New National Heritage Program Offers Help for Counties

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by Douglas M. Knudson, Forest Recreation Specialist

County Park Board members and others involved with resource planning will want to be alert to the new National Heritage Program. Close on its heels may come a Natural Diversity Act, now before Congress in bill form. Both of these are elements in the new efforts to identify and preserve special places of natural, historic or cultural value.

In the January, 1978, budget proposal, President Carter called on Congress to approve and fund a National Heritage Program. He asked for $69.3 million, mostly from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), to be earmarked for the efforts of the National Heritage Program. He requested that total LWCF monies be raised to $725 million, over last year's $600 million. Another $45 million has been requested for funding the on-going Historic Preservation Fund.

The purpose of the coordinated $110 million program is to identify and conserve the best of our natural and historic heritage. It is not aimed at the federal agency level. The program requires the participation of state and local governments. The counties and cities will be encouraged to seek out and preserve their outstanding and unique areas of scenic, wild, geologic, ecological and historical significance.

These spots can be nominated by the state for addition to national registers of natural and historic places. If listed, these special places cannot be affected adversely by other federal development programs.

Such places may also be eligible for increased federal financial and technical assistance to acquire and protect them. This assistance is administered along the same lines as the present policies of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Historic Preservation Fund.

Administration

The National Heritage Program will be administered by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. That is a new name for the beefed-up Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Its functions now include listing and assisting with preservation of places of special natural, historic, and scientific value.

There will be $64 million available to the states for the heritage program to distribute among the states, plus a portion of the Historic Preservation Fund. Criteria to judge relative significance have not yet been developed. When they are, the acquisition and/or protection money will be distributed to the highest ranking project.

At the state level, the programs will be administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Outdoor Recreation will coordinate Land and Water Conservation Funds, as in the past. The Division of Historic Preservation (formerly Museums and Memorials) will apparently continue to coordinate monies from the Historic Preservation Fund.

Procedures

Action on the local level is a key to the success of this program. There is time to lay the groundwork now. By starting to select areas on a rational basis, the county or city can have a backlog of information ready when the regulations and the typically short deadlines are announced.

The Department of the Interior outlines four steps in the process:
1. Identification of the potential heritage resource by private organizations, individuals, local and state governments.
2. Evaluation against criteria for the National Register of Historic Places or National Register of Natural Areas, by professionals.
3. Registration of eligible resources at the state and federal levels.
4. Protection and designation as National Heritage Landmarks and/or state or county landmarks.

None of these steps implies any change in current ownership.

The first step is one which can be initiated immediately by county and city park boards, citizen's organizations and interested individuals. A preliminary identification of special areas in the community and the gathering of information about them will be of great help in making the applications. Start now. The following procedure is recommended for a county park board or its advisory committee.

A. List all the areas in the county which are already in the National Registry of Historic Places or other cultural type registers, as well as the lands which are listed as National Natural Landmarks, state nature preserves, or other lists of natural places. Visits to these areas may identify special problems of protection or administration.

B. List and visit all the identified potential areas in the county. Start with those which are listed in the book "Natural Areas in Indiana and Their Preservation" by A.A. Lindsey, D.V. Schmelz, and S.A. Nichols (1969—Purdue University Dept. of Biological Sciences—now out of print). These are areas which have already been identified as having outstanding natural qualities. Call the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves (317-633-5253) for a list of additional areas which have been identified in your county. If there have been local efforts to identify special historic sites, add these to the list.

C. Seek nominations of other areas from citizens with as complete descriptions as are reasonable, including ownership and acreages and statements about the natural or historic characteristics of note. Conduct preliminary field studies of as many of these as possible.

D. For the most interesting areas, gather as much natural and historic background material as possible. This will be helpful in preparing nomination documents.

E. Make contact with the Division of Nature Preserves or the Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (a private, non-profit organization—812-988-7547) for criteria for identifying natural areas. The Nature Conservancy has done pilot studies of this process in 10 states and the Tennessee Valley Authority lands. In Indiana, work has begun to organize the process.

There will be cost-sharing federal grants for organized inventories, available through the state. These will be announced by the Department of Natural Resources when available. Counties which have started organizing information as above will be prepared to apply for planning and inventory funds and will be most likely to have successful programs. Even if the properties selected are not evaluated to be of national significance, knowledge of them will be helpful in local planning and development.

Look for wetlands, scenic rivers, other aquatic type areas of geological interest, special or typical plant communities, animal habitats, the presence of rare and endangered species of plants or animals, prairies and other areas which will exhibit the natural diversity of the county.
Organizational Changes
Along with the call for the National Heritage Program, the President made some structural changes which will alter the manner in which some federal programs are handled. Most of the changes will be a matter of a new address within the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The newly structured Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (former BOR) will integrate efforts in three types of programs: natural, cultural and recreational. The integration is supposed to provide more efficient administration and coordination.

The Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service now administers the following programs which were handled by the National Park Service:
- National Register of Historic Places
- Historic Preservation Fund
- Historic Sites Survey
- Historic American Buildings Survey
- Historic American Engineering Record
- Interagency Archeological Services
- Technical Preservation Service
- National Natural Landmarks Program and Register

The HCRS also now has responsibility for historical, archeological and natural science aspects of regional planning and river basin planning.

The HCRS retains management of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and all the recreational planning functions of the former Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, except for three types of studies. The following study functions are now transferred to the National Park Service:
- Federal water project implementation studies—recreation aspects
- Wild and scenic river studies
- National scenic trails studies

The order for these changes was dated January 25, 1978. All changes at the federal level should be completed by April 1.

Summary
Some new terminology, new ideas, new guidelines, and new monies are about to become available to the states and their sub-divisions. Emphasis on preservation of natural, historical and cultural heritage areas will be the key to active participation by local park and recreation boards. Some action can be taken immediately to be prepared for these programs. Preliminary identification and inventory of significant local resources will provide the information foundation for full participation.

Guidelines and announcements from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources will provide detailed instructions for county, city, organizational and individual participation in the National Heritage Program.

References


Various memoranda and news releases from the U.S. Department of the Interior.