

CHAPTER IV ROOTED IN THE TREES: THE APPALACHIAN FOREST HERITAGE AREA

Introduction

Economically, the logging industry that dominated Appalachia in the late 19th century was largely a success. Environmentally, it was devastating. Before the rise of the “scientific forestry” espoused by Gifford Pinchot and others, lumber companies effectively clear-cut large tracts of Appalachian forests, often leaving behind piles of brush and downed tree tops that were easily ignited, accelerating the spread of forest fires. Clear-cut lands also contributed to the erosion of forest topsoil, essential to the absorption of water during rainstorms. “The destruction of the earth cover,” a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) report stated in 1905, “prevented water from fully penetrating the earth.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, once forest tracts were denuded, the lumber industry left them abandoned or “torn to pieces,” as one USGS report put it, and of little use to anyone.¹⁶¹

With strong support from Pinchot and conservationists, Congress codified the principles of scientific forestry in the Weeks Act of 1911, which authorized the federal acquisition of both still-wooded and logged-over lands to be set aside as national forests. Immediately following passage of the legislation, nearly 1.5 million acres were purchased in the southern Appalachians, primarily from lumber companies and investors. In the early years of forest acquisition, about two-thirds of the acquired forestlands were selectively thinned or completely cut, with the remainder being virgin timber stands. In addition to conserving forestlands, protecting watersheds from erosion, and allowing the

forests time to recover, the national forest system was intended to provide a perpetual wood supply for the commercial lumber industry.¹⁶²

The acquisition and creation of these new national forests affected residents in several ways. By 1930, the Forest Service had shifted its acquisition focus from large landowners and timber companies to small individual properties, bringing the total national forest acreage in the Appalachian region to more than 4 million acres.¹⁶³ Many landowners increasingly found themselves surrounded by national forestland and often felt forced to sell their lands to the Forest Service, sometimes at below market value. Furthermore, if the corporate logging of the late 19th century had the unintended effect of environmentally degrading watersheds, the national forest system of the early 20th century fostered the more insidious destruction of the subsistence economy of the mountains, according to Donald Edward Davis, by “removing much needed farmland from the community land base as well as eliminating from the forest the native plants and animals that mountain families had long depended upon for survival.”¹⁶⁴ Yet other landowners were able to sell their lands at (or even above) the market rate. Many mountain residents also welcomed the conservation of the “big woods,” even if they might have been wary of the process by which it was done.¹⁶⁵

In the coming decades, mountain residents would turn to the forests for education, industry, preservation, and tourism. The centerpiece of these efforts, in West Virginia at least, lay in the creation of the Monongahela National Forest. The Forest Service acquired the lands for the forest in 1914, primarily to protect the region’s highland watersheds and later to provide for timber production, as well as to provide for recreational and other uses. Soon afterwards, several West Virginia and Maryland state

parks and forests were also established to provide additional public lands, as the forests recovered from early cutting, fires, and agricultural uses.¹⁶⁶

Although mountaineers in eastern West Virginia and western Maryland had suffered from depressed economies, loss of farmland, and population loss in the early 20th century, the preservation of the region's mountain forests proved to have a galvanizing effect on the area's social development. As early as 1907, institutions such as the Rothkugel Plantation near Winterburn, West Virginia, were developed to foster the development and application of scientific management practices to West Virginia's forests. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps employed young men throughout the region in planting trees, fighting fires, improving watersheds and roads, and building recreational facilities. The Fernow Experimental Forest, located near Parsons, West Virginia, was established in 1934 as a forest research laboratory. By the end of that decade, West Virginia University had graduated its first professional foresters. Culturally, the central Appalachians also developed distinctive folk arts, music, and crafts, much as their counterparts did farther south in the Blue Ridge region. Yet West Virginia's particular history also led to the development of forest-specific heritage preservation efforts, such as the Woodchopping Festival in Webster Springs, a celebration of the area's timber heritage that has been held each year since 1960.¹⁶⁷

In 1999, to preserve and promote these and other aspects of the region's forest culture, West Virginia University's Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Consumer Sciences and the WVU Extension initiated the development of the 18-county Appalachian Forest Heritage Area (AFHA) in West Virginia and Maryland. The primary goal of the heritage area was to integrate central Appalachian forest history, culture,

