



HERITAGE TOURISM AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Northern New Mexico Perspectives



Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Issues Forum Report

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Executive Summary

On August 7, 2002, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) sponsored an issues forum in Espanola, New Mexico, on heritage tourism and the Federal government. Representatives of State, tribal, and local interests from Northern New Mexico offered perspectives on their public-private partnerships involving heritage tourism. Initiatives discussed included the National Scenic Byways Program, the Resource Conservation and Development Program, the Rural Economic Development Through Tourism Project, several U.S. Forest Service activities, and the proposed Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area. The importance of respecting cultural diversity in all of these programs was stressed.

Participants noted some of the problems that can threaten the success of heritage tourism initiatives, including insufficient attention to questions of sustainability, a shortage of development mechanisms, inconsistent and sometimes inadequate participation by Federal agencies, and lack of planning to offset potential negative impacts of heritage tourism. Attendees also offered a number of specific suggestions for how the Federal government could improve its support of heritage tourism, ranging from creating new Federal programs, to enhancing use of existing programs, to encouraging Federal land managers to be better and more frequent partners in heritage tourism initiatives.

Despite its regional perspective, several conclusions can be drawn from the meeting that are broad enough in scope to merit careful consideration by ACHP as it further explores the role of the Federal government in heritage tourism. These include:

- While new Federal funding to support heritage tourism should be considered, the Federal government should work to encourage the full and effective use of existing funding sources.
- Federal land managing agencies should be encouraged to participate in public-private partnerships that would promote heritage tourism.
- The Federal government should consider development of a centralized or coordinated program to support heritage tourism through promotion, development, and marketing. Such a program could include dissemination of heritage tourism “best practices.”
- Any Federal programs promoting heritage tourism through funding and technical assistance should be premised on local planning and decisionmaking. Checks and balances should be in place, however, to ensure that funded projects are sustainable.
- The Federal government should consider how it can encourage more direct economic benefit from heritage tourism for preserving, maintaining, and operating the historic sites that attract visitors, rather than have visitor tax revenues and other public financial support going predominantly to new facility development or promotion.
- Any Federal programs to promote heritage tourism should respect the uniqueness of each area’s history and its multiple cultures, and help the public understand how the interaction of those cultures contributed to the area’s heritage.

Introduction

Heritage tourism offers a triple benefit to communities – it promotes the preservation of their historic resources, educates both tourists and local residents about America’s historical and cultural heritage, and results in substantial benefits for local economies. ACHP, the Federal agency responsible for promoting the preservation and productive use of America’s historic resources and advising the President and Congress on preservation matters, considers it vitally important to promote Federal support for heritage tourism.

Scheduling ACHP’s August 2002 meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, offered an important opportunity to explore how the Federal government could improve its support for heritage tourism. Tourism is New Mexico’s second largest industry, and five of the top seven reasons why people visit the state are related to history and culture. Santa Fe and northern New Mexico contain a rich, multi-cultural array of historic resources, and there are a variety of heritage tourism initiatives planned or underway. To tap into the region’s experience with heritage tourism, ACHP convened a meeting of representatives from northern New Mexico’s Federal, State, local, tribal, nonprofit, and business organizations.

Thirty-four attendees, plus ACHP members and staff, participated in an issues forum held on August 7, 2002, at the City of Espanola’s Plaza Mission Convento. (See Attachments #1 and #2 for the agenda and list of participants.) Some attendees disseminated information and brochures from their programs. A “how-to” guide on New Mexico heritage tourism, *Weaving Cultural Tourism, The Fabric To Life in New Mexico*, by the New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs and the New Mexico Department of Tourism was shared with ACHP members and staff.

This report summarizes the key themes that emerged at the issues forum as participants offered perspectives on the following questions that had been posed by ACHP prior to the meeting.

- Are there exemplary intergovernmental and public-private partnerships in the region that could serve as models for Federal policies, programs, and action?
- What are the views of governmental representatives, organizations, and business interests on the proposed Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area and its potential to support and sustain heritage tourism and related economic development?
- What critical needs and gaps must be addressed, or obstacles overcome, in pursuing public-private partnerships to promote and support heritage tourism?
- How can the Federal Government improve its support of local and regional heritage tourism efforts in north central New Mexico?

