

MotorCities National Heritage Area

Evaluation Findings



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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Report

In 1998, United States Congress through Public Law 105-355 officially designated the Automobile National Heritage Area, now MotorCities National Heritage Area (MCNHA), which encompasses over 10,000 square miles in southeast and central Michigan. The MotorCities National Heritage Area (MCNHA) is composed of portions of 16 counties in Southeastern and Central Michigan, with nearly 260 municipalities and townships, and approximately six million residents. The regional boundary encompasses 10,000 square miles and has over 900 diverse cultural, historic, and natural resources, including 15 watersheds. The region includes the “MotorCities” of Detroit, Dearborn, Flint, Lansing, Jackson, and Pontiac. The focus of the heritage area is its industrial, cultural, and natural heritage, with emphasis on its innovations in manufacturing and their influence on the labor movement and the world wars, as well as the associated industrial artifacts, buildings, and institutions.

The area’s coordinating entity, MotorCities National Heritage Area Partnership, Inc. (MCNHA Partnership, Inc.) is headquartered in Detroit. A National Heritage Area, or NHA, can be any size and is intended to encourage historic preservation and an appreciation of the unique natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources that represent a nationally important American story. MCNHA is one of now 49 designated areas. They started receiving National Park Service (NPS) Heritage Partnership Program (HPP) funds in 2000. This evaluation covers the period from 2000 through 2015, though specific financial data were only available to us through 2013 at the time the evaluation was conducted.

In December 2014, Congress through Public Law 113-291, reauthorized NHA funding for MCNHA until 2020, if no evaluation was performed or until

2021 if an evaluation was performed¹ under the auspices of the Secretary of the Interior to review accomplishments made since designation. National Heritage Area designation is in perpetuity, although funding is limited and must be reauthorized or extended by Congress once the law sunset date is reached or funding ceiling is reached. Based on the findings from the evaluation, the Secretary of the Interior will prepare a report to Congress with recommendations regarding the future role of NPS with respect to the NHAs.

Key Evaluation Questions

The key findings from the MCNHA evaluation are organized by the three questions introduced in Section 1 and derived from the legislation, Public Law 110-229, that serve as a framework for this evaluation:

Evaluation Question 1 Based on its authorizing legislation and general management plan, has the heritage area achieved its proposed accomplishments?

Evaluation Question 2 What have been the impacts of investments made by Federal, State, Tribal and local government and private entities?

Evaluation Question 3 How do the heritage areas management structure, partnership relationships, and current funding contribute to its sustainability?

¹ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-113publ291/html/PLAW-113publ291.htm>

Key Findings

Evaluation Question 1 Based on its authorizing legislation and general management plan, has the heritage area achieved its proposed accomplishments?

The Evaluation determined that over the last 16 years, the MCNHA Partnership Inc. has addressed each of its legislated purposes and has completed many but not all of the goals outlined in the management plan through the federal resources provided. As outlined in Table E.1, the legislated purposes for MCNHA and the authors of the Management Plan articulated the Plan goals into five strategy areas of activities. Members of the Westat Evaluation and MCNHA Partnership Inc. administrators revised these five areas into the current three strategy areas represented in the Logic Model that guided this evaluation (see Figure 3.1). The MCNHA Partnership Inc. efforts have centered around three strategies: Education/Interpretation, Tourism, and Preservation/Conservation/Revitalization. The accomplishments and impacts in each of these areas are briefly described below. A more complete assessment of each of the areas is provided in Section 3.

Education/Interpretation: *Developing and supporting programs, initiatives, and materials that create awareness and appreciation of and communicate and make widely known, understandable, and accessible the identity, heritage, and history of the region.*

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has successfully fulfilled the legislative requirement in meeting Education/Interpretation goals. MotorCities has invested over \$3,279,356 in the period from 2000 through 2013 (the last year financial documents were available when the evaluation was conducted) in the education strategy area. Further, the MCNHA Partnership Inc. was involved in the planning as well as the development of many of these projects. Activities in the education strategy area included *Lunch and Learns*, exhibits and other forms of educational media, and educational events in museums. Stakeholder interviewees stated repeatedly and consistently that educational activities like the *Lunch and Learns* would not have been possible for community leaders without the MCNHA Partnership Inc. Educational activities within museums contributed to increased use of the historical buildings. The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum, for example, reported increased attendance after an automotive television show aired educational information from the museum.

