

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:                   SEEKING HIGHER GROUND:  
  DETERMINING FACTORS FOR SUCCESS IN  
  APPALACHIAN HERITAGE AREAS

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This thesis examines the hypothesis that certain primary factors increase the likelihood of success in national heritage areas. Such factors include: a) the existence of active local constituencies, b) existing preservation efforts and partnerships, c) a clearly defined network of sites that relate to the stated themes of the heritage area, and d) a sustainable funding stream from heritage tourism. Specifically, research focuses on two heritage areas in the Appalachian region—the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area—which are contrasted with the more established Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

The Appalachian region was chosen as a primary focus of this thesis based on the supposition that mountain residents have a profound intellectual and emotional connection to their land and traditions. Research for this thesis bears this out. Having

lived in these mountains for centuries, Appalachian people are finely attuned to their culture and heritage, and yet many have wholeheartedly championed the relatively new concepts of heritage area planning and preservation.

Based on the examination of these two heritage areas and a comparison against the Blackstone River Valley, which was recently the subject of an in-depth sustainability study, this thesis demonstrates several primary factors that contribute to the success of heritage areas. These include a clearly defined regional network of sites and circulation routes, a well-developed framework for partnership and preservation, and the continued expression of cultural traditions. This work also demonstrates, however, that a sustainable funding stream from heritage tourism was not critical to the success of a heritage area. That said, funding is a critical concern for national heritage areas. This work shows that funding is one of the least-studied and -understood aspects of heritage area planning, and that more research is needed to determine how funding, from both public and private sources, affects heritage area planning, project implementation, and ultimate success. The Appalachian people may have the passion and commitment to create national heritage areas, but whether they can secure enough funding and support for their long-term sustainability remains to be seen.

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