



A Proposed New National Heritage Area in North Jersey

Summary

The Northern New Jersey Community Foundation is leading an effort to create a National Heritage Area (NHA) in portions of North Jersey (Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union counties). An NHA is a region recognized by Congress as making a special contribution to the heritage of the United States. For this NHA, we plan to focus on elevating North Jersey's distinct experiences with migration, suburban development and innovation. (We may add other themes as we develop the NHA.) The NHA would provide many benefits to the region, including:

- Hundreds of thousands more federal dollars to North Jersey.
- Increased cultural heritage tourism around the NHA region. This can help support local businesses and arts and cultural activities in many communities, create jobs, and keep more discretionary dollars in the region.
- Elevation and preservation of the diverse cultures in the region.
- Greater awareness and increased pride in the region's natural and historic assets.

All this can be achieved with NO required financial costs to residents, local governments, or state governments. An NHA places NO restrictions or obligations on governments or property owners. But it does need to be publicly and widely supported by stakeholders and elected representatives.

The following provides more information about the proposed NHA and asks you to [join in this effort](#).

Contents:

- *What is an NHA?*
- *How can an NHA help us?*
- *Why these themes: suburbia, migration, industry & innovation, and transportation & infrastructure?*
- *Who should be involved? How can I get involved?*
- *How will the NHA be managed?*
- *Steps to getting an NHA?*
- *What's the status of this effort?*

Introduction

What is so special about North Jersey? Actually, a lot.

It is a place of American firsts (industrial city, automobile suburb, town in country suburb) a gateway for millions of migrants who shaped what is the United States today and a center for innovation in technology, urban development and transportation. All of this happened along and near three arterial rivers – the Hudson, Hackensack and Passaic – that have nurtured people for more than 10,000 years.



A great way to share the stories of North Jersey – and to benefit the communities in it – is by making a large part of it a National Heritage Area.

National Heritage Areas are regions designated by the federal government as places of special historic, cultural or environmental significance. There are 62 NHAs around the United States, and each tell different stories about America. An NHA covering North Jersey would add several new chapters to this dynamic collection.

It can also support economic development in many communities, help protect natural and historic resources, and bring more federal dollars into the region. It can inspire more pride in, and a greater understanding of, our communities.

There is NO ‘catch’ to our communities or to New Jersey. The NHA does NOT place any restrictions on properties and does NOT require municipalities to do anything differently. It is a recognition -- one that comes with a lot of benefits.

The Northern New Jersey Community Foundation (NNJCF) is coordinating a collaborative effort to create a National Heritage Area that focuses on at least three related themes (that is, storylines): suburban development and culture, migration and innovation. The NHA would cover at least these counties: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union. We are still in the early stages of this effort; other themes or counties might be added. (We are also calling it the North Jersey National Heritage Area for now; the final name will be chosen later.)

Through this new NHA, we can:

- Distribute tens of thousands – or even hundreds of thousands -- of dollars to support historic, cultural and environmental organizations in the region. Significant portions of that funding could go to spur cultural entrepreneurship, heritage tourism, environmental protection and cultural experiences in communities with large concentrations of low- and moderate-income residents.
- Encourage more people to visit downtowns, historic sites, recreational sites along rivers and special places (like Radburn or the Little Lima neighborhood in Paterson). This will bring more visibility to the areas and more dollars to businesses and towns in the region.
- Encourage cultural, civic and business leaders to collaborate on programming that can help support sites and places.
- Inspire the development of more public art and community events that help tell deeper stories about the diverse heritages and distinct histories in the region.
- Create a tourism website that serves as an interactive guidebook to places and sites in the North Jersey.
- Create a resource library and support convenings on suburbia, migration and innovation in North Jersey.
- Inspire more research about suburban life and culture, which is often overlooked with so much focus on cities and rural areas.
- Help protect our waterways, woodlands, wildlife and open spaces by highlighting their important role in supporting human civilization in the area for more than 10,000 years.



- Support the work of destination marketing organizations, chambers of commerce and downtown associations, and other groups working to support businesses, jobs and entrepreneurship in the region.

The NHA will be overseen by a consortium of historic, cultural, environmental, business, and government organizations throughout the region. The Foundation will manage the NHA. We will do what we do best: supporting nonprofit organizations, sharing knowledge, and convening people together to inspire new partnerships, projects, programs and policies. The Foundation will help partners and grantees with their programs, create an interactive website, as well as produce and share informational materials that help promote places to visit. NNJCF will also coordinate with managers of heritage sites, cultural events, and relevant activities to promote a suite of related experiences.

But to make this happen, we need your help. We need to show that there is widespread support for this effort. If you live in, or represent an organization in, Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union county, please [sign on to support this effort](#).

Learn more about the proposed National Heritage Area, including:

What is an NHA?

A National Heritage Area is a region, corridor or area in the United States that is recognized by the US Congress as a place that contributes to American heritage. Although it is a federal program overseen by the National Park Service, each NHA is managed independently.