Table E.1 MCNHA Partnership Inc. Goals and Activities

Purposes as Specified in Legislation	Management Plan Goals (Pages 40-42)	Current Goals/Activities
Foster a close working relationship with all levels of government, the private sector, and the local communities in Michigan and empower communities in Michigan to conserve their automotive heritage while strengthening future economic opportunities	Revitalization Mission Goals	Preservation/Conservation/Revitalization
Conserve, interpret, and develop the historical, cultural, natural, and recreational resources related to the industrial and cultural heritage of the Automobile National Heritage Area	Education and Interpretation Mission Goals	Tourism
	Tourism and Economic Development Mission Goals	Education/Interpretation

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. also ensures access to its educational materials through documentaries and other exhibits. For example, MotorCities collaborated with the Michigan Institute for Contemporary Art and MessageMakers to produce the documentary *Second Shift: from Crisis to Collaboration*. This documentary showcases the successes of local stakeholders to collaborate with General Motors who invested over \$1 billion in Lansing instead of pursuing plans to close production plants. Currently, the a sequel, *This Model Works*, is being produced to highlight the process of working with GM as a model for other communities that may be threatened from the loss of capital when a large corporation announces plans to move out of an area. Other exhibits include *From the Margins to the Core*, which shares the contributions of Latin American workers to the auto industry. These activities and others align well with the educational goals of MotorCities such as communicating the roles of ethnic and minority groups in the MCNHA story.

Although MotorCities' staff documents the grant funding and dissemination of their educational activities, staff do not measure visitors' awareness of automotive heritage concretely. In response to this limitation, we conducted 35 intercept interviews to determine how aware individual persons in the NHA are of the region's automobile heritage as well as MCNHA Partnership Inc. activities. As noted in section 1, we were unable to conduct a full survey due to constraints of OMB Paperwork Reduction Requirements. Results from the interviews suggest that MotorCities has had some successes in raising awareness of automotive heritage throughout the area. We conducted interviews both at partner sites and outside of such sites in Lansing, Detroit, Dearborn, and Ypsilanti. Eight interviewees were aware of both the MCNHA and overall automobile heritage. Eighteen interviewees were aware of automobile heritage in the area, but they were not familiar with the NHA. Five Michigan residents were familiar with automobile heritage, and three of the five were aware of the MCNHA.

Tourism: *Ensuring clear, consistent and environmentally appropriate signs for access to points of interest, enhancing*

and maintaining existing attractions, establishing interpretive venues, improving visitor experience, developing recreational opportunities, and increasing beneficial economic impact

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has had some successes with tourism goals, but enhancing awareness of the NHA and its activities would meet additional stated goals, (e.g., developing linkages across attractions with clear and consistent signage; improving branding.)

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has invested \$2,817,349 in tourism activities between 2000 and 2013. Tourism activities include supporting exhibits at local museums, connecting people to the history and culture of the heritage area, and promoting tourism at multiple area events. Interviewees repeatedly lauded the MCNHA Partnership Inc. for its role as a founding partner of one of the largest automobile heritage tourist events, Autopalooza. Further, stakeholders appreciated the recent completion of the Wayside Exhibit program to highlight 250 sites across the NHA. However, almost all informants suggested that MCNHA Partnership Inc. should work harder to develop linkages across attractions. Suggestions included developing an online application that links the signs and sites to each other and to local attractions; providing additional signs over highways to raise awareness that visitors are in the MCNHA; and developing branding to indicate when the MCNHA Partnership, Inc. is among the sponsors of an event.

