



# National Coal Heritage Area Management Action Plan

## DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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## COVER SHEET

**Proposed Actions:** Approval of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Strategic Management Action Plan for the National Coal Heritage Area, West Virginia

**Type of Statement:** Draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement)

**Lead Agencies:** National Park Service  
National Coal Heritage Area

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### Abstract:

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) describes and analyzed an 11-county area in southern West Virginia in response to federal legislation authorizing the establishment of a National Coal Heritage Area and calling for a management plan to be developed and submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for the preservation, conservation and interpretation of the National Coal Heritage Area. The Draft Strategic Action Management Plan/DEIS sets forth four possible alternatives in meeting this mandate: Alternative A: Phased Corridor Development, calling for linkages of cultural resources along transportation routes in the form of Visitor and Destination Centers and Experience Zones; Alternative B: Focal Point Development, calling for development of a single, large scale visitors and interpretive center located at the region's transportation crossroads of I-77 and I-64; Alternative C: Focal Point with Phased Corridor Development, essentially a combination of Alternative A and Alternative B and; Alternative D: No Action (Continuation of Current Trends). All action alternatives call for the continuation of conservation, preservation and interpretation activities, protection of physical and cultural resources, partnering and community and agency cooperation, improvements to public access, marketing and creation of a central organization entity to provide the management and oversight necessary to raise funds and to implement the plan. In considering these alternatives, the National Coal Heritage Area Steering Committee selected Alternative C as the preferred alternative, as it best meets the legislative intent of the National Coal Heritage Area Act to "develop and implement integrated cultural, historical and land resource management policies and programs to retain, enhance and interpret significant values of the lands, water, and structures of the Area." Alternative C provides visitors several options for exploring the 11-county heritage area, and provides for a strong central leadership structure. Alternative A was judged to be the environmentally preferred alternative because it is likely to result in minimum adverse impacts to natural resources, while at the same time resulting in beneficial impacts for the preservation of cultural resources and socioeconomic development.

## Summary

The Omnibus Public Lands and National Forest Adjustments Act (Public Law 100-699), enacted by the 100<sup>th</sup> Congress on November 19, 1988 called for studies “to determine the feasibility of protecting and preserving certain significant cultural, historic and natural resources associated with the coal mining heritage of southern West Virginia.” The National Coal Heritage Area Act of 1996 officially designated the 11-county area in southern West Virginia (Boone, Cabell, Fayette, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne and Wyoming counties) as the National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA). The NCHA is bordered on the southwest by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, on the southeast by the Commonwealth of Virginia and on the north by other counties of the State of West Virginia. Additionally, a small portion of the NCHA borders the State of Ohio near Huntington, West Virginia.

The NCHA encompasses over 5,000 square miles of some of the most rugged topography of any area in West Virginia, where the landscape, culture and history of the region were altered significantly due to the extraction and transportation of bituminous coal. According to *Coal Heritage Mining Study: Southern West Virginia* (NPS, 1993):

*In no other state has coal mining so dominated the economy and social structure. In southern West Virginia, specifically, the industry has been pervasive, from the days of the first railroad in 1873 to the present, exporting huge amounts of coal recognized internationally for its quality. The remoteness of the area, combined with rapid industrialization and population growth, resulted in the creation of a society unusual for its ethnic and racial diversity. Today, the relationship among different elements of the past and present in the coal mining region forms a distinctive landscape of national interest.*

Over the last century the NCHA has experienced both moderate growth and decline, mostly as a result of the boom and bust cycle of the coal mining industry. In 1900, the total population of the NCHA was 190,217 persons. The area’s population more than tripled by 1950 (714,043), but has since declined to 487,000 in 2000. Similar to the total population of the NCHA, population levels in nine of its 11 counties peaked in 1950 at the height of the coal industry. The exceptions were Wayne and Summers counties, which are part of the “peripheral area” of the NCHA and substantially attribute their economic and population growth to resources other than the coal mining industry. The total population of the NCHA has declined almost 4.5 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Per capita income is a leading indicator of economic stability within a region. In 1997, the average per capita personal income for the NCHA was \$17,993, which was slightly less than the state average for the same year (\$18,724) and significantly less than the nation’s average of \$25,427. While the nation’s per capita income grew by 28.1 percent between 1990 and 1997, many of the counties within the NCHA experienced a greater than 30 percent gain in per capita income. Although the NCHA is increasing its per capita income at a faster rate than the nation, the region’s income levels are still well below other regions of the United States.

