

MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD NOVEMBER 19, 2009 AT FOUR RIVERS  
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, 25055 WEST WALNUT LANE,  
CHANNAHON, ILLINOIS, RE ILLINOIS & MICHIGAN NATIONAL HERITAGE  
CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN PROCESS

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m.. Mr. Dennis Bieschke opened the meeting by introducing himself and explaining the purpose of the meeting, which was to begin gathering input from members of the public for the development of a management plan for the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. Mr. Bieschke then asked that each person introduce himself or herself, state what town he or she was from, and, if he or she is affiliated with an organization or is representing an organization, to state that information as well. About 30 persons were present, including representatives of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau, Openlands and several private citizens.

Mr. Bieschke then introduced Ms. Ana Koval, President of Canal Corridor Association (“CCA”). Ms. Koval presented a PowerPoint slide show about the history of the National Heritage Corridor, CCA, the 1984 legislation and the 2006 legislation which re-authorized the National Heritage Area and designated CCA as the local coordinating entity for the management plan development. She noted that the completion of a general management plan is one of the National Park Service requirements for all National Heritage Areas, and that funds have been recently appropriated by Congress for the planning process. Ms. Koval also commented that the limited funding which Congress has approved was required to be matched by other funds raised by CCA so that donations would be welcome.

Ms. Koval’s presentation included the following: The Heritage Corridor includes 49 communities, is approximately 100 miles long and encompasses approximately 450 square miles. The 96 miles long I&M Canal was the last great American canal, connecting the east coast to the Mississippi River, thereby opening up major markets for Midwestern farmers, lumber and mining companies and manufacturers, as well as creating access for products from the Atlantic seaboard to the expanding middle of America. The canal opened in 1848, the same year that the board of trade opened in Chicago, and the canal was the catalyst that caused Chicago to become a major city. Chicago rapidly became a major transportation hub with the addition of railroads and the Cal-Sag Canal. The I&M Canal continued in active use until the twentieth century, when the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (1900) replaced it on the east and the Illinois Waterway on the west (1933). Illinois continues to have considerable commercial activity on water including canals and the Illinois Waterway. When the Stevenson Expressway was constructed, the Chicago portion of the I&M canal was filled in. The remaining canal runs from Hodgkins to LaSalle, although the portion through downtown Joliet is also now gone. CCA was founded in 1982 for the purpose of redeveloping the canal corridor using its natural, cultural, and historic resources and in 1984 President Reagan signed the legislation creating the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor as the first national heritage area on earth. There are now 48 other national heritage areas in the United States, making 49 in all.

Mr. Bieschke then began the discussion part of the meeting by describing the planning process, which will include public meetings like this one to get civic involvement and input, meetings beginning in January with ‘partnering’ organizations such as representatives from the

communities in the corridor, using a website to post drafts and ask for feedback, and also creating a blog about the management plan effort. Ms. Koval said that CCA had sent more than 150 letters to potential partnering organizations and that if anyone present had ideas about who else to invite, to please let her know. Mr. Bieschke said that CCA would take the ideas generated in the public meetings and put together drafts of the vision statement, the mission statement and the guiding principles, and eventually the other parts of the plan, for all to read on the website. After drafts are reviewed and revisions made to incorporate comments received, the plan would be finalized sometime in mid-2010 and sent to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for review and approval. Once the plan receives approval from the Secretary, implementation would begin. Tonight CCA was seeking input concerning vision, mission and guiding principles. Mr. Bieschke also commented that four by six cards and pens had been distributed to the audience so that, as the discussion progressed from one topic to the next, if someone thought of an additional comment on an earlier topic they could write it on a card so that it would be included in the meeting minutes.

The first topic for discussion was to talk about a vision for the Corridor. Mr. Bieschke said that, according to the National Park Service, a vision “articulates a region’s concept of what they want the heritage area to be in the future. It describes the kind of place the heritage area should be.” He asked “What do we want the Corridor to be?” Many ideas were suggested, including the following:

- Make it a place where people will come (tourism)
- Create places where people will feel the history
- Create opportunity for people to experience the natural and cultural heritage
- Evoke a community sense of pride in place
- Make it pretty -- have esthetic value
- More usefulness and accessibility
- Provide educational experiences and opportunities through research
- Have total infrastructure that is well maintained
- Provide ADA accessibility with safety in mind for all
- The whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- Create connectivity throughout
- Have a network of communities that share common branding
- Make the Corridor one long history walk
- Cooperate in partnering with communities, organizations, schools, parks, towns and other groups
- Celebrate the agricultural, industrial and mining heritage of the area
- It should be sustainable – with sufficient monetary sources for future generations

Mr. Bieschke used large white sheets of paper on an easel to list all of these ideas and they were posted on the room's walls so that all could see them. At the end of this part of the meeting, he presented the vision statement from the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area ("FFNHA").

