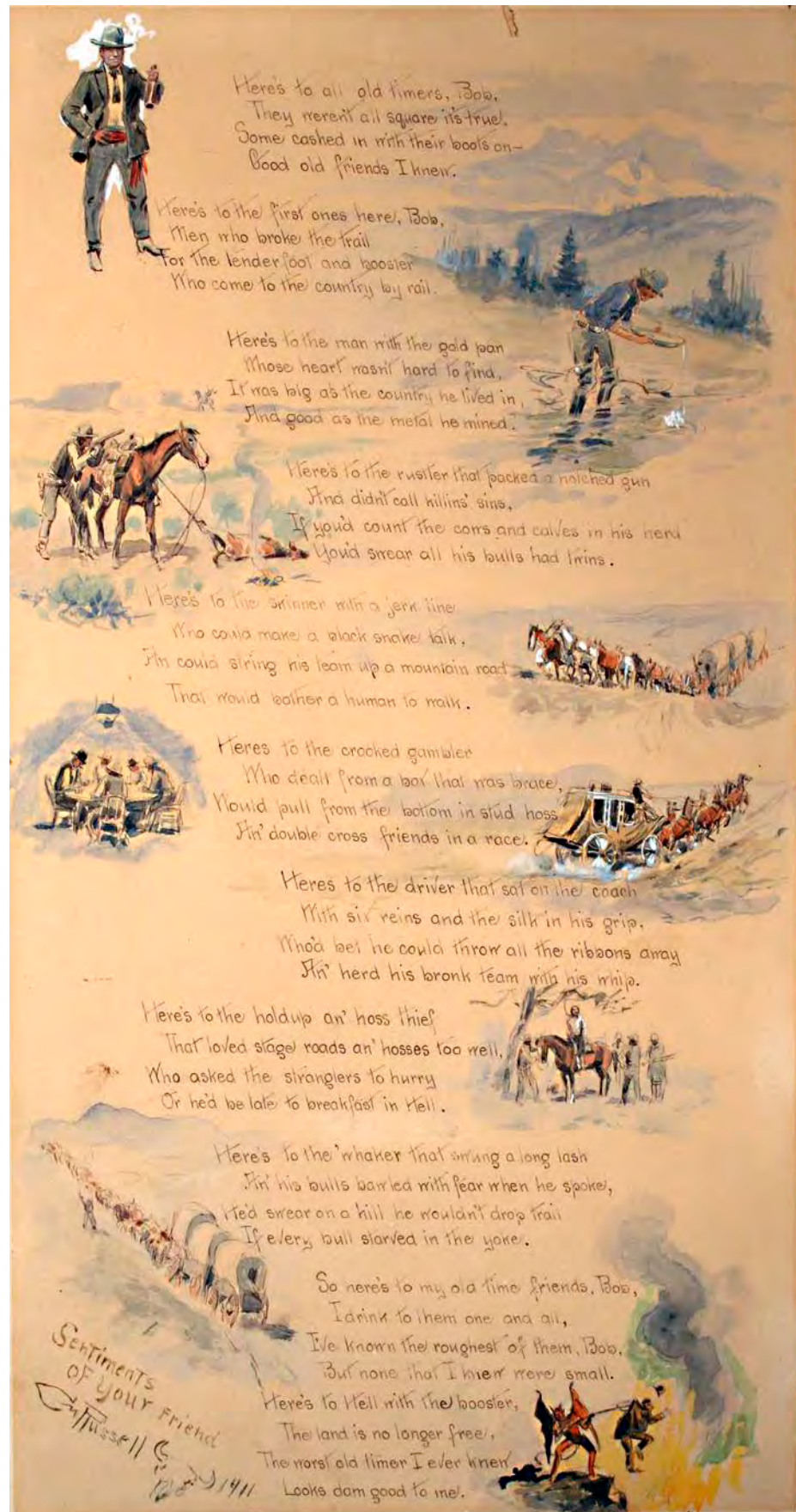
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APPENDICES



APPENDIX I

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA CONCURRENT PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Education Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Great Falls Public Schools Strategic Plan for 2019-2020, approved August 5, 2019	Great Falls Public Schools	https://gfps.k12.mt.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-2020-Final-Goals-Key-Results-Objectives.pdf	One of the goals of this plan emphasizes student achievement and the goal to be creative beyond the traditional means and to explore additional project-based learning opportunities for K-12. The plan includes goals to strengthen community/business partnerships, improve curriculum materials, and continue focus on Indian Education best practices. Future collaboration could include projects to enhance the curriculum materials in the areas of MT history, social studies, and Indian education.
Indian Education for All Curriculums	Montana Office of Public Instruction	http://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All/Indian-Education-Curriculum-Development-Implementation	Given the geographic region associated with the Big Sky Country NHA, schools can use expertise and community resources to ensure Indian Education for All as mandated by MCA 20-1-501 and the Montana Constitution. Given the funding from the State Legislature to support Montana Schools in this effort, the BSCNHA, Inc., can build and foster relationships in local communities to shape the success of rural schools in the implementation of Indian Education for All students. The OPI resource will provide a framework for implementation.

Economic Development & Growth Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Cascade County Growth Policy Update, 2014	Cascade County Board of Cascade County Commissioners	http://www.cascadecountymt.gov/df/departments/public-works/planning/Adopted2014_GrowthPolicy.pdf	There are mutual purposes of the Cascade County Growth Policy and Big Sky Country NHA. Goal 1 is to sustain and strengthen the economic well-being of the county's citizens by promoting development of cultural resources and tourism to broaden Cascade County's economic base. Goal 2 focuses on protecting and rural character and the historic relationship with natural resource development. Goal 5 is to preserve and enhance the rural friendly and independent lifestyle of citizens by preserving and promoting the county's cultural heritage, rooted in natural resource development and reflected in its numerous cultural, historic, and archaeological sites. BSCNHA, Inc., will honor traditions through education, supporting local events, and providing technical support for preservation activities desired by local citizenry.
Chouteau County Growth Policy, updated 2017	Chouteau County Commission, MT	http://www.co.chouteau.mt.us/index.htm/files/Chouteau%20Growth%20Policy%202017.pdf	The growth policy, in part, addresses the goal to enhance the recreational and cultural tourism opportunities throughout the county's rural areas, while protecting the environment, unique geological features, and national resources of the area as a means to diversify the economy.
City of Belt Growth Plan, adopted July 18, 2018	City of Belt	City of Belt	The Belt Growth Plan states the community supports the NHA initiative. Many action items align with NHA efforts. Big Sky Country NHA can assist the city with plans for improvements in the historic district through interpretive assistance, coordinating manpower for landscaping projects, promoting events at the Belt Performing Arts Center, the PRCA Rodeo, and events planned by the Belt Park Board. Big Sky Country NHA can also offer research assistance for the inventory of historic assets and the history of the coal mining region.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
City of Great Falls Growth Plan and Update 2013, <i>Imagine Great Falls</i>	Planning & Community Development Department, City of Great Falls, MT	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/file_attachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/growth_policy_update_-_august_6_2013.pdf and https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/file_attachments/planning_and_community_development/page/29271/imagine_great_falls_publicparticipation_results.pdf	Coordination with the City of Great Falls to maximize the benefits of the Big Sky Country NHA potential with the City.
City of Great Falls Downtown Master Plan, October 2011	Planning & Community Development Department, City of Great Falls, MT	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/file_attachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/dtmp_cc_public_hearing_final.pdf	The plan builds upon the assets and advantages of downtown as the cultural and civic center of Great Falls, with its historic buildings, parks and open spaces, and proximity to the Missouri River. The primary goal of the plan is to facilitate the creation of a downtown that is more active, vibrant, accessible, and livable, just as the NHA does.
Fort Benton Planning Area Growth Policy, 2010 update	Fort Benton City-County Planning Board	Fort Benton City-County Planning Board	Coordination with the City of Fort Benton to maximize the benefits of the Big Sky Country NHA potential with the City.
Town of Cascade Growth Policy, approved 2019	Town of Cascade	Town of Cascade	This is a planning document for the Town of Cascade. The plan specifically mentions identifying, protecting, rehabilitating/reusing historically and culturally significant structures and sites in town, as well as expanding recreation and cultural tourism as it pertains to parks, trails, and activities on the river. Big Sky Country NHA could offer technical assistance and volunteer resources as needed.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Town of Cascade Capital Improvements Plan, approved 2018	Town of Cascade	Town of Cascade	The CIP is a budgeting and financial tool to establish public works rehabilitation and maintenance priorities and to establish funding for repairs and improvements. Part of this plan outlines current and future needs of parks, trails, and other recreational facilities that Big Sky Country NHA could potentially partner on to enhance their viability for residents and tourists to Cascade.
Downtown Great Falls Targeted Block Redevelopment Visioning, February 2020	Downtown Development Partnership	Great Falls Development Authority	The targeted block redevelopment visions seek to protect and restore historic features of properties in the downtown Great Falls historic districts, attracting private investment that will lead to historically sensitive renovations and the opening of businesses that will attract more cultural tourists to the market.

