

**Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative**  
**An Assessment and Recommendations Report**  
**for**  
**Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism**  
**Development**  
**in Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area**  
**Alabama**



Funded by the



National Endowment  
for the Arts



Appalachian Regional  
Commission

November 2011

Report prepared by  
**NATIONAL  
TRUST  
FOR  
HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION**

Heritage Tourism Program  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Carolyn Brackett, Senior Program Associate

## THE CONSERVATION FUND

*America's Partner in Conservation*

Conservation Leadership Network  
The Conservation Fund  
Katie Allen, Training Associate



***The Appalachian Regional Commission's mission is to be a strategic partner and advocate for sustainable community and economic development in Appalachia.***

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, ARC is composed of the governors of the 13 Appalachian states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the president. ARC funds projects that address the four goals identified in the Commission's strategic plan:

1. Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
2. Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
3. Develop and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.
4. Build the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia's isolation.

[www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov)



The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. [www.nea.gov](http://www.nea.gov).

Cover photos: Sipsey Wilderness, FAME Studio—photos by Katie Allen  
Rosenbaum Home, Jesse Owens Museum—photos by Carolyn Brackett

## Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Acknowledgements	6
Gateway Assessment Goals	7
Overview	8
Sustainable Tourism	10
Sustainable Ecotourism Principles	11
Five Principles of Cultural Heritage Tourism	12
Key Travel Trends	13
Cultural Heritage Travel	13
Ecotourism	14
Agritourism	14
Outdoor Recreation	15
Additional Travel Trends	16
Staycations	16
Volunteer Vacations	17
Green Tourism	17
Baby Boomer Travel	18
Priority Recommendations	19
Region-wide Evaluation and Recommendations	25
Heritage Trails and Tours	26
Celebrating Music in Muscle Shoals NHA	29
Museums with Irreplaceable Collections	33
Proposed and Planned Museums	35
Showcase Women’s History	36
Promotion to Visitors	38
Recreation Development Opportunities	40
Paddle Sports	40
Bicycling	42
Equine Tourism	45
Place Based Education	45
Build a Volunteer Network	47

## Table of Contents

Site Evaluations and Recommendations	49
Historic House Museums	
Pond Spring	51
Ivy Green	53
W.C. Handy Home, Museum and Library	55
Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum	56
Historic Sites and Museums	
Alabama Music Hall of Fame	57
Decatur— Planned Museums	59
Colbert Ferry, Natchez Trace Parkway	60
LaGrange College Site Park	64
Jesse Owens Museum	66
Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center	66
Recreation and Natural Resources	
Bear Creek Lakes	67
Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve	69
McFarland Park	70
Wheeler Wildlife Refuge	71
Delano Park	74
Bankhead National Forest	75
Joe Wheeler State Park	77
Richard Martin Trail	78
Appendix—Itineraries	81



## Introduction

In March 2007, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) announced a new program to promote asset-based economic development in Appalachia's gateway communities: *The Appalachian Gateway Initiative: Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism Development*. Gateway communities are defined as towns that border national and state parks, wildlife refuges, forests, historic sites, wilderness areas and other public lands. The initiative's intent is to assist communities in enhancing natural, recreational, arts and historic assets in order to create sustainable tourism programs.

In the 2010 application period, an application requesting an assessment visit and recommendations report was submitted by the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area. The application noted *"In March 2009, the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area (MSNHA) received designation as a national heritage area by the U.S. Congress, becoming one of 49 national heritage areas in the United States. As a new NHA, Congress requires that a management plan be developed and approved by the Secretary of the Interior."* The management plan will develop goals, strategies and implementation plans for the region. An Appalachian Gateway Communities Initiative assessment visit and recommendations report was requested to assist in this effort. Assistance was requested to *"identify the resources and planning measures that will make the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area sites not only come alive but make them a preferred tourism destination to the general public."*

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism Program and The Conservation Fund were retained by the ARC and NEA to conduct the assessment visit and to prepare the assessment and recommendations report. Services were provided by Carolyn Brackett, Senior Program Associate, Heritage Tourism Program, National Trust for Historic Preservation and Katie Allen, Training Associate, Conservation Leadership Network, The Conservation Fund.

The assessment visit was conducted September 20-23, 2011. The itinerary was developed by the local planning team and included touring many cultural, historic, recreation and natural resources in the region. The itinerary also included opportunities to talk with community stakeholders to gather information about cultural, historic and natural resources and to discuss ideas, challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development and promotion. The assessment team was also provided current studies, promotional brochures and other materials to familiarize them with the area's resources. (The itinerary is included in the Appendix of this report.)



Tennessee River  
Photo by Katie Allen

We would like to thank the planning committee and stakeholders who assisted with planning the site visit and provided tours, information and insights about the area:

- \***Judy Sizemore** - Director, Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area
- \***Joann Maxwell** - Northwest Community College, Lauderdale County
- \***Barbara Broach** - Director, Florence Museums (Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum, W.C. Handy Home and Museum, Pope's Tavern, Kennedy-Douglas Center for the Arts)
- \***L.C. and Louise Lenz** - LaGrange College Site Park
- \***Melissa Beasley** - Executive Director, Pond Spring: Home of Gen. Joe Wheeler
- \***Barbara Kelly** - Delano Park Conservancy, Morgan County
- \***Richard Martin** - Martin Trail, Fort Henderson/Trinity School, Limestone County/Athens
- \* **Lindy Ashwander** - Director, Princess Theater, Decatur
- \* **Chris Ozbirn**—Franklin County Archive
- President and Mrs. Bill Kale** - University of Northern Alabama
- Dr. John Thornell** - Vice President of Academics, University of Northern Alabama
- Dr. Tanja Blackstone** - University of Northern Alabama
- Randy Pettus**—Community member, Shoals Theatre
- Barry Morris**—Florence City Council
- Dutch Maxwell**—Community member
- Laura Webb** - representative for Congressman Mo Brooks
- Angie Nutt** - The Nutt House Recording Studio, Sheffield
- Sue Pinkerton** - Ivy Green: Home of Helen Keller, Tuscumbia
- Kara Long**, Curator, Pond Spring
- Mary Settle Cooney** - Executive Director, Tennessee Valley Art Museum and Ritz Theater
- Scotty Kennedy** - Director, Red Bay Museum
- Wiley Barnard** - Executive Director, Alabama Music Hall of Fame
- Robert Steen** - Historian and Author, Florence Historical Board
- Richard Sheridian** - Historian, Tennessee Valley Historical Society
- Tori Bailey** - WZZA Radio host "Looks at the Shoals"; W.C. Handy Music Festival
- Rex Burlinson** - Colbert County Commission
- Melinda Dunn** - Certified Local Government Coordinator, Old State Bank, Decatur
- Nancy Pinion** - Jesse Owens Museum, Danville
- Robbie Rebman** - Courtland Museum, Courtland
- Ryan Claborn**—Courtland Museum, Courtland
- Ginny Fite**—Courtland Museum, Courtland
- Darlene Thompson**— Courtland Museum, Courtland
- Casey Reed** - Executive Director, Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum
- Peggy Towns** - Historian and Author, Decatur
- Wally Terry** - Redevelopment Committee, Decatur
- Robby Rebman** - President, Courtland Museum
- Veen Sneed** - Historian, Mooresville
- Tisha Black** - Director, Spirit of Athens
- Sandy Thompson** - Director, Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives
- Terry Wildy** - Supervisory Park Ranger, National Park Service - Natchez Trace Parkway
- Shannon McKinney** - Administrator, Bear Creek Development Authority
- Patrick Shremshock** - Director, Bear Creek Education Center
- Barry Moore** - Franklin County Probate Judge
- Stratt Byars** - Franklin County Commissioner

**Greg Smith** - Franklin County Commissioner  
**Don Hastings** - Franklin County Commissioner  
**Howard Hutcheson** - Franklin County Commissioner  
**Wayne Smith** - Allegro Club  
**Beverly Franklin** - Dismal Canyon Conservatory  
**Weston Metcalf**—Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum  
**Kevin Cheek**— Dismal Canyon Conservatory  
**Nina McNatt** - Franklin County Chamber of Commerce  
**Jim and Faye Lacefield** - Cane Creek Canyon Preserve  
**Teresa Adams** - Supervisory Ranger, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge  
**Alan Stover** - Decatur Community and Economic Development Department  
**Phil Wirey** - historian, Decatur  
**Jim Felder** - Executive Director, Alabama Scenic River Trail  
**Johnny Mack Morrow** - Legislator, Alabama State Legislature  
**Chad Davis** -Joe Wheeler State Park  
**Mike Nave** - Limestone County Parks and Recreation Department  
**Jean Allan** - archaeologist, Bankhead National Forest  
**Joey Tetlow** - recreation, Bankhead National Forest  
**Rita Patterson** - timber, Bankhead National Forest  
**Beth Alexander** - summer student worker, Bankhead National Forest  
**Dan Tidwell** - field representative, Office of Congressman Robert Aderholt  
**Jackie Richardson** - Pioneer Camp  
**Charles Rose** - environmentalist and musician  
**Diane Hutchins**—Limestone Tourism  
**Wendy Clem**—Spirit of Athens (Athens Main Street)

(Star - \* - denotes planning committee member)

### **Gateway Assessment Goals**

Calls were held with the planning committee, Carolyn Brackett and Katie Allen in March, May, July, August and September to develop the itinerary for the assessment visit. Goals set for the assessment visit were:

- Provide recommendations that will contribute to the National Heritage Area management plan.
- Include a game plan that will help with year-by-year planning.
- Make it usable by tourism bureaus to integrate into their plans.
- Help the region make connections between natural and cultural resources such as suggestions for the development of heritage trails.
- Help build collaboration among the counties.
- Give recommendations that will help visitors have a better experience.
- Identify weaknesses such as sites that could be wonderful attractions but need support to be developed.
- Be positive and optimistic to help unify efforts around nature, art and history.

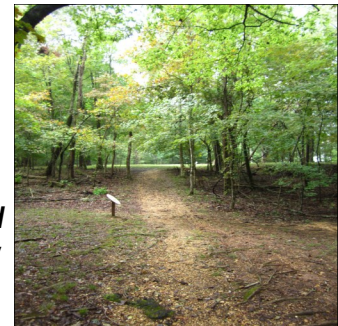
## Overview

Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area, which operates under the University of Northern Alabama in Florence, is a six-county region located in the northwest corner of Alabama. Counties are Lauderdale, Colbert, Franklin, Lawrence, Limestone and Morgan. The region is also a gateway to public lands as it borders the Natchez Trace Parkway, Bankhead National Forest and Wheeler Wildlife Refuge.

The mission statement of the MSNHA is *to promote cultural tourism by education, preservation and conservation of the heritage and culture of the six counties within the designated area. MSNHA seeks to inform, educate, develop, and interpret visitor-ready sites, create living history experiences, and chronicle the evolution of the area's landscape, as well as to extend the opportunities to the largest audience possible.*

The background study which preceded designation as a National Heritage Area identified three primary themes that define the area's unique characteristics:

- ***Mounds and Musshells: The Muscle Shoals Prehistory and Settlement*** - Focusing on how the obstacles presented by the rocky shoals affected trade routes and ultimately America's settlement toward the southwest.
- ***Harnessing the Mighty River: The Muscle Shoals in Times of War and Peace*** - Tells the story of the region's role in national defense and regional development epitomized by building a system of canals, constructing Wilson Dam and establishing the Tennessee Valley Authority.
- ***Music and Modern Times: The Muscle Shoals and the River that Sings*** - Relates the story about the legendary Muscle Shoals sound and its place on the world stage.



Natchez Trace Trail  
Photo by Katie Allen



The Village  
Photo by Carolyn Brackett



FAME Studio  
Photo by Carolyn Brackett

(Source:  
*Muscle Shoals NHA Background Study*)

The ARC-NEA Gateway Communities Initiative came at a time when the MSNHA is in the process of developing a management plan to guide the National Heritage Area's activities for the next 15-20 years. Development of the management plan over a two-year period includes intensive research into the area's history and resources, public meetings, numerous stakeholder interviews and many planning sessions.

As noted in the Gateway application: *"The findings of the visiting committee will be woven into the (management) plan as it is developed."* In particular, the assessment visit and recommendations report were requested in order to provide *"a building block of interpretation and planning...to be used by the sites to develop their long-range plans to become visitor ready."*

The assessment visit itinerary and the resulting assessment report were designed to support and contribute to the development of the management plan. Because the assessment visit was limited to three days, the local planning committee carefully selected specific sites for the assessment team to visit. **It is important for readers to note that this report is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the entire region; rather, the report reflects the assessment team's observations and recommendations related to the specific sites and communities that were toured and people who were interviewed.**

The assessment team was struck by the abundance of resources the region offers and the commitment of so many stakeholders to make the most of the area's many wonderful assets and opportunities. It is an exciting time for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area as plans develop to preserve the region's cultural, historic and natural resources, interpret their stories and present a visitor experience that is sure to be memorable and to make Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area a destination of choice for an increasing number of travelers.