An additional tourism activity is the NPS Passport Program. MotorCities encourages visitors to record their visits to over 20 locations throughout the NHA by stamping their NPS passports. Specific sites range from museums (e.g., Michigan Historical Museum) to historic homes (e.g., Edsel and Eleanor Ford House). The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has produced a brochure with a map and pictures of the sites so that visitors can locate the attractions. Although the NPA Passport program might connect individual sites within the NHA, many visitors might not know about the program.

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has successfully completed activities that promote widespread

awareness of its role and tourism activities (e.g., completion of Wayside Exhibit), but the majority of informants note that more work is needed.

Many Interviewees noted the critical importance of improving the visibility of the MCNHA to future activities and sustainability, as discussed in Section 5. For example, although the MCNHA Partnership Inc. completed the installment of 250 signs across the NHA in 2014, the signs are not systematically linked together to tell the overall story of the MCNHA heritage. While Lansing and Flint have created online resources that connect the signs to tell a story for visitors, many of the signs remain isolated and unreferenced in any publication, whether print (e.g., brochure) or on-line. The remaining signs remain individual exhibits, and interviewees suggest that the signs would be much more impactful if they were linked together, perhaps with an online application. Further, interviewees often stated that more signs may be needed on highways to raise the awareness of the NHA. The MCNHA Partnership Inc. staff and board are aware of the need for increased visibility of the MCNHA and are working to improve the awareness of the MCNHA among its partners as well as the general public. Improved awareness of the MCNHA is the first of the three stated goals of the new Strategic Plan.

Preservation/Conservation/Revitalization:

Identifying, interpreting, preserving, conserving, and linking auto heritage natural and cultural resources; restoring historic buildings and documents; and revitalizing communities and districts

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has successfully fulfilled the legislative requirements in meeting resource preservation/conservation/revitalization goals. The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has invested \$2,483,146 in preservation/conservation/revitalization activities from 2000 through 2013. The founding members of the MCNHA Partnership Inc. planned the foundation of the NHA while working on preservation, conservation, and revitalization activities such as restoring Ford industry mills that were slated to be demolished. Current activities include restorations at museums (e.g., Ford Piquette Avenue Plant, Ypsilanti Michigan Firehouse Museum, Ypsilanti Automotive

Heritage Museum) and other historical landmarks (e.g., Flint arch restoration project).

The MCNHA Partnership Inc. also works to preserve the cultural history of the NHA. For example, MotorCities works with partners to share the importance of the heritage area's labor history in projects such as the web tour *Auto and Labor History on the Detroit River*. This virtual tour shows visitors historical sites (many of which have been torn down). Additional preservation activities include conserving the cultural history of Willow Run, where the iconic Rosie the Riveter made her debut. Historians and other interviewees discussed many additional conservation projects that preserve the area's history.

Multiple historians stressed the importance of the MCNHA Partnership Inc. to preserve historic automotive artifacts. Further, key informants described how local residents increased their appreciation for their home communities. For example, residents of one neighborhood renamed their community *REO Town* after revitalization activities exposed the residents to their history with R.E. Olds (Oldsmobile). One interviewee stated, "there was no name for that neighborhood until people talked about auto heritage." MotorCities is an active participant in such conversations.

While the activities of the MCNHA Partnership Inc. have consistently centered on the goals cited in the legislation and their Management Plan, there was wide variation in the support they brought to each of the three activity areas over time. Some of the variation can be directly tied to the trajectory of the MCNHA Partnership Inc., which had six Executive Directors between the period 2002 – 2013: Constance Bodurow (2002-2003), Mark Pischea (2003-2006), Bud Lieberman (interim, late 2006-early 2007), Gary Familian (2007-2009), Nancy Darga (2009-2013), and Shawn Pomaville (2013-present). This lack of continuity in leadership is reflected in Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the report, impacting program activities, funding, and sustainability. In addition, during the same thirteen year period, there have been shifts in the economic climate in Detroit that have contributed

to shifts in MCNHA Partnership, Inc. supports and resources. Fluctuations in leadership, partner support and fund-raising affected the ability of the MCNHA Partnership to fund activities in the three activity areas. For example, there were clearly fewer grants funded in the years when the NHA experienced lower levels of overall financial resources (e.g., in 2006 and 2007).