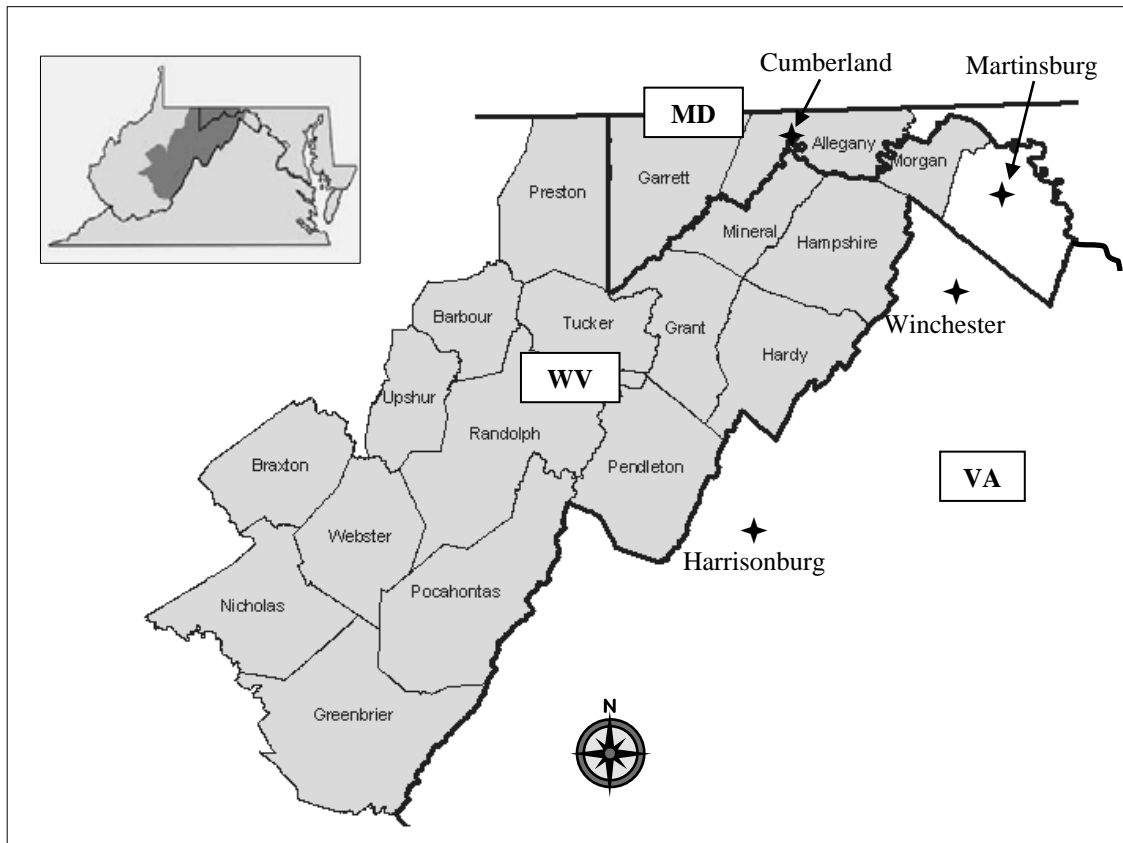


Figure 13. Map of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area. Reprinted from the AFHA web site, available from ahc.caf.wvu.edu/heritage/> (accessed on 10 April 2005), with modifications by author.

environment, products, and management practices into a two-state regional heritage tourism initiative (Fig. 13). By soliciting input from a broad range of federal, state, local, and private partners, the steering committee for the heritage area developed myriad objectives under the unified theme of forest heritage. The proposed heritage area includes both existing and potential historic sites; current forestlands that are managed for preservation, recreation, and logging; and a partnership of artisans, educators, and manufacturers. Based a series of meetings, volunteer collaborations, and stakeholder workshops, the steering committee has identified four themes—the natural forest, the historic forest, forest culture, and forestry—that together explain the significance of the

AFHA to the larger national story of determination and industry.¹⁶⁸

This chapter will discuss previous heritage tourism and preservation initiatives in the region, the planning process for the heritage area, and interpretive themes, and it will conclude with an evaluation of the extent to which the initiative incorporated the factors for possible success that were identified in Chapter I.