## Sustainable Tourism Includes Many Types of Tourism

Tourism is the world's largest industry. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism accounts for 10 percent of the worldwide gross domestic product. More people earn wages from tourism than any other employment sector (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2006).

Tourism is also very important to Alabama's economy. The *2009 Alabama Travel Industry Economic Impact Report* estimates that almost 21 million people visited Alabama during 2009, spending close to \$10 billion and generating over \$650 million in state and local tax revenues. The economic impact of tourism has meant big savings for households in Alabama as well, saving over \$391 in additional taxes per household to maintain service levels.

Tourism also creates jobs in Alabama. An estimated 162,464 jobs were directly or indirectly attributed to the travel and tourism industry in 2009. It is estimated that the total impact of the travel and tourism industry on Alabama's earnings in 2009 is more than \$3.6 billion. With every \$85,050 of travel-related expenditures, one direct job is created in Alabama.

Tourism is an ever-changing industry and spans many experiences. The fastest growing segments focus on experiencing unique and authentic places and cultures while being sensitive to maintain or enhance the qualities that originally attracted visitors and contribute to a good quality of life for residents. Called *sustainable tourism*, such tourism encompasses many categories including cultural heritage, nature-based, community-based, outdoor recreation, agritourism and even "voluntourism" or vacation-based philanthropy. In contrast to mass-market tourism, such as cruise ships and theme parks, sustainable tourism stresses quality over quantity, favors unique experiences based on a place's resources (such as distinctive destinations, unspoiled landscapes and historic sites) and relies on locally-owned businesses that circulate money in the local economy.

Sustainable tourism has made an impact on the local counties in the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area and continues to generate revenue in these communities to provide a sustainable economic base. For example, according to the *2008 Alabama State Outdoor Recreation Plan*, Colbert County had a 0.5 percent increase (\$1,332) in state lodging tax revenue attributed to fishing and sports tournaments occurring in 2006-2007. Increased numbers of out-of-town visitors attending the *Miracle Worker* play and spillover attendees of the W.C. Handy Festival also contributed to the increase in state lodging tax collections for the county. Franklin County had an 11 percent increase (\$6,491) from 2006-2007 in state lodging tax revenues that was attributed to many visitors coming for the Watermelon Festival in August and participation in fishing tournaments throughout the year.

The MSNHA is poised to capitalize on the interest in sustainable tourism. The area provides a great diversity of historical sites, outdoor recreation opportunities and cultural heritage experiences ranging from music, Native American culture and life on the Tennessee River to provide unique, authentic experiences for visitors.

## Sustainable Ecotourism Principles

According to ecotourism development expert Ed McMahon (founder of Scenic America, past Vice President of the Conservation Fund and currently Senior Resident Fellow for Sustainable Development at the Urban Land Institute), sustainable tourism focuses on authentic experiences that are unique and specialized to the place's resources (culture, heritage and natural resources). Sustainable tourism is a strong component of gateway communities. According to *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities* by Jim Howe, Ed McMahon and Luther Propst (The Conservation Fund, 1997), successful gateway communities:

- Develop a widely shared vision
- Create an inventory of local resources
- Build on local assets
- Use education, voluntary initiatives and incentives as well as regulations
- Meet the needs of both landowners and communities
- Partner with public land managers
- Recognize the role of nongovernmental organizations
- Provide opportunities for leaders to step forward
- Pay attention to aesthetics

Additionally, the Rural Ecotourism Assessment Project by Gail Y.B. Lash and Alison Austin lists three components of community-based tourism:

- Understand and meet the needs of the community
- Realistically deliver a long-term quality tourism product
- Make specific efforts to connect these products to international and local markets

(Source: Gail Y. B. Lash and Alison D. Austin. Rural Ecotourism Assessment Program (REAP): A Guide to Community Assessment of Ecotourism as a Tool for Sustainable Development, EplerWood International, p. 8. October 2003, [www.ursainternational.org/REAP\\_424k.pdf](http://www.ursainternational.org/REAP_424k.pdf).)

Sustainable tourism is particularly attractive for communities interested in maintaining or enhancing their community's character and sense of place. In addition to economic development and job creation, sustainable tourism increases the area's attractiveness to outside industries and people seeking to relocate to locales rich in natural amenities, which results in more civic pride and offers residents more shops, activities and entertainment offerings the local market alone might not be able to support.

## **Five Principles of Successful and Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism**

Through its work with communities across the country, the National Trust for Historic Preservation Heritage Tourism Program has developed five principles to help guide successful and sustainable cultural heritage tourism development:

### **Principle One: Collaborate**

By its very nature, cultural heritage tourism requires effective partnerships. Much more can be accomplished by working together than by working alone.

### **Principle Two: Find the Fit between the Community and Tourism**

Cultural heritage tourism should make a community a better place to live as well as a better place to visit. Respect carrying capacity so everyone benefits.

### **Principle Three: Make Sites and Programs Come Alive**

Look for ways to make visitor experiences exciting, engaging and interactive.

### **Principle Four: Focus on Quality and Authenticity**

Today's cultural heritage traveler is more sophisticated and will expect a high level of quality and an authentic experience.

### **Principle Five: Preserve and Protect Resources**

Many of your community's cultural, historic and natural resources are irreplaceable. Take good care of them; if they are lost you can never get them back.



# Key Travel Trends

## Cultural Heritage Travel

While the economic recession of recent years has had a tremendous impact on the travel industry, a study shows that cultural heritage travel continues to be a strong industry segment. *The Cultural and Heritage Traveler, 2009 Edition* found that 78 percent of U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling. This translates to 118.3 million adults each year. According to the study, cultural heritage travelers say they want:

- Travel experiences where the destination, its buildings and surroundings have retained their character.
- Travel to be educational - they make an effort to explore and learn about local arts, culture, environment and history.

Cultural heritage travelers spend an average of \$994 per trip compared to \$611 for other leisure travelers, making this a highly desirable travel industry segment. Cultural heritage travelers take an average of five trips per year vs. less than four trips for other travelers.

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE ACTIVITIES	% of Travelers Engaged
Attend a fair or festival	68%
Visit historic buildings	67%
Visit historic sites	66%
Visit Native American sites	64%
Attend a re-enactment	64%
Visit history museums	61%
Visit living history museums	60%
Take a tour of local history	59%
Visit a natural history museum	59%
Visit an art museum or gallery	54%
Shop for local arts and crafts	51%
Take an architecture tour	49%
Experienced local or regional cuisine	40%
Visit state/national parks	41%
Explore small towns	40%
Take a self-guided walking tour	32%
Visit farms and ranches	32%
Explore an urban neighborhood	30%
Visit a farmers' market	27%
Take a scenic drive	24%

Source: *The Cultural and Heritage Traveler, 2009 Edition*, conducted by Mandala Research, LLC for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the U.S. Cultural and Heritage Tourism Marketing Council, and the U.S. Department of Commerce

## Ecotourism

According to the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism market, with a 5 percent annual growth rate.

- Nationwide, in 2007, visitors spent \$11.79 billion in local regions surrounding national parks, supporting 244,400 jobs in gateway regions. National parks received 275.6 million visits in 2007, while the Forest Service had 204 million visitors.
- There is a continued upswing in heritage and ecotourism among all demographic groups. (James H. Gramann, Trends In Demographics and Information Technology Affecting Visitor Center Use: Focus Group Report, National Park Service, 2003. (Trends Report: [http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/NPS\\_Inf\\_Tech\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/NPS_Inf_Tech_Report.pdf))

## Agritourism

- There were 591 farms in Alabama participating in agritourism providing services valued at over \$7 million in 2007, a \$2 million increase since 2002.
- Cooperative Alabama Research, Education & Extension Services Partners, Alabama Department of Agriculture, Alabama Farmers' Markets, Alabama Small Business Development Center and Alabama USDA Rural Development program all have representatives for each of the counties in the MSNHA that can assist in developing agritourism and farm-based recreation services throughout the region. The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center ([www.agmrc.org](http://www.agmrc.org)) provides resources and information about best management principles and building agritourism.
- In addition to serving as an additional source of income, agritourism can benefit farmers and ranchers by 1) creating name recognition for agricultural products, 2) educating consumers about rural heritage and farming and ranching traditions, 3) generating financial incentives for the protection and enhancement of natural resources and natural amenities, and 4) generating economic development opportunities in neighboring communities by bringing tourists into town who may shop, eat and lodge locally. (Agritourism Online Resources, 2007, [www.agmrc.org](http://www.agmrc.org))
- According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, 23,350 farms provided agritourism and recreation services valued at \$566 million. Of the total farms, 3,637 farms indicated gross farm receipts of \$25,000 or more. (Ag Census Report: [www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/usv1.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/usv1.pdf))
- Examples of agritourism include equine agritourism, fee and lease pond fishing, game bird and hunting leases, farm tours and hands-on chores, rural weddings and wine tours. (Source: Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. Agritourism Profile. )

## Outdoor Recreation

- According to the *2008 Alabama State Outdoor Recreation Plan*, over 95 percent of the population is projected to participate in one or more outdoor recreation activities of some kind during the year. The 10 activities with the highest percentages of the population as participants are walking for pleasure (65.3%), freshwater beach (54.8%), pool swimming (52%), football - watching and playing - (43.8%), visiting historical sites (41.6%), saltwater beach (38.2%), fishing in freshwater from the bank (31.5%), outdoor basketball (21%), camping at developed sites (20.1%) and soccer - watching and playing (18.0%).
- According to the Outdoor Foundation's *2010 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report*, 137.8 million Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2009 totaling 48.9 percent of Americans age six or older. Of this audience, the majority agree that preserving undeveloped land for outdoor recreation is important. A large percentage of outdoor participants also believe that developing local parks and hiking and walking trails is important and that there should be more outdoor education and activities during the school day.
- Nationally, 45% of outdoor participants are from households with incomes of \$75,000 or greater. With these higher incomes, outdoor participants are able to spend more, stay longer and make more frequent trips to enjoy recreational activities.
- Nationwide, participation in team sports and higher cost destination activities was generally down in 2009, while participation in human-powered outdoor activities, in many cases, increased significantly. Adventure racing, bow hunting, triathlon and whitewater kayaking all showed double-digit increases in participation. In response to a need for more cost-effective vacations, increasing numbers of Americans took to the outdoors for hiking, trail running and camping vacations. Particularly of interest to the MSNHA, kayaking increased by 10.2%, and road/hard trail biking increased by 5.3%.

## Additional Travel Trends

A July 2011 survey found expectations for travel had declined to 27% expecting to take more leisure trips, down from 33 percent in January 2011. High gasoline and airfare prices were cited as the primary reason for this decrease. The State of the American Traveler, a quarterly survey produced by Destination Analysts, Inc. ([www.destinationanalysts.com](http://www.destinationanalysts.com)) finds among travelers who cut back on travel in the previous 12 months, “gasoline too expensive” is the top reason - 53.6%. Other reasons include “personal financial reasons” (48.9%), “airfare was too expensive” (38.9%), “too busy at work” (21.5%) and “didn’t have enough vacation time” (17.6%). The July 2011 study shows travelers are not giving up on travel but are adopting strategies to make it more affordable:

Travel Plans	Percentage
Look for travel discounts or bargains	58.1%
Visit generally less expensive destinations	28.8%
Reduce the number of leisure trips	25.8%
Reduce total days spent on leisure trips	22.1%
Shorten the distance of leisure trips	21.3%
Take at least one staycation	18.8%
Select less expensive modes of transportation	15.1%

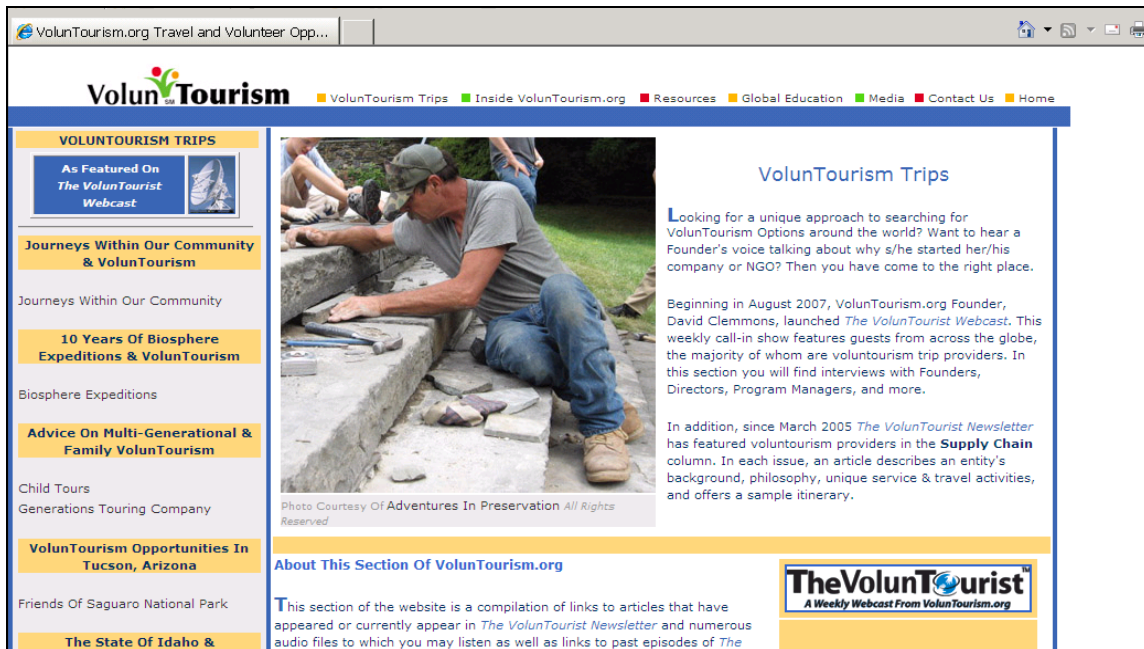
## Staycations

Traveling close to home may not really be a new phenomenon, but with an economic recession in full swing by late 2008, the buzzword for travel quickly became “staycation.” Matt Wixon, author of *The Great American Staycation*, defines a staycation as “a vacation in which the vacationer stays at home or near home while creating the environment of a traditional vacation.” Near home usually refers to destinations or activities within a 100-mile range. Rising gas prices, overall economic concerns and lack of time (41% of Americans say they experience “time poverty” according to the YPartnership 2008 Travel Monitor and Expedia survey) are all frequently cited reasons for not traveling. The good news is studies show people still want to travel and are finding ways to compensate: 18.8% say they will take at least one staycation a year (Destination Analysts, *State of the American Traveler Survey*, July 2011). Spotting this trend, tourism bureaus across the country are promoting staycations in their communities. Campaigns often use themes such as “Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown” and offer special events, tours or activities for residents in the community or state.