Historic Preservation Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Preservation Montana, The Montana Historic Preservation Plan, 2018-2022	State Historic Preservation Office, State of Montana	https://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/shpo/docs/MontanaStatePlan_2018_2022.pdf	This plan is a guide for state and local preservation efforts and a tool in setting priorities and creating partnerships for the preservation of significant historic, archeological and traditional cultural places.
Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Benton Lake NWF Complex	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/refuges/completedPlanPDFs_A-E/bnl_ccpfinal_all.pdf	The plan includes visitor services and cultural resources goals. Future partnerships could be in supporting both goals.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Cascade County/Great Falls Historic Preservation Advisory Commission Annual Goals and Objectives	Great Falls/Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/40821/goals_and_objectives.pdf	Assist the Big Sky Country NHA board in their effort to create Montana's first NHA. Create a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines future cooperation between the two entities. Partner on preservation projects in Cascade County.
List of High Potential Historic Sites, NPS Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, 2017 - an addendum to Comprehensive Management Plan (underway).	U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service	https://www.nps.gov/lecl/learn/historyculture/places.htm	Several Lewis and Clark sites within the Big Sky Country NHA boundary are considered high potential historic sites, to include Decision Point, Great Falls Lower Portage, Rainbow Falls, Giant Springs, Great Falls Upper Portage, Square Butte, and Tower Rock. Each of these sites are important to the Lewis and Clark story within our project area.
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Long-Range Interpretive Plan, September 2018	U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service	https://www.nps.gov/lecl/getinvolved/upload/ECL-LRIP-508_LowRes.pdf	With a portion of the LCNHT running through the Big Sky Country NHA, there are opportunities to partner with the NPS to assist with implementation of their interpretive plan in this area.

Interpretive Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Malmstrom AFB Museum Mission/Purpose, 2019	Malmstrom AFB Museum	Malmstrom AFB Museum	The Malmstrom Museum and Air Park is a non-profit museum operated by the USAF whose mission is to preserve the heritage and traditions of the USAF and share the story of missions from pre-WWII to today. The story aligns with the New West theme. Big Sky Country NHA can collaborate with the museum to promote educational programming and connect airmen/women to the greater community to garner support and understanding of the importance of their role in keeping America safe.
Montana's Missouri Riverway – Great Falls Interpretive Program Plan, December 1997	Great Falls Interpretive Working Group	Park and Recreation Department, City of Great Falls	Coordination with various agencies along the Missouri riverway, one of the area's premier attractions and the second-longest river in the U.S.

Land Use Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
EPA DRAFT Land Use Plan (former Smelter Site, 2019)	Water Environmental Technologies, Inc. (WET)	Board of Cascade County Commissioners	Cascade County has been working in partnership with the Black Eagle community to determine acceptable future uses for repurposed Super Fund properties owned by ARCO. The county has contracted the services of WET to prepare a draft plan that will eventually be acted upon by the Cascade County Commission. When the final plan is approved and ready for implementation, Big Sky Country NHA can provide research and technical assistance for the county to use in their interpretive signage; partnership opportunities for implementation of the county's planned infrastructure; and/or assistance with future onsite recreation management.
Missouri River Urban Corridor Master Plan	Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan Work Group and Great Falls City and Cascade County Planning Department	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/mrucp1.pdf	The Missouri River is a tremendous community asset. Not only is it a center for recreation and activity, it is part of Great Falls' collective history, playing a key role in the economy and industry of the city. The Missouri River is also a central theme of the Big Sky Country NHA.

Recreation and Natural Resource Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
First Peoples Buffalo Jump (Ulm Pishkun) State Park Management Plan, December 2005	Ulm Pishkun Advisory Committee and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park	Ulm Pishkun (now, First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park) is an important cultural and educational site, offering visitors opportunities to learn about buffalo and the cultures that depended on them. Big Sky Country NHA is an important partner to assist with aspects of implementing their education/interpretation, cultural resource management, and recreation management goals.
City of Great Falls Park and Recreation Master Plan, adopted October 2016	Park and Recreation Department, City of Great Falls, MT	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/park_and_recreation/page/166661/great_falls_master_plan.pdf	Coordination with the city of Great Falls for future projects in city parks and with respect to area recreational opportunities. Great Falls is the largest municipality in the proposed NHA.
River's Edge Trail Maintenance Plan, adopted April 2014	Montana State Parks; Great Falls Park and Recreation Dept.; River's Edge Trail, Inc. (TD&H Engineering)	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/41061/trail_maintenance_plan_2014.pdf	Coordination with Montana State Parks, the city of Great Falls and Recreational Trails Inc., who strive to maintain one of the highest-rated attractions in the region.
Smith River State Park and River Corridor, Recreation Management Plan, July 2009	Montana State Parks, division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	State Headquarters, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, MT	Smith River State Park and River Corridor, partly within Big Sky Country NHA, has natural features and settings, fishing opportunities, and moderate degree of difficulty for floaters. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks manages Smith River through partnerships with the people of Montana and their guests, landowners, outfitters, the US Forest Service, county officials, and other people who have a passion for this resource and how it is managed.
Giant Springs State Park, Park Area Management Plan, January 2004	Montana State Parks, division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Region 4 Montana State Parks, Great Falls, MT	This plan provided management guidance for Giant Springs State Park, a significant site centrally located within Great Falls and Big Sky Country NHA.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Draft Environmental Impact State (DEIS) for the Draft Revised Forest Management Plan (June 2018)	U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service	Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Helena Supervisor's Office	Many of the goals of the draft Forest Plan align with the role of an NHA. The Forest Service manages the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center in Great Falls, which aligns with the Lewis and Clark theme. Big Sky Country NHA anticipates partnering with the Forest Service to assist with educational programming about the LC story and the valuable natural resources and landscapes of the National Forest. Additionally, there are many historic recreation residences and special use resorts within the National Forest. Big Sky Country NHA can assist with technical assistance on the preservation practices to retain their historic character.
Kings Hill Scenic Byway Master Plan	U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service	Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Great Falls Supervisor's Office	Big Sky Country NHA could partner with the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest to expand upon the management goals of the plan: 1. Improve the local, rural economy by encouraging more and longer visits to the general area. 2. Enhance the present and future recreation opportunities. 3. Improve the public's understanding and awareness of the resources of the Little Belt Mountains and how these resources continue to provide for society.
Montana State Parks Heritage Resources Strategic Plan, 2017-2024, February 2017	Montana State Parks, division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	State Headquarters, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, MT	This plan helps further inform program coordination and management of heritage resources within the park system and the parks included in Big Sky Country NHA.
A New Day for Montana State Parks/ Parks in Focus Commission Final Recommendations, December 2018	Parks in Focus Commission	https://resourceslegacyfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/A-New-Day-for-Montana-State-Parks_1-2-2019-00473280xA1C15.pdf	This document contains recommendations for Montana State Parks, which would have an impact on tourism, economic growth, and recreational opportunities in the state and within Big Sky Country NHA.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Charting a New Tomorrow: Montana State Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, 2015-2020	Montana State Parks, division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	State Headquarters, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, MT	One of the goals stated in the plan is to foster strategic partnerships and an engaged constituency with visitors and key stakeholders that have a shared interest in the success of the Montana State Park system. With five state parks (one of them also an NHL) within our project area, Big Sky Country NHA is a logical partner in this endeavor.
Enhancing Montana's Outdoor Recreation Legacy: State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024	Montana State Parks, division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	https://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2019-2020/EQC/Meetings/Jan-2020/scorp-2020-2024.pdf	Identifies major outdoor recreation trends, needs, and issues of statewide importance, both at the state and regional level, including within the Big Sky Country NHA.
Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan, 2008	U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Lewistown Field Office	https://ia801603.us.archive.org/35/items/uppermissouririv00unit/uppermissouririv00unit.pdf	This National Monument adjoins the Big Sky Country NHA to add 149 miles of Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. A strong relationship with the Bureau of Land Management is important in promoting education and tourism throughout our Upper Missouri region.