Previous Partnerships and Preservation Efforts

As with other heritage areas, the roots of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area lie in the development of partnerships among academia, local communities, tourism chambers, and federal, state, and local government. Here, local leaders are working to combine and hone previous heritage tourism ventures, marketing initiatives, and volunteer collaborations into a coordinated regional heritage area effort. Heritage tourism, according to a study by the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia (PAWV), is the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry. In a study published in 1999, PAWV concluded that heritage tourism in West Virginia had created an additional business volume of \$46.7 million in the state in 1996, directly employing 520 West Virginians.¹⁶⁹ “By showing that preservation of resources and culture can bring direct economic benefits to the local community,” Phyllis Baxter, a project coordinator for AFHA, has said, “those resources also will be preserved for the quality of life benefits for mountain residents, who have in some cases been blinded to long-term sustainability issues by the pressures of economic depression.”¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, the heritage area depends on the positive effects of a long legacy of government intervention in land conservation. As previously mentioned, numerous state

and federal public lands, protecting both natural and cultural resources, can be found within the currently proposed boundaries of the AFHA. At more than 900,000 acres, the Monongahela National Forest is by far the largest single protected entity in the heritage area. Other federally protected natural sites include the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Fig. 14), the Seneca Rocks/Spruce Knob National Recreation Area, 14 national natural landmarks, five wilderness areas, 12 West Virginia state parks, five West Virginia state forests, nine Maryland state parks, and four Maryland state forests. Historic sites include five national historic landmarks, the Cumberland terminus of the C&O Canal National Historical Park (Fig. 15), two national scenic byways, 13 state designated byways, and 26 historic districts and 215 individual sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Finally, the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is viewed as a complement to the two other national heritage areas found in West Virginia: the National Coal Heritage Area, a collection of 11 counties, including former coal company towns, in the southern part of the state, and the Wheeling National Heritage Area, which primarily interprets the area's transportation and industry as a catalyst to national expansion.¹⁷¹ Although AFHA partners consider the existence of these other parks and historic sites to have a positive impact on its visibility and ultimate success, it remains to be seen whether the abundance of competing sites will simply draw visitors and tourism dollars elsewhere.

Colleges and universities in West Virginia have taken the lead in conducting studies related to heritage tourism in the region, sponsoring specific heritage events as well. West Virginia University's Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology, for example, documents historical sites and outlines recommendations for



Figure 14. Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, a federal protected area in the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, which is nearly surrounded by the Monongahela National Forest. Photo by author (16 April 2005).



Figure 15. The restored railroad depot in Cumberland, Maryland, now used as a visitor center for the C & O Canal National Historical Park, one of the main Maryland sites included in the proposed heritage area. Photo by author (17 April 2005).

their protection and preservation. Davis & Elkins College and Salem International University both offer heritage education programs, and Davis & Elkins also houses the Augusta Heritage Center, which sponsors intensive classes in traditional music, crafts, dancing, and folklore. The region also has several smaller, community-based groups, such as the Friends of Bulltown Historic Area, the Friends of the Monongahela National Forest, and the Staunton-Parkersburg Alliance.¹⁷²

Nonprofit groups have also been active. In 1999, the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia issued a call for proposals for the development of heritage tourism projects in West Virginia, which would be funded by a grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. In response, five self-proclaimed heritage regions, encompassing 18 of West Virginia's fifty-five counties, applied to the program, illustrating "that there is a strong desire and need on the part of local communities to receive assistance in developing heritage tourism," according to one West Virginia University report.¹⁷³

Once the winning project was chosen, PAWV began to develop the pilot heritage region as a first step toward a sustained heritage tourism initiative. The project, known as "Frontiers to Mountaineers," covering Lewis, Marion, Monongalia, Harrison, and Preston counties, includes a preservation plan, interpretive and highway signs, and a cultural resources database. The organization developed a steering committee that included representatives from the state's history, culture, and tourism offices, as well as other nonprofit and community partners, which was charged with several heritage tourism initiatives beginning in 2003.¹⁷⁴

Chief among these initiatives were 15 community workshops that discussed agri-tourism and retail opportunities in depressed or underutilized areas. A primary outcome

of this was the development of the online West Virginia Tourism Business Locator (found at www.wvtourismbusinesssites.org), designed to match potential heritage tourism businesses with vacant properties in locations that already have a growing or established heritage tourism base. The steering committee also participated in other regional heritage preservation efforts, including the existing Frontiers to Mountaineers effort, the burgeoning Appalachian Forest Heritage area effort, and other projects such as the Coal Heritage Trail Authority and the Eastern Panhandle Rural Tourism Partnership.¹⁷⁵

