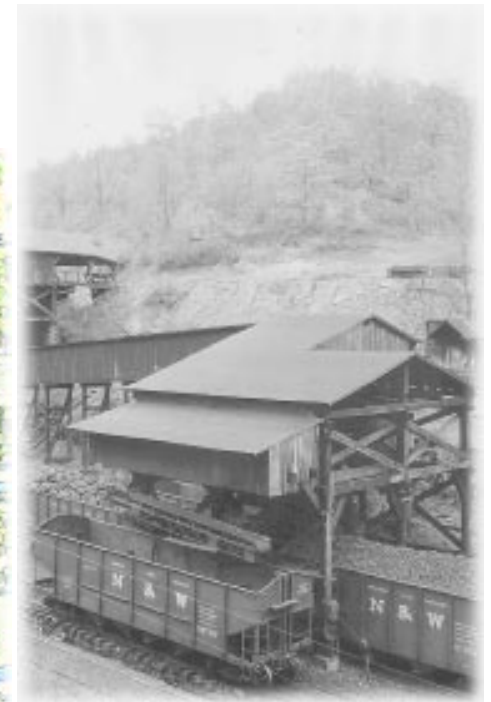


# National Coal Heritage Area

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

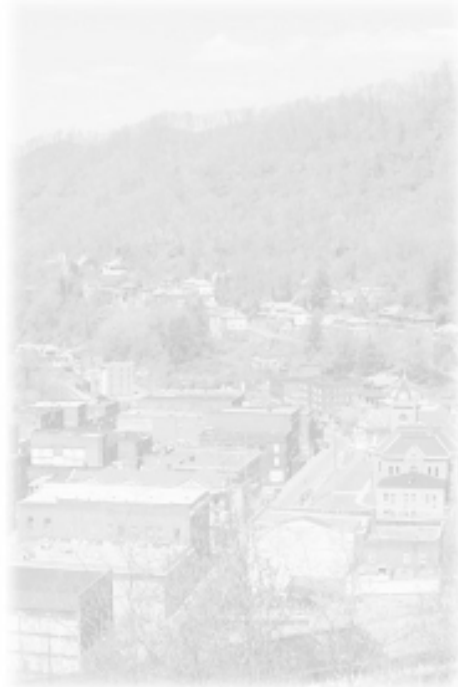


**DRAFT**  
DECEMBER 2000



# National Coal Heritage Area

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN



### **Submitted to:**

State of West Virginia  
Division of Culture & History  
Division of Tourism

National Park Service  
Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program  
Philadelphia, PA

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SWV	West Virginia State Archives
WVT	West Virginia Tourism Wild & Wonderful
WVU	West Virginia University Archives, Charleston

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# Executive Summary

The National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA) encompasses hundreds of square miles of rugged, industrial landscape where hard-working miners of all races labored to extract and transport the coal which shaped modern America. It is a story of national significance. Coalfield history and culture contain all of the elements of American social and economic history — industrial might, labor struggles, ethnic diversity and distinctive cultures. The coalfields story is a uniquely American story which is expressed in the customs, communities and stories of this remarkable region. The National Coal Heritage Area has accepted as its mission the challenge of preserving, protecting and interpreting historic resources associated with coal mining. This plan, prepared with the participation of area residents, and state and federal agencies, will serve as a blueprint for fulfilling that mission.

The story of coal heritage continues to be told first hand through the memories and stories of the people who lived and worked in the distinctive communities of the region. Five primary themes form the fabric of the coal heritage experience: the coal business, working in coal, the company town, mining technology, and crisis and renewal. Woven within the fabric are the stories of people bound to an industry through geography, culture and economic dependence. Connecting visitors with the authentic sites and experiences of mining will bring an understanding of coal mining’s impact on the region and nation. Stories told by and through the region’s populace will challenge perceptions and stereotypes of Appalachia and coal camp life. Thematically -linked destinations will provide an organized framework for



Coal miner, Mullens Smokeless Coal Company, Wyoming County. NA

understanding the history of the region and interpreting the coal story to a diverse audience. A three-tiered strategy of visitor centers, destination centers and experience zones will disperse visitors to the communities and sites where coal heritage has been preserved, protected, and interpreted. *Visitor centers* will attract and inform new visitors; *destination centers* will link interpretive information with sites and events; and *experience zones* will place visitors in the region’s distinctive communities - where stories and experiences will be revealed in authentic settings.