Tourism and Marketing Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Great Falls MT Tourism Strategic Plan – Adopted April 18, 2019	Great Falls Montana Tourism	Great Falls Montana Tourism	Cultural tourism is a key component of the Great Falls Montana Tourism Alliance’s strategic plan, seeking to protect, enhance and promote visitor experiences in Great Falls and in a day trip radius of the city, which encompasses all of the proposed NHA. Tourism strategic themes include the arts, historical locations, museums, natural environment, and cultural events.
Montana’s Basecamp for Art and Adventure: 2020 Marketing Plan, July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020	Great Falls Montana Tourism	https://visitgreatfallsmontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2020-Plan.pdf	This marketing plan implements the Great Falls Montana Tourism Strategic Plan listed above. The plan promotes cultural, historical, arts, museum, and events in the region.
Central Montana Tourism Marketing Plan, approved April 11, 2019	Central Montana Tourism Board of Directors	https://marketmt.com/Portals/129/shared/RegionsCVBs/docs/FY20%20Marketing%20Plans/October%202019/Central%20Montana%20Oct%202019.pdf?ver=2019-10-29-113057-273	The characteristics of Central Montana’s target market include those who value local business and locally grown or produced items; enjoy our scenic landscapes; and value access to public lands, waterways, and open space. This plan’s objectives focus on heritage travelers and those seeking an educational experience.

Transportation Plan

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Transportation Improvement Program, FFY 2019-FFY2023	Great Falls Planning Board	https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/41061/great_falls_tip_2019-23_amendment.pdf	The TIP is a multi-year program of transportation projects developed by the city of Great Falls, Cascade County, Montana DOT, and the Great Falls Transit District that includes a list of priority road improvement projects. BSCNHA, Inc., can provide input about events that might attract large numbers of travelers and/or tourism developments (i.e. trail connections) for consideration in future transportation priority setting.

Other Plans

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Strategic Plan, City of Belt, Montana, approved March 21, 2018 and Strategic Plan Annual Review, 2019, August 7, 2019	City of Belt, MT	City of Belt, MT	This annual review proposes historic preservation and interpretive programming enhancements to the city. Big Sky Country NHA can offer technical assistance in the effort to inventory historic sites and provide research and mapping assistance to create the proposed <i>Now and Then</i> map of historic asset locations.
Great Falls, Montana Development Authority Strategic Plan, September 2019	Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA)	https://growgreatfallsmontana.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/GFDA-Strategic-Plan_Clean.pdf	This regional economic development plan encompasses the entire Big Sky Country NHA region. Priorities include growing the tourism sector, downtown revitalization, enhancement of the river corridor, and continued community improvements to retain and attract talent. The plan details economic development services like gap and bridge financing, business planning, business development, and brownfield redevelopment important for historic preservation and renovation projects.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Trail Stewardship Endowment: A National Council of the Lewis & Clark Expedition Bicentennial Legacy Project, 10 Year Report, 2006-2016. July 7, 2016	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	This endowment was a gift to the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation for stewardship projects across the LCNHT and the Eastern Legacy route. Considering Lewis and Clark is a major theme of the Big Sky Country NHA, this could potentially be a funding source for Lewis and Clark-related projects within the project area.
Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Strategic Plan and Action Plan March 2018, updated November 2, 2018	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	Several goals of the strategic and action plans align with the purpose of Big Sky Country NHA; and the NHA can assist with promotion, technical assistance, interpretive planning, event promotion, and collaboration on programming related to the Lewis and Clark story to help implement these plans.
Keepers of the Story, Stewards of the Trail: An Administrative History of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Jackie Gonzales, and Emily Greenwald, Historic Research Associates, 2019	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	A partnership with the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, headquartered in Great Falls, is important to keeping the story of Lewis and Clark alive in the Big Sky Country NHA, particularly through projects.
C.M. Russell Museum 2019-2024 Exhibition Schedule, Sept. 2019	C.M. Russell Museum	C.M. Russell Museum	Our focus on increasing heritage tourism in Big Sky Country NHA should add increased visitation for exhibitions at the C.M. Russell Museum.
C.M. Russell Museum Strategic Plan for 2019-2022, approved June 2018	C.M. Russell Museum	C.M. Russell Museum	One of the goals in the plan is to work with other interested educational, cultural, and historical entities to enrich programming. This fits within the scope of Big Sky Country NHA as the C.M. Russell Home and Studio NHL is within our boundary.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Commemoration and Collaboration: Administrative History of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, 2018, Jackie Gonzales and Emily Greenwald	Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Omaha Office, NPS	http://npshistory.com/publications/lecl/adhi.pdf	As the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail continues to build its legacy in the post-bicentennial era, reengaging tribal and other partners are crucial to ensuring the Lewis and Clark story maintains viability. A strong partnership between the Big Sky Country NHA and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail could be key for success.
Get Fit Great Falls Strategic Plan 2020-2023	Get Fit Great Falls	Get Fit Great Falls	Get Fit Great Falls intends to increase walkability and improved wayfinding in the Great Falls community by incorporating opportunities for interpretive walks through historic districts in the downtown area. GFGF also plans to expand interpretive opportunities in the south side of Great Falls to bring awareness of the city's history into those walking neighborhoods. BSCNHA, Inc., can collaborate on the assembly of those historic stories and assist with walking tours during the annual Summer Trails Day event sponsored by GFGF to introduce the community to these interesting, walkable routes.
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Foundation Document, December 2012	Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Omaha Office, NPS	Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Omaha Office, NPS	This management document assists the NPS LECL staff in establishing goals, assessing planning needs, and identifying and analyzing resources and values of the trail. A collaborative relationship with BSCNHA, Inc., could assist the NPS LECL in implementing their goals on the L&C Trail in our area.
Monarch-Neihart Historical Group Long Range Plan 2018-2023	Monarch-Neihart Historical Group	Monarch-Neihart Historical Group	The plan supports both the MNHG's and the Big Sky Country NHA's goals of promoting and preserving the Monarch-Neihart area.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
Montana Performing Arts Consortium Strategic Plan, 1993 and updated 2015	Montana Performing Arts Consortium	Montana Performing Arts Consortium, Great Falls, MT office	Art is one of the main themes of the Big Sky Country NHA, and a relationship with the Montana Performing Arts Consortium could be beneficial in promoting the arts in our project area, as well as helping develop new communities and presenters to an arts series and providing education and training for artists and presenters.
The Montana History Foundation Strategic Priorities 2017-2020, adopted May 2017	Montana History Foundation	Montana History Foundation	The History Foundation helps preserve Montana history by making grants and creating collaborative initiatives. They leverage the generosity of donors to create opportunities for Montana communities to expand economic development through heritage tourism and historic preservation. This plan focuses solidifying the History Foundation's internal and external capacity to achieve those goals through 2020 and beyond.
Montana Wilderness Association Strategic Plan 2018-2021, approved September 2017	State Office of MWA, Helena, MT	State Office of MWA, Helena, MT	MWA's strategy of preserving outdoor opportunities while working with diverse communities to conserve multiple human and natural values and connections to place integrates well with the NHA's vision and mission of preserving area heritage and enhancing the human connection to it.
Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art Strategic Plan, 2016-2020	Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art	Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art	This significant cultural center plans for the presentation of contemporary art exhibitions; builds a substantial permanent collection; preserves and utilizes a National Register listed building; and provides art education for all ages echoing a significant focus on art by the Big Sky Country NHA.