A July 2011 study showed that 61% of travelers listed “visiting friends and relatives” as their primary reason for travel (Destination Analysts, *State of the American Traveler Survey*). Educating residents about their hometowns through a staycation can transform them into ambassadors when they host guests or make travel recommendations to friends and family.

## Volunteer Vacations

According to Julie Leones, tourism researcher, Arizona Cooperative Extension, University of Arizona, more travelers are also giving back to destinations they visit by donating time, money, talent and their repeat business to protect and positively impact the cultures and environments they visit. More people are participating in voluntourism, a form of travel philanthropy in which travelers visit a destination and take part in projects within the local community. Projects are commonly nature-based, people-based or involve such activities as restoration or construction of buildings, removal of invasive species and planting trees.



The screenshot shows the VolunTourism.org website. The header includes the logo and navigation links: VolunTourism Trips, Inside VolunTourism.org, Resources, Global Education, Media, Contact Us, and Home. The main content area is titled "VolunTourism Trips" and features a photograph of a man working on a stone wall. Text on the page describes the website's purpose, mentioning its founder David Clemmons and the "The VolunTourist Webcast" which features interviews with trip providers. A sidebar on the left lists various trip categories such as "JOURNEYS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY & VOLUNTOURISM", "10 YEARS OF BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS & VOLUNTOURISM", and "ADVICE ON MULTI-GENERATIONAL & FAMILY VOLUNTOURISM".

Websites like [www.voluntourism.org](http://www.voluntourism.org) help travelers find vacation and volunteer opportunities.

## Green Tourism

In addition to giving back, travelers are increasingly interested in green tourism, lessening their environmental impact through lodging choices, using transit or bicycles or offsetting their carbon emissions. (Sources: Laura Bly, "Top Travel Trends for 2010," *USA Today*, January 8, 2010; Brian Mullis, "Trends in Sustainable Travel and Tourism," *Green Money Journal*, Spring 2010, [www.greenmoneyjournal.com/article.mpl?newsletterid=48&articleid=677](http://www.greenmoneyjournal.com/article.mpl?newsletterid=48&articleid=677); Rossitza Ohridska-Olson, Cultural Realms blog, [www.culturalrealms.com](http://www.culturalrealms.com) and Trend Tracker newsletter: Tourism Industry, [www.slideshare.net/Stutts/tourism-trend-tracker-may-2010](http://www.slideshare.net/Stutts/tourism-trend-tracker-may-2010); Lisa Wolfe, Heritage Traveler blog, <http://theheritagetraveler.com/2010/02/10-hot-travel-trends/>)

## Baby Boomer Travel

With 78 million baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) entering retirement in the coming years, this population segment is very important to the travel industry. A 2007 study by the AARP found that half of all baby boomers state that the desire to travel and explore new destinations is one of their “life goals.” The study found that baby boomers make at least two trips each year.



Travel is an important life experience for Baby Boomers.  
*Photo courtesy Stratford Hall, Stratford, Virginia*

## Priority Recommendations

Following are summaries of priority recommendations that address overall opportunities throughout the six-county region of the MSNHA. Each is explored in further detail in this report.

1. **Preserve the region's unique character.** The Muscle Shoals region was designated a National Heritage Area due to its abundance of irreplaceable historic, cultural and natural resources. These assets are vulnerable to incompatible development, and there is a need for an overall vision and plan to guide growth and development. The management plan currently in development will look closely at the challenges faced by the MSNHA and include strategies to preserve the region's character.

Inspiration and ideas, such as those included in this report, can help promote better development. A tool that has benefitted many communities is the use of design guidelines. Design guides provide local government officials and staff with a way to open discussion and ask for development that respects community character, creating good economic opportunities and sense of pride in the place.

Carroll County, Maryland created its *Design Expectations* guide (<http://ccgovernment.carr.org/ccg/compplan/design/intro.pdf>) to provide developers and landowners with examples of vernacular architecture. At county pre-application meetings, staff request that landowners incorporate specific design elements in construction or redevelopment. This voluntary process has resulted new development that is more aligned with the character the county desires.



The *Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide* ([www.pawildsresources.org/resources](http://www.pawildsresources.org/resources)) is another guide that has resulted in new commercial buildings integrating traditional and/or culturally appropriate building styles.



- 2. Extend the experience and package the region's assets.** Sustainable tourism is distinguished from mass-market tourism by visitors' desire to experience the unique and authentic attributes of a place. Visitors' memories are created from the activities available, the roads and trails that lead travelers to your door, plus the food, music, interpretation, crafts, buildings and towns. The various subsets of sustainable tourism often attract visitors who enjoy a variety of activities. The same visitor might be an adventure tourist one day, enjoying a wilderness hike, and a heritage tourist the next day, exploring a historical downtown. There is no shortage of activities in the region ranging from recreation to modern music heritage, but the stories can get lost in the options. The MSNHA identified three unique core themes: music, Native American heritage and Tennessee River natural and cultural history. Recognition of the overlap of different experiences is important to define offerings, to package and market the area's attractions and to lead visitors from one experience to the next. The experiences should not start and stop at a museum, but continue with a taste of a new food, the sights and sounds of lifeways in the past and the opportunity to bring lasting memories home.



Travelers may enjoy a variety of activities including visiting nature-based attractions, touring museums and shopping in historic downtowns.  
From the left, Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, *photo by Katie Allen*; Red Bay Museum and downtown Decatur, *photos by Carolyn Brackett*

- 3. Continue to build and strengthen partnerships.** MSNHA has the unique opportunity to build a network among organizations and groups throughout the six-county region. Each county and the towns within have active tourism bureaus and organizations that are promoting, for the most part, their local vision and plans. Through MSNHA, representatives from all of the counties and towns, as well as public land managers, cultural heritage resource attraction representatives and interested citizens can become partners in this effort. As part of the MSNHA, there will be regular gatherings to work together to develop the management plan and to incorporate recommendations from this report into the plan. Equally important is the commitment to raise awareness region-wide about what it means to be part of the MSNHA.



4. **Develop regional wayfinding signage program.** The rural, winding roads of the six-county region are part of the appeal of visiting northwest Alabama; however, getting lost is not. The assessment team often found themselves far off the beaten path wondering where their next turn should be due to the lack of directional signs or inaccurate directions. Downtowns, such as Florence and Decatur, have wonderful directional signs to the area’s attractions, but once a visitor enters the county, they find only small highway signs. Wayfinding signs can use the MSNHA logo to direct visitors to multiple sites. Specific journeys can also be created to guide visitors through various themes. These journeys can be mapped and reinforced through signage. Given the proliferation of billboards, the MSNHA signs will need to be carefully designed and placed to be easily seen. Wayfinding signage requires an investment of planning to ensure the best results, keeping in mind the visitor’s needs and the most important information to display.



Wayfinding signs such as this one in Decatur are needed throughout the region.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

**RESOURCE: *Wayshowing For Byways: A Reference Manual***

*Wayshowing for Byways: A Reference Manual*, a new tool from the America’s Byways Resource Center, reveals new insights to the process of showing travelers how to experience a route and provides methods for improving the navigational element of the visitor experience.

A culmination of more than two years of research, development and testing, *Wayshowing for Byways: A Reference Manual* addresses the concerns of a different audience in each chapter.

For more information, visit: [www.bywaysresourcecenter.org/topics/visitor-experience/wayshowing](http://www.bywaysresourcecenter.org/topics/visitor-experience/wayshowing)

5. **Make connections to downtowns.** It is apparent that there has been significant revitalization of several downtowns including Florence, Decatur and Athens. Others, such as Sheffield and Moulton, have not yet met their potential to provide gateway services to visitors. Visitors coming from the interstate are overwhelmed by signs for chain stores, hotels and restaurants. Because of the bypasses, they may never find the quaint downtowns with boutique shops and locally-owned restaurants as they head out into the county to attractions. The downtown areas have the potential to serve as the springboard to exploration of natural, cultural and heritage sites. Reinvestment in these areas can help revive the downtowns, providing housing and supporting locally-owned businesses while helping preserve historic structures and the traditional fabric of the community as well as sustain the substantial infrastructure investments that have been made in the gateway communities of Decatur, Florence and Athens. A goal for MSNHA is to ensure that the downtowns, revitalized or not, identify with their roles as gateway communities and work together as the central locations for information about the region.
  
6. **Promote the creative use of the Internet, social media and smart phone applications for marketing.** Fewer than one in five people report using more traditional forms of information, such as travel brochures, guidebooks, AAA and magazines and newspapers. The primary tools used by online travel planners include online travel agency websites, search engines, company websites and destination websites. Over 105 million American adults used the Internet to plan travel in 2009 - up from 90 million in 2007.

Though there are pros and cons to every new technology, trends indicate social media will continue to be a popular information sharing destination for diverse users. The region should increase its online presence to provide easily accessible information that can assist in travel planning. Popular options for incorporating into an online communication strategy include:

- Theme-based guides (music, Tennessee River heritage, hiking) rather than focused on specific regions
- Mini-guides—great for quick trips, provide essential information on particular destinations, fewer pages and smaller for easy travel and can be sold in box sets or downloaded
- E-Guides that can provide exclusive online information and email news alerts
- Guidebooks that move beyond the basics (lodging, dining, etc.) and include historical and cultural information
- Top-ten lists and “best of” roundups can provide shortcuts to the ultimate travel experiences
- Smart Phone applications

(Source: Ted Eubanks, founder, Fermata, Inc., presentation “National Balancing Nature and Commerce Course”, Shepherdstown, WV, 2011.)

### **Smart Phone Application: Trails2go**

The Trails2go SmartTrail application is a digital tour guide for iPhone, iPad, and Android devices. SmartTrails enable the user to select and stream or download multiple trails, each enriched with video, sound, maps, and directions. After this application is downloaded, the user will have access to a variety of different trails.

