



CHAPTER 1

Downeast Maine National Heritage Area

The initiative to seek designation as a National Heritage Area began with local farmers who sought to save the wild blueberry industry. The conversation evolved to reveal a collective regional passion to preserve the landscapes and culture that define Downeast Maine.

What is a National Heritage Area?

A National Heritage Area is a place where the historic relationship between people and landscape has contributed significantly to the cultural and natural heritage of the Nation. It is a place where that heritage story is intact on the landscape today and provides opportunities for community engagement and economic development

The underlying purpose of the NHA program is to support strong, healthy communities. The program provides tools to support community and economic development driven by a community's unique assets and priorities. Goals for the NHA Program are to:

- Inspire long-term citizen engagement in stewarding heritage resources
- Build collaborations and thus capacity to achieve mutual goals
- Develop education programs and learning opportunities around local heritage
- Develop a sustainable tourism industry founded in local culture and outdoor heritage

NHA Designation is national recognition of an area's unique cultural & natural heritage and contributions to the Nation's collective heritage. The Federal designation is approved by Congress through legislation brought forward by state delegates.

The NHA program **does** bring financial benefits with designation. Up to \$350,000 in federal funding is available annually to match local dollars and in-kind contributions 1:1. Funds are provided by the Department of the Interior; technical support is provided by the National Park Service. **All program funds and projects are prioritized and managed by a collaboration of local heritage groups.** This local management entity makes decisions about priority programs, projects, and funding for eligible heritage projects and programs within the NHA region.

NHA Designation does NOT mean that an area becomes a unit of the National Park Service or Federal Government and they are not operated or governed by NPS or Federal Government. NHAs involve no ownership of land, nor are they a tool to regulate land use or remove municipal or private jurisdiction. NHAs do not create new expenses for a community to bear.

IF a National Heritage Area designation is granted, the next step for communities is to create a region-wide NHA Management Plan, essentially a roadmap for developing and then promoting NHA infrastructure and programs. The NHA Management Plan is developed through an extensive public process. It outlines objectives and strategies that align with local and regional economic development goals. **The local management entity then implements the NHA program according to the directives set forth by the public and planning team within the Management Plan.**

The National Heritage Area Program

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- Create new expenses for a community to bear.

A Vision for the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area

Communities and organizations across Downeast Maine already share core goals with the National Heritage Area program and implement projects and programs that support them. They all strive in some way to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- Foster community-driven, heritage-based conservation and economic development.
- Create collaboration amongst citizens and long-term commitment to pro-actively shape the future of their communities.
- Inspire stewardship of heritage resources by community members through increased awareness of natural environment and cultural experience.
- Nurture active engagement in learning about and sharing history and heritage.
- Provide a platform for heritage-based economic development by attracting visitors and new residents.

Community members want to support each other and work together, especially across sectors typically seen as unconnected. They want to retain and attract residents while promoting and preserving valued local heritage. They want businesses to thrive, expand, innovate, and increase in number. They want children and families to connect with place and community and be aware of existing and new opportunities for themselves here in DownEast Maine .

The National Heritage Area program focuses on four core values that also directly align with core values of communities and organizations across Downeast Maine.

- Sustainable economic development
- Healthy environment and people
- Education and Stewardship
- Community Engagement and Pride



Wild Blueberry Heritage Center - Marie & Dell Emerson built Wild Blueberry Land in 2001. In 2021, their iconic wild blueberry shaped retail shop was transformed into the Wild Blueberry Heritage Center & Museum. The Center celebrates an important part of the traditional Downeast Maine way of life, and the people whose lives are dedicated to wild blueberries.

The National Heritage Area program contributes to a sustainable economy by leveraging federal funds to create jobs, generate revenue for local governments, and sustain local communities through revitalization and heritage tourism. Many NHAs improve water and air quality in their regions through restoration projects. They provide new recreational opportunities and help people to access natural and cultural sites. NHAs can help develop new or improved amenities, unique settings, and educational and volunteer opportunities.

NHAs improve local quality of life through engagement of residents, especially youth and families, in telling our united but separate heritage stories. NHAs connect communities to natural, historic, and cultural sites through educational activities, which promote awareness and fosters stewardship of heritage resources. NHAs engage community members in heritage conservation activities, which strengthens a sense of place and community pride.

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These directly align with core values of communities and organizations across Downeast Maine.



The people of Downeast Maine are fiercely proud of their heritage, motivated to strengthen their economy, and committed to developing quality education opportunities that highlight local heritage. The NHA program provides resources to support communities to plan and implement these types of initiatives at the local level.