PLAN NAME	ORGANIZATION	PLAN AVAILABILITY	INTEGRATION WITH BIG SKY COUNTRY NHA
University of Providence Strategic Plan, December 1, 2017	University of Providence Board of Trustees	https://www.uprovidence.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/UP_Strategy_FINAL-BOARD-APPROVED.pdf	As Central Montana's only four-year university, University of Providence provides students with the opportunity to obtain a liberal arts education for living and making a living. UP offers a link to both academia and students looking to further their education, both which help to build the economic framework of Big Sky Country NHA.

APPENDIX II

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, INC.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

June 2020

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Reneé McDonald, Educator
Fort Benton Elementary School

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Town of Cascade

The board acknowledges the time, intellectual contributions, and commitment of previous board members not listed, including the late Dr. Ruth Knudsen and the late Dr. Nicholas Vrooman. It is in appreciation of all of their efforts that the Big Sky Country NHA, Inc., Board of Directors proudly advances this feasibility study to the National Park Service and the United States Congress.

APPENDIX III

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

PARTNERS

ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITY/MISSION of ORGANIZATION	FINANCIAL SUPPORT: CURRENT CONTRIBUTOR (CC) POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTOR (PC)	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OR OTHER IN-KIND SERVICE
Key Partners			
Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO)	Preservation & development of Superfund recreational site	Annual financial contributions (CC)	Black Eagle Superfund Site re-purposing
Bear Paw Development Corporation	Economic development	Grants (PC), loans	Haz-mat surveys (Brownfields) & removal, business development, grant writing assistance
C.M. Russell Museum	Preservation, tourism, education	In-kind (CC)	Planning, protection, & promotion of C.M. Russell NHL
Cascade County	Economic development, preservation, conservation, recreation	In-kind (CC), funding of Historic Preservation Officer & other staff time (Jane) (CC)	Board membership (CC); identification, evaluation, & protection of significant resources within the NHA; meeting space for committee meetings; growth policies
Certified Local Government/Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission	Preservation, economic development, recreation, tourism	In-kind (CC)	Project assistance, preservation planning, National Register assistance, cultural resource surveys
Chouteau County	Economic development, preservation, conservation, recreation	In-kind (PC)	Board membership (PC), growth policies
City of Great Falls	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind & funding of HPO (CC)	Heritage database mapping, IT support, office space, meeting space, staff assistance, events & projects (City Parks and Recreation)
Fort Benton Community Improvement Association	Economic development, tourism, preservation	Contribution (CC) & in-kind (PC)	Operations funding & project funding & assistance

Great Falls Development Authority	Economic development	Grants (PC), loans	Board membership (CC), haz-mat surveys (Brownfields) & removal, business development, grant writing assistance
Great Falls Montana Tourism	Tourism promotion	Grants (PC), in-kind (CC)	Online tourism promotion for significant resources within the NHA, project assistance
Historic Preservation Officer	Preservation, economic development	In-kind (CC)	Ex-officio board membership (CC), project assistance, technical assistance in historic preservation, heritage database assistance
Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	Grants (CC)	Preservation & promotion of the L & C National Historic Trail
Montana History Foundation	Preservation of significant historic resources in Montana	Grants (PC)	Board membership (CC), grant writing assistance
Montana State Historic Preservation Office	Preservation	In-kind (PC), grants (PC), contributions (PC)	Technical assistance on historic matters
Montana State Parks	Preservation, conservation, recreation	In-kind (CC)	Board membership (CC), recreational trail acquisition & development, preservation/promotion of First Peoples Buffalo Jump NHL & 4 other state parks within the NHA
NorthWestern Energy	Economic development	Annual financial contribution (CC)	Recreational development, historic preservation, NHL evaluation, dam & powerhouse preservation, tourism
Sweetgrass Development	Economic development	Grants (PC), loans	Haz-mat surveys (Brownfields) & removal, business development, grant writing assistance
Town of Belt	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind (PC)	Board membership (PC), preservation & promotion of Belt National Register district & other significant resources, recreational trail development
Town of Cascade	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind (PC)	Board membership (CC), preservation planning for Cascade, National Register identification & evaluation
Town of Fort Benton	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind (PC)	Board membership (PC), preservation planning for Fort Benton NHL & other significant resources

Town of Neihart	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind (PC)	Preservation of significant resources in Neihart, recreational trail development
Current Partners			
Central Montana Tourism	Tourism	Grants (PC), in-kind (CC)	Board membership (CC), promotion/marketing of significant resources within the NHA
Lewis & Clark Foundation (local)	Tourism, education	In-kind (CC), contributions (PC)	Member of Fundraising Committee (CC), planning & promotion for the L & C Interpretive Center
Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana	Education, heritage tourism, culture	In-kind (CC)	Expert panel (CC), project assistance, technical assistance on cultural matters
Monarch-Neihart Historical Group	Preservation, conservation, recreation, tourism	In-kind (CC)	Land acquisition; identification, evaluation, & preservation of significant resources; recreational trail development
Montana Historical Society	Preservation, heritage tourism, education, interpretation	In-kind (PC)	Technical assistance on historic matters
Montana Preservation Alliance	Preservation	In-kind (PC), grants (PC)	Technical assistance on historic matters
Sun River Valley Historical Society	Preservation, tourism, education, interpretation	In-kind (PC)	Planning, preservation, & promotion of Fort Shaw & other area resources
The History Museum	Preservation, heritage tourism, education, interpretation	In-kind (PC)	Technical assistance on historic matters
Potential Partners			
1st Bank of Montana	Economic development, banking	Contribution (PC)	Project funding
1st Interstate Bank	Economic development, banking	Contribution (CC)	Project funding
Belt Valley Bank	Economic development, banking	Contribution (CC)	Project funding
BNSF Railroad	Transportation	Annual financial contribution (PC)	Operational and/or project funding
Bureau of Land Management	Recreation	In-kind (PC)	Upper Missouri River Breaks Interpretive Center events, programming, and/or staffing
Cargill	Economic development, food, agriculture, research & development	Contribution (PC), in-kind (PC)	Project funding and/or assistance, events
Cascade Bank	Economic development, banking	Contribution (PC)	Project funding

