

## Pennsylvania Heritage Areas – “A Primer”

The DCNR Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program began in 1989. The following is the heritage areas program description provided in the 2009 DCNR Heritage Area Program manual.

*State Heritage Areas are large geographic regions or corridors of the Commonwealth that span two or more counties. These areas contain a multitude of historic, recreational, natural and scenic resources of state and national significance that collectively exemplify the heritage of Pennsylvania. Through regional partnerships and public grassroots planning strategies, these resources are identified, protected, enhanced and promoted to strengthen regional economies through increased tourism, creation of new jobs and stimulation of public and private partnerships for new investment opportunities. This holistic and bottom-up approach to planning ensures that the legacy of a region and the natural, educational and recreational values inherent to it - are preserved for future generations.*

*A Pennsylvania Heritage Area is a process as well as a product. It is both the means and the end to substantially enrich the quality of life in Pennsylvania and the communities and regions of the state where these initiatives are pursued. It is also about partnerships. The foundation upon which a heritage area is structured involves building and strengthening regional coalitions of community leaders, non-profit interest groups, the private sector, state agencies and the federal government. Its success is dependent upon partners being able to erase governmental and institutional boundaries while planning, acting regionally and strategically.*

The Heritage Areas Program has five goals: economic development, partnerships, cultural conservation, recreation and open space, and education and interpretation.

Heritage areas were designated using a prudent, thoughtful approach which includes a feasibility study, a management action plan and an interpretive plan. These plans guide the work of those areas. The plans are developed with tremendous grassroots participation and input which is why the heritage areas are so effective in communities. They build the relationships from the beginning.

The Heritage Area program comprehensively plans and strategically invests in the second largest industry in the Commonwealth – Tourism.

State designated heritage areas have no other sources of state funding that will provide operational dollars. There are few, if any, foundations that fund operations for heritage areas. Similarly, grants can be obtained for projects but not for operations. These areas are large, multi-county strategic investment regions. There are no gates where fees can be assessed to raise revenues. Their partners are communities and non-profits who are not in the financial position to support their operations. They cannot exist without Commonwealth administrative support.

### **Heritage Area Managers:**

- ◆ work at the grassroots level in 52 Counties and over 2,200 communities and non-profit organizations.
- ◆ create economic development, leveraging DCNR's grant investment at an average of 5 to 1 ratio.
- ◆ are often the first people at the table when a community or organization begins a project because these agencies understand the heritage area's ability to recognize, facilitate and develop the capacity and funding sources needed to achieve the desired outcome.
- ◆ are resourceful - use creative solutions and develop strategic partnerships that help communities accomplish their projects.
- ◆ provide capacity-building and technical assistance to local and regional agencies, municipalities, non-profit and community organizations in conceptualizing, planning, and implementing multiple types of projects, grant resources, grant application and proposal preparation, project implementation, procurement procedures, contract compliance measures and reporting, construction inspection, project completion and close-out.
- ◆ are equally well connected to other state and federal agencies. Heritage agencies and staff convene the appropriate representation from those agencies and help their communities navigate the requirements and complexities of government-funded grants and programs.
- ◆ play an important role in the communities they serve, participating at the board level with economic development agencies and programs like Main Street and Elm Street as well as with municipal, county, and state elected officials.
- ◆ are involved on a daily basis with many projects and efforts outside of the DCNR's grant programs – these projects build and enrich communities, advocate for “pride in place,” and contribute to the well-being of residents.
- ◆ use conservation, education, recreation, cultural & historic preservation and tourism as tools for community revitalization and economic development.
- ◆ identify, preserve, renovate, adapt, and attract private investment to important buildings, sites and artifacts that might otherwise deteriorate or be dismantled or destroyed.

### **In Conclusion:**

Heritage Areas are the organizations that develop, build, revitalize, and restore Pennsylvania's heritage tourism infrastructure. It is that work which helps small businesses survive and thrive. It is that work which gives the DCED's tourism office and the TPA/CVB community a visitor-ready product to market. Their marketing drives new money to PA.

Visitors do not see and are not interested in political boundaries. They come here to learn about history and heritage, to enjoy our wealth of cultural venues, to immerse themselves in our rich natural and recreational resources. Even if the venue is in the next community or county, the impact is felt regionally.

Heritage Areas are economic generators. They are also image makers. Both contribute to the health of the Commonwealth and benefit your constituents.

**VISIT [www.heritagepa.net](http://www.heritagepa.net) for more information about PA's Heritage Areas**