Respecting Cultural Diversity

An significant theme which cross-cut the discussion of all of the questions at the issues forum was the importance of culturally sensitive and respectful heritage tourism initiatives. This was presented as critical if New Mexico's different cultures – notably Anglo, Hispanic, and Indian – were to appreciate their shared but not always harmonious past. This is more than an academic question; to paraphrase one participant, “If you don't respect people's history, you won't respect them in everyday life.”

Several participants, some of them descendants of the state's founding Spanish families, discussed the importance of New Mexico's Hispanic heritage to the history of the United States. They stressed the importance and early date of the Spanish exploration and settlement of New Mexico, which traditionally have received less recognition than English settlement of the Atlantic Coast.

Not far north from the meeting site in Espanola is the location of the first permanent European settlement in the American West, which was established by the Spanish in 1598, thus predating the English colony of Jamestown by nine years. In 1998, New Mexico commemorated the four hundredth anniversary of this event, and the Cuarto Centenario celebration provided a focal point for cultural and heritage tourism initiatives.

The early Spanish explorers and settlers entered a land already inhabited by native peoples, and the eventual interaction and merging of the Spanish and Indian cultures resulted in many of the unique historic and cultural attributes of modern New Mexico. Today, there are 23 federally recognized Indian tribes in New Mexico, and many tourists come to New Mexico seeking to understand and experience tribal culture.

The New Mexico Department of Tourism maintains an Indian tourism program, which was one of the first such programs established in the country. A number of tribes also have active tribal tourism programs or tourism departments that interpret and operate sites, museums, and visitor centers, in addition to promoting cultural events and tribal arts and crafts.

Representatives of three northern New Mexico tribes – the Pueblo of Jemez, the Pueblo of San Ildefonso, and the Jicarilla Apache Tribe – participated in the issues forum. Among their comments, they stressed the need to recognize that there is not a monolithic Indian culture, but rather each tribe has a unique culture and views on the meaning of historic preservation. It is critical that heritage tourism initiatives acknowledge this, and that such initiatives also be designed to encourage proper etiquette and respect among visitors to tribal lands.

Successful Models of Heritage Tourism Public-Private Partnerships

The issues forum highlighted several programs where the Federal government is working in partnership with State, local, and tribal governments and private citizens to promote heritage tourism and preservation of historic properties.

- **National Scenic Byways Program.** The National Scenic Byways Program provides technical and financial assistance to help preserve America's scenic roads and promote tourism and economic development. The Federal Highway Administration administers the program and designates roads as National Scenic Byways and All-America Roads, the best of the National Scenic Byways.

Byways may be designated not only for their intrinsic natural, scenic, and recreational qualities, but also for their historic, cultural, and archeological resources. A corridor management plan, developed with community involvement, must be prepared for each scenic byway corridor and must spell out a strategy for how State and local entities will maintain and enhance the byway's important features. Grants are available to assist States in implementing projects on National Scenic Byways and developing State scenic byways programs.

New Mexico was an early participant in the National Scenic Byways Program, and, even before the national program was created, had its own State byways program. The State currently has six National Scenic Byways and 18 State Byways, and New Mexico will host the 2003 National Scenic Byways Conference. Several of the byways cross U.S. Forest Service lands, and there has been good coordination between the Forest Service and the State. Five byways cross tribal lands, and several tribes have applied for byways funding.

New Mexico's byways program is strong, and a substantial amount of Federal funding and technical assistance has helped to support the successful development of management plans, promotional campaigns, interpretive facilities and materials, tourism needs assessments, and other projects. The program is not without its problems, however, and these are discussed later in this report in the context of challenges to pursuing public-private partnerships.

- **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program.** A program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the RC&D program helps people in rural areas plan and carry out activities that increase conservation of natural resources, support economic development, and enhance the environment and standard of living in local communities.