Community Beautification Assn.	Community beautification	Contribution (PC)	Project funding
DA Davidson	Financial planner, wealth management, investment banking	Annual financial contribution (PC)	Operational and/or project funding
Downtown Development Partnership	Preservation, economic development, downtown revitalization	In-kind (PC)	Project assistance, wayfinding
Farmers Union	Economic development, education, recreation	Annual financial contribution (PC), in-kind (PC)	Project assistance
Fort Benton Chamber of Commerce	Tourism, economic development, promotion	In-kind (PC)	Events and assistance with business promotion
Friends of the Missouri River Breaks	Conservation, recreation	In-kind (PC)	Project assistance
Great Falls Business Improvement District	Tourism, economic development, downtown revitalization	Grants (PC), in-kind (PC)	Project assistance, promotion of Downtown Historic District, urban art
Great Falls Chamber of Commerce	Tourism, economic development, promotion	In-kind (PC)	Events and assistance with business promotion
Montana Grain Growers	Economic development, education, ag production	In-kind (PC)	Agri-tourism projects
MT Department of Commerce	Preservation, economic development	Grants (PC), in-kind (PC)	Operational and/or project funding
Museum Consortium	Preservation, tourism, education, interpretation	In-kind (PC)	Projects and events
Pacific Steel	Economic development	Annual financial contribution (PC)	Operational and/or project funding
Portage Route Chapter	Preservation and promotion of Great Falls Portage NHL	Contributions (PC), in-kind (PC)	Educational programming, interpretive signage, events
Preservation Cascade, Inc.	Preservation of significant resources	In-kind (PC)	Project assistance
Rivers and Plains Society	Preservation, education, tourism	In-kind (PC)	Project assistance and events
River's Edge Trail	Preservation & promotion of National Recreation Trail	In-kind (PC)	Project and technical assistance, promotion
Rural Electric Co-ops	Economic development, promotion, education	Contribution (PC)	Project funding

Service Organizations (Kiwanis, Optimists, Lions, Rotary, etc.)	Community service	In-kind (PC)	Project assistance
Stockman Bank	Economic development, banking	Contribution (PC)	Project funding
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Recreation	In-kind (PC)	Events at Benton Lake, interpretation and education
US Forest Service	Recreation	In-kind (PC)	Events, programming at the Interpretive Center, staffing at the Interpretive Center, Sulphur Spring Trail and/or other trails, possible trailhead at the Monarch area
Wells Fargo Bank	Economic development, banking	Contribution (PC)	Project assistance, preservation planning, National Register assistance, cultural resource surveys

APPENDIX IV

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED SPRING & SUMMER 2018

1. Portage Route Chapter Members – Lee Ebeling, Walt Walker, Norm Anderson, Don Peterson
2. River and Plains Society – Larry Cook
3. Mayor of Fort Benton – Rick Morris
4. President/CEO of NorthWestern Energy – Bob Rowe
5. President and Board Member of River’s Edge Trail – Bruce Pollington and Anders Blewett
6. Business Development at Great Falls Development Authority – Jolene Schalper
7. Great Falls Montana Tourism – Rebecca Engum
8. President/CEO of Great Falls Chamber of Commerce – Shane Etzwiler
9. Chairman of Great Falls Area Community Foundation – Lori Eckhardt
10. Mayor of Great Falls – Bob Kelly
11. Montana Farmer’s Union – Chris Christiaens
12. Chairman of Little Shell Tribe of the Chippewa Indians of Montana – Gerald Gray
13. Mayor of Belt – Jim Olson
14. Belt Performing Arts Center – Amy Olson
15. Montana Flour and Grains – Karyn Giles
16. Grand Union Hotel – Cheryl Gagnon
17. Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development – Sean Becker
18. Administrator, Montana State Parks – Beth Shumate
19. Forest Supervisor, Helena/Lewis and Clark National Forests – Bill Avey
20. Representative from BP/ARCO – Doug Birkbeck, Business Liability Manager
21. Chouteau County Performing Arts – Randy Morger
22. Local Historian and Preservation Activist – Cheryl Hutchinson

APPENDIX V (A)

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT — PRESENTATIONS

DATE of PRESENTATION	ORGANIZATION RECEIVING PRESENTATION	PRESENTER(S)	ATTENDANCE
	2015		
Friday, January 30, 2015 & Saturday, January 31, 2015	Grand Tour I	Lee Nellis	100
	2016		
Friday, April 1, 2016	Grand Tour II	John Taillie, Lynette Sriver, Bill Bronson, Jane Weber	70
Tuesday, April 26, 2016	Lewis and Clark County Commissioners and HPAC	Ellen Sievert and Jane Weber	14
Thursday, May 5, 2016	Fort Benton (Chouteau County Commissioner, Fort Benton City Council, Planning Board and Community Members	Bill Bronson, Jane Weber, Ken Robison	14
Monday, May 16, 2016	Fergus and Phillips County Commissioners and Community Members (Winifred, MT)	Bill Bronson, Jane Weber, Ken Robison, Ellen Sievert	50
Wednesday, May 18, 2016	Business Advocacy Committee of the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce	Jane Weber, Ellen Sievert, Mary Willmarth	12
Wednesday, May 18, 2016	Cascade County Commissioners	Tracy Houck, Ruthann Knudson, Ellen Sievert, Ken Robison	3
Thursday, May 19, 2016	Follow-up Meeting, Cascade County Commissioners Briggs and Larson	Ken Robison and Ruthann Knudson	2
Tuesday, June 7, 2016	Chouteau County Commissioners	Ken Robison	4
Tuesday, June 7, 2016	Fort Benton Chamber of Commerce	Ken Robison	7
Monday, June 13, 2016	Follow-up Meeting, Cascade County Commissioners Briggs and Larson	Ruthann Knudson and Ken Robison	2
Tuesday, June 14, 2016	GOP Party - Roger Hagen, Brian Hoven, Ed Buttrey, Steve Fitzpatrick, etc.	Bill Bronson and Jane Weber	12
Monday, June 20, 2016	Fort Benton City Council	Ken Robison and Bill Bronson	17
Tuesday, June 21, 2016	Lion's Club, Great Falls	Jane Weber and Ruthann Knudson	19
Tuesday, June 21, 2016	River and Plains Society Board Meeting, Fort Benton	Ken Robison	16
Thursday, June 23, 2016	TBID/CVB	Jane Weber and Gayle Fisher	9

	2017		
Tuesday, February 28, 2017	PEO at NeighborWorks	Jane Weber and Bill Bronson	21
Wednesday, March 1, 2017	North Central MT RC&D	Jane Weber and Ruthann Knudson	3
Sunday, March 12, 2017	Montana Dude Ranchers Association	Jane Weber and Gayle Fisher	25
Tuesday, March 14, 2017	Kiwanis Club	Jane Weber	7
Monday, April 3, 2017	Sun River Valley Historical Society	Jane Weber and Ken Robison	30
Monday, April 10, 2017	Cascade Conservation District	Jane Weber and Bill Bronson	11
Monday, April 17, 2017	Portage Route Chapter of the LCHTF	Jane Weber and Lindy Hatcher	9
Wednesday, April 19, 2017	Helena Rotary Club	Bill Bronson and Ellen Sievert	30
Wednesday, May 3, 2017	Black Eagle Civic Group	Carol Bronson	12
Monday, June 5 2017	Gates of the Mountains Chapter of the LCTHF	Carol Bronson, Ellen Sievert, Lindy Hatcher	10
Friday, August 18, 2017	NHA Montana Exploratory Group (Bozeman)	Bill and Carol Bronson	6
Monday, August 28, 2017	Montana History Foundation	Ken Robison and Charlene Porsild	26
Wednesday, September 6, 2017	Business and Professional Women	Jane Weber and Lindy Hatcher	7
Thursday, September 14, 2017	Town Council Cascade	Jane Weber	8
Friday, October 6, 2017	NHA Montana Exploratory Group (Bozeman)	Bill and Carol Bronson	17
Wednesday, October 18, 2017	Great Falls Conservation Consortium & MT Wilderness Assn.	Jane Weber and Bill Bronson	36
Friday, November 3, 2017	NorthWestern Energy	Jane Weber, Bill Bronson, and Heidi Hockett	1
Monday, November 13, 2017	Salvation Army Women's Auxilliary	Jane Weber	35
Tuesday, November 28, 2017	Great Falls Rising	Jane Weber and Bill Bronson	64
Thursday, January 19, 2017	Community Dinner at Ag Museum, Fort Benton	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	30
Saturday, January 21, 2017	Community Presentation at Cascade Senior Center	Jane Weber, Bill Bronson, Murry Moore	10