As PAWV sought partners and pressed on with its tourism initiative, other heritage initiatives were being developed in the region. In response to the PAWV call for proposals, the Canaan Valley Institute, a nonprofit organization that provides grants and technical assistance for community enhancement projects, and Historic Beverly Preservation, a local heritage group, convened an all-volunteer committee to study the feasibility of creating a West Virginia Mountain Frontier Heritage Area, including about two thirds of the area that would later be included in AFHA. Although the project was ultimately deemed too complex for the purposes of the pilot project, it is credited as a key catalyst in the subsequent AFHA planning process. In Maryland, Allegany County spearheaded the development of the Canal Place Heritage Area, a state-designated program focusing on transportation heritage and anchored by the C&O Canal National Historic Park. In addition, Garrett County has been participating in a study process in preparation for designation as a Maryland Heritage Area.¹⁷⁶

Planning for a Regional Heritage Area

In fall 2000, even after it did not receive funding for its Frontier Heritage Area

project, the Canaan Valley Institute committee held a planning meeting to discuss heritage tourism opportunities in the region. More than 50 people attended the session, representing non-profits, agencies, educational institutions, elected officials, businesses, and individuals from most of the included counties. Several committees were formed to follow up on the ideas generated from the meeting, but little follow-up occurred.¹⁷⁷

In 2001, a team of West Virginia University forestry professors and employees of the U.S. Cooperative Extension System, a national agricultural education outreach program, which includes forestry, took note of a community-based effort in Webster Springs, West Virginia, to celebrate the region's forestry heritage. Webster is a remote, economically depressed community whose major local industry is logging, and the town's main tourism dollars come from its annual Woodchoppers Festival, featuring logging skills competitions. Building upon the success of the festival, community leaders envisioned the development of a Woodchopper's Village, designed to be a permanent tourist attraction and a year-round source of income.¹⁷⁸

Impressed by the idea, the WVU team successfully applied for a USDA Fund for Rural America grant on the community's behalf. Because the Fund was seeking proposals that crossed state lines, the project was initially called the Forestry Heritage Trail and grew to encompass the counties located in the highland forest regions of West Virginia and western Maryland. The initial project workshop, held at Blackwater Falls State Park in November 2001, drew more than 90 people, primarily representing organizations concerned with tourism, preservation, conservation, forestry, and economic development. Participating preservation groups, for example, included the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, the Potomac Heritage Partnership, the Rich Mountain

Battlefield Association, the Aurora Area Heritage Society, the Elkins Historic Landmarks Commission, and the Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association. National, state, and local government representatives participated, as did five conservation groups: the Canaan Valley Institute, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, the Shaver's Fork Coalition, Conservation International, and the West Virginia Land Trust.¹⁷⁹

The meeting resulted in the creation of several organized groups: a leadership team, led by staff from WVU and the Canaan Valley Institute; a steering committee that would include leadership team members and community and government partners; and six task groups that would address specific issues, including resource inventories, interpretation, business and infrastructure, networking, organization and sustainability, and marketing.¹⁸⁰ The steering committee also identified three communities in the heritage area that would serve as pilot communities for an “asset mapping” project—Webster Springs and Elkins in West Virginia and Oakland, Maryland. For each community, project teams would determine who the stakeholders are in each community, inventory their resources, and develop initial plans for heritage preservation.¹⁸¹

Within a year of receiving the Fund for Rural America grant in 2001, the lead partners agreed to change the project's name to the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, to better reflect the growing interest in preserving and celebrating the region's forests and the large land area that would be covered. But the decision was not universally praised. The initial planning meeting, according to West Virginia University researchers Steve Selin and David McGill, revealed what they called “the underlying dynamics and social tensions of the heritage area movement.” On one hand, participants expressed a desire for

a regional approach to heritage preservation, often describing a heritage area as an “umbrella of communities” or a “centrally administered network.” At the same time, these views were undercut by frequent concerns about keeping local control. One participant, according to Selin and McGill, said that the heritage area “should be sustained by community consensus and support by school systems and civic organizations”; another said that it should serve to “document and conserve local histories and reflect local roots.”¹⁸²

Selin and McGill also report that there were “occasional differences of opinion among participating organizations and interest groups.” The primary debate was waged over whether the heritage area should focus just on forest heritage generally or forestry in particular. Participating forestry and wood product representatives felt strongly that the project should focus more narrowly on the history and practice of forestry, while representatives of environmental and conservation groups advocated for a broader focus that included forestry but also encompassed forest ecology, preservation, and forest-based artisans. Eventually, a decision was made at the April 2002 general stakeholders meeting to move forward under the more inclusive forest heritage theme; however, according to Selin and McGill, the decision has dissatisfied some project stakeholders.¹⁸³