Developing and nurturing cooperative partnerships is a prerequisite for fulfilling the NCHA mission. Under the leadership of a state-chartered commission with broad community representation, communities and groups may receive organizational, technical and financial support. In turn, local organizations will embrace common goals, participate in area initiatives and support targeted allocations of resources in achieving strategic objectives. Preservation of the region's cultural and physical inheritance will be accomplished by government working with its citizens, through public-private partnerships and by self-supporting private enterprise. Sharing this inheritance with an interested public will increase the number and duration of visitors, which will be expressed in economic activity: employment and spending. Collaborating with established regional destinations in marketing and promoting will leverage resources in building the coal heritage "brand name".

A four-phase, 10-year implementation plan is recommended. Action items within each phase bridge plan elements that pursue multiple management objectives. Early actions focus on stabilizing the management structure, strengthening partnerships, and developing first phase visitor destinations. Subsequent phases pursue similar objectives in locations throughout the National Coal Heritage Area.



*Hinton, Summers County.*



# Enabling Legislation

The Omnibus Public Lands and National Forests Adjustments Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-699) authorized a feasibility study of the heritage-rich eleven county area in southern West Virginia. Over the past twelve years there has been a sustained effort to bring the coal heritage story to the forefront and for that story to address a broad audience of varied interests. Several important early studies, such as *A Coal Mining Heritage Study: Southern West Virginia* by the National Parks Service, have paved the way for subsequent studies, plans and projects.

Thanks to these efforts, in 1996 the National Coal Heritage Area Act was passed by Congress, which officially recognized the area for funding from the Federal government (Public Law 104-333). The legislation -- co-sponsored by Congressman Nick J. Rahall, II, 3rd District, West Virginia -- directs the National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA) 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." To facilitate this, the legislation calls for an NCHA management plan to be completed and submitted to the Secretary of the Interior. The Strategic Management Action Plan is the blueprint for conservation,

preservation and interpretation of the National Coal Heritage Area.

The National Park Service continues to play a significant role in the development of the National Coal Heritage Area through technical assistance, planning guidance, encouragement of sustained partnerships with federal and state agencies, and local and regional organizations. A forty-member Steering Committee, appointed by the Governor of West Virginia, fosters partnerships between such organizations. Representatives from state agencies, community and economic development organizations, local government, private corporations, and small businesses, among others, comprise the NCHA Steering Committee.

This Strategic Management Action Plan, based on these partners' cooperation and commitment to implementation, provides the foundation for future success within the National Coal Heritage Area.



*Miners ready for work, Gary Mines,  
McDowell County, NA*

# Mission & Goals

The NCHA has developed a mission statement and a set of goals and strategies to inform the plan and provide a strong foundation for implementation. Citizens throughout the heritage area guided the crafting of NCHA goals and strategies. The NCHA Steering Committee and Planning Subcommittee also provided direction. The nine goals and their accompanying strategies are the basis of the Strategic Management Action Plan and will guide all future planning and implementation in the NCHA.

## **Mission**

The National Coal Heritage Area preserves, protects and interprets historic, cultural and natural resources associated with West Virginia's coal mining heritage to help stimulate tourism and economic development, thereby improving the quality of life for the region's residents.

## **Goals**

Keeping the mission as the prime focus of the organization, eleven goals in nine categories were identified through the planning process to guide the growth of the NCHA. These goals provide direction for many initiatives, ranging from creating a memorable image and identity, to preserving the many artifacts and structures that are representative of coal heritage regionally and nationally. These goals address organizational and physical development, resource allocation and public relations.

## **1. Identity, Marketing and Promotions**

The National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA) will achieve ready recognition by the public by virtue of its strong brand name as a heritage tourism destination.

Develop and implement a marketing and promotional campaign focused on integrated coal heritage destinations targeted to a diverse group of visitors.

## **2. Organizational Structure**

Create an organizational structure that will provide adequate financial, staff and other resources to ensure the National Coal Heritage Area's ability to implement this plan and maintain long-term viability.