	2018		
Thursday, February 1, 2018	L&C-Helena National Forest, SO	Jane Weber and Bill Bronson	8
Thursday, February 8, 2018	PEO Organization	Jane Weber	25
Friday, February 9, 2018	NC Montana Retired Teachers Association	Jane Weber	38
Tuesday, May 1, 2018	Meeting with State of Montana officials, Lt. Governor, L&C County Commission, USFS, City of Helena Mayor	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	20
Tuesday, May 1, 2018	Community Conversation, Helena	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	12
Wednesday, May 2, 2018	Community Conversation, Fort Benton	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	41
Thursday, May 3, 2018	Community Conversation, Great Falls	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	60
	2019		
Wednesday, January 30, 2019	Community Conversation, Fort Benton	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	65
Thursday, January 31, 2019	Community Conversation, Black Eagle	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber	105
Saturday, June 15, 2019	Information Booth at the Lewis and Clark Festival	Jane Weber, John Taillie, Rich Ecke, Gayle Fisher	100
Saturday, June 29, 2019	Information Booth at the Summer Celebration, Fort Benton	Ken Robison, Charlene Porsild, Gayle Fisher, Kate McCourt, Jane Weber	40
Saturday, August 24, 2019	Information Booth at the Little Shell PowWow/ First People's Buffalo Jump	Jane Weber and Gayle Fisher	95
Thursday, September 12, 2019	Final Community Conversation, Belt	Augie Carlino, Nancy Morgan, Jane Weber, Ellen Sievert	110
Thursday, October 17, 2019	Presentation to the Community Improvement Association, Fort Benton	John Taillie, Jane Weber	6
Total Number of Presentations: 51			
Total Number of Attendees: 1,474			

APPENDIX V (B)

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT - PRESENTATIONS

Since the inception of creating a National Heritage Area in Montana (early 2015), board members of the Big Sky Country NHA Corporation have made 51 formal presentations to state and local elected government officials, business leaders, ranchers, and the general public. Nearly 1,500 people attended these meetings, some of which undoubtedly attended more than one presentation or public meeting. Forty of those meetings (820 attendees) were conducted prior to the start of the Feasibility Study and the formal public engagement process. Board members made these presentations to local elected officials and many service/education/business organizations twice in large public sessions, but often in small group settings. An introductory PowerPoint program was created by the board to introduce community members to the purpose of National Heritage Areas, the economic, preservation and educational value NHAs provide communities, the process to achieve NHA status and make attendees aware of the volunteer board members who have raised funds and worked through the process to gain federal designation. Although a listing of all the presentations made is provided in the Appendix IV, following is a summation of several important sessions conducted by board members.

January 30 (evening) and January 31, 2015 (morning) Grand Tour I Public Meeting in the Missouri Room in the Civic Center in Great Falls, MT (100 attendees)

Determining the potential for the creation of a National Heritage Area was a goal of the Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, a Certified Local Government board. The initial project, funded by a State Historic Preservation Office grant and the Tourism Business Improvement District, included both a professional heritage tourism assessment and a public meeting to discuss the potential of a designation of a National Heritage Area.

Media included: on-line electronic postcard, notices on City of Great Falls Planning Department website, News releases to the local media in Great Falls; posters in the community. Also included an on-line survey.

Meeting Structure: Presentations by Charles Flynn, Executive Director of the Yuma Crossing NHA, AZ about the creation and management of a NHA, partnerships and the community's success in managing two state historic parks threaten by closure due to state budget cuts. Vicky Soderberg of Cygnet Strategies reported on the Visitor Assessment conducted during the summer of 2014 by a team of professional travelers who utilized on-line information, on-site information to plan trips to the Great Falls community. The Assessment results provided suggestions on ways to build on Great Falls' sense of place and heritage. Considerable Q&A throughout the meeting. The public worked at tables to draw their favorite historic, heritage or recreation places in the Great Falls vicinity and beyond the city limits.

At the culmination of the meeting, Lee Nellis, Deputy Planning and Community Development Director for the City of Great Falls, asked for a show of hands indicating whether the community should pursue the concept of seeking federal designation of a National Heritage Area. The response was overwhelmingly in support.

April 1, 2016 Grand Tour II Public Meeting in the Missouri Room at the Civic Center in Great Falls, MT (70 attendees)

Meeting was organized by the newly established board of Directors for the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation, Inc. for the purpose of updating those who attended the initial Grand Tour I; introducing attendees to the UMRHAPC board of directors; reviewing what a NHA is and can do for communities; revealing proposed boundary from resources identified at the Grand Tour I public meeting, the extensive database of resources that was being developed and maintained by the city GIS coordinator; reviewing the strategic plan (mission, goals and action steps) created in Fall 2015 with the assistance of facilitator Mark Willmarth; reviewing the administrative accomplishments (501(c)(3) soon to be filed, articles of incorporation and bylaws completed; revealing initial six themes (American Indians, Exploration and Settlement, Transportation, Military, Industrial/Agriculture, and Art). Large displays of each of the themes and their subthemes was posted on easels throughout the room so attendees fully understood the intent of each theme.

Comment forms were provided on all the tables asking for input in three areas:

1. Draft NHA boundary (header read: *I would like to make some suggestions about historical/cultural sites of significance that you should consider*). Commenters were asked to identify the county their story was located in and describe the national significance of the site or story and describe the location of the site in detail. NOTE: at this time the boundary included all of Cascade and Chouteau Counties as well as the Missouri River beyond Chouteau County to include the entire upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River terminating at Kipp bridge on US 191, and the lands bordering the Missouri River Breaks National Monument, and lands along the Missouri River beyond Cascade County to Gates of the Mountains
2. Themes (header read: *I would like to add some ideas or stories for one of the themes. Circle the theme you are choosing to provide comments. Please use a different form for each theme you choose to address*)
3. Volunteering (header read: *I would like to volunteer for one of the committees. Please circle the committee you are interested in and we will contact you with more information – Fundraising, Database, Communications/Public Engagement*)

Media Included: on-line electronic postcard notice using existing emails of attendees to Grand Tour I, news releases to the local media in Great Falls and the airing of a PSA on radio stations.

Meeting Structure: PowerPoint presentation by UMRHAPC board of directors and Pro Bono Counsel followed by table discussion facilitated by UMRHAPC board members to enlist members for the following committees - Fundraising Committee, Database Committee and Communications/Public Engagement Committee.

Contributions: First Interstate Bank, Pizazz, Community Improvement Association in Fort Benton, CM Russell Museum, DA Davidson Company, Great Falls-Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, JCCS Corporation, Randy Morger, Northwestern Energy, and the Tourism Business Improvement District.

April 26, 2016 Meeting with the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners and the City-County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission in the County offices in Helena, MT (14 attendees)

Upon invitation of the HPAC, several board members made a presentation to the commission and to Lewis and Clark County Commissioners Andy Hunthausen and Susan Good Geise on the progress of the UMRHAPC. The meeting consisted of a PowerPoint presentation followed by Q&A.