Participants also reflected their own particular missions. Historic preservation advocates emphasized the stewardship of natural and historic resources over economics, although they acknowledged that heritage tourism could enable communities to “diversify their economies and promote traditional ways of life.” Regional economic development authorities had similar thoughts but reversed the emphasis, focusing on the commerce potential of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, which was typified by

comments such as, “[the Forest Heritage Area will] create commerce through the development, preservation, interpretation, and promotion of forest-based attractions in the region.” State tourism officials and representatives of regional visitors bureaus had similar perspectives to the economic development groups. Finally, forest industry representatives viewed the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area as an opportunity to educate the public about responsible forestry practices and wood products.¹⁸⁴

A second challenge for the leadership team has been accommodating property rights concerns of project stakeholders and landowners. In West Virginia and western Maryland, in particular, private landowners want assurances that heritage area designation will not limit their land use options through increased regulations or federal government purchase of land. To provide assurances to these landowners, the AFHA leadership team has agreed to not list potential forest-based sites on a “regional asset map” that the group is working to compile, if the landowner is opposed to their inclusion.¹⁸⁵

By July 2003, the AFHA Steering Committee hired a consultant, Scott Gerloff, president of Historic Connections, LLC, and chief executive of Potomac Heritage Partnership, to direct the development of a feasibility study for the heritage area, as a necessary first step for national heritage area designation. The consultant spent October and November 2003 interviewing 36 regional stakeholders, talking to representatives of other state or national heritage areas, and reviewing literature on the heritage area phenomenon. In addition, the steering committee convened seven focus groups, totaling 65 people from 29 communities, which would examine such aspects as conservation, marketing, forestry, heritage sites, and local business involvement. Finally, public

meetings were held to gauge the interest and reaction of people in parts of the region that hadn't yet been reached.¹⁸⁶

The first draft feasibility study for the heritage area was released in late 2004, followed by an updated feasibility study released for public comment in spring 2005. The study coincided with the launch of the official web site for the heritage area (ahc.caf.wvu.edu/heritage) although much of the site remains under construction. Three other domain names were acquired that were thought to be easier to type in or find: www.afha.us, www.appalachianforest.us, and www.forestheritage.us.¹⁸⁷

Among other things, the feasibility study summarizes the perceived benefits and concerns that were discussed in the various planning meetings. Generally, respondents believed that the benefits would include an appreciation and better understanding by residents of their heritage; enhancement of current economic development efforts by bringing visitor expenditures from outside of the area; assistance in creating an awareness of the importance of the forests and forestry to the local area, state, and country; future stewardship of historic sites, cultural traditions, and natural resources; and stronger partnerships and communities. The primary concerns were that not all viewpoints would be expressed through interpretive materials such as signs, brochures, and exhibits; that the complexity of the area, because of its size and diversity of organizations, might prove too challenging; that there might be negative impacts of tourism on communities, private property, and historic and scenic sites; that visitation could negatively impact the forest industry's primary purpose of being a working business; and that it would be difficult to maintain local control. One key question was raised: "Is this just another organization with lots of meetings with no actions?"¹⁸⁸

Finally, participants and interviewees were asked whether they supported the region's designation as a national heritage area. A "strong majority" said yes, with no one dissenting, but "a significant number" said they did not know how they felt about national designation yet. "This uneasiness is aimed at possible federal action, not the organization," the feasibility study states, "but needs to be addressed directly and to indicate that these kinds of actions are not the mission or goals of AFHA."¹⁸⁹

Interpretive Themes

Having decided to focus the heritage area on both the region's natural and cultural history and its industrial forest heritage, the AFHA steering committee developed four themes that would guide the direction of heritage area preservation projects, interpretive materials, and grant applications. Each theme is anchored by existing public lands and historic and cultural sites that, to varying extents, already tell the thematic story. AFHA partners view the themes as organizational elements that will guide future interpretive and preservation efforts, acknowledging that local residents have little appreciation for the region's history. Whether forests and forestry are powerful enough tools to engage visitors will be discussed in the evaluation section later in this chapter.