## Summary

Data from the West Virginia Bureau of Business and Economic Research shows that unemployment rates vary by county within the NCHA, but as a whole, the area has consistently higher unemployment rates than the nation and the state. Although the state and the NCHA have experienced improvements in their unemployment rates, these rates are still relatively high compared to the national average.

Poverty is a serious problem, particularly in southern West Virginia. Seven of the counties within the NCHA have more than 20 percent of their total populations living below the poverty line. The five counties considered “core coal mining counties” (Boone, Logan, McDowell, Mingo and Wyoming) each have between 20 percent and 30 percent of their populations living below poverty.

In January 1999, the State of West Virginia and the NPS established a NCHA Steering Committee to direct the planning efforts for the NCHA. The NCHA Steering Committee was charged with overseeing the development of a Management Plan for the NCHA that protects and preserves the significant cultural, historic and natural resources that contribute to the coal mining heritage of southern West Virginia.

Preparation of a Management Plan for the NCHA began in late 1999. Upon adoption of an overall management plan for the NCHA, the NPS, in coordination with the NCHA Steering Committee and other affected parties, will prepare detailed plans for the implementation of the selected management approach. These actions will be the subject of subsequent environmental reviews and documentation, which will provide greater detail and specificity concerning their environmental effects. This “tiering” process, encouraged under NEPA, focuses on the actual issues immediately “ripe” for decision-making at each level of environmental review. This initial Programmatic EIS will provide the public with a broad understanding of the consequences of the area-wide plan for managing the NCHA. Subsequent environmental documents will detail the effects of localized actions proposed to implement the overall plan as resources permit them to become the subjects of decision-making.

The goals of the NCHA include:

- Development of a regional identity and implementation of a marketing and promotional campaign focused on integrated coal heritage destinations.
- Creation of an organizational structure that will provide adequate financial, staff and other resources to ensure the NCHA’s ability to implement the management plan and maintain long-term viability.
- Development of cooperative partnerships that nurture capable project sponsors and viable grass roots organizations that build human, technical and financial capability and support plan implementation within the NCHA.
- Development of a regional identity and implementation of a marketing and promotional campaign focused on integrated coal heritage destinations.
- Interpretation of the history, culture and technology of the mining era.

## Summary

- Creation of an organizational structure that will provide adequate financial, staff and other resources to ensure the NCHA's ability to implement the management plan and maintain long-term viability.
- Implementation of a phased strategy of linked coal heritage experiences that engage visitors while advancing cultural and resource conservation within the NCHA.
- Fostering of an ethic of pride and stewardship within the region.
- Promotion of the protection and preservation of the region's rapidly vanishing artifacts, structures and sites from the mining era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Encouragement of projects that balance conservation and growth, providing for economic development while protecting the area's resources.
- Development of cooperative partnerships that nurture capable project sponsors and viable grass roots organizations that build human, technical and financial capability and support plan implementation within the NCHA.
- Encouragement of improved linkages between coal heritage visitor destinations in gateway communities and improved access and linkages to destinations in non-gateway counties.
- Fostering of a relationship between West Virginia's hospitality and tourism industry and visitors and provision of assistance with exceeding visitor expectations, both in terms of quality and location of services.

The NCHA Management Plan reflects the NCHA mission by:

1. Setting forth integrated cultural, historical and land resource management policies and programs to retain, enhance, and interpret the significant values of the lands, water, and structures of the NCHA;
2. Describing the guidelines and standards to which projects to be implemented must conform to preserve, restore, maintain, construct, operate, interpret, and promote buildings, structures, facilities and sites in the NCHA;
3. Setting forth the responsibilities of the NPS, the State of West Virginia, units of local government, nonprofit entities, and other organizations needed to preserve historic sites and to oversee compatible economic revitalization in the NCHA;
4. Establishing the organizational structure for the management of the NCHA; and
5. Describing the implementation schedule and financial requirements for programs and projects within the NCHA.

## Summary

The following potential issues were identified during the development of the Draft Management Plan:

- Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreational Resources
- Socioeconomic Environment
- Natural Resources
- Land Use and Design of the Built Environment
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Visual Quality
- Hazardous Materials
- Sacred Sites, Indian Tribal Resources and Tribal Lands

Four NCHA Management Plan alternatives are under consideration. These alternatives were developed through a multi-step planning process and based on extensive outreach with affected interest groups and parties within the NCHA.

Alternatives A, B and C are Action Alternatives, Alternative D is the No-Action Alternative. Alternative C is the Preferred Alternative. Alternative A is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. Each alternative is comprised of six plan components, which together, create an approach that aims to achieve the goals of the NCHA. The plan components and elements are listed below.

