

Downeast Maine National Heritage Area – an Overview

How NHAs are Created

The National Heritage Area program was created by Congress in 1984 to enable communities to develop their own heritage programs that build upon their community's unique cultural and natural heritage assets and address their unique needs and priorities.

NHAs are created through legislation brought forward to Congress by local stakeholders and their Congressional delegates. **Designation as a National Heritage Area (NHA) provides national recognition** of an area's unique cultural & natural heritage and its important contributions to the Nation's collective heritage.

NHA designation requires that:

- The historic relationship between people and landscape has contributed significantly to the cultural and natural heritage of the Nation
- The heritage story is intact on the landscape today – a working or living landscape
- Ample opportunities exist for community engagement and economic development through heritage interpretation and continuation

Program Purpose

The NHA program is meant to strengthen connections between people and place, build local pride in community and heritage, and inspire long-term citizen engagement in stewarding heritage resources.

This is achieved by:

- Building **regional collaborations** and collective capacity to achieve mutual goals
- Developing **education programs** and learning opportunities around local heritage
- Building a **sustainable tourism** industry rooted in local culture and outdoor heritage

The program provides federal funds for local projects that invigorate communities, contribute to quality of life, create jobs, generate revenue, and increase local capacity. **NHAs can support local initiatives** such as:

- Historic Preservation
- Community events
- Arts and Cultural programs
- Education programs
- Parks and trails

Creation of Downeast Maine National Heritage Area

The Downeast Maine National Heritage Area, designated on January 5, 2023, includes Washington and Hancock Counties, whose heritage stories are deeply intertwined. The Feasibility Study phase was initiated in March 2020, and the Management Planning phase will occur through December 2025.

Downeast Maine's National Importance

Every National Heritage area is different, but they all have an overarching statement of their national importance and the underlying interpretive themes that support their story. **The nationally important story** of the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area focuses on our Natural Heritage, and how the forces of nature and our location on a glacial landscape at the easternmost edge of the continental US continues to shape us as people after many thousands of years.

Our story begins with a truly unique landscape that created abundant natural resources which supported Wabanaki communities and then the development and growth of American cities - including fisheries, forest products, granite, wild blueberries, and other agriculture. It includes boatbuilding, coastal mapping and the many lighthouses that enabled mass shipping of these natural resources. It also includes nature-based tourism, arts inspired by nature, and preservation of open space, wildlife habitat, and public access to natural resources. Our international relationships and the formation of the international border are also important aspects of the National story.

Statement of National Importance

Downeast Maine embodies a nationally important story about America's northern Atlantic coastal frontier and international relations with eastern Canada and the Wabanaki Tribes. Downeast Maine tells this story through an enduring natural-resources economy and nature-based way of life; naturally inspired and world-renowned tourism and arts; patterns of early American settlement; and deep relationships between the United States and Canada, and between Maine and the Wabanaki Tribes.

The landscape, people, and events of Downeast Maine have been and remain today examples of political, cultural, economic, and physical "borders" that create the unique experience of life on the easternmost edge of the United States. The cultural and natural borders and edges at interplay within this area of Maine, Wabanaki territory, and eastern Canada have helped to and continue to shape, supply, and inspire our nation – and the people and communities of Downeast Maine - in numerous ways.

Interpretive Themes

"Interpretive Themes" are the most important stories to tell about the National Heritage Area and are derived from the area's supporting resources and cultural values. They bring to light the meaning, concepts, and values represented by the resources in a National Heritage Area. They encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes.

Six Interpretive Themes were identified to frame the nationally important story of Downeast Maine:

1. Geology, Landscape, and Climate
2. Natural Resources Economy
3. Arts, Tourism and Recreation
4. Land for Wildlife and People
5. Shipping and Shipbuilding, Mapping and Navigation
6. National Boundaries and International Relations

Next Steps in Planning Process

A Management Plan is required by the National Park Service within 3 years after designation is approved before the NHA is eligible for an increase in their Federal funds to facilitate program implementation.

Management Plan:

- Outlines the **objectives, strategies, actions, partnerships, and business and promotion plans** for the NHA program
- Includes **extensive public outreach** with partners and stakeholders
- Must be **completed within 3 years** of designation

After that, we will be able to implement regional programs and support partners across the region to develop collaborative projects that align with public priorities as determined through the management planning process. A primary function of the Downeast Maine NHA program is to provide sub-grants to schools, municipalities, and non-profit organizations for heritage based projects around heritage education, outdoor recreation, open space, partnership development, and sustainable tourism. The NHA will also develop its own projects that facilitate regional cohesion through initiatives such as branding, wayfinding, storytelling, and promotion.

Questions for Discussion

What are the overarching GOALS of you/your community that align with those of the National Heritage Areas program?

What are some specific ACTIONS to take in each of the following topics related to your goals?

- Education and Stewardship – engaging people in learning and sharing heritage stories and caring for heritage assets
- Historic Preservation
- Land Conservation for Habitat, Open Space, And Public Access
- Economic Development
- Tourism, Recreation, and Wayfinding
- Community Resiliency to Detrimental Change - climate, economic, natural, or man-made disaster, pandemic, etc.
- Local Quality of Life

Learn more and submit your ideas online at <https://sunrisecounty.org/nha/>.

Contact Crystal Hitchings with questions or to schedule a conversation with your board, committee, or community at chitchings@sunrisecounty.org or 207-707-2057.