According to the National Park Service:

“National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation’s diverse heritage. NHAs are lived-in landscapes. Consequently, NHA entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships, NHA entities support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Leveraging funds and long-term support for projects, NHA partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

Benefits of NHAs

Some of the long-term benefits of NHA activities include:

- *Sustainable economic development* – NHAs leverage federal funds (NHAs average \$5.50 for every \$1.00 of federal investment) to create jobs, generate revenue for local governments, and sustain local communities through revitalization and heritage tourism

- *Healthy environment and people* – Many NHAs improve water and air quality in their regions through restoration projects, and encourage people to enjoy natural and cultural sites by providing new recreational opportunities.
- *Improved Quality of Life* –Through new or improved amenities, unique settings, and educational and volunteer opportunities, NHAs improve local quality of life.
- *Education and Stewardship* – NHAs connect communities to natural, historic, and cultural sites through educational activities, which promote awareness and foster interest in and stewardship of heritage resources.
- *Community Engagement and Pride* – By engaging community members in heritage conservation activities, NHAs strengthen sense of place and community pride.”

[Learn more about National Heritage Areas.](#)

New Jersey has one statewide Heritage Area: [Crossroads of the American Revolution](#). That NHA focuses on New Jersey’s special history in the Revolutionary War. The proposed NHA would tell other stories about our region.

How can an NHA help us?

Through a National Heritage Area, we can guide people to places and raise their awareness of issues in a region.

The NHA website, brochures and other informational materials can encourage more North Jersey residents and tourists to visit downtowns, special places like India Square in Jersey City, and sites along the three rivers. This will bring and keep more dollars in the region, support local businesses, and promote cultural and environmental preservation.

The impacts could be big. A 2012 study of six NHAs in the Northeast and Midwest found that each:

- Supported between 1,944 and 6,154 jobs,
- Generated between \$222.6 million and \$921.2 million in economic impact (in 2023 dollars), and
- Generated between \$19.7 million and \$49.4 million in tax revenue (in 2023 dollars).¹

Of these six, the NHA that is most like the one proposed for North Jersey – the Schuylkill River Greenway NHA – supported more than 6,100 jobs, and generated \$771.8 million in economic impact and \$49.4 million in tax revenue (in 2023 dollars).

This kind of impact can especially help places that are culturally diverse or that have high concentrations of low and moderate-income residents; not just Newark and Paterson, but also places like Passaic, East Orange and Hackensack. More visitor spending can support more jobs in retail, arts and culture, and service industries. It can help support the cultural sites and small local businesses that strengthen communities and serve its residents.

¹ The Economic Impact of National Heritage Areas: A Case Study Analysis of Six National Heritage Areas in the Northeast and Midwest Regions, TrippUmbach, 2015



The North Jersey NHA can bring hundreds of thousands of federal dollars to North Jersey. Each year, every NHA gets a federal allocation of at least \$150,000, and could get up to \$1 million. Many NHAs get about \$500,000. The Foundation plans to use a significant amount of these federal dollars to provide grants to nonprofit organizations or local agencies for activities related to the NHA goals. This includes:

- Arts organizations working on projects that elevate local histories or cultures,
- Chambers of commerce or merchants' associations for events or programs that support cultural or heritage tourism
- Cultural, heritage and environmental organizations
- Educational organizations – such as colleges or universities – for informational events on suburbia, migration or innovation
- Municipalities or counties for programs that support cultural preservation or entrepreneurship, recreational programs that support the natural environment, or historic preservation

The Northern New Jersey Community Foundation is supporting low- and moderate-income residents of North Jersey by supporting their communities

The North Jersey NHA can also elevate and help protect local traditions, build greater pride among residents in their communities, and create even more experiences, which together help enhance quality of life in our region.

At the Foundation, we are particularly excited about the potential for the North Jersey NHA to honor the original people of the area – the Lenape (also known as the Lenni Lenape or the Delaware).

Why these themes: suburbia, migration, industry & innovation, and transportation & infrastructure?

You may know that Thomas Edison set up his laboratory on Main Street in West Orange. There his company invented the motion picture camera, among other innovations. But did you know what brought him there from Menlo Park? It was America's first planned suburban community – Llewellyn Park in West Orange. This tony community was made possible because the Oranges were a major industrial center. Orange was known as the hat making capital of America. And all of this was possible because of waves of immigrants, first and second-generation Americans, and Black Americans who moved to the area from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century.

The motion picture camera being invented in West Orange, together with the natural beauty of the Palisades, led to Fort Lee becoming America's first center of filmmaking.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without North Jersey's extensive network of roads, railroads and shipping. North Jersey was the home of many innovative transportation and infrastructure strategies, including the electric railroad, the New Jersey Turnpike, and the cargo container. The cargo container may have had the biggest impact on globalization and the design of cities throughout the world.