- 1. Goals**
- 2. Management Component**
  - a. Structure
  - b. Staffing
  - c. Partnering
  - d. Community and Agency Coordination
  - e. Performance Standards and Evaluation
- 3. Funding Component**
  - a. Sources of Funding
  - b. Levels of Funding
- 4. Cultural Component**
  - a. Preservation and Conservation
  - b. Interpretation
  - c. Education
- 5. Marketing and Tourism Component**
- 6. Physical Component**
  - a. Visitor Centers
  - b. Destination Centers
  - c. Museum
  - d. Corridors

The following plan components and elements are common to each of the Action Alternatives:

- **Goals**
- **Management Component**
  - a. Structure
  - b. Staffing
  - e. Performance Standards and Evaluation
- **Funding Component**
  - a. Sources of Funding
- **Cultural Component**
  - c. Education

## Summary

The following plan components and elements differ between the alternatives:

- **Management Component**
  - c. Partnering
  - d. Community and Agency Cooperation
- **Funding Component**
  - b. Levels of Funding
- **Cultural Component**
  - a. Preservation and Conservation
  - b. Interpretation
- **Marketing and Tourism Component**
- **Physical Component**
  - a. Visitor Centers (VCs)
  - b. Destination Centers (DCs)
  - c. Museum
  - d. Corridors

Alternative A, the Environmentally Preferred Alternative, is based on a phased corridor development approach with the NCHA central organization assuming a key leadership role in the development of partnerships among organizations and government, intergovernmental cooperation, capacity building and the preservation and protection of coal-related resources within the NCHA. Interpretation of coal-related resources would be decentralized. Interpretation and preservation efforts would be focused on the nine Destination Centers and tourism would be encouraged in the surrounding Experience Zones. A marketing plan would be developed and marketing materials would be distributed at Visitor and Destination Centers. Informational resources at existing Visitor Centers located at the gateways to the NCHA would be improved. Alternative A advocates improved roadway access to, and connections between, the Destination Centers. Implementation is tied to roadway access. Funding requirements for Alternative A is estimated at approximately \$38 million over a 10-year period.

The primary benefits of Alternative A include:

- Establishment of a clear path for preservation efforts.
- Consolidation and coordination of preservation efforts.
- Development of a broad-based preservation effort.
- Increased effectiveness of interpretive programs due to the linkage of cultural resources through Destination Centers/Experience Zones.
- Creation of demand for new jobs within the NCHA due to preservation efforts, marketing and the creation/enhancement of Visitor and Destination Centers.

The potential adverse effects of Alternative A include:

- Some degradation of cultural resources due to wear and tear from increased visitation.
- Potential impact on land use within/immediately adjacent to Destination Centers.
- Potential for increased traffic on existing roadways.
- Potential for visual impacts.

## Summary

Alternative A is the environmentally preferred alternative because it is likely to result in minimal adverse impacts to natural resources, while at the same time resulting in beneficial impacts for the preservation of cultural resources and socioeconomic development.

Alternative B is based on a focal point development approach with the NCHA central organization encouraging the development of partnerships among organizations and government. Under this alternative, communities are responsible for local capacity building and intergovernmental cooperation. Preservation would be based on community initiative. Alternative B proposes the development of a large-scale, state-of-the-art interpretive and educational museum/visitor center complex near Beckley. Interpretation efforts would be centralized and would occur at the proposed visitor center/museum. Communities would also be responsible for initiating interpretive programs and projects. The development of Destination Centers and Experience Zones is not proposed under this alternative. A marketing plan would be developed and marketing materials would be distributed to the proposed Museum and to communities and/or attractions, as requested. Alternative B is estimated to cost approximately \$44 million over a 10-year period.

The primary benefits of Alternative B include:

- Establishment of a clear path for preservation efforts.
- Enhanced visitor understanding and awareness through the development of a new, large-scale, state-of-the-art interpretive and educational museum/visitor center complex.
- Creation of demand for new jobs in Beckley due to the development of the visitor center/museum.

The potential adverse effects of Alternative B include:

- Some degradation of cultural resources due to wear and tear from increased visitation.
- Potential disturbance of archaeological resources that might be located on the proposed visitor center/museum site during site construction.
- Potential impairment of the historic integrity of the visitor center/museum site.
- Potential impacts on natural resources as a result of the construction of the proposed visitor center/museum.
- Potential impact on land use within/immediately adjacent to the proposed visitor center/museum.
- Potential for increased traffic on existing roadways.
- Potential for visual impacts.