## **3. Capacity Building and Partnering**

Develop cooperative partnerships which nurture capable project sponsors and viable grass roots organizations that build human, technical and financial capacity and support plan implementation within the NCHA region.

## **4. Project Development**

Implement a phased strategy of linked coal heritage experiences that engage visitors of varying levels of knowledge and interest while advancing cultural and resource conservation in the National Coal Heritage Area.



### **5. Interpretation**

Interpret the history, culture and technology of the mining era and, in a compelling and thought provoking manner, tell the story of the people of the region.

### **6. Education**

Foster an ethic of pride and stewardship among Area residents, who will understand the importance of coal mining in regional and national history.

### **7. Resource Protection, Preservation and Growth Management**

Promote the protection and preservation of the region's rapidly vanishing artifacts, structures and sites from the mining era of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Encourage projects that balance conservation and growth issues to provide for economic development while protecting resources.

### **8. Access and Circulation**

Encourage improvement of linkages between coal heritage visitor destinations in gateway counties and improve access and linkages to destinations in non-gateway counties.

### **9. Visitor Services and Community Development**

Foster a relationship between West Virginia's hospitality and tourism industry and visitors and provide assistance in exceeding visitor expectations, both in terms of quality and location of services.

Strategies for achieving the NCHA's mission and goals are located in Appendix A.