Migration, innovation and of course suburban development in North Jersey continues through today in a broad diversity of people, products and places.



There are so many interesting and intersecting stories to tell about migration, transportation, innovation and suburbia in the United States through the North Jersey NHA. No other NHA is telling these stories like we can.

We are still in the early stages of pursuing the National Heritage Area, so there might be additional themes added to our narrative.

Who should be involved? How can I get involved?

Everyone can get involved in the North Jersey NHA. Right now, the Foundation is looking for allies who:

- Are connected with cultural, heritage, business, environmental, educational and government organizations in North Jersey;
- Are residents who live or work in North Jersey; or
- Can help promote the NHA to elected officials at all levels of government – from the municipal to the federal levels

As we move along in this effort, there may be other ways for you to get involved. To get involved, or just show your support, please [fill out this short form](#).

If you have any questions, please contact Leonardo Vazquez at the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation at leo@nnjcf.org or 201-568-5608, x2. You can also write to him at Northern New Jersey Community Foundation, 1 University Plaza Drive, Suite 128, Hackensack, NJ 07601

How will the NHA be managed?

The Northern New Jersey Community Foundation will manage the NHA as the designated “Coordinating Entity.” This work will be overseen by a Steering Committee that we expect to include:

- Representatives of county cultural and heritage commissions from all of the counties included in the NHA. This will also include Morris Arts, Morris County’s arts agency.
- Representatives of heritage and environmental associations involved in North Jersey.
- Representatives of arts associations or councils involved in North Jersey.
- Representatives of economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, or business organizations involved in North Jersey.
- Scholars in the areas of suburban development, innovation or migration.
- Representatives of organizations focuses on social equity in North Jersey.

Steps to getting an NHA

There is a two-step process to getting a National Heritage Area designation, according to the Association of National Heritage Areas:

1. A feasibility study must be completed. The study needs to answer at least these questions, according to the [National Park Service](#):
 - a. Does the landscape have an assemblage of historic, cultural, and natural resources that, when linked together, tell a nationally important story?

- b. Do outstanding opportunities exist for improving the quality of the resource assemblage through conservation, recreation, and education?
 - c. Are there ongoing traditions, customs, and lifeways associated with a nationally important story?
 - d. Does an organization exist that has the financial and organizational capacity to coordinate heritage area activities?
 - e. Is there public support for NHA designation and the proposed coordinating entity, and are potential partners interested in working with the proposed coordinating entity on heritage area activities?
2. The proposed National Heritage Area must be approved by an act of Congress. This usually means that our congressional representatives need to sponsor this effort and get support from a majority of their fellow senators and representatives.

The process could take several years. But the faster we can get the feasibility study done, and the more widespread support we have, the sooner we can get the designation.

What is the status of this effort?

We are in the early stages. As of April 2024, the Northern New Jersey Community Foundation is:

- Building a diverse steering committee of representatives from cultural, environmental, governmental, educational and business groups in North Jersey.
- Generating public support and seeking volunteers for this effort. [Get involved or show your support.](#)
- Seeking financial support from foundations, corporations and government entities. We estimate that the cost of completing the feasibility study and gathering public support will be at least \$150,000.

We also plan to work with two consultants with exceptional expertise in developing and managing National Heritage Areas.

August R. Carlino is the president and managing partner of Acorn Hill Strategies, LLC. His client base is extensive, having worked with National and State Heritage Areas, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local governments. In addition, Carlino is also the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation (RSHC) based in Homestead, Pennsylvania. His experience working with numerous organizations demonstrates that success depends on an effective organizational structure and a committed and active board and staff. His team of partner consultants have all served as staff to nonprofit organizations and on boards at the national and community levels.

Carlino has consulted with several nonprofit groups on strategic planning, board and organizational development, and fundraising. Carlino was recognized in 2020 by a major foundation as one of Pittsburgh's most effective nonprofit leaders. In 2018, *Smart Business Magazine* named him as one of Pittsburgh's Top 50 Business Leaders. In addition, Rivers of Steel has been recognized as one of the most successful National Heritage Areas in the United States under his leadership.



Dr. Nancy Morgan, of Point Heritage Development Consulting, is a heritage development specialist with a background in cultural anthropology has experience in National Heritage Area management and planning, research and interpretation, and community development. Following seven years as Executive Director of Cane River National Heritage Area in Louisiana, she established Point Heritage Development Consulting in 2008. She has also served as Co-Executive Director of Goodwood Museum & Gardens, a historic site in Tallahassee, FL, since 2015.

We will also begin outreach later in 2024 to generate public support for the North Jersey National Heritage Area. If you would like to show your support, [please add your name \(and organization, if appropriate\) to the petition](#) calling on public officials to support the North Jersey NHA.

Questions? Please contact Leo Vazquez, Executive Director, North Jersey National Heritage Area and NHA Project Director, at leo@nnjcf.org or 201-568-5608, x2.