Alternative C, the Preferred Alternative, is based on a combined focal point/corridor development approach and is a hybrid of Alternatives A and B. Alternative C is the same as Alternative A except for the following: Alternative C includes the nine Destination Centers and Experience Zones proposed in Alternative A *and* the development of a large-scale, state-of-the-art interpretive and educational museum/visitor center complex near Beckley proposed in Alternative B. Alternative C is estimated to cost approximately \$78 million over a 10-year period.

## Summary

The primary benefits of Alternative C include:

- Establishment of a clear path for preservation efforts.
- Consolidation and coordination of preservation efforts.
- Development of a broad-based preservation effort.
- Increased effectiveness of interpretive programs due to the linkage of cultural resources through Destination Centers/Experience Zones.
- Enhanced visitor understanding and awareness through the development of a new, large-scale state-of-the-art interpretive and educational museum/visitor center complex.
- Creation of demand for new jobs within the NCHA due to preservation efforts, marketing and the creation/enhancement of Visitor and Destination Centers.

The potential adverse effects of Alternative C include:

- Some degradation of cultural resources due to wear and tear from increased visitation.
- Potential disturbance of archaeological resources that might be located on the proposed visitor center/museum site during site construction.
- Potential impairment of the historic integrity of the visitor center/museum site.
- Potential impacts on natural resources as a result of the construction of the proposed visitor center/museum.
- Potential impact on land use within/immediately adjacent to Destination Centers.
- Potential impact on land use within/immediately adjacent to the proposed visitor center/museum.
- Potential for increased traffic on existing roadways.
- Potential for visual impacts.

Alternative C is the preferred alternative because it best meets the legislative intent of the National Coal Heritage Area Act to “develop and implement integrated cultural, historical, and land resource management policies and programs to retain, enhance, and interpret significant values of the lands, water, and structures of the Area.” Alternative C would capture a broad range of visitors and encourage local capacity building simultaneously. It gives visitors several options for exploring the 11-county heritage area with a large interpretive center, several Visitor Centers and nine Destination Centers. Alternative C provides for strong central leadership that would take an active role in the development of a broad based preservation and conservation effort that is likely to result in increased investment in the NCHA and increased business and employment opportunities.

Alternative D, the No-Action Alternative, does not propose any changes to the current operation/management of the NCHA. Under this alternative, there would be no development of goals or strategies, the current ad-hoc Steering Committee would continue and would remain part of state government. The NCHA executive director would assume all roles and responsibilities for marketing, managing, interpretation and the building of partnerships. Limited partnering activities would continue. Distribution of NCHA printed materials would be limited. Funding would continue at current levels

## Summary

(approximately \$200,000 per year) or would decline if the NPS decides to decrease funding. Alternative D is likely to have the least impact on the preservation of cultural resources and economic development.

The primary benefits of Alternative D include:

- Minimal to no impact on natural resources.
- Minimal to no impact on land use patterns.

The potential adverse effects of Alternative D include:

- Lack of a clear path for preservation efforts.
- Potential loss of cultural resources due to continued neglect/deterioration/abandonment.
- Potential for visual impacts.

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the National Coal Heritage Area Management Action Plan is being sent out for a 60-day public review period, during which time the public can comment on the document. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the NCHA Management Plan will be prepared after receipt and evaluation of comments on the DEIS. The FEIS will identify and respond to comments received on the DEIS, describe the preferred Management Plan alternative, include an evaluation of all other reasonable alternatives considered and the reasons for their rejection, summarize the process used to involve the public in the preparation of the FEIS, identify measures, if any, proposed to mitigate any adverse impacts of the preferred alternative and document compliance with federal and State of West Virginia requirements. Once approved by NPS, the FEIS will be filed with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and transmitted for public review to federal, State of West Virginia and local agencies, public officials, and interested organizations and individuals. Copies of the FEIS will be made available at the same locations at which copies of the DEIS were made available to the public.

After approval of the FEIS, the NPS will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD), which will serve as the final federal finding regarding the preferred NCHA Management Plan, and explain, as appropriate, the reasons for selection of a preferred alternative, identify measures to be implemented to mitigate adverse impacts of the preferred alternative, if any, and document other required regulatory approvals.

Subsequent to approval of the overall NCHA Management Plan, site-specific environmental documents will be prepared, as necessary, for future actions implementing the Plan, detailing the effects of future actions as they become “ripe” for implementation. These “tiered” documents will draw upon, to the extent practicable, the information and evaluations included in this DEIS, and will more precisely detail site-specific effects, as their plans and designs become finalized. As required by NEPA, the public and agencies will be given opportunity to participate in the development and review of these actions as they are brought forward for implementation.

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