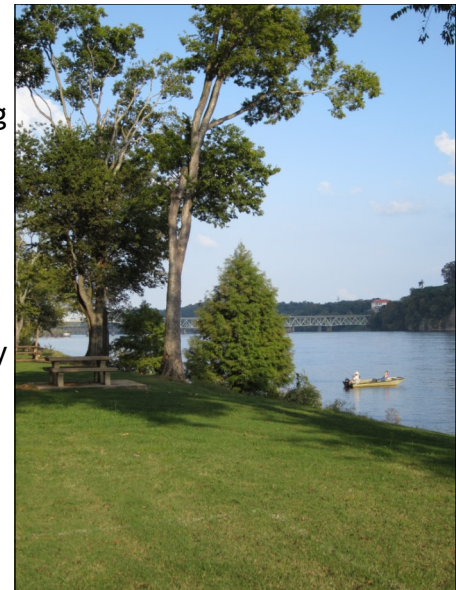
Major features of each SmartTrail:

- Descriptive text that illuminates the history, culture, nature, heritage, and recreations of special places
- Selective audio and video to help users better understand and enjoy the SmartTrail
- Interactive, zoomable GPS maps that indicate the current location and the location of all points of interest on the SmartTrail
- Pause, play, fast forward and rewind for any trail segment's audio and video
- Multiple means of finding points of interest, from a zoomable map to a sortable list of points of interest
- Location-based waypoint triggering; as a user explores, a dynamic list of nearby points of interest will continue to refresh, and content is delivered automatically based on location
- Images of points of interest that will help the user orient to the surroundings and find points of interest quickly
- Rich text for addresses, email addresses, physical locations and websites for each point of interest
- Listings of events along the SmartTrail

(Contact Ted Eubanks, [ebanks@fermatainc.com](mailto:ebanks@fermatainc.com), Fermata Inc., [www.fermatainc.com/?page\\_id=1126](http://www.fermatainc.com/?page_id=1126))

**7. Consider opportunities for conservation.** Just as the preservation of community character and downtown infrastructure is important to developing and sustaining a sense of place, so is conservation of the natural landscape. Several towns within the MSNHA have initiated conservation planning techniques to build greenways, preserve open space and ensure compatible development. The town of Athens has a conceptual greenway plan to connect green spaces and riparian corridors to create healthy wildlife habitat and opportunities for recreation. Huntsville adopted a greenways plan in 2006 to develop connected, open green spaces in and around the city to beautify and provide recreation for residents. The city of Florence adopted green infrastructure policies into their 2007 comprehensive plan that direct the conservation of scenic and sensitive natural resources and the organization of development to capitalize on these assets.

The concept of green infrastructure is a strategically planned and managed network of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that conserves ecosystem functions and provides benefits to human populations. For communities, planning and protection of green infrastructure means reduction in flood damage to property as floodplains are managed by the network design, support for working lands and tourism by creating preserved spaces that are not threatened by development, increasing home values due to the enhanced natural surroundings that make communities more attractive to buyers and enhancing quality of life by providing scenic views, fresh air and water and places to enjoy outdoor recreation and physical activity.



Green spaces such as McFarland Park contribute to the quality of life in any community.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

Due to the large landscape and overall privately-owned rural composition of the MSNHA, it is important to plan for the future conservation of open spaces and direct development into the most appropriate areas that will protect these fragile linkages. Doing so will ultimately ensure that a sustainable tourism industry will thrive well into the future. The MSNHA should consider the development of a green infrastructure network map to create a visual representation of the open space connections that currently exist and to highlight the potential connections that may exist in the future and which may cross county lines. A green infrastructure network is a strategic approach for future land use and can be used to illustrate potential goals, objectives, actions for preservation and conservation to better support sustainable tourism and quality of life in the MSNHA. For more information about green infrastructure planning and design visit [www.greeninfrastructure.net](http://www.greeninfrastructure.net).



## Region-wide Evaluation and Recommendations for Cultural, Heritage, Recreation and Natural Resources

The culture, heritage, recreation and natural resources of Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area can be experienced by tourists in many ways - by driving or bicycling along scenic country roads, exploring historic downtowns, touring historic sites and museums, camping in a state park, bird watching in a natural refuge, enjoying performances at restored theaters or attending an event or festival. This section looks at region-wide opportunities for cultural, heritage, recreation and natural resources and provides an evaluation of the current visitor experience as well as opportunities to further develop the resources.



Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area offers many interesting places for tourists to visit. From the left, 3614 Jackson Highway, Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, LaGrange College Site Park, Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, W.C. Handy Home and Museum and Natchez Trace Parkway.  
*Photos by Carolyn Brackett and Katie Allen*

## Heritage Trails and Tours

There are more than two dozen types of tours and trails in the MSNHA. Information for the trails varies from brochures to downloadable audio tours to tours with wayfinding signage. Tours include:

- **Walking or driving tours** - Historic districts or neighborhoods in Athens, Decatur, Florence-Lauderdale County, Tuscumbia, Courtland, Sheffield
- **Religious history** - Hallelujah Trail (Cherokee, DeKalb, Colbert, Jackson, Limestone Counties and Athens); Amen Trail (Morgan County); Glory Road (Limestone County); Rock of Ages (Colbert County)
- **Antebellum and Civil War** - Tennessee Valley Civil War Trail (part of statewide Alabama Civil War Trail); Athens-Limestone County (Civil War); Limestone County (Antebellum); Decatur
- **Nature and Outdoors** - Athens-Limestone County (15 themed nature and heritage trails); Athens (Noah Bike Trail and The Richard Martin Trail); Tennessee Valley Talon Trail (part of the Alabama Birding Trail); North Alabama Birding Trail; Limestone County Canoe and Kayak Trail
- **Military** - North Alabama Military Trail
- **Trail of Tears** - Colbert and Lauderdale counties
- **Trails of the Southern Soul** - Florence - topical tours (food, fishing, architecture, etc.)
- **North Alabama Wine Trail**
- **Shopping Trail**
- **Road Trips** - Highway 43: Revel in Our History or Our Natural Splendor; Interstate 65: Bright Lights and Starry Nights; Interstate 59: From the Interstate to Off the Beaten Path
- **North Alabama Barbecue Trail**



Interpretive signage helps visitors learn about many aspects of a destination. Signage at Colbert Ferry.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The Colbert County tourism website ([www.colbertcountytourism.org](http://www.colbertcountytourism.org)) has a section for themed itineraries and notes that themes under development are music heritage, bird watching, Tennessee River & TVA, Civil War, historic homes and districts, golf and Great Americans.

The Florence-Lauderdale tourism website ([www.visitflorenceal.com](http://www.visitflorenceal.com)) offers to organize tours for any size group around themes including farm, history, outdoors, shopping, music, arts & culture and others.

Plans are also under way for the development of a **Roots of American Music Trail** along the corridor of the Natchez Trace Parkway. This trail is addressed in the section titled “Music” in conjunction with evaluation and recommendations for music-related resources in Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area.

Heritage trails and tours are intended to enhance a visitor’s experience by linking sites to create a cohesive storyline and to make it easy for the visitor to plan a trip. In many ways, the heritage trail *becomes* the destination, not just the route from point to point.

A general definition of a heritage trail is *a network of cultural, heritage and natural resources that collectively create an identity and share a region's stories with visitors*. Even though a definition of *heritage trail* can be offered, the actual development of heritage trails, and what they offer to enhance the visitor experience, varies widely. In thinking about development, it is helpful to consider three types or levels of heritage trails:

1. **Basic Heritage Trails** - A basic trail involves creating a list of sites and posting these on a website or in a printed piece along with a map. A next step in this category would be to develop suggested itineraries. A basic trail promotes sites that are currently available to visitors but does not address the visitor experience at the sites or along the route.
2. **Interpreted Heritage Trails** - An interpreted trail offers materials - either through the Internet or printed materials - to guide a visitor's tour and to provide additional historical and cultural information to create an enhanced visitor experience. Interpretive materials can include guidebooks, interpretive signage, downloadable or cell phone audio and/or video tours.
3. **Full Service Heritage Trails** - In addition to the materials developed for interpreted heritage trails, a full service trail includes features such as wayfinding signage and visitors centers. In addition, heritage trail developers may also become involved in developing special events or guided tours and in advocating for improved visitor services along the route.

In each of the three levels, organizers may also develop criteria for selecting sites to include on the heritage trail, as in the case of the Hallelujah Trail where each church is at least 100 years old, stands on its original site and is still holding services.

#### **Case Study: HandMade in America - Western North Carolina**

Since its inception more than 20 years ago, HandMade in America, based in Western North Carolina, has become a national model for cultural and heritage trail development. HandMade in America was created to showcase artists and craftspeople in a 23-county region and to generate economic impact for this economically depressed area.

HandMade developed a system to guide visitors directly to the artists' studios, but to do so they needed criteria to determine which artists would be included on the trail. Criteria included: Is the site well marked, safe and easily accessible? Do the proprietors maintain regular hours? In the case of HandMade in America, shops and galleries must feature American-made crafts with an emphasis on those from Western North Carolina. Restaurants must feature indigenous foods as part of their standard menu. After sites were selected, the next step was training. Participants were trained in how to welcome and accommodate visitors and how to think as entrepreneurs to create new partnerships and promotions. ([www.handmadeinamerica.org](http://www.handmadeinamerica.org))

## Evaluation

Tourism organizers in the MSNHA have the right idea in developing thematic itineraries, tours and trails for visitors. The challenge for the visitor is finding the information and sorting through the multitude of the tour options. Each tour listed above has a brochure and/or website listings. Some - like the Hallelujah Trail - require visitors to request brochures, while others - like Decatur's walking and driving tours - have podcasts or tours accessible through smartphones. The plethora of information and options could be confusing to a visitor or cause them to miss a great opportunity for a tour. In addition, printing so many brochures for individual trails is very costly.

## Recommendations

The MSNHA can play an important role in organizing current trail offerings and promoting them to visitors. Steps can include:

1. **Create an inventory of existing trails** - Document what is offered in the various trails, identify the level of each trail (basic, interpreted, full service) and where visitors can find information on the trail.
2. **Use the MSNHA website as a central location for trail information** - The website (<http://msnha.una.edu/heritage>) has a category titled "Heritage" with subsections on African American Heritage, Architectural Heritage, Cultural Heritage, Civil War Heritage, Music Heritage, Natchez Trace Heritage, Native American Heritage, Natural Heritage, Tennessee River Heritage and Transportation Heritage with historical information on these themes. Under the category "Plan a Visit," visitors can select a theme and find a listing of attractions related to that theme. A suggested revision:
  - Take the inventory of trails and match each to one of the seven thematic categories.
  - If a trail does not match with any of the existing themes, consider adding additional categories.
  - At the end of the historical description of the theme, add links to information on each trail that connects to the theme.
  - Write an introductory paragraph for each tour to explain where it is and what a visitor will experience when following the trail.
  - Include maps showing the routes of each trail.
3. **Organize a Heritage Trails Committee** - The committee can include representatives from the tourism organizations which offer heritage trails and tours as well as representatives from heritage attractions. Committee members should work together to evaluate existing heritage trails and to find ways to consolidate or expand trails as needed to make it easy for visitors to find and enjoy the trails. The committee can also explore ways to move trails that are currently at the "basic" level into an "interpreted" or "full service" level.
4. **Consider Developing a Heritage Trails Guidebook** - Many regional or statewide heritage and culture trails are promoted through guidebooks that are sold to visitors. The guidebooks help visitors find their way along a trail route and also make a nice souvenir. The MSNHA could work with the Heritage Trails Committee to develop a guidebook to sell at heritage attractions throughout the region, resulting in revenue generation as well as promotion. (The guidebook could also be available in a downloadable version.)



Examples of guidebooks include:

*Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook*

[www.cherokeemuseum.org/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=CM&Product_Code=07158&Category_Code=B)

[Screen=PROD&Store\\_Code=CM&Product\\_Code=07158&Category\\_Code=B](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=CM&Product_Code=07158&Category_Code=B)

*Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina and Farms, Gardens and Countryside Trails*

[www.handmadeinamerica.org/products/publications](http://www.handmadeinamerica.org/products/publications)

*Rails to Trails Guidebooks*

[https://secure2.convio.net/rtt/site/Ecommerce/315461964?FOLDER=1030&store\\_id=1141](https://secure2.convio.net/rtt/site/Ecommerce/315461964?FOLDER=1030&store_id=1141)

*Journey through Hallowed Ground Travel Guide*

[www.hallowedground.org/Gift-Shop](http://www.hallowedground.org/Gift-Shop)

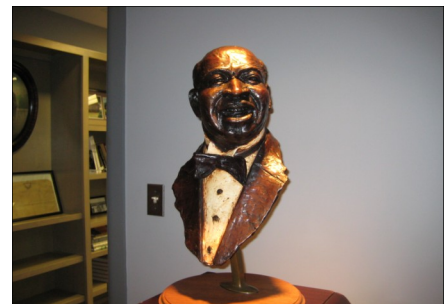
## Celebrating Music in Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area: From Legend to Legendary

*Music and Modern Times: The Muscle Shoals and the River that Sings* is one of three defining themes identified in the *Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Background Study*. Of the themes, music is the one with the most immediate recognition world-wide.

The study recounts the Native American legend of hearing singing coming from beneath the waters of the Tennessee River. This legend was just the beginning of what has become a world-renowned musical legacy. Musicians creating and performing every genre of music have come from and to the Muscle Shoals region - from “Father of the Blues” W.C. Handy in the 1920s and 30s, to the emergence of recording studios such as FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio: 3614 Jackson Highway where singers and musicians created what became known as the “Muscle Shoals Sound” and made the area the “Hit Recording Capital of the World” by the 1970s.



One of the challenges of promoting a “musical” experience in the MSNHA is that much of the music created here, music which created the “Muscle Shoals Sound” and made the region famous, was produced many years ago, and the singers do not live in the region.