The premise of the program is that local people know best what is needed in their communities, so each designated RC&D area has a volunteer RC&D Council that identifies and seeks solutions to local problems. In order to carry out their plans for community improvements, the Councils receive technical and financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture, which leverages support from other sources. The RC&D program was given permanent authorization in the recent Farm Bill.

There are nine RC&D Councils in New Mexico, and the Northern Rio Grande RC&D Area was among the first ten RC&D areas authorized in the country. Eligible themes for RC&D projects include community improvement, cultural resources, economic development, and recreation and tourism. The Northern Rio Grande and other New Mexico RC&D councils have supported heritage tourism initiatives by partnering on scenic byway projects and helping to raise funds for promotional tourist materials, to cite two examples.

- **Rural Economic Development Through Tourism Project (REDTT).** The REDTT Project is a federally-funded initiative designed specifically to boost rural tourism development in central and southern New Mexico. Funding from the Department of Agriculture is administered by the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service. County Tourism Councils, consisting of leaders in business, education, industry, government, tourism, and the County extension service, have been established in thirteen counties. They meet monthly to develop and implement local and regional tourism goals.

REDTT professional team members and volunteers work with the County Tourism Councils and other public and private agencies to educate, train, inform, and assist in tourism development. Objectives include enhancing opportunities for tourism activities involving agricultural products and processes, educating the public about the advantages of tourism, providing hospitality training, and marketing tourism events. Given the focus of the issues forum on northern New Mexico, there was limited discussion of REDTT, but it was identified as another good example of a public-private partnership to enhance heritage tourism.

- **U.S. Forest Service Initiatives.** The U.S. Forest Service administers five National Forests and one National Grassland in New Mexico and is involved in a number of heritage tourism initiatives. Through the Passport in Time Program, volunteers work with professional Forest Service staff on archeological and historic preservation projects. Time volunteered to the program has been equivalent to \$1.4 million worth of person-hours invested in cultural resource stewardship. While these projects draw participation from local citizens, they also offer volunteer vacation opportunities for tourists, allowing private citizens to partner directly with the Federal government in heritage tourism and historic preservation.

The Southwestern Region of the Forest Service has also been entering into institutional partnerships to promote heritage tourism. The Forest Service has participated in initiatives spearheaded by the RC&D and REDTT Programs, and has cooperated in scenic byways projects. It has also partnered with the Pueblo of Jemez by leasing space and providing information and expertise at the tribe's Walatowa Visitor Center.

Proposed Northern Rio Grande National Historic Area

A nascent public-private partnership initiative that would support heritage tourism in northern New Mexico is the proposed Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area. Heritage areas are areas that contain significant historic, cultural, and natural resources that are geographically proximate and thematically related. Formal designation as a National Heritage Area provides a mechanism for the Federal government to provide needed funding and technical assistance to local decision makers to assist in planning for, managing, and promoting their historic assets.

Each heritage area has a local management entity that receives Federal assistance through the National Park Service (NPS), and the support leverages grass-roots efforts to promote and coordinate historic preservation, heritage tourism, economic development, recreation, and public education initiatives.

Senator Jeff Bingaman and Representative Tom Udall have introduced almost identical bills (S. 2576 and H.R. 5239) to create the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, comprising Rio Arriba, Taos, and Santa Fe counties. (See Attachment #3 for a copy of S. 2576.) Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, Inc., a non-profit corporation that would serve as the local management entity, would receive technical assistance and matching grant funds from NPS. The legislation would authorize appropriation of \$10 million over the next 15 years for development and implementation of a master plan for the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area.

Representatives of the interim board of Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, Inc., participated in the issues forum and explained how heritage area designation could be a conduit for needed funds and technical assistance. They also stressed how the heritage area would help in celebrating the unique culture of northern New Mexico, particularly the significance of its Hispanic and Indian traditions.