May 5, 2016 Presentation to the Chouteau County Commissioners, members of the Fort Benton Town Council and the City Planning Board. This was an open public meeting in the Sheriff's Office area in Fort Benton. (14 attendees)

Meeting Structure: A PowerPoint presentation was made followed by Q&A. Several farmer/ranchers attended and asked questions about potential infringement of private property rights.

May 16, 2016 Presentation to the Fergus and Phillips County Commissioners and farmers/ranchers in the two- county area (50 attendees)

Throughout April, the UMRHAPC made multiple calls to the Fergus County Commissioners requesting an opportunity to discuss the proposed NHA effort and the preliminary boundary with the commissioners and their constituents in a public forum. The initial requests were rebuffed several times. After several failed attempts to schedule this meeting, the Fergus/Phillips County Commissioners relented and agreed to schedule a presentation in Winifred, MT.

Meeting Structure: Four UMRHAPC board members and their pro bono counsel attended the meeting and shared in the presentation of a PowerPoint program, then followed by a Q&A session. Since the Fergus and Phillips County commissions had already passed resolutions opposing consideration of an NHA in their counties, this meeting was essentially designed to simply provide the facts about NHA designation, allay concerns about private property rights issues and thank the communities for listening. The UMRHAPC had by this time already discussed removing all lands within those two counties.

May 18, 2016 Presentation to the Cascade County Commissioners in the Commission Chambers in Great Falls, MT. The PowerPoint presentation was shown, followed by a Q&A session.

January 24, 2017 Press Release and attendance at Northwestern Energy's Annual Public meeting in Great Falls

The UMRHAPC released a press announcement stating the recent accomplishments of the UMRHAPC board of directors and inviting folks to contact a board member if their organization would like a presentation on the NHA process and progress. The news release was sent to all radio and print media in the Fort Benton, Helena, Great Falls area.

At the Northwestern Energy annual community meeting on January 24, 2017 at the History Museum in Great Falls, the UMRHAPC provided postcards on all of the attendees' tables identifying the following:

- Mission of the UMRHAPC
- Listing of the website
- Invitation for an UMRHAPC board member to provide a presentation to any public or private organization

Approximately 75 business and community leaders attended this meeting and had the opportunity to obtain a postcard.

May 1, 2018 Briefing at the Governor's Office

- Lt Governor Mike Cooney
- Bruce Whittenberg, Director of the Montana Historical Society
- Wilmot Collins, Mayor of Helena
- Andy Hunthausen, Lewis and Clark County Commissioner
- Sean Becker, Division Administrator, MT Office of Tourism and Business Development
- Beth Shumate, Montana State Parks Administrator

- Kate Hampton, SHPO Officer, MT Historical Society
- Marty Mitzkus, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest representative for Forest Supervisor, Bill Avey
- Jason Smith, Montana Indian Affairs
- Tash Wisemiller, MT Main Street Coordinator, Community Development Division, MT Dept. of Commerce
- Ken Fichtler, Director, Governor's Office of Economic Development

May 1, 2018 Community Conversation at MT. Historical Society

May 2, 2018 Community Conversation at MT Agricultural Center in Fort Benton

May 3, 2018 Community Conversation in Missouri Room at Civic Center in Great Falls

Media included: recorded PSAs, Live Radio Broadcasts at STARadio, Cherry Creek Radio and MT Public Radio *Voices and Views Program* in Great Falls and Press Releases to all print media (Helena, Fort Benton, Great Falls) and Jenn Rowell at on-line media (The Electric) and electronic postcard mailings to the Constant Contact email list.

Meeting Structure: With the exception of the Helena Meeting which had a small attendance, the public was invited to work in small groups at tables and identify resources and review draft themes. Postcards with a statement of the UMRHAPC mission, listing of the themes, identification of the names of the Board of Directors, and contact information for the UMRHAPC organization was provided on all the tables for attendees to take home.

January 30, 2019 Community Conversation in Black Eagle Community Center, Black Eagle, MT

January 31, 2019 Community Conversation in the MT Agricultural Center in Fort Benton

Media included: recorded PSAs, Live Radio Broadcasts at STARadio, Cherry Creek Radio and MT Public Radio *Voices and Views Program* in Great Falls and Press Releases to all print media (Fort Benton, Great Falls and Black Eagle News) and Jenn Rowell at on-line media (The Electric) and electronic postcard mailings to the Constant Contact email list.

Meeting Structure: Presentation of what an NHA is, the draft themes, revised map incorporating resources from previous meetings and Q&A session. An information handout sheet was provided at each of the meetings

September 12, 2019 Final Community Conversation in the Belt Performing Arts Center, Belt, MT

Media included: recorded PSAs, Live Radio Broadcasts at STARadio, Cherry Creek Radio and MT Public Radio *Voices and Views Program* in Great Falls and Press Releases to all print media (Fort Benton and Great Falls) and Jenn Rowell at on-line media (The Electric) and electronic postcard mailings to the Constant Contact email list. Fort Benton sponsored a bus for attendees who did not wish to drive to Belt.

Meeting Structure: Since this was the final meeting prior to the packaging of the Feasibility Study, this was primarily a presentation and reveal of the new name, the Statement of Significance, revised map and revised themes. A comment card was provided for folks to submit comments to the NHA Board of Directors who were identified at the meeting.

Contributions: Harvest Moon Brewing Company; Del Darko; Jim and Amy Olson for partial payment of the use of the Belt Performing Art Center; Board members of the Belt Performing Arts Center; Pepsi; The Diamond; and Belt Valley Bank.

Support: Letters or Public Expressions of Support from Jim Olson, Mayor of Belt; Rick Morris, Mayor of Fort Benton; Steve Taylor, Mayor of Neihart; Bob Kelly, Mayor of Great Falls; Murry Moore, Mayor of Cascade

APPENDIX VI

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA POTENTIAL FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

Foundations	Arts, Culture & Humanities	Education	Environment, Conservation & Wildlife	General Support	Historic Preservation, Community & Economic Development	Native Americans
The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation		X	X			
L.P. and Teresa Anderson Foundation		X			X	
Michael D. and Susan H. Arenson Family Foundation, Inc.						
The Bibler Foundation			X		X	
BNSF Railway Foundation	X	X				
Boe Brothers Foundation		X				
Archie Bray Foundation	X					
Burke Family Foundation	X	X		X		
Burnt Leather Foundation		X	X			
Canyon Creek Foundation		X	X			
Carl Carbon, Jr. Charitable Trust		X				
Cinnabar Foundation			X			
Frank and Mary Cipech Charitable Trust		X				
Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation			X			
Cobb Foundation	X					
Bill & Marian Cook Foundation				X		

Cordingley Foundation	X	X				
Darkenwald Foundation, Inc.				X		
Double F Foundation				X		
First Interstate BancSystem Foundation, Inc.					X	
The Foley Family Charitable Foundation	X	X				
Four Times Foundation						X
Gerhart Foundation				X		
Greater Montana Foundation		X				
The Harder Foundation			X			
Humanities Montana	X					
Royal and Norma Johnson Charitable Foundation				X		
Kongsgaard-Goldman Foundation	X		X			
Leaw Family Foundation, Inc.	X	X				
Lee Foundation	X	X	X			
Lippard-Clawiter Foundation				X		
Lore Kann Foundation	X					
MDU Resources Foundation	X	X		X		
Jerry Metcalf Foundation	X	X	X		X	
MKM Foundation		X		X		
Montana Arts Council	X					