Muscle Shoals music heritage is known around the world. From the left, Alabama Music Hall of Fame, awards at FAME recording studio, bust of W.C. Handy. *Photos by Katie Allen and Carolyn Brackett*

To bring the region's musical legacy to life, plans are under way to develop a new heritage trail called the *Roots of American Music Trail*.™ The trail will use the Natchez Trace Parkway as the orientation point with future plans calling for extensive expansion of the route from Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee to Natchez, Mississippi (along the Natchez Trace) and eventually extending to the Mississippi Delta and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Grants have been awarded through the National Scenic Byway grant program to develop the Alabama portion of the trail (the Natchez Trace Parkway is a National Scenic Byway and an All-American Road). Funding will support the update and expansion of an inventory of live music venues near the byway, creation of a website, development of music heritage interpretive materials including printed materials, video and audio for cell phone tours, trail signage and development of music heritage tours (both guided and self-guided).

Plans for the *Roots of American Music Trail*™ were developed in 2005 when funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration supported the efforts of partners from Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee to create a detailed development and marketing plan. Now that funds have been awarded through the National Scenic Byways program, work is beginning in Alabama with the guidance of the MSNHA and with plans to expand to partner states in the future. The long-term vision for the trail also includes plans for creating a musical drama and hosting a conference on the music of Muscle Shoals.

Currently, visitors can experience Muscle Shoals' musical legacy in several ways such as:

- Studio tours are given at FAME (Florence Alabama Music Enterprises) twice a day from Monday through Friday. A sign on the studio door states that tours are only for groups but does not indicate how many people are needed to make a group. Information about the tours is not included on the Florence/Lauderdale County tourism website ([www.visitflorenceal.com](http://www.visitflorenceal.com)). Information is found on the Alabama Office of Tourism website ([www.800alabama.com/alabama-attractions/FAME\\_Studios\\_Muscle\\_Shoals\\_Music.html](http://www.800alabama.com/alabama-attractions/FAME_Studios_Muscle_Shoals_Music.html)) but it states that tours are given from 8 to 10 a.m. Monday through Friday by appointment - no phone number is given.
- The Alabama Music Hall of Fame features exhibits and a walk of fame showcasing the many singers, songwriters and music publishers from Alabama. Exhibits throughout the museum tell of the state's musical legacy, including the Muscle Shoals Sound.
- The Red Bay Museum has an exhibit honoring country music star Tammy Wynette which includes some of her stage costumes and other memorabilia.
- The W.C. Handy Festival celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year in 2011. This 10-day festival, centered in Florence, includes more than 300 events through a four-county region and draws 250,000-300,000 attendees. Headliners feature well-known performers as well as up-and-coming groups.
- W.C. Handy Birthplace and Museum - Located in Florence, this historic site includes an extensive collection which Handy donated to the museum including his trumpet and piano, sheet music, photographs and personal papers.
- The Princess Theatre in Decatur offers performances which showcase Alabama music and artists such as the Acoustic Christmas Concert and a concert by emerging artists The Secret Sisters.

The Alabama Office of Tourism designated 2011 as the *Year of Alabama Music*. A website and a Facebook page were created to help visitors find places to enjoy music in Alabama: [www.yearofalabamamusic.com](http://www.yearofalabamamusic.com). The site includes information on music-related attractions, events and festivals and Alabama artists.

Of particular interest is the listing of 100 places to hear music in Alabama. Twenty-nine of the live music venue listings are in the MSNHA region: Athens (8), Decatur (4), Florence (6), Muscle Shoals (5), Red Bay (1), Russellville (1) and Tuscumbia (4).

These live music venues are not promoted on any of the Muscle Shoals' regions tourism websites:

- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association: [www.northalabama.org](http://www.northalabama.org)
- Muscle Shoals NHA: [http://msnha.una.edu/plan-a-visit/?t=art\\_music\\_culture](http://msnha.una.edu/plan-a-visit/?t=art_music_culture)
- Decatur: [www.decaturofb.org](http://www.decaturofb.org)
- Limestone County/Athens: [www.visitathensal.com](http://www.visitathensal.com)
- Lauderdale County/Florence: [www.visitflorenceal.com](http://www.visitflorenceal.com)
- Colbert County: [www.colbertcountytourism.org](http://www.colbertcountytourism.org)

## Recommendations

The development of the Roots of American Music Trail™ is an exciting project that, when completed, will bring increased awareness of the Muscle Shoals region's musical contributions and will also increase visitation as tourists come to explore and experience the many musical stories along the trail.

Developing the trail's many components - website, printed and audio/video materials, signage, etc. - will likely take several years of planning and implementation. In the meantime, partners should begin coordinating efforts to promote existing musical experiences and to encourage the development of new places to enjoy the Muscle Shoals Sound. Recommendations include:

1. **Confirm the list of the Muscle Shoals area's 29 live music venues** promoted on the Year of Alabama Music website ([www.yearofalabamamusic.com](http://www.yearofalabamamusic.com)).
2. **Look for any other live music venues** that could be added to this inventory.
3. **Create a website page** (or pages) with information on these venues and include it on all of the tourism websites listed above. Cross promoting each community's offerings is an essential part of creating partnerships through the National Heritage Area.
4. **Encourage the development of new places to hear live music.** When a new music venue opens, be sure to add it to the website listings and cross market with other music venues.
5. **Invite managers from live music venues** to join the planning process for the new music trail.

## Additional Recommendation

As the Roots of American Music Trail™ is developed, contact the National Park Service to request that the trail be included as an itinerary in the *Discover Our Shared Heritage* travel itinerary series.

The travel itinerary program was developed by the National Park Service through the Heritage Education Services Program to showcase thematic tours at historic sites across the country. Travel itineraries list thousands of sites, and most are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Itineraries offer self-guided tours focusing on significant American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. Tour topics include American Presidents, Civil War National Cemeteries, Aboard the Underground Railroad, Aviation: From Sand Dunes to Sonic Booms, Cultural Diversity - Places Reflecting America's Diverse Cultures and many others. Itineraries are developed as a partnership between the local organizers and the National Park Service. For more information, visit [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel) or contact Carol Shull, Chief, Heritage Education Services, 202-354-2234, [NPS\\_HeritageEducation@nps.gov](mailto:NPS_HeritageEducation@nps.gov).



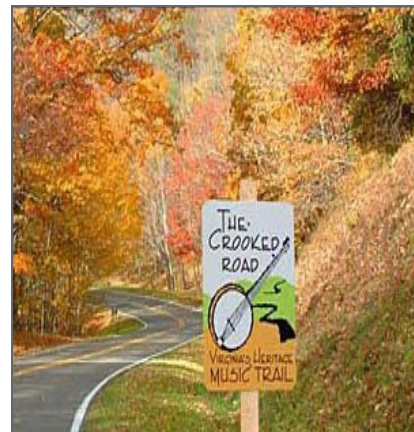
A tour of places which tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement is one of many itineraries developed by the National Park service through the *Discover Our Shared Heritage* travel itinerary series. As plans for the Roots of American Music Trail™ develop, organizers should contact the National Park Service to discuss the possibility of inclusion in this program.

### Case Study: The Crooked Road: Virginia's Music Heritage Trail

As stated on the website for the Crooked Road ([www.thecrookedroad.org](http://www.thecrookedroad.org)): The Crooked Road: Virginia's Music Heritage Trail began as an idea in January 2003. The basis of the idea is to generate tourism and economic development in the Appalachian region of Southwestern Virginia by focusing on the region's unique musical heritage.

The Crooked Road includes ten counties, three cities, ten towns, five regional planning districts, four state agencies, two tourism organizations and a large number of music venues. A steering committee representing these entities meets on a monthly basis to make decisions and implement policy.

The Crooked Road is funded primarily by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Additional support comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Program, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, Virginia Tourism Corporation and local communities. The Commonwealth of Virginia has given official recognition to The Crooked Road Highway signage identifying the more than 300-mile route as it winds through the scenic terrain of the region. Although the trail is focused on the uniqueness and vitality of the region's heritage music, it also includes outdoor recreational activities, museums, crafts and historic and cultural programs. Promotion includes a travel guide, website and audio CDs featuring local musicians, highway pull-offs with radio transmitters and additional written information along the trail route.



## Museums with Irreplaceable Collections

The assessment visit to the MSNHA provided a chance to learn about the region's multi-faceted history as shared through many historic sites and museums. Some sites are owned by state or local governments and some are owned and operated by nonprofit organizations. All showed the dedication of residents to preserving their history and sharing it with others. The multitude of volunteer hours devoted to these sites is obvious in the buildings and collections that have been saved.

Sites toured in the assessment visit included the Rosenbaum House, W.C. Handy Home and Museum, Pope's Tavern, Ivy Green - Home of Helen Keller, Red Bay Museum, Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Pond Spring - Home of General Joe Wheeler, Jesse Owens Museum, Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum, Courtland Heritage Museum, LaGrange College Park Site and Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives.

Specific recommendations for some of these sites are included in the following section and recommendations that can assist all of the sites are found in the sections on Heritage Trails and Tours, Promotions and Building Partnerships.

This section addresses a concern that relates to all of the sites that were visited with the exception of Pond Spring and the Jesse Owens Museum - *protection of irreplaceable collections*. Pond Spring is fortunate to have a professional curator on staff to document and conserve the extensive collection. As noted during our visit, there are currently no funds to construct a climate-controlled storage facility (although this included in future plans), but in the meantime, artifacts and documents are being protected in appropriate containers. The Jesse Owens Museum is professionally designed and features exhibit galleries with artifacts protected by encasement.

The other historic sites and museums that were visited did not have apparent conservation practices for displaying artifacts. Visitors are fortunate to see remarkable collections at each site. Just a few examples are:

- Original uniforms and gear from veterans of World War I through the present-day at the Alabama Veterans Museums and Archives
- 1914 Poll Tax Receipts at the Red Bay Museum
- A folk art treasure - the bicycle of resident Dinky Davis - at the Courtland Museum
- Thousands of spear points and arrowheads at the Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum
- Beautiful blankets hand woven by Mildred Rosenbaum at the Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum
- Original pictures and documents at the W.C. Handy Home and Museum
- A 19<sup>th</sup> century child's rocking horse at Pope's Tavern



Red Bay Museum holds many important historical artifacts.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*



Although documentation of what existed in the past is possible through digital records, there is no substitute for seeing the actual artifact. It is a tribute to the dedication of staff and volunteers at all of these sites that these artifacts and archival materials have been saved. It is these collections - along with the many historic buildings that have also been saved - that are tangible reminders of the culture and heritage of the Muscle Shoals region.

## Recommendations

To ensure these artifacts and archives will be available for many years into the future, it is recommended that all of the sites begin a process of conservation planning. There are many organizations which provide resources - including books, technical assistance and training - to help in this process. Some resources that can help include:

- ◆ *AAM Guide to Collections Planning* - Provides guidance on developing a collections plan for a museum. [www.amazon.com/AAM-Guide-Collections-Planning/dp/0931201888](http://www.amazon.com/AAM-Guide-Collections-Planning/dp/0931201888)
- ◆ *Collections Management and Practices* - This workshop is offered periodically by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and is presented by curators and conservators. The next workshop is scheduled for June 13-14, 2012 in New Orleans, Louisiana. [www.aaslh.org/collwork.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/collwork.htm)
- ◆ *Collections Camp: Military History* - Also offered by AASLH, this workshop focuses on the care, conservation and exhibition of military artifacts. The next workshop is scheduled for June 27-29, 2012 in Atlanta, Georgia. [www.aaslh.org/ColCampMilHistory.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/ColCampMilHistory.htm)
- ◆ *The Basics of Archives* - This is an online workshop offered by AASLH. It provides training in how to manage and protect archival collections. This beginning level course is designed for staff and volunteers at historical organizations and libraries with minimal or no experience in managing archival collections. The current training session concludes December 1, 2011. Check the website for 2012 dates: [www.aaslh.org/basicsofarchives.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/basicsofarchives.htm)
- ◆ *Museum Assessment Program* - The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is offered by the American Association of Museums with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS - a federal agency) to assist museums of all sizes to improve in planning and operations through self-study and peer review. There are three types of assessments offered through MAP - organization, collections stewardship and community engagement. The **collections stewardship MAP assessment** is recommended for all museums in the Muscle Shoals region which do not currently have collections policies and procedures. The scope of the assessment includes collections care and use, acquisitions and deaccessioning, legal, ethical and safety issues, documentation, inventory and emergency planning. For museums with budgets of less than \$125,000 annually, MAP is *free* to the museum. MAP provides an estimated \$4,000 in services to the museum including a self-study workbook, peer reviewer travel expenses and honorarium, access to AAM webinars during the approximately one-year assessment process. The next deadline is December 1, 2011. For complete information applying for a MAP assessment, please see [www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm).



Many resources are available to provide information on saving historical documents and artifacts.

## Proposed and Planned Museums

In addition to museums that have been developed in recent years such as the Courtland Museum and the Red Bay Museum, there are a number of new museums planned or proposed for the Muscle Shoals region including Ft. Henderson/Trinity School in Athens, a Native American history museum in Florence, a museum in the historic depot as well as the home of Patti Cashin Sykes and Leo Sykes and a collection of thematic museums in Decatur, a visitor/interpretive center for the Trail of Tears and an expansion of the Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives in Athens.