Several pueblos would be included in the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area, and the Pueblo of Jemez urged expanding the proposed boundaries so that it might be included, making this point at both the issues forum and in correspondence to ACHP. (See Attachment #4.) Jemez Pueblo leaders stressed the importance of the regional approach embodied by the heritage area concept, noting that regional partnerships will be critical to the tribe's heritage tourism development given its resource constraints.

Problems that Undermine Successful Heritage Tourism Partnerships and Initiatives

A wide-ranging discussion among participants at the issues forum identified a variety of problems that sabotage public-private heritage tourism initiatives. Economic and promotional issues were identified during the session and also were a focus of a series of questions developed and distributed to the group by ACHP member Ted Sanderson, President of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. (See Attachment #5.) Inadequacies in Federal government participation in heritage tourism partnerships and the possibility of negative side effects from heritage tourism were also discussed.

- **Questions of Sustainability.** Problems experienced in the New Mexico Scenic Byways Program served as a focal point for a discussion of the economic sustainability of heritage tourism initiatives and historic attractions. National Scenic Byways Program grants have helped fund construction of several interpretive centers in New Mexico, but some of these are now struggling to remain viable.

Because of limited local resources to administer the centers, proposals have been floated to turn all or parts of them to other uses, including retail and office. Absent long-term business plans, the sustainability of such federally funded “bricks and mortar” projects can be questionable. In addition, some byways in the state have essentially become inactive, while some others are not effectively spending the Federal funding they receive, resulting in lack of coordination and duplication of effort.

In addition to issues regarding return on Federal investment, participants discussed the extent to which historic resources are failing to benefit economically from heritage tourism. While it was noted that every dollar of tourism advertising in New Mexico generates a seven dollar return, it is not clear that historic resources are profiting. Hospitality industry properties generally benefit rather than the historic resources, and the hotels and restaurants are often nationally owned chains rather than locally-owned small businesses. Also, while New Mexico communities collect a lodging tax, one participant noted that, in her experience, half of that money goes into advertising and the remainder generally to new development.

Several tribal representatives noted that tribes are not always seeing the economic benefits of heritage tourism, despite the fact that many tourists come to New Mexico seeking to experience native culture. There generally is a lack of major infrastructure, such as restaurants and hotels, on tribal lands to support large tour groups and capture lodging and dining dollars. Less intensive tourist development capitalizing on native culture, such as traditional Navajo hogan bed and breakfasts, is occurring in some areas.

- **Lack of Heritage Tourism Development.** Discussion of economic issues raised questions regarding the adequacy of market analyses for heritage tourism and the need for product development and promotion. For the most part, the New Mexico Department of Tourism concentrates on marketing, with studies focusing on who is coming to the state and who is not. The agency co-produced the previously mentioned guide, *Weaving Cultural Tourism, The Fabric To Life in New Mexico*, but otherwise does not have a strong tourism development focus. The principal tourism development agent in the state is REDTT, but only for those counties that it serves. Gaps in heritage tourism development at the State, tribal, and local level are not backfilled by the Federal government, since there currently is no Federal tourism development program.
- **Obstacles to Effective Federal Participation.** Absent a centralized Federal tourism program, participation in heritage tourism initiatives is guided by the policies of individual agencies. One

participant noted that the land managing agencies in the West, such as NPS, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service, often lose sight of the importance of public-private partnerships given the ongoing struggle to address difficult management issues, often without adequate funding. Lack of resources has also led to limited Federal professional staff in disciplines associated with historic preservation and heritage tourism, which further hampers partnership efforts.

Rigidity on the part of some Federal agencies was also cited as a problem. In some cases, Federal decisionmakers interpret lack of explicit authorization to undertake an initiative as a prohibition to participation. Unless given a specific charge by Congress or the President to engage in partnerships through designation of a National Heritage Area, National Historic Trail, or other special initiative, agencies tend to focus on managing the resources and facilities on their own lands. Creative public-private partnerships involving the Federal government require a more flexible mindset regarding the ability and extent of Federal participation.