The Natural Forest

This theme focuses on the natural history and forest ecology of the Appalachian highlands of eastern West Virginia and western Maryland. Stories related to this theme include the evolution of the dominant forest species in the region. Historically, the region contained a healthy mix of white pine, various hardwood trees, spruce, and hemlock. Today, the regrowing forests are similar in species composition, but with changes in the

frequency of certain species and in the overall size of trees. Another interpretive thread is the decimation of the American chestnut trees, a mainstay of these forests for centuries, by the early 20th-century chestnut blight. Other common natural features in the region include limestone caves, rock outcroppings, whitewater rivers, and waterfalls—all popular with hikers, boaters, and other visitors. Existing sites that reflect the natural forest include the Monongahela forest, Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, and several state parks and forests.¹⁹⁰

The Historic Forest

The historic forest theme, as described by the AFHA steering committee, involves the various ways that humans have interacted with these landscapes since Native Americans first settled there. Possible interpretative opportunities related to this theme include the impact of the mountain forests on transportation, settlement, and subsistence patterns. The evolution of forestry is another primary story, from small-scale forests to large industrial forestry operations. Industrialists that benefited from the region's resources included Senators Henry Gassaway Davis and his son-in-law Stephen B. Elkins, who bought large tracts of land, invested in the railroad industry, and established new towns and businesses. Existing sites that reflect the historic forest theme include Swallow Falls State Park in Maryland, which protects old-growth forest (Fig. 16); the Cass Scenic Railroad State Park in West Virginia, which preserves the connection between the railroads and the logging industry (Fig.17); and Graceland and Halliehurst, the historic homes of Henry Davis and Stephen Elkins, respectively.¹⁹¹



Figure 16. A primary theme of the heritage area is the historic forest, embodied in the old-growth stands at Swallow Falls State Park in Maryland. Photo by author (17 April 2005).



Figure 17. The Cass Scenic Railroad has restored historic logging camp cars at its Whittaker Camp site. Photo courtesy of the Mountain State Railroad and Logging Historical Association, available from <www.msrlha.org/whittaker.htm> (accessed on 15 April 2005).

Forest Culture

This theme deals with the settlement of the Appalachian forest by different ethnic groups over time, and the development of a distinct Appalachian culture that is recognized for its music, crafts and folklore. Interpretive opportunities include the story of how the AFHA landscape led to an agriculture-based society that produced a variety of regional products, including both lumber and specialty foods such as ginseng, goldenseal, ramps, and maple syrup. The region has a thriving wood craft tradition, as well as a living culture dedicated to Appalachian music and dance. These cultural traditions are upheld at such sites as the Augusta Heritage Center, as well as at regional festivals including the Mountain State Forest Festival in Elkins, West Virginia, and the Autumn Glory Festival in Oakland, Maryland.¹⁹²

Forestry & Forest Management

The final theme for the heritage area is the one that spurred the idea in the first place: traditional and modern forestry. In addition to the long history of timbering in the AFHA region, forest stewardship and the processing and manufacturing of wood and other forest-related products continue to be one the largest contributors to the local economy. In addition to the Monongahela National Forest and the state forests in the area, other interpretive resources include the Fernow Experimental Forest, a 4,700-acre forest near Parsons, West Virginia, that is used by Forest Service researchers as a field laboratory for sustainable forestry, and the 7,600-acre West Virginia University Forest at Coopers Rock. The MeadWestvaco Wildlife and Ecosystem Research Forest in Randolph

County is a private research forest that has sponsored numerous research projects related to the ecology and management of area wildlife and habitat.¹⁹³

Evaluating Factors for Success

As discussed in Chapter I, and reiterated in Chapter III, this thesis hypothesizes that certain factors must exist to increase the likelihood of a successful heritage area. Not surprisingly for a relatively new initiative, the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area does not yet demonstrate as many likely factors of success as more established heritage areas, such as the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor or even the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, a newly designated heritage area that nonetheless has benefited from years of established partnership efforts. Following is an evaluation of the heritage area based on the factors for success outlined previously.

Existence of Active Local Constituencies

The roots of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area lie in the efforts of one active community, Webster Springs, to preserve and celebrate its primary industry with the yearly Woodchopper's Festival. This led to the formation of a larger area devoted to forest heritage. Other local heritage preservation efforts, including festivals, conservation initiatives, and academic programs, were under way throughout the AFHA region long before the idea was formed. According to the feasibility study, dozens of established community heritage groups, county commissions, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels have issued letters of support for the designation of the heritage area.¹⁹⁴ The Preservation Alliance of West Virginia and the Canaan Valley Institute, in particular, have demonstrated leadership qualities by

issuing grants and encouraging projects that preserve natural and cultural resources in the region.