All of the proposed or planned museums have the potential to contribute to telling engaging stories of their communities and the MSNHA. However, creating a new museum is a costly undertaking and keeping it operational is even more costly. According to the American Association of Museum's *2009 Financial Study* there are at least 17,500 museums in the United States (including art museums, historic house museums, children's museums, history museums, natural history museums, science and technology museums and general interest museums). The survey found the median admission cost is \$7, although many museums do not charge any admission.

The study also found that the median cost of serving one visitor is \$31.40. Most museums' earned income generates only one-third of this amount. To fill the gap, museums must do a tremendous amount of fundraising. The study showed most museums depend on private charitable donations for the largest part of their revenue (35%) while government funding provides 25% and investment income is 10%. [www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm)



A museum is planned in Athens at the Ft. Henderson/Trinity School site, and a museum is being considered at the Cashin Sykes home in Decatur.

*Photos by Carolyn Brackett*

## Recommendations

Considerable thought and planning should be given to each proposed museum in the MSNHA before development begins. Museum planners should take the following steps before proceeding:

1. **Develop a statement of purpose for the museum.** Describe why the museum should be developed. What stories will be told? Why is it important to tell these stories?
2. **Describe the museum's exhibits.** What artifacts are needed to help tell the story? How will the artifacts be acquired? How will the artifacts be protected? Will a professional exhibit designer be retained to guide exhibit planning and creation?
3. **Look at other museums of similar size and themes.** Visit museums in Alabama and nearby states to see how they are presenting stories to their audiences. Are there good ideas that can be adapted to the new museum?

4. **Consider how visitors will experience the museum.** Will tours be self-guided, guided or a combination?
5. **Identify the museum’s audience.** Are most visitors expected to be local residents? School groups? Out-of-town tourists? How will the museum engage each type of visitor? How many visitors are expected annually? How much revenue will be generated from visitor admissions? Gift shop sales?
6. **Develop a budget for development and annual operation.** How much will it cost to develop a first-rate museum? How will the needed funds be raised? How will the museum’s ongoing operations be funded? How will the museum be promoted to attract visitation?

The American Association of Museum offers several books that are helpful in the planning and development process including:

- *Organizing Your Museum: The Essentials* - Includes advice on starting a museum and developing long-range plans.
- *Starting Right: A Basic Guide to Museum Planning* - Evaluates the pros and cons of establishing a new museum and advice on all aspects of museum development.

For more information and to purchase these or other books on museum development, visit [www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm).

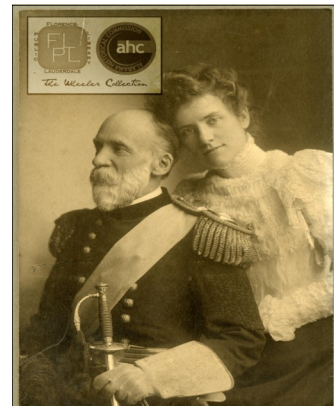
Additionally, the National Endowment for the Humanities offers grants for planning and development of museums in the category of America’s Historic and Cultural Organizations. Planning grants are in the \$40,000-\$75,000 range; implementation grants range from \$50,000 - \$400,000. For more information on grant guidelines and deadlines, visit [www.neh.gov/grants/grantsbydivision.html](http://www.neh.gov/grants/grantsbydivision.html) (under Public Programs).

## Showcase Women’s History

While touring the sites included on the assessment visit itinerary, the importance of women’s contributions and achievements in the MSNHA, as well as nationally and internationally, became evident. Many women’s stories are reflective of the times in which they lived, while other stories tell of women blazing their own trail - often ignoring the norms of their era. A few examples include:

- Helen Keller - (Late 19<sup>th</sup> - through Mid 20<sup>th</sup> century) - Advocated for the disabled, championed women’s rights and became involved in controversial political issues.
- Mildred Rosenbaum - (Mid 20<sup>th</sup> century) - Reflected women’s role in high society in the Mid 20<sup>th</sup> century; talented weaver
- Pattie Malone (19<sup>th</sup> Century) - First African American in Limestone County to graduate from high school; member of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and graduate of Fisk
- Annie Wheeler (Late 19<sup>th</sup> - Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century) - Forged her own path by joining the Red Cross and traveling to care for the wounded in two wars; reflected the interesting combination of American patriotism and allegiance to the “Lost Cause” at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Annie Wheeler and her father, General Joe Wheeler





- Mae Jemison (Late 20<sup>th</sup> - Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century) - First African American female astronaut, traveled on the Space Shuttle Endeavor in 1992.
- Natalie Chanin (Late 20<sup>th</sup> - Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century) - Fashion designer, Alabama Studio Style
- Anne Royall (19<sup>th</sup> century) - First woman journalist and activists, traveled the state and wrote *Letters from Alabama*
- Women in the Military (20<sup>th</sup> Century) - Alabama women's military service is highlighted in exhibits at the Alabama Veterans Museum
- Singers - (Mid 20<sup>th</sup> - early 21<sup>st</sup> Century) - Female singers from Aretha Franklin to the Dixie Chicks to the up-and-coming Secret Sisters have left their mark on the region, contributing to the world-famous Muscle Shoals Sound.
- Women's Education - (early 19<sup>th</sup> Century) - The Athens Female Academy was established in 1822 (later becoming the co-ed Athens State University).



Mae Jemison

### Recommendations

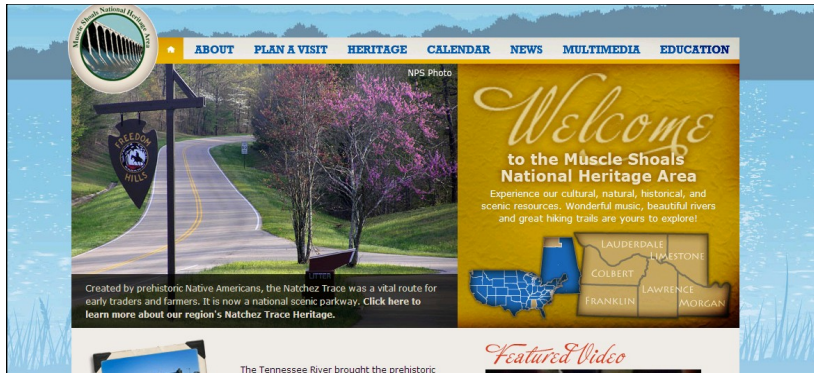
The fascinating stories of these and other women - past and present - should be woven into the interpretation, events and promotion of MSNHA. This could be accomplished through many venues including:

1. **Create original productions.** A series of one-woman plays could be developed focusing on women from different historical eras. The plays could be presented at the Princess Theatre in Decatur or the Ritz Theater in Sheffield.
2. **Host symposiums on women's history.** Plans for the Roots of American Music Trail™ call for a symposium on MSNHA's musical contributions. Part of the focus could incorporate presentations on women's singers, producers and musicians. Other symposiums could also be held to look at specific topics such as women's changing role in the military, women in the arts, women as advocates for social change, etc.
3. **Present musical performances.** The Alabama Music Hall of Fame provides an excellent venue to host performances by female singers and musicians.
4. **Showcase women artists.** Venues such as the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art could host exhibitions by women artists from the Muscle Shoals region.
5. **Develop tours focused on women's history.** As the heritage trails (discussed in a previous section of this report) are developed, consider creating a trail that traces sites connected to women's history.

## Promotion to Visitors

There are currently many organizations promoting the MSNHA region including:

- Alabama Tourism Department: [www.alabama.travel](http://www.alabama.travel) - The state of Alabama's tourism division promotes the state through its website, advertising, travel trade promotions, public relations, social media and other venues. The agency works with partners across the state to develop special promotions such as the 2011 Year of Alabama Music.
- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association: [www.northalabama.org](http://www.northalabama.org) - This membership-based association promotes 16 counties in the region.
- Muscle Shoals NHA: <http://msnha.una.edu> - The National Heritage Area has recently unveiled a website focused on helping visitors plan a trip to the region.



Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area recently unveiled a new website which will help visitors plan a trip to the region.

### City/County Tourism Agencies:

- Decatur: [www.decaturchvb.org](http://www.decaturchvb.org)
- Limestone County/Athens: [www.visitathensal.com](http://www.visitathensal.com)
- Lauderdale County/Florence: [www.visitflorenceal.com](http://www.visitflorenceal.com)
- Colbert County: [www.colbertcountytourism.org](http://www.colbertcountytourism.org) (includes Muscle Shoals, Sheffield and Tuscumbia)
- Lawrence County: [www.lawrencealabama.com](http://www.lawrencealabama.com)

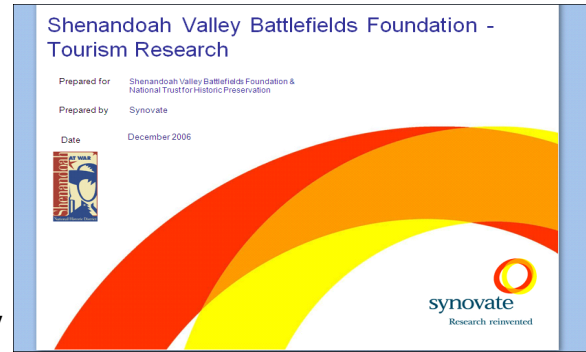
## Recommendations

All of these tourism agencies are working diligently to reach visitors through their websites, social media, brochures and other venues. Although this means that a lot of information is available, it can also mean confusion for visitors who are trying to sort through this information. It can also mean lack of a clear message about the unique characteristics of the region. Examples include:

- The MSNHA is focusing on the region's culture and heritage as a selling point for tourism, but the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association lists fishing, hunting, shopping, golf and nightlife under "Activities" on its website with no mention of heritage or culture.
- As discussed in another section of this report, most towns have walking or driving tours of historic neighborhoods and districts. A visitor must sort through many brochures (or websites) to learn about the tours and to decide which ones to take.

The following recommendations are made to help tourism promoters effectively reach and attract visitors:

1. **Gather visitor research from the entire region** - or conduct a visitor research study if needed - to learn more about visitors including:
  - Find out how visitors are learning about the region: Internet, newspaper articles, vacation guide advertisements, etc. This information will not only help in understanding how visitors are currently finding out about the area, it will also be useful in determining where to target future promotions.
  - Create a profile of visitors to the region: Where are they coming from? What do they enjoy doing while in the area?
  - Explore visitors' perceptions about the region. What do they know about the area? What do they see as its strengths? What would they like to see developed or offered?
2. **Look for ways to cross promote attractions.** Cross promotions can help create a more seamless experience for visitors; rather than having to piece a trip together, they can easily gather information and decide on activities for their trip.
3. As discussed in a previous section, **consider development of a Heritage Trails Guidebook** in order to consolidate information that is currently found in an assortment of brochures. Individual tours can also be available for download from websites.
4. **Place an information kiosk at the Marriott Shoals Hotel and Spa.** This 200-room hotel attracts vacationers and convention-goers and is a prime location for telling them about all there is to see and do in the region. Placement of an information kiosk in the lobby should be a priority. As funds allow, information kiosks should also be placed in locations throughout the region.



Visitor research, such as this study conducted for the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Heritage Area, provides information on the current visitor experiences and helps identify target audiences.

## Recreation Development Opportunities

Given the abundant outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the region, following are specific activity recommendations that could be applied to all recreation destinations.

### Paddle Sports

During interviews with recreation specialists and public land managers, many acknowledged that despite the multitude of easy, public access routes to rivers, lakes, and streams, the MSNHA's water assets are underutilized by canoers, kayakers and rafters. Kayaking is one of the fastest growing outdoor sports and is appropriate for all ages. According to a 2009 Special Report on Paddle Sports by the Outdoor Foundation, 9.9 million Americans participated in canoeing in 2008; 7.8 million Americans participated in kayaking, and 4.7 million in rafting. (www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.paddlesports.html).



Kayaking is one off the fastest-growing outdoor sports activities.  
*Photo courtesy Deep Water Kay*

Though concerns were voiced that the wide, fast flowing sections of the Tennessee River may be too rough and dangerous for the inexperienced paddler, several opportunities already exist that are safe for the whole family such as the Bear Creek Floatway in Franklin County, the Elk River with five easy put-ins throughout Limestone County, and Alabama's only National Wild and Scenic River with over 20 miles of meandering waters in the Sipsey Wilderness and Bankhead National Forest in Lawrence County. There are many lakes with hundreds of miles of shoreline that create optimal exploration of wildlife and birding habitat from the water throughout the six-county region.

