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Title

An Assessment of Regional Partnerships for Economic Development through the National Heritage Area Collaborative Model

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Abstract

The National Heritage Area program administered by the National Park Service represents a collaborative partnership approach to managing large-scale natural and living landscapes. Heritage area management objectives integrate goals across disciplines including resource conservation, historic preservation, community revitalization and economic development. With the growing number of National Heritage Area designations over the past decade, increasing focus has turned towards efforts to measure program effectiveness and resulting economic impacts as a return on federal investment. Previous studies established a working program evaluation model that places emphasis on the importance of the partnership system in heritage area implementation and outcomes. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute further to the understanding of the heritage area collaborative model as well as the intersection of the heritage area agenda with regional economic development strategies through an assessment of the partnerships that form between heritage areas and the economic development community.

The findings are based on primary and secondary data collection across four heritage areas through interviews with partnering organizations. Results from the qualitative analysis indicated that the large majority of interviewees considered the heritage area a strong regional partner, confirming findings from previous studies. While this research suggests opportunities for improved heritage area engagement with this interest group, findings also indicate that there is a clear role for partnerships among heritage areas and economic development and private sector organizations in mobilizing resources to achieve economic development goals.

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