Montana Community Foundation	X	X	X	X		
Montana History Foundation					X	
M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust	X	X		X		
Nance Family Foundation, Inc		X				
William and Lorene Nefsy Foundation	X	X			X	
Peter Nelson Charitable Trust		X				
Pleiades Foundation	X					
The Rock Foundation					X	
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation			X			
Sacred Ground International			X			X
Steele-Reese Foundation	X	X	X			
Talbot Family Foundation			X			
Jean B. Taylor & Richard Lucian Taylor Family Foundation				X		
Ruth and Vernon Taylor Foundation	X	X	X			
Tordik Wildlife Foundation			X			
Treacy Company		X			X	
Turner Foundation, Inc.			X			
U.S. Bancorp Foundation, Inc.	X	X				
Dennis R. and Phyllis Washington Foundation, Inc.	X	X				

APPENDIX VII (A)

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

INVENTORY – HISTORICAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Resource Name	Designation Date										City		County		National Resource					Notes				
Anaconda Mining Company																								
Arvon Block																								
Bank of North Montana																								
Belt Commercial Historic District																								
Belt Creek																								
Belt Jail																								
Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge																								
Birdtail Divide																								
Birdtail Rock																								
Carter Ferry																								
Cascade County Courthouse																								
Charles M. Russell House and Studio																								
Charlie and Nancy Russell Honeymoon Cabin																								
Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Passenger Depot																								
Choteau House																								
Chouteau County Courthouse																								
Decision Point (confluence of Marias River)																								

APPENDIX VII (C)

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA INVENTORY – EVENTS AND AMENITIES

Resource Name	County				City				Historical	Natural	Cultural (Living Traditions)	Recreational	Tourism	Event	Notes
	The Missouri River	Lewis & Clark	A Far Distant Land	A New West	Belt	Cascade	Chouteau	Chouteau							
Belt Performing Arts					X										
Belt Rodeo					X										
Beyond the Dam (bike race)															
Black Eagle 4th of July Picnic					X										Hosted by NW Energy
Cascade Rodeo					X										ACM/Black Eagle community tradition
Western Art Week					X										CM Russell, modern art, Western art, gun and antique show, crafts, multi-nation powwow
Chouteau County Country Christmas					X										
Chouteau County Fair					X										
Chouteau County Performing Arts					X										
Exceptional Rodeo					X										
Fort Benton Farmers Market					X										
Fort Benton Rodeo					X										
Fort Benton Summer Celebration					X										
Dusty Gliko Bull Riding Challenge					X										
Great Falls Farmers Market					X										
Great Falls Performing Arts					X										
Montana Pro Rodeo Circuit Finals					X										
Great Falls Turf Club Horse Racing					X										
Labor Day Picnic					X										
Lewis and Clark Festival					X										
Little Shell Powwow					X										
Luminaria Walk					X										
Missouri Breaks Triathlon/Cho Co Fun					X										
Missouri River Landing Farmers Market					X										
Monarch Rocks					X										
Montana High School Rodeo					X										
Montana State Fair					X										
PRCA Big Sky Pro Rodeo					X										
Big Sky Region Rodeo					X										
Waking the Dead					X										

X = Resource
Pr = Primary reason for inclusion in inventory
+ = Supporting reason for inclusion in inventory

APPENDIX VII (B)

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

INVENTORY – MUSEUMS AND INTERPRETIVE CENTERS

Resource Name	County										Notes
	The Missouri River	First Peoples	Lewis & Clark	A Far Distant Land	A New West	City	Cascade	Chouteau	Cascade		
C. M. Russell Museum	X	X	X	X	X	Great Falls				Pr	
Dean & Donna Strand Western Art Gallery	X	X	X	X	X	Fort Benton				Pr	
Cascade Senior Citizens Center and Museum						Cascade				Pr	
Cowboys Bar and Museum						Great Falls			Pr	+	Not individually listed, contributing property in the Great Falls West Bank Historic District
Eden Community Hall and Park						Eden				Pr	
Fort Benton Veterans Park						Fort Benton				Pr	
Galerie Trinitas						Great Falls				Pr	
Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art						Great Falls				Pr	
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center	X	X	X	X	X	Great Falls				Pr	
Malmstrom Air Force Base Museum						Great Falls				Pr	
Mehmke Steam Tractor Museum						Great Falls				Pr	
Montana Museum of Railroad History						Great Falls				Pr	
Montana State Agricultural Museum						Fort Benton				Pr	
Museum of the Upper Missouri						Fort Benton				Pr	
Old Forts Trail						Fort Benton				Pr	
The History Museum (Cascade County Historical Society)	X	X	X	X	X	Great Falls				Pr	
Starr Gallery of Western Art	X	X	X	X	X	Fort Benton				Pr	
Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center	X	X	X	X	X	Fort Benton				Pr	
Ursuline Academy/Ursuline Centre (Great Falls)						Great Falls				Pr	

X = Resource

Pr = Primary reason for inclusion in inventory

+ = Supporting reason for inclusion in inventory

APPENDIX VIII

BIG SKY COUNTRY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, INC. PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS RESOLUTION

Resolution No. 2017 – 2

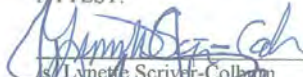
BE IT RESOLVED, that the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area Planning Corporation, Inc. [the Corporation] endorses the following language in any authorizing legislation designating any portion of Montana as a National Heritage Area¹:

- (1) The local coordinating entity identified in the enabling legislation shall not use federal funds received in its establishing legislation to acquire any interest in real property;*
- (2) The establishment as a National Heritage Area shall not affect the authority of any federal official to provide technical or financial assistance under any other law;*
- (3) The establishment as a National Heritage Area shall not modify any law or regulation authorizing federal officials to manage federal land under their control, or limit the discretion of federal land managers to implement approved land use plans within the boundaries of the National Heritage Area, nor shall designation as a National Heritage Area be construed to modify, alter, or amend any authorized uses of these federal lands;*
- (4) Nothing in any enabling legislation act shall be construed to:*
 - abridge the rights of any property owner whether public or private, including the right to refrain from participating in any plan, project, program or activity conducted within the designated National Heritage Area; nor*
 - require any property owner to permit public access (including federal, state, tribal, or local government access) to such property or to modify any provisions of federal, state, tribal or local law about public access or use of private lands; nor*
 - alter any duly adopted land use regulation or any approved land use plan or any other regulatory authority of any federal, state, or local agency or tribal government, or to convey any land use or other regulatory authority to any local coordinating entity; nor*
 - authorize or imply the reservation or appropriation of water or water rights; nor*
 - diminish the authority of the State of Montana to manage fish and wildlife including the regulation of fishing and hunting within the designated National Heritage Area; nor*
 - create any liability, or have any effect on any liability under any other law, of any private property owner with respect to any persons injured on such private property.*
- (1) In addition, the Corporation supports action by local governing bodies incorporating language in their respective growth policies, to the effect that any National Heritage Area designation within their jurisdictional boundaries shall in no way be construed by the local governing authorities, planning boards, and/or zoning commissions as a basis for zoning or other land use regulation adopted in accordance with those growth policies.*

¹ Language in sections (1) through (4) above is derived from H.R. 1002, 115th Congress, 1st Session, A bill to authorize a National Heritage Area Program, and for other purposes. February 13, 2017. Introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Charles Dent of PA with Reps. Tonko and Higgins of NY, Rep. Thompson of PA, Reps. Grijalva, Maloney of NY, Reps. Moulton, Cartwright, Meehan Doyle of PA, Reps. Allen of GA, Lou Barletta of PA and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources.

ADOPTED this 22th day of May, 2017.

ATTEST:



/s/ Lynette Scriver-Collum
Secretary



/s/ Bill Bronson
Legal Counsel



BIG SKY COUNTRY

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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