### Recommendations:

1. **Use market studies to determine additional opportunities for outfitters in the region.** The MSNHA may wish to investigate the region's ability to support and sustain more outfitters and recreational-based businesses. There are no water sport outfitters or guides for canoeing and kayaking the Tennessee River and its tributaries in the region. The MSNHA can help support and enhance this part of the local economy by providing training and networking opportunities and bringing small business owners from other parts of the state or region to share strategies for growing a successful recreational outfitter business.
2. **Develop and market Water Trails.** Water trails, or blueways, offer opportunities to enjoy scenic and historical sites along a riverway by kayak, canoe or other water use. Water trails typically include points of interest, access locations, day-use sites and camping areas that are accompanied by a map or guide brochure. The previously mentioned water trail opportunities can be developed into water trails that interpret the heritage and natural history of water navigation through a journey on the water.



The Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network provides a *Water Trail Toolkit* to assist in the planning, development and management of water trails. ([www.baygateways.net/watertrailtools.cfm](http://www.baygateways.net/watertrailtools.cfm))

Another resource is the National Park Service’s River and Trails Conservation Assistance Program. The NPS website provides a multitude of studies, surveys, funding and technical assistance for the development of water trails. ([www.nps.gov/ncrc/portals/rivers/projpg/watertrails.htm](http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/portals/rivers/projpg/watertrails.htm)).

Locally, Jim Felder, executive director of the Alabama Scenic River Trail, is a great resource to provide local knowledge about navigable water for paddle sports in the region and the process for developing water trails in Alabama. The Alabama Scenic River Trail is a blueway from the mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. It offers over 1,000 miles of water for paddling and powerboats along the Alabama River, Coosa River, Tensaw River, Tennessee River, Cahaba River and other Alabama rivers and creeks. During its short history, the trail organization has hosted several special events, has had great success marketing the trail through their website, and northeastern Alabama has seen a major increase in the number of paddle sport outfitters as a result. ([www.alabamascenicrivertrail.com/](http://www.alabamascenicrivertrail.com/))



The Alabama Scenic River Trail offers over 1,000 miles of water for paddling and powerboats. *Photo courtesy Alabama Scenic River Trail*

### Case Study: Northern Forest Canoe River Trail Combines Work with Vacation for Travelers

When the nonprofit Northern Forest Canoe River Trail (NFCT) was created in 2000, organizers set as the mission connecting people to the natural environment, human heritage and contemporary communities along the 740-mile inland paddling trail tracing historic travel routes across New York, Vermont, Quebec, New Hampshire and Maine. To meet the mission of stewardship, and to offer an opportunity to visitors who want to combine a little work with their vacation, NFCT created Waterway Work Trips. NFCT selects sites along the route that are in need of work and designs three-day trips that include trail maintenance along with paddling. Participants pay a small fee to cover the costs of food and bring their own camping and paddling gear. Interns prep the site and are on hand to supervise participants’ work. “This program has been well received,” says NFCT executive director Kate Williams. “It engages people who are willing to volunteer their time, roll up their sleeves, and help steward the trail.” For more information, visit [www.northernforestcanoetrail.org/](http://www.northernforestcanoetrail.org/) or contact Kate Williams at [kate@northernforestcanoetrail.org](mailto:kate@northernforestcanoetrail.org), telephone: 802-496-2285.



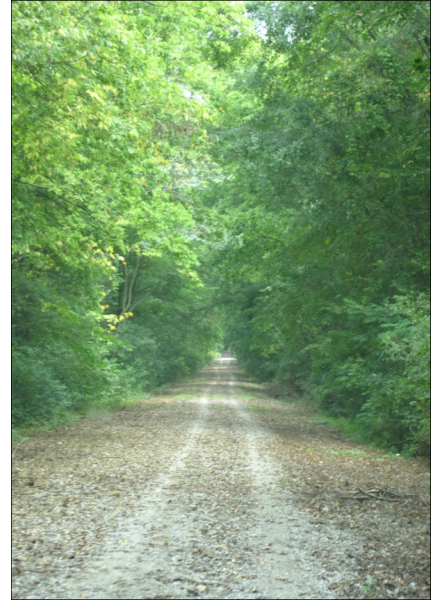
*Photo courtesy Northern Forest Canoe Trail*

## Bicycling

There is no doubt that bicycling is a popular outdoor recreation activity. In 2010, 43.3 million Americans six years and older participated in bicycling, making bicycling (road biking, mountain biking and BMX - bicycle motorcross) the fourth most popular outdoor activity in America (OIA, 2010). As a result, the bicycling industry generates billions in revenue and taxes, creates jobs and leads to expenditures in other recreational and service related industries.

In 2006, the bicycle industry was estimated to support 1.1 million jobs, generate nearly \$18 billion in federal, state and local taxes, and contribute \$133 billion annually to the U.S. economy. (Outdoor Industry Foundation, *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy*, 2006.) Not only do bicyclists generate dollars as part of the bicycling industry, their effect can be felt in other industries as well. Bicycling is characterized as a “gateway activity” as 78% of bikers participate in another outdoor activity (OIA, 2010) such as kayaking, rafting, hiking or climbing - many of the activities the MSNHA has to offer.

Limestone County Parks and Recreation Department’s 80+ mile road biking system is an example of how the MSNHA can make bicycling on the region’s winding rural roads a scenic adventure. Additionally, many of the cities in the MSNHA have started to implement planning for bicycles and pedestrians in their downtowns. Decatur has a city-wide bikeway plan, and Florence has incorporated pedestrian and bicycle priorities into street design. The efforts to make the area more bike-friendly are the beginning steps to creating a regional biking system that can offer a range of touring options from mountain biking in the Bankhead National Forest to historical architecture tours through downtowns.



The Richard Martin Trail in Limestone County is one of many places in the region that bicyclists can enjoy.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

### Recommendations:

- 1. Evaluate biking opportunities on roads and trails carefully to determine demand, user needs for facilities and compatibility with other users.** The MSNHA should evaluate the demand for bicycling and, if promoting further, design trails and bicycle road facilities for bicyclists. The Shoals Cycling Club ([www.shoalscyclingclub.org](http://www.shoalscyclingclub.org)) is a great partner as they actively ride the roads of the MSNHA and can help in choosing the right bicycle facility based on the context of the roadway. Bicycle facilities can range from signed shared roadways to designated bike lanes to separated shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. More information about bicycle facilities can be found in the *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), 1999.

2. **Use market studies to determine opportunities to develop and/or improve bicycle services in the region.** Bicycle services and bike facilities work hand-in-hand to provide recreational opportunities that support economic development. Throughout the region there is only one bike shop mentioned, Shoals Bicycle Shop in Florence, and there is no place to rent bikes for day or week use. As with the potential for paddle sports, the MSNHA can help support and enhance bicycling services and other recreational or visitor service sectors to support and attract cyclists visiting and living in the area by providing training and networking opportunities, bringing small business owners from other parts of the state or region to share strategies for growing a successful recreational outfitter business. Bicycle services include bike shops and rentals, bike parking and bike hostels:
- **Bike shops and rental outfitters** are important amenities for the traveling cyclist and resident user. Bicycle retailers provide the goods and services associated with bicycling, act as information resources about bicycling for visitors and new riders and can often attract and cultivate biking enthusiasts in communities.
  - **Bike parking** and bicycle racks are simple and easy ways to make an area more accessible for bikers. Having these amenities allows bikers to explore downtowns, shop, eat and feel safe knowing that there is a secure place to leave a bike.
  - **Bike hostels** can take many shapes and forms, from the formal to the informal, all providing the necessary amenities for traveling cyclists. June “The Cookie Lady” Curry Bike Hostel in Afton, Virginia is a well-known stop along the TransAmerica bike route where Curry has hosted over 10,000 cyclists at her home since 1976. She provides a well-stocked kitchen with food, cold water shower and lots of floor space with great hospitality.

#### Case Study: Nashville Uses Public Art to Aid Bicyclists

In 2010, the Metro Nashville Arts Commission, working with the Mayor’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, solicited design proposals from local artists to design bicycle racks for downtown Nashville. The project was part of the city’s public art program which is funded through a “1% for Art” - a fee on large-scale construction projects in the city. Seven bicycle racks were designed, constructed and placed in downtown locations. Designs include those reflective the location where they were placed, such as a giant microphone placed near Music Row and a design of corn and tomatoes placed at Farmer’s Market. ([www.artsnashville.org/ArtsInPublicPlaces.aspx?MID=3](http://www.artsnashville.org/ArtsInPublicPlaces.aspx?MID=3))



Photo courtesy of Ron Cogswell

3. **Consider launching or expanding a bike event, festival, rally or race.** The W.C. Handy Three-State Century is a successful bike event that runs in conjunction with the W.C. Handy Music Festival. This bike event runs through downtown Florence, along the Tennessee River and for many scenic miles on the Natchez Trace Parkway. The Shoals Cycling Club hosts the “Tour de Shoals,” a 25-mile community ride through Florence, Muscle Shoals, Tuscumbia and Sheffield. For minimal investment, communities can benefit economically from recreational bicycling events of all sizes. It is estimated that each ride participant contributes \$535 in direct economic impact in the community they ride in, a total of \$572 million nationally per year (Gluskin Townley Group: *The Economic Power of the NBTDA*, NBTDA Annual Conference, November 7, 2008). The MSHNA, as it grows as a bicycling destination, should consider events that tie together the themes of the heritage area by incorporating elements of history, music and Tennessee River culture and heritage.



### Funding Opportunities for Bicycling

Though Congress has not approved a new Federal Transportation Law, the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) has demonstrated considerable support for bicycling and bicycle related projects. Between 2005 and 2009, SAFETEA-LU authorized \$4.5 billion for bicycling and walking. There are several programs that provide funding for a variety of projects, both on-road and off and that can be valuable resources when looking to improve bicycle facilities in communities.

- **Transportation Enhancements** - \$2.5 billion was authorized for new bike paths, lanes, and safe crossings.
- **National Safe Routes to School Program** - \$612 million to help communities create safe ways for kids to pedal and walk to school.
- **Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program** - \$100 million to develop model bicycle/pedestrian communities in Columbia, Missouri; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; Marin County, California; and Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- **High-Priority Projects** - \$1 billion in guaranteed funding for high-priority projects that benefit bicycling.
- **Recreational Trails Program** - \$350 million for construction and repair of dirt trails.

Reconnecting America is a resource that helps navigate the complex maze of federal funding opportunities. Reconnecting America has a compiled list of all upcoming programs and deadlines. Visit: [www.reconnectingamerica.org/resource-center/federal-grant-opportunities](http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/resource-center/federal-grant-opportunities)



## Equine Tourism

Equine Tourism is a huge draw for areas that actively provide services that are needed and create the experiences desired by riders. A \$102 billion industry, equine tourism attracts 4.6 million people annually. Seventy percent of horse owners live in small communities as rural living provides adequate space to care for horses and easy access to recreational opportunities (*The Economic Impact of the U.S. Horse Industry*, American Horse Council, 2005). Potential equine tourism products include guided horse treks, tours and trail rides, fixed-site farmstays at guest and working ranches, riding clinics and camps, competitions, horse-related conferences and meetings and horse-drawn carriage rides.

### Recommendation:

**1. Evaluate the existing equine tourism products in the MSNHA and trends associated with equine tourism to determine demand, user needs and facility development.**

Through interviews with public land managers it was acknowledged that equine tourism is a possible area for further development. The Bankhead National Forest and the Richard Martin Trail are two examples of existing equestrian facilities that provide trailer parking, hitching posts and equestrian friendly trails. It is recommended that the MSNHA continue to watch trends in equine tourism in the region and surrounding states, research existing markets and products, and if it is an area to pursue, create equine tourism development strategies appropriate for the area.

## Place-Based Education

Place-based service-learning is an effective strategy for involving and engaging schools, students and community partners as active citizens of their community and stewards of public land resources. Place-based learning integrates civic engagement and service learning to create an experience for students of all ages to explore and experience the unique context of their community in a broader framework. Place-based learning projects develop a sense of pride in place, teach skills that help students become active leaders in their communities and provide an understanding of stewardship for natural and cultural resources. As one of only 49 National Heritage Areas in the U.S., MSNHA has a unique opportunity to engage school children in project-based, relevant, interdisciplinary experiences that allow them to discover their own voices in the community. These programs also are based on partnerships between public land managers, schools, and community members to continually make investments in future generations.

## Recommendation:

### **Explore opportunities to develop place-based learning and community engagement.**

Currently, Alabama state education curriculum includes Alabama history in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. There may be potential curriculum expansion opportunities for the counties of the MSNHA to develop place-based programs that incorporate experiences related to the unique themes of the MSNHA – music, history and Tennessee River culture – for all grade levels. These programs should also encourage service-learning projects that incorporate the partnerships with public land managers and community leaders to improve environmental, social and economic vitality in the community.

The Center for Place-Based Learning and Community Engagement ([www.promiseofplace.org](http://www.promiseofplace.org)) provides more information about place-based education. See their manual at ([www.promiseofplace.org/curriculum\\_and\\_planning/planning\\_tools](http://www.promiseofplace.org/curriculum_and_planning/planning_tools))

### **The Appalachian Trail's Trails to Every Classroom**

***A Place-Based Professional Development Workshop Series Connecting Communities Along the Appalachian Trail, Promoting Resource Stewardship, Recreation and Community Engagement.***

Modeled after A Forest for Every Classroom in Vermont, Trails to Every Classroom (TTEC) is a three-season, multi-disciplinary professional development series for educators aimed at providing the inspiration, knowledge and skills to transform classroom teaching into effective and exciting place-based education.