Clearly Defined Regional Network

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area benefits from a wealth of protected areas, both natural and historic sites, that are known to area residents as well as out-of-town visitors from urban areas like Washington, D.C. In both West Virginia and Maryland, certain sites serve as important landmarks or anchors for the myriad towns, businesses, parks, and cultural sites that will be included in the heritage area. Chief among these, in this author's opinion, are the federal protected lands: the Monongahela National Forest, the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and the Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area in West Virginia and the C&O Canal National Historical Park in Maryland. The Blackstone River Valley study illustrated the value that heritage area partners and constituents place on the presence of experienced federal land managers. If all heritage area sites were unified under a recognizable logo, banner, or interpretive materials, smaller and lesser-known sites could benefit from the existence and experience of these more-established public lands.

Unlike the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, however, which capitalizes on the existence of the highly recognizable Blue Ridge Parkway as well as the centrally located city of Asheville, or the Blackstone River Valley, which is organized around the riverway and is terminated on either end by the cities of Providence and Worcester, the AFHA suffers from a lack of a clear circulation system that links the various areas together. The only sizable population center is Cumberland, Maryland, located on the northern end of

the heritage area, which leaves visitors with few options for dining and lodging farther south. Furthermore, visitors must navigate through an amalgam of rural two-lane roads to reach many heritage area destinations. Because of this, clear branding and signs, which have not yet been produced, are critical.

Functionally, it may not be clear to visitors that the two westernmost counties of Maryland are part of the heritage area. Originally, the two counties were included primarily for the purposes of applying for the initial grant from the Fund for Rural America, which was seeking only multi-state projects. In developing the boundary and interpretive themes for the heritage area, the partners rightly pointed out that the Maryland counties have similar geographical features and timber history as the West Virginia counties and were therefore worthy of inclusion. In practice, however, those two counties might have a challenge in getting recognized as part of the heritage area, especially when competing against 16 counties in West Virginia for funding and attention.

Working Partnerships and Processes for Civic Engagement

The formation of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is the result of more than five years of partnerships and planning efforts among academia, private organizations, and local, state, and federal government representatives. The steering committee has held regular public meetings since 2000, inviting newcomers to attend if they haven't participated previously and issuing updates via a quarterly newsletter, *Growth Rings*. Although the heritage area web site is not complete, it does include the feasibility study for the heritage area and invites public comment.¹⁹⁵

A promising partnership initiative of the heritage area has been its mini-grant program, which is funded out of an initial \$60,000 grant awarded to West Virginia University to foster programs that preserve Appalachian forest heritage and create forestry-related products. To date, the mini-grant program has funded an astonishingly diverse selection of projects and engaged several different kinds of groups.

Mechanisms for Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Although the key partners have established a strong network of partnering organizations, representing both the public and the private sector, the fact that so many groups are well established could create a “blind spot” toward underrepresented groups and localities. In the feasibility study’s description of the “forest culture” interpretive theme, for example, it discusses the fact that the use of these forests evolved over time from their initial settlement by Native Americans and early Anglo-European settlers, and then later European immigrants and African-Americans who came to work in the lumber and coal industries throughout West Virginia. Yet so far, there has been little demonstrated outreach to representatives of tribal or minority groups throughout the planning process.

The feasibility study also admits that “most tourists and many residents” have little understanding of historic and current forest management techniques and how these products affect their everyday lives. On one hand, the fact that forestry is not widely interpreted could make the region a unique and appealing destination for visitors. On the other hand, forestry might be a “hard sell” for visitors who are unfamiliar with forest history and culture and do not otherwise have a connection with it. Furthermore, the

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is competing with two other national heritage areas in West Virginia alone, as well as the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to the south, which interprets a similar Appalachian story. Despite this, the AFHA steering committee believes that, although these sites have similarities, they can complement each other's interpretations of Appalachian culture, benefiting all parties.¹⁹⁶

Continued Expression of Cultural Traditions

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is the fact that the cultural traditions and ways of life that it aims to preserve are still practiced today. Logging and forest products manufacturing remain a large part of the local economy. Furthermore, in addition to the Woodchoppers Festival, other events celebrate the region's forest-based culture, including the West Virginia Timber and Wood Show and the Mountain State Forest Festival. The Augusta Heritage Center sponsors intensive classes in traditional music, crafts, dancing, and folklore. Two active community groups in the region include the Seneca Trail Art Guild, a group of landscape artists, and the Mountain Weaver's Guild, which promotes traditional cloth and basket weaving.¹⁹⁷

Sustainable Income Stream from Heritage Tourism

It is unclear, as yet, whether the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area will have a sustainable income stream from heritage tourism. Although the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia commissioned one study of the impacts of heritage tourism on the state back in the 1990s, little research has been done regarding the extent to which forestry-related heritage tourism could have a demonstrable economic impact on local communities in the heritage area. The AFHA steering committee has expressed an

interest in studying other parks and partnerships to determine the benefits and pitfalls of forestry-related heritage tourism.¹⁹⁸ Although some economically depressed communities in the heritage area might feel that any heritage tourism would be welcome, the fact that forest-related heritage tourism has not been widely tested could prove to be a liability for the long-term success of the heritage area.