# T Table of Contents

**Executive Summary ..... i**

**Enabling Legislation ..... iii**

**Mission & Goals ..... iv**

**Table of Contents ..... vi**

**Journeys through the Region and Interpretive Themes ..... 1**

1.1 Physical Characteristics and Key Resources ..... 2

1.2 Interpretive Themes ..... 5

    1.2.1 The Coal Business ..... 5

    1.2.2 Working in Coal ..... 6

    1.2.3 The Company Town ..... 7

    1.2.4 Mining Technology ..... 8

    1.2.5 Crisis and Renewal ..... 9

1.3 Relating Interpretive Themes to Facilities and Sites ..... 10

**Visitor Experiences ..... 11**

2.1 Connecting Visitors to the NCHA ..... 12

2.2 Visitor Experience Strategy ..... 13

    2.2.1 Visitor Centers ..... 13

    2.2.2 Destination Centers ..... 16

        2.2.2.1 Beckley ..... 17

        2.2.2.2 Bramwell ..... 19

        2.2.2.3 Coalwood ..... 21

        2.2.2.4 Holden ..... 22

        2.2.2.5 Itmann ..... 23

        2.2.2.6 Matewan ..... 24



2.2.2.7 Nellis ..... 25

2.2.2.8 Thurmond ..... 26

2.2.2.9 Welch ..... 27

2.2.3 Experience Zones ..... 28

2.2.4 National Coal Museum and Miners Memorial ..... 28

**Organization and Management ..... 32**

3.1 Understanding the Management Challenge ..... 32

3.2 Management Concept ..... 33

3.3 Management Structure ..... 34

3.4 Enhance Staff Capabilities ..... 36

**Partnerships ..... 39**

4.1 Build Strong Regional Partnerships ..... 40

4.2 Federal Partnership Opportunities ..... 41

4.3 Strengthen State Partnerships ..... 42

4.4 Forge New Partnerships and Build Local Capacity ..... 43

4.5 Execute Interlocal Agreements and Initiate an Interlocal Organization ..... 45

4.6 Initiate a Grant and Loan Program ..... 46

**Preservation and Conservation ..... 48**

5.1 Endangered Sites ..... 49

5.1.1 Historic Sites Survey ..... 50

5.2 Building Condition Survey ..... 52

5.3 Rehabilitation and Renovation Strategies ..... 53

5.3.1 Cost Factors ..... 54



5.4 Cultural Preservation ..... 55

5.4.1 Oral Histories and Folklife ..... 56

5.4.2 Guides to Cultural Conservation ..... 57

**Regional Development ..... 58**

6.1 Current Issues and Pressures ..... 59

6.1.1 Transportation ..... 59

6.1.2 Economy ..... 59

6.1.3 Preservation and Conservation ..... 60

6.1.4 Identity ..... 60

6.1.5 Political Outreach ..... 60

6.1.6 Land-Use ..... 60

6.1.7 Regional Presence ..... 60

6.2 Growth Management ..... 61

6.2.1 Investments in Infrastructure Development ..... 61

6.2.2 Incentive-Based Development Guidelines ..... 62

6.3 Integration with Existing Regional Plans and Agencies ..... 63

**Tourism ..... 64**

7.1 Product and Packaging Development ..... 66

7.2 Hospitality Training ..... 69

7.3 Entrepreneurship ..... 70

7.4 Passport/Multi-Destination Ticketing ..... 71

7.5 Collateral Material Development ..... 72

7.6 Develop Relationships with Other Tourism Operations ..... 73



**Communications ..... 75**

8.1 Publicity and Identity ..... 76

8.2 Marketing the NCHA ..... 76

8.3 Tourism ..... 76

8.4 The Role of the Internet ..... 77

8.5 Industry Associations ..... 77

**Performance Standards ..... 78**

9.1 Measurement Tools for Meeting Visitor Expectations ..... 79

9.2 Procedures for Plan Update ..... 80

**Economics ..... 81**

10.1 Concepts and Definitions ..... 82

10.2 Economic Impact Assessment of Destinations and Attractions ..... 84

10.3 Leveraging Economic and Other Benefits from NCHA-Driven Tourism ..... 86

**Implementation and Action Plan ..... 88**

11.1 Phasing Strategy ..... 89

11.2 Phase I: Organizational Realignment, Partnership Outreach and Identity Development ..... 90

    11.2.1 Establish Coal Heritage Commission ..... 90

    11.2.2 Increase NCHA Office Staffing and Establish a Satellite Office ..... 90

    11.2.3 Execute Intergovernmental Agreements ..... 90

    11.2.4 Create Identity and Wayfinding Materials ..... 91

    11.2.5 Fund Early Action Projects ..... 91

    11.2.6 Develop Events Guide ..... 91

    11.2.7 Explore Multi-state Initiatives ..... 91



11.3	Phase II: Visitor Attraction, Resource Protection, Marketing and Education .....	92
11.3.1	Collaborate in Attracting Visitors .....	92
11.3.2	Support Education Development .....	92
11.3.3	Update Endangered Resources Survey .....	92
11.3.4	Support Acquisition and Stabilization of Key Resources.....	93
11.3.5	Prepare Marketing Plan and Materials.....	93
11.3.6	Provide Training and Technical Support .....	93
11.3.7	Strengthen Existing Coal Heritage Destinations .....	93
11.3.7.1	Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine .....	94
11.3.7.2	Bramwell to Coopers to Pocahontas Journey .....	94
11.3.7.3	Fayette Station Road .....	95
11.3.8	Natural Resources Protection .....	95
11.4	Phase III: Expanding Preservation and Interpretive Initiatives, National Coal Mining Museum and Memorial .....	96
11.4.1	Local Assistance Programs .....	96
11.4.2	Enhancing Destination Centers .....	96
11.4.2.1	Nellis .....	96
11.4.2.2	Holden .....	96
11.4.2.3	Matewan .....	97
11.4.3	National Coal Museum and Miners Memorial Feasibility Study .....	97
11.5	Phase IV: The Heart of Coal Country .....	98
11.5.1	Ultimate Destination Centers – Journey Through the Heart of Coal Country .....	98
11.5.1.1	Itmann.....	98
11.5.1.2	Coalwood.....	99
11.5.1.3	Welch.....	99
11.5.2	National Coal Museum and Miners Memorial .....	99
<b>Endnotes</b>	.....	<b>106</b>



**Appendices (Separate Document)**

- 12.1 Appendix A: Mission, Goals & Strategies
- 12.2 Appendix B: Inventory and Assessment
- 12.3 Appendix C: Historical Overview
- 12.4 Appendix D: Public Meeting Summaries
- 12.5 Appendix E: Demographic and Economic Baseline Data Analysis
- 12.6 Appendix F: Stakeholder Interview Summaries
- 12.7 Appendix G: Analysis Mapping with Description
- 12.8 Appendix H: Literature Review/Bibliography
- 12.9 Appendix I: Organizational Structure
- 12.10 Appendix J: Profiles of Existing Destinations
- 12.11 Appendix K: Alternatives
- 12.12 Appendix L: Sample Building Condition Surveys
- 12.13 Appendix M: Coal Mining Destination Case Studies