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area is an internationally recognized region in western Missouri and eastern Kansas where a young nation's diverse definitions of freedom collided. Through sharing authentic and honestly interpreted stories, residents respect multiple views of freedom. Compelling learning experiences, interpretation, and preservation offer visitors and residents of all ages an understanding of the region's importance. Historically aware citizens collaborate to build diverse economies for current and future generations.

Mr. Bieschke then directed the discussion to the topic of creating a mission statement. He said that the mission statement should be about how we would like to make the vision into a reality. According to the National Park Service, "the mission articulates how the local coordinating entity and other partners in the heritage area intend to make the vision a reality. It describes the heritage area's purpose." He presented the mission statements from the management plans for Blue Ridge National Heritage Area ("BRNHA") and FFNHA:

The mission of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area is to protect, preserve, interpret, and develop the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate improved economic opportunity in the region.

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area is dedicated to building awareness of the struggles for freedom in western Missouri and eastern Kansas. These diverse, interwoven, and nationally important stories grew from a unique physical and cultural landscape. FFNHA inspires respect for multiple perspectives and empowers residents to preserve and share these stories. We achieve our goals through interpretation, preservation, conservation, and education for all residents and visitors.

In the discussion that followed, people suggested that the BRNHA mission was a good starting point, but the last sentence from Freedom's Frontier would be a good addition. Further discussion emphasized the importance of the following for the mission:

- The mission should include making the Corridor a place to have fun
- Save the environment . . . places, stories, history, cultural
- Encourage enjoyment (recreational land and water)
- Restoration of natural, historical and cultural features

At the end of this part, Mr. Bieschke suggested the following as a possible mission statement that had come out of the meetings held the prior three nights in Morris, Lemon and LaSalle: "To protect, preserve, interpret and develop the natural, historical and cultural resources of the Corridor, tell the story of the canal and how it changed the area, and to stimulate increased economic opportunity in the Corridor." Mr. Bieschke told the audience to check the website

(soon to be up and running) for the first draft of a mission statement and asked that people post their comments.

The discussion then turned to listing possible projects that could be undertaken as part of the mission. Suggestions included the following:

- Add signage for all “things” that were/are part of the canal
- Explain the engineering of the canal (do an “anatomy of the canal” educational piece)
- Get CBOT involvement in the canal history, since the CBOT and the canal open the same year and the canal was important to development of Chicago as a grain market
- Publish a canal book
- Create a canal library
- Create a maintenance plan, including preventive maintenance, for the canal
- Create a capital improvement plan
- Create a plan for places to stop throughout the Corridor
- Integrate the canal with the Corridor community to create destinations
- Reintroduce the DuPage feeder canal
- Do a hydraulic study
- Reconsider the Corridor’s “Heritage Area” boundaries

Mr. Bieschke then directed the final portion of the meeting to considering guiding principles for developing and implementing the management plan. He noted that guiding principles are traits or qualities that are considered worthwhile, that represent our highest priorities and driving forces – how we will value visitors, suppliers, partners and the members of the Corridor community. They describe fundamental values and the actions to put those values into use. In response, members of the group proposed the following:

- Respect for public and private property
- Understand that the sum is greater than the parts
- Benefit all, exclusive of none
- Approach all structures to preserve with safety in mind
- Must have sustainability
- Approach all activities in an honest, open and responsible manner
- Do honest portrayals of history
- Prepare and promote Corridor assets for today and future generations
- Have respect for natural resources
- Have respect for our vision and mission and how the mission is carried out
- Invest in community engagement -- promote stakeholder buy-in

- Respect and preserve the natural environment
- Watchword should be “How can we help make it happen?”

For comparison, Mr. Bieschke then presented the guiding principles of FFNHA and said that we seemed to have covered most of the same points, except that last one:

1. We will be tolerant and respectful of diverse stories from multiple perspectives.
2. We will respect property rights.
3. We will focus on authentic and engaging experiences.
4. We will honor the region’s peoples, past and present.
5. We will appreciate the unique cultural and historic assets within the nationally important landscape.
6. We will invest in community engagement, education and empowerment.
7. We will sustain and grow sense of place.
8. We will value and protect the natural environment.
9. We will consider future generations in everything we do.

At this point, Mr. Bieschke began to wrap up the meeting. He thanked everyone for coming and asked what would be the best way to communicate with people. Most people expressed a preference for email, although a few said they like regular mail. Mr. Bieschke also asked for ideas about how CCA can get the message out about the planning process to more people and several suggestions were made, with specific emphasis on reaching out to partner entities, such as local governments and park districts. Mr. Bieschke reminded people to use the four by six cards to write down any additional suggestions, thoughts, comments or ideas that they wanted to share and give them to him, and many people did give him cards.

Mr. Andrew Connor, CCA’s Chairman, the spoke briefly to recap the meetings’ themes, praise Mr. Bieschke’s leadership of the meeting, thank everyone for attending and urge people to stay involved in the process of creating the Management Plan.

The meeting then adjourned at 8:30 p.m.