Monument Cove - Unique land features like those found at Monument Cove on Mount Desert Island reveal the specific geologic formation of Downeast Maine to inspire works of art and wonderment. Photo by Del Higgins.

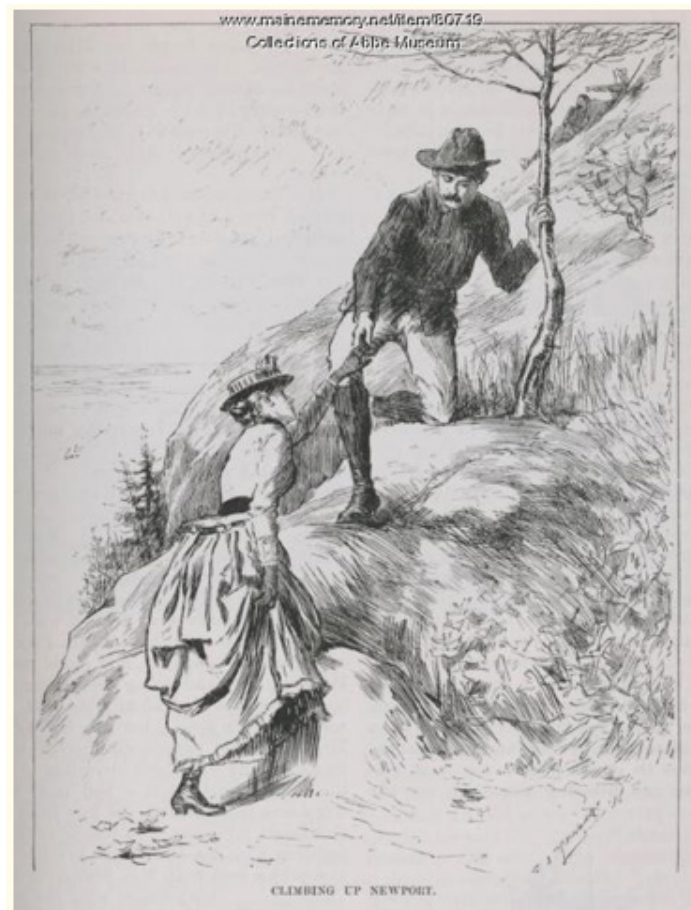
The Feasibility Study

The Feasibility Study is the first step in seeking a National Heritage Area designation. The Feasibility Study determines if the heritage resources and story are nationally significant, whether or not the community supports this idea, and if there is adequate community commitment to successfully manage an NHA program for the long term. The Feasibility Study is conducted by a group of local representatives of the different heritage stories and heritage organizations. Community input is sought from as many residents, business owners, municipalities, and organizations as possible across the region. The Feasibility engages community members to explore these questions together:



Peavey Memorial Library, Eastport - Most libraries in Downeast Maine occupy well-preserved historic structures. Some have always been libraries while others played various roles in their communities.

- What distinctive stories unite the region?
- How is this important to our Nation's heritage?
- How do we want to share those stories?
- Are existing resources sufficient for cohesive, in-depth, interactive storytelling?
- How can we pool and leverage our human and financial resources with other initiatives?
- Does local support and organizational capacity exist to fund, administrate, and manage an NHA for the long-term?
- Is NHA designation the right strategy to achieve community goals?
- How would NHA designation support & expand community conservation and development goals?
- Where are the proposed NHA boundary delineations, based on the above points?



Climbing Champlain Mountain- The beauty and mystery of what is now Acadia National Park on Mt. Desert Island has attracted summer visitors for thousands of years, beginning with the Wabanaki people. Climbing the mountains was a favorite activity for rusticators. These mountains now draw millions of outdoor enthusiasts and tourists to the park annually. Illustration by Charles S. Reinhart from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, August 1886. Photo courtesy of Abbe Museum.

A Feasibility Study for NHA

Designation examines a region's national significance from a number of angles. National Heritage Area designation requires meeting 10 base criteria – the Feasibility Study evaluates whether or not these criteria can be met. The 10 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 noncontiguous 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.

This document is the Feasibility Study – the official submission for designation as a National Heritage Area. The Feasibility Study is submitted to Maine’s Congressional Delegates, who introduce it to Congress as a bill. The following chapters examine the assets and capacity of this region to meet the above listed criteria and determine if NHA designation is right for Downeast Maine.