Teachers who participate in TTEC develop their own curriculum to increase student literacy skills and foster student understanding of and appreciation for the public lands and resources connected by the 2,175 miles of the Appalachian Trail. These curricula integrate hands-on study of the natural and cultural resources of communities from Georgia to Maine addressing concepts in ecology, sense of place, recreation, volunteerism and civics.

*“The Trail to Every Classroom program engages young people in nature. It brings together Trail managers, teachers, and children, allowing a safe place to engage in physical exercise, explore nature, learn about the Trail as a natural and cultural resource, and collectively get their hands dirty. This is exactly the kind of program we need to see more of as a way to connect children to nature.”*

*~Richard Louv, Author of Last Child in the Woods:  
Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit  
Disorder, 2005.*

For more information about the Trail to Every Classroom Program, visit [www.nps.gov/appa/forteachers/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/appa/forteachers/index.htm).

## Build a Volunteer Network

Sites toured during the assessment visit were owned and operated by volunteer groups or, as in the case of state-owned sites, needed volunteers to achieve the site's mission.

Volunteering is an important activity for many people as it allows them to make a contribution to the quality of life in their community or region and to affiliate with others who have similar interests. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 62.8 million people volunteered at least once between September 2009 and September 2010. Other findings in the report including:

- Women volunteer at a higher rate than men across all age groups, education levels and other major demographic characteristics.
- Those age 35-44 years were most likely to volunteer (32.2%).
- Those in their early 20s were least likely to volunteer (18.4%).
- Volunteers - both women and men - spent a median of 52 hours on volunteer activities during the period from September 2009 and September 2010. Median annual hours spent on volunteer activities ranged from a high of 96 hours for volunteers age 65 and over to a low of 40 hours for those 16-34 years old.
- Most volunteers were involved with either one or two organizations - 69.1% and 19.8%, respectively.
- In 2010, the organization for which volunteers worked the most hours during the year was most frequently religious (33.8%), followed by education or youth services related (26.5%). Another 13.6% volunteered for social or community service organizations.
- The main activity performed by volunteers was fundraising (10.9%); collecting, preparing, distributing or serving food (9.9%); or tutoring or teaching (9.8%).
- 42.7% of volunteers became involved with their main organization after being asked to volunteer, usually by someone in the organization.
- About 41.6% became involved on their own initiative.

(To see the complete report, visit [www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm).)

## Recommendations

1. **Inventory opportunities for volunteers at MSNHA sites.** The MSNHA could inventory historic, cultural and recreation sites to document volunteer opportunities. Categories might include assisting with events, programs and festivals; fundraising, publicity, giving tours, historical research, stewardship (such as clean up days, planting trees, etc.), cataloging artifacts, serving on the board or a committee and other opportunities. Both short-term and long-term volunteer opportunities should be included.

The Jesse Owens Museum is among the many sites in the region which depend on volunteers to operate.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*



2. **Create a volunteer database.** Once the information is collected, an area on the MSNHA website could be developed to host a volunteer database. (Placement could be under the “About Us” section with a new area titled “Partners.”) The database could begin as a simple listing of sites in the MSNHA, volunteer opportunities and contact information. As the site is developed, the database could be designed to be searchable. This would allow potential volunteers to look for opportunities that match their interests, skills and available time for volunteering. The database would need to be updated regularly to ensure current information is available to potential volunteers.
3. **Publicize the database.** Once the database is developed, publicize this resource throughout the region in local media, Facebook, through participating site websites and newsletters and other venues.
4. **Track use of the database.** Ask participating sites to document when they have new volunteers to track whether they learned about the volunteer opportunity through the database.

An example of searchable volunteer database is found at [www.handsonbirmingham.org/HOC\\_Volunteer\\_Opportunity\\_Search\\_Page?p=vct](http://www.handsonbirmingham.org/HOC_Volunteer_Opportunity_Search_Page?p=vct).

### Case Study: Maine Maritime Museum - New Approach Creates New Partnerships

In 2006, the Maine Maritime Museum began a process of evaluating the museum’s resources and identifying community needs. Four key areas were targeted: tourism to generate economic impact, an active maritime industry that could be recruited as partners, offering training in traditional and contemporary maritime skills, and a unique quality of place because of the natural environment and the importance of maritime history to Maine. Within this framework was the need to balance the budget and achieve the mission of stewardship of a collection that includes 20 acres of galleries and exhibits, five original 19<sup>th</sup> century shipyard buildings, a life-size sculpture of the largest wooden sailing vessel ever built, a Victorian home, river cruises and plenty of hands-on activities. To accomplish this, the museum would need lots of new partners.

In 2007, the museum took a major step in creating a Business Partner Program. Rather than the traditional “businesses giving money to nonprofits” model, the program was positioned as an alliance between the museum’s 45,000 annual visitors and its corporate and business partners. Business partners are prominently featured on the museum’s website and are included in an Honor Roll display in the lobby and in the quarterly newsletter. Partners range from retail shops to arts and entertainment venues, restaurants, boat cruise businesses, financial organizations and many others. By 2010, the museum had 105 partners - up from 60 in 2009.



Tours of Bath Ironworks are scheduled by the museum and are very popular with visitors.  
*Photo courtesy Maine Maritime Museum*

The museum also sought partnerships with the Navy League, a nonprofit that educates citizens about the importance of the Navy to national security, and with Bath Ironworks which is located next to the museum and builds destroyers for the Navy. Both partnerships created new opportunities. In return for space for the group’s meetings the Navy League provides speakers for the museum’s programs, and the two groups split the proceeds. At Bath Ironworks, the museum arranged to give trolley tours, making it the only shipyard in America with behind-the-scenes tours. The docent is a retired Ironworks employee, and tours sell out every time. For more information, visit [www.mainemaritimemuseum.org](http://www.mainemaritimemuseum.org); contact Amy Lent, [lent@maritimeme.org](mailto:lent@maritimeme.org).

# Site Evaluations and Recommendations

## Historic Downtowns

MSNHA is fortunate to have so many downtowns including Florence, Athens, Decatur, Sheffield, Courtland, Rogersville, Mooresville, Russellville, Red Bay and Tuscumbia. Each downtown has its own distinguishing characteristics of architecture, businesses and history, and each has citizens who are actively working to revitalize their community's downtown. Examples include:

- Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority has recently completed a strategic plan which is guiding redevelopment including streetscaping, and committees are working on issues such as loft residential housing and evaluating how to accommodate sidewalk cafes.
- Both in Courtland and in Red Bay, community activists have placed their county history museums downtown and are working to attract new businesses.
- Rogersville has experienced a renaissance in recent years as new retailers and restaurants have moved into the historic district.



From the left: Courtland, Decatur and Rogersville downtowns; *Photos by Carolyn Brackett*

## Recommendation for Sheffield: Paducah, Kentucky Case Study

Although the area's downtowns were included in a driving tour during the assessment visit, time did not permit an in-depth look at each one. However, Sheffield was identified during the tour as having a downtown in particular need of ideas for development. Streetscaping has enhanced the downtown's appearance with trees, sidewalks and lighting, but the district has a high vacancy rate - as high as 80-90%.

Focusing on a particular type of business may be a helpful approach to generate a higher occupancy rate in Sheffield's historic downtown buildings. An example that could be considered for adaptation to Sheffield is the Artist Relocation Program in Paducah, Kentucky. The Paducah program focuses visual artists, but given Sheffield's musical heritage, a similar program could be considered to attract musicians.

In 2000, Paducah, Kentucky, a city located on the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers, created an Artist Relocation Program which is managed by the Paducah Renaissance Alliance. Its success has earned the program national recognition and numerous awards as a model for using the arts for economic development.



Streetscaping has provided an enhanced setting for the historic buildings in downtown Sheffield. *Photo by Carolyn Brackett*



As stated on the program's website: At a time when funding for the arts is being cut, Paducah fosters an environment where artists and the arts can flourish.

([www.paducahalliance.org/artist\\_relocation\\_program.php](http://www.paducahalliance.org/artist_relocation_program.php)) In the process, Paducah has found a way to revitalize its historic neighborhoods by attracting artists to renovate dilapidated housing. Artists have relocated from all over the country - attracted by the program's incentives for those who qualify. Among the incentives are:

- Areas are zoned live/work, enabling residents to have a gallery or studio, restaurant, living and other mixed uses.
- Properties can be purchased for as little as \$1 and obtain a \$2,500 reimbursement for architectural or other professional services.
- Moving assistance of up to \$2,500, business start up assistance of up to \$2,500 and rehab costs of up to \$5,000.
- Promotion of the arts district.

In the years since the program began, more than \$30 million has been reinvested in Paducah's historic districts. More than 100 artists live and work in the area known as Lower Town. A 2009 study by Americans for the Arts found that the arts scene brought in \$27.8 million with almost \$22 million of those revenues coming from tourists.

### **Recommendation for Nitrate Village One: Benham Schoolhouse Inn, Kentucky**

The Village is a charming residential area filled with houses and a school built by the U.S. government in 1918 for workers at the nearby nitrate plant during World War I. The Village was owned by TVA from 1933 to 1949 when the houses were sold at auction and the school was given to the City of Sheffield. The Village was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

The school is no longer in operation, and the school building is currently empty. It was not clear what plans might be under consideration for this building. One use that could be considered would be to restore the building for use as an inn.

An example of this type of use is seen in the Benham Schoolhouse Inn in Benham, Kentucky.

([www.kingdomcome.org/inn](http://www.kingdomcome.org/inn)) The former elementary school has been restored and includes 30 guest rooms, a restaurant and a banquet hall. The inn is managed by the Southeast Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization which supports the hospitality program of a local community college.



Adaptive reuse of the Nitrate Village One school could make it an important resource for tourism.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

## Historic House Museums

### Pond Spring - Home of General Joseph Wheeler

Located in Lawrence County near Courtland, Pond Spring was the home of General Joseph Wheeler, his wife Daniella Jones Sherrod Wheeler and their children. The couple married in 1866 and built the home a few years later on property Daniella inherited when her first husband died. The facts of General Wheeler's life weave an interesting story - graduating from West Point in 1859, only to join the Confederate Army in 1861 after fighting Indians in New Mexico and earning the nickname "Fighting Joe." After serving in major battles throughout the Civil War, Wheeler returned to Courtland to marry, raise a family and to become a planter. He redirected his allegiance to the United States and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1880. His loyalty to the U.S. also extended to the military, and in 1898, he volunteered to serve in the Spanish-American War. Wheeler also served in the Philippine-American War. At the war's conclusion in 1900, the Wheelers moved to New York. General Wheeler died in 1906 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery - a rarity for a former Confederate officer.



Pond Spring, the home of General Joseph Wheeler, will be an important destination for visitors when it reopens in 2012.

*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

The history of the Pond Spring site's habitation begins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with settlement by the Hickman family. The site was purchased by Benjamin Sherrod in 1820 who brought his family and many enslaved African Americans. Benjamin's grandson - also named Benjamin - married Daniella in 1859, leaving her a widow upon his death two years later.

Twelve structures remain including an 1820s dogtrot cabin that served as housing for slaves, the Sherrod family home, a plantation office, stables, barn and the Wheelers' Victorian-style home. There are also three family cemeteries. In 1994, Wheeler's descendants gave the home and its contents to the state of Alabama. The site is managed by the Alabama Historical Commission and is currently undergoing a major restoration. The Friends of the Joe Wheeler Home Foundation is a nonprofit, 501c3, which raises funds to help support the site.

Of the Wheeler's seven children, Annie Early Wheeler, born in 1868, left the strongest legacy. Annie moved back to Pond Spring after her father's death in 1906 and lived there until her death in 1955. Annie's story is equally as fascinating as her father's - maybe more so because of her many accomplishments in an era when women's opportunities were limited. Remarkably, in 1898, Annie followed her father and brother to Cuba and served in a hospital during the Spanish-American War. She also went to the Philippines a year later, and when World War I began, Annie joined the Red Cross and served in France and England. At Pond Spring, Annie saw to it that her father's legacy was preserved, turning the home into a shrine and becoming active in the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and Colonial Dames.

When the family left Pond Spring to the state of Alabama, they also bequeathed a treasure trove including furnishings, thousands of family belongings and military artifacts. The home will be interpreted in the period of the 1920s to enable guides to tell the story from Annie Wheeler’s perspective. Restoration is targeted for completion within the next year when the home will open for visitors. Cataloging and conservation of the extensive collection will continue for many years as will continued restoration of other buildings and the surrounding landscape.

## Evaluation

Undertaking the restoration and interpretation of a historic site as massive as Pond Spring, with many buildings, thousands of artifacts, an extensive landscape and representation from several periods of history is a daunting challenge