Evaluation Question 2 What have been the impacts of investments made by Federal, State, Tribal and local government and private entities?

NHA has largely expended HPP funds on programmatic activities that address goals and objectives specified in the authorizing legislation.

Since its inception, MCNHA Partnership, Inc. investments have generally aligned with the core mission and goals. Overall, expenditures were in keeping with the three core areas of education, tourism and preservation/revitalization/conservation throughout the period. MotorCities has a variety of funding sources beyond NPS, including other federal sources, Michigan state agencies, and private donation. The MCNHA Partnership Inc. has exceeded the match requirements of the legislation, bringing in a total of \$7,511,548 to match \$6,691,689 in NPS funding for a total of \$15,055,526. Of this total, \$11,525,035 constituted Programmatic Expenses. With respect to these expenditures, according to federal accounting reports, the largest expenditure occurred in the area of education (28%). Tourism accounted for 24% of funding, and preservation/conservation/revitalization accounted for 22% of funds. Finally, 26% of expenditures were not categorized (See discussion in Section 4.2).

While overall expenditures were in keeping with the management plan goals, the MCNHA Partnership Inc. faced financial challenges. In 2006 the Executive Director was asked to leave following financial irregularities that were subsequently remediated. In 2009, the Financial Statement and the Single Audit Reporting Package indicate that the MCNHA Partnership Inc. had incurred \$160,554 in debt

that was carried over into the next fiscal year. The subsequent Executive Director and Board successfully managed this net reduction in assets over time. The Executive Director and Board worked with creditors, created fund raising mechanisms, invested limited personal resources, and worked with partners to recoup the funds.

The MCNHA Partnership, Inc. succeeded in meeting overall match requirements for the period from 2000 through 2013 (\$6,541,689 in NPS funds expended and \$7,511,548 in matching funds). Since 2009, the match has been met primarily through in-kind contributions (between 80%-95% of the total match from 2009 through 2013 is in in-kind contributions).

MCNHA Partnership Inc. efforts to create a more stable financial base are discussed in Section 5. Section 4 of this document provides a more detailed overview of MCNHA Partnership Inc. investments and use of the financial resources received.

Stakeholders reported the importance of MCNHA Partnership Inc. funds as seed investments that provide avenues for obtaining additional funds. For example, they provided seed funds and acted as a fiduciary for improvements to the Piquette Avenue Ford Plant so that the plant could receive additional funding from other sources. This required much less financial investment from MotorCities than if they had tried to fund a large project, and allowed the Ford Plant to pursue larger redevelopment funding from others. Additional examples include seed money to the Ypsilanti Auto Heritage Museum. The credibility that the MCNHA brings to partnerships with local agencies allows these organizations to leverage their resources for substantial development projects. In Section 2.3 we provide detailed lists of MCNHA Partnership Inc. partners, who include representatives from federal, State, county, and city governments, non-profit organizations, tourist promotion agencies and travel & convention bureaus, universities, schools and other educational organizations, regional historic preservation initiatives, environmental groups, cultural organizations, artists/art organizations, and foundations. As documented throughout the

report, MotorCities' partnerships are reciprocal in nature, with the joint planning activities furthering the mission of the MCNHA as well as the partner organization. The MCNHA Partnership Inc. looks for community partners that have the local engagement and resources to become stewards of the project after their involvement diminishes over time. Accordingly, sustainability of the project is given consideration at the beginning of each partnership and project.

Evaluation Question 3 How do the heritage areas management structure, partnership relationships, and current funding contribute to its sustainability?

To guide the assessment of sustainability, we have adopted the definition developed by NPS with the assistance of stakeholders from a number of National Heritage Areas. Sustainability for an NHA is as follows:

“...the National Heritage Area coordinating entity’s continuing ability to work collaboratively and reciprocally with federal, state, community, and private partners through changing circumstances to meet its mission for resource conservation and stewardship, interpretation, education, recreation and economic development of nationally significant resources.”