- **Unanticipated Negative Impacts of Heritage Tourism.** The relative benefits of heritage tourism generally far outweigh any negative impacts, but visitor-generated traffic, congestion, noise, and inadequately controlled commercial activities can be problems in some communities. The potential for such consequences needs to be acknowledged, and any such effects must be managed if they are not to undermine the success of heritage tourism initiatives.

At the issues forum, representatives of Jemez Pueblo noted that the Pueblo decided to build its new Walatowa Visitor Center outside of its village because increasing visitation at the original visitor center was affecting the privacy of tribal members and causing traffic problems. Jemez Pueblo is also using scheduled festivals as a tourism management tool, since such events encourage needed influxes of visitors in a structured manner that can be planned for and controlled.

Improving Federal Government Support of Heritage Tourism

Participants in the issues forum offered a number of specific suggestions for how the Federal government could improve its support of heritage tourism.

- **Create a Federal program focused on marketing and development of heritage tourism destinations and resources.** The Federal government could provide funding and technical assistance to States, tribes, and local communities for developing, protecting, and marketing their heritage tourism assets. This program could help to fill the void that often exists at other levels of government regarding tourism development. Through such a program, the Federal government could also participate directly in marketing of America's heritage tourism destinations. One participant in the issues forum noted the examples of other countries, and consortia of countries such as the European Union, that annually market selected cities or regions to international tourists.
- **Create a Federal community development program focused on assisting tourism and tourism-related businesses in small towns.** Some aspects of such a program could be modeled after the Department of Housing and Urban Development's now defunct Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program. The UDAG program required public-private partnerships before competitive public funds were allocated to cities, and stipulated that public funds be used to leverage private funding.
- **Encourage enhanced use of existing Federal assistance programs for heritage tourism.** Many community and economic development programs, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program, are not targeted specifically to heritage tourism but can support that goal if local communities make it a priority. The Federal government could proactively cultivate increased awareness of the potential use of such programs.
- **Encourage cooperative partnerships between Federal land managers and State, tribal, local, and nonprofit entities.** As noted earlier, current ad hoc participation in heritage tourism partnerships by Federal land managing agencies would benefit from governmentwide policy and encouragement.
- **Change the requirement of many Federal funding programs that Federal dollars cannot be used to match other Federal dollars.** While designed to ensure that projects do not receive inordinate amounts of Federal funding, this requirement can be overly restrictive.
- **Coordinate transportation policies to improve accessibility to heritage tourism resources.** Some places, notably in the West, can be relatively difficult to access, particularly for international visitors. Federal transportation policies that encouraged enhanced air, rail, bus, and car connections would help to address this issue.

Conclusion

Given the geographic focus of the Espanola issues forum, participants addressed issues of particular concern in Northern New Mexico, which may or may not have specific applicability in other parts of the country. However, one can reach conclusions from these regional perspectives that are broad enough in scope to merit careful consideration by ACHP as it further explores the role of the Federal government in heritage tourism. These include:

- While new Federal funding to support heritage tourism should be considered, the Federal government should work to encourage the full and effective use of existing funding sources.
- Federal land managing agencies should be encouraged to participate in public-private partnerships that would promote heritage tourism.
- The Federal government should consider development of a centralized or coordinated program to support heritage tourism through promotion, development, and marketing. Such a program could include dissemination of heritage tourism best practices.
- Any Federal programs promoting heritage tourism through funding and technical assistance should be premised on local planning and decisionmaking. Checks and balances should be in place, however, to ensure that funded projects are sustainable.
- The Federal government should consider how it can encourage more direct economic benefit from heritage tourism for preserving, maintaining, and operating the historic sites that attract visitors, rather than have visitor tax revenues and other public financial support going predominantly to new facility development or promotion.
- Any Federal programs to promote heritage tourism should respect the uniqueness of each area's history and its multiple cultures, and help the public understand how the interaction of those cultures contributed to the area's heritage.

The Espanola issues forum provided ACHP an important opportunity to hear firsthand from representatives of State, tribal, and local interests regarding the obstacles and opportunities related to Federal support of heritage tourism. ACHP thanks all of the participants for their time and their insights.



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