Although no other national heritage area has a specific forestry focus, there are several local and state heritage areas, including the Texas Forestry Trail in eastern Texas and the Tillamook Forest Center in Oregon, that interpret forest culture and history. Established in 2001, the Lumber Region Heritage Park in Pennsylvania, a state heritage area that includes all or part of 15 counties in the north-central part of the state, interprets a variety of resources that exemplify the history of the state's timber industry. Like the AFHA, the Lumber Regional Heritage Park covers different periods from the earliest logging pioneers to today's sustainable foresters.¹⁹⁹

An early example of a professionally managed forested landscape, the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock, Vermont, also interprets conservation history and forest stewardship. In 1993, the National Park Service and the Woodstock Foundation, along with the Library of Congress, sponsored a conservation stewardship workshop that would help to define the interpretive goals of the park, which was designated in 1998. The workshop revealed that it was important to ground interpretation of conservation history in the demonstration of modern stewardship practices, so the park could in effect "practice what it preaches." More recently, the park has collaborated with the USDA Forest Service and other partners to establish a well-received outdoor education program that uses the forest to help educators and students

engage in place-based learning. But park managers also acknowledge that the park has difficulty balancing all its interpretive stories, including such topics as 19th- and 20th-century conservation, the art of the Hudson River School, and the identification of trees.²⁰⁰ Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park could offer guidance for the AFHA in terms of how to interpret forest stewardship and balance disparate stories.

Methods of Dealing with Threatened Resources

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is unique in that it celebrates not a landscape or way of life that is disappearing, but one that is coming back. The heritage area is banking on residents' and visitors' nostalgia for the past, but also on their pride and interest in how well these forests have recovered from previous exploitation, thanks to more recent conservation efforts and sustainable forestry. Because much of the region has suffered from depopulation and economic depression at various points over the last century, the heritage area could benefit from the community's strong desire to hold on to their past, which could translate into real preservation achievements.

Already, through the mini-grant program and other initiatives, preservation initiatives are taking place throughout the heritage area. In 2003, for example, Randolph County's Citizens for Historic Opportunity, Preservation, and Education (C-HOPE) received \$2,000 for the partial funding of a feasibility study for the adaptive use of the Elkins Milling Company Building. The historic Swiss community of Helvetia received \$2,000 to create and produce four post cards of historic resources in the area, in addition to a brochure. More than \$4,000 was awarded to the Central Appalachian Arts and Crafts

Cooperative, which featured six artists who created forest-related crafts and products in a 12-week campaign that included advertisements and in-person demonstrations.²⁰¹

Conclusion

In just five years since planning began, the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area has successfully positioned itself to seek national heritage area designation, by involving a broad range of federal, state, local, and private partners; identifying four distinct interpretive themes to guide future preservation and interpretation efforts; and encompassing a variety of natural and cultural sites related to the stated themes of the heritage area. The heritage area benefits from active local constituencies, the continued expression of cultural traditions, and a fierce local pride in and commitment to preserving the region's history, natural resources, and unique mountain culture.

However, when compared to other heritage initiatives such as the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, AFHA may have certain liabilities going forward. First and foremost, the heritage area lacks a clear circulation system that unifies the myriad natural and historic sites, spread over two states, that are included in the heritage area. AFHA partners must work to develop materials, such as a logo, slogan, and interpretive materials, that will brand the heritage area at various points throughout the region. Although the heritage area's web site is up and running, more could be done to expand its rather technical content and make it more appealing to casual visitors.

It is also unclear whether the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area will be able to draw a reliable income stream from heritage tourism. Although the AFHA steering committee has expressed an interest in studying other sites to understand how best to

capitalize on forestry-related heritage tourism, the fact that this subset of the tourism industry has not been widely tested could prove to be a concern for the heritage area over the long term. Finally, the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area faces a challenge in distinguishing itself from other heritage areas in West Virginia and North Carolina. Although its future is unclear, through continued careful planning and coordinated outreach to a broad range of constituents, this heritage area initiative could still be successful.