In terms of the heritage area management structure, the evaluation found that MCNHA Partnership Inc. currently has the governance in place and is staffed appropriately to operate a sustainable NHA organization. As discussed in Section 2, the MCNHA is governed by the MCNHA Partnership, Inc. The Board of Directors is composed of four Executive Officers and 15 Board Members. Five of the Board members are selected by the Stewardship Council (an advisory body) and 10 to 17 of the at-large members are nominated by the Nominating Committee. The Board has four officers: the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Many board members have careers that are representative of the stakeholder groups that comprise the MCNHA’s constituency: industry leaders and key stakeholders

from the region’s cultural and educational institutions and community and non-profit organizations. The Board plays an active role in MCNHA Partnership Inc. affairs, meeting quarterly to assist in exploring MCNHA Partnership Inc. policy and activities.

Board members interviewed in April 2015 suggested that sustainability is a primary objective of their activities. The Board has identified four main sources of funding: state funding, special events, membership, and special/major gifts. Several board members discussed the importance of, and efforts towards, reducing reliance on federal funding. The MCNHA Partnership, Inc. has experienced a challenging trajectory in the years since its authorization in 1998. While the support of the Big Three Automobile Manufacturers and the United Auto Workers Union provided a strong financial base in the early years through 2004, the organization has faced financial challenges in all subsequent years. In the years from 2003 through 2009, changing leadership and mismanagement led to reduced resources and decreased partner participation. Since 2009 the vast majority of matching resources have consisted of in-kind contributions, not cash. By 2009 the organization was in debt with no stable financial base. Due to the dedicated effort of the Board and the Executive Director Nancy Darga, starting in 2009, the debt was paid off. Under the guidance of a new Executive Director, Shawn Pomaville, hired in 2013, the Partnership successfully lobbied for reauthorization and is regaining the trust and participation of old and new partners. The MCNHA Partnership, Inc. leadership and the Board of Directors are designing and implementing a Strategic Plan that has promise in creating a new financial stability and sustainability. The Strategic Plan contains many options for activities that could create a viable financial foundation for the future. The leadership and Board are committed; the plans are robust and well thought through. But realization of these goals, and achieving sustainability for the MCNHA Partnership, Inc., is still in the future.

Interviewees’ responses were mixed in terms of MotorCities’ viability in the absence of federal funding. Some interviewees suggested that the NHA would

disappear without federal support. Others were more optimistic, suggesting that MCNHA Partnership Inc. would survive if federal support went away. These optimists did not ignore the opportunities that federal funding provides to the NHA, however, and they suggested that the heritage area would be forced to

cut its current level of activity if federal funding was reduced. Interviewees across agencies reported the potential implications of financial loss as impacting the size and scope of their activities. Multiple respondents noted the importance of federal funding to provide resources for further development.

Structure of the Report

The report is divided into 5 sections

Section 1 defines and describes the National Heritage Areas (NHA) and NHA coordinating entities in general and describes the evaluation methodology. It also introduces the MotorCities National Heritage Area (MCNHA) which is the focus of this evaluation report.

Section 2 provides an overview of the MCNHA, the coordinating entity structure and organization; The MCNHA authorizing legislation, mission and goals; and relationships between community and NPS partners.

Section 3 explores the first evaluation question, “Based on its authorizing legislation and general management plan, has the heritage area achieved its proposed accomplishments?” It describes the MCNHA coordinating entity’s goals and objectives as required by the authorizing legislation and management plan; the relationship of these goals to program areas and activities; and the MCNHA coordinating entity’s relationship with various NPS organizations.

Section 4 explores the second evaluation question, “What have been the impacts of investments made by Federal, State, Tribal and local government and private entities?” It provides an overview of the investments made in the MCNHA coordinating entity and an analysis of how the MCNHA coordinating entity has used the investments, and their impact.

Section 5 explores the third evaluation question, derived from legislation (P.L. 110-229), “How do the coordinating entity’s management structure, partnership relationships, and current funding contribute to the MCNHA’s sustainability?” This section presents an analysis of the interrelationship of the coordinating entity’s staffing and ability to obtain resources and the sustainability of the MCNHA.