

Stewardship of Living Landscapes

It is timely to dedicate an issue of *The George Wright Forum* to the heritage areas movement. This is an important direction in conservation, as demonstrated by the growth in the number of heritage area initiatives at every level in the United States. Today there are twenty-three congressionally designated heritage areas and corridors and more than a dozen proposals for additional national areas. A number of new state heritage programs have joined the established ones in New York and Pennsylvania, and literally hundreds of regional grassroots initiatives are underway across the country.

While the first national heritage area was designated as recently as 1984, the concept of conserving important lived-in landscapes—by harnessing the energy of every level of government and, most critically, of the people who live in them—has been under development for over thirty years. These ideas have been tested not just in the United States, but also in Europe and, now, around the world. The shift has been from a straightforward park model with a sharp boundary, owned and managed by a public agency, to large landscapes with multiple owners and complex partnerships as the managing entity. This collection of papers examines global trends in conservation stewardship, reviews the historical development of heritage areas in the United States, and examines some of the benefits of this collaborative approach in telling richer stories and tackling daunting preservation projects.

We are indeed fortunate to have Adrian Phillips' paper to lead off this issue of the *Forum*. Titled "Turning Ideas on Their Heads: The New

Paradigm for Protected Areas," the article looks at the new models for conservation that are emerging around the world. The classic view of protected areas has been that of the government-owned, government-run national park units as developed in the United States. Through careful comparison of international trends in conservation, Phillips demonstrates that the approach to protected areas has shifted radically from a top-down, regulatory one to an inclusive vision with shared management and multiple objectives that include those of the community.

His work, along with Brent Mitchell's, provides an international perspective and allows for thoughtful comparisons between international trends and some of the innovations in protected areas here in the United States. The similarities between the conservation practices in other countries around the world and the experience in designating large living landscapes as heritage areas are striking. The opportunity for placing these new larger living landscapes in a con-

ervation framework broadens the context of our work and increases the public benefit.

Brenda Barrett and Glenn Eugster provide a historical context for the emergence of national heritage areas in the United States. Tracing both ideas on landscape-based conservation within the federal government and such outside societal influences as transportation and suburban sprawl, these papers track the development of a new partnership role for the National Park Service. This is characterized by a fundamental shift in control and governance that empowers the people who live in special places with the responsibility for telling their stories and caring for their resources. Laura Gates and Nancy Morgan illustrate how national park units and national heritage areas can work together to preserve a larger whole. The successful partnership of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and the larger Cane River National Heritage Area recognizes the unique value the local community can add to interpretation of place and the power that partnerships bring to resource conservation. As new heritage areas are proposed that incorporate larger expanses of public lands, particularly in the West, these models of collaboration between land manager and community will become more and more significant.

Finally, national heritage areas can play a critical role in saving at least something of what Constance Bodurow calls the “big and dirty” industrial landscapes. Such areas as the Ford Rouge Plant and the steel valleys in Pittsburgh are of unparalleled

significance, but present an overwhelming management challenge to a park-based agency. Her overview defines the scale of the issue and offers an alternative to the total loss of these resources by transforming how we think of their preservation.

Although the national heritage area movement is still young, it is not too early to try and place the ideas that give it energy within the larger context of community-based conservation. Developing a heritage area at any governmental level involves working in partnership across political and disciplinary boundaries. It is a strategy to achieve conservation in concert with compatible economic development, whether renewing traditional economic pursuits or finding new ways to sustain the people that give the landscape life. The goal is to maintain resource values, both natural and cultural, as well as maintaining community vitality: to manage change with losing the spirit of place.

Forty-five million people live within the boundaries of existing national heritage areas. The proposed new areas showcase strong partnerships with national park units, Western landscapes, diverse stories, and even more people. For this reason alone the National Park Service and all organizations that care about conserving the American landscape should look closely at this phenomenon. Adrian Phillips suggests that this new paradigm may offer unparalleled potential to view protected areas in a broader context and to build support among residents and their political leaders.

Finally, it is valuable to understand that these areas are not out of step with

the history of resource protection in the United States and around the world. Undoubtedly, the idea of what constitutes a heritage area will continue to evolve and new and innovative ways to address the conservation of

living landscapes will be explored. New possibilities for conservation with communities are still developing, and we hope that the ideas in this issue will provide both background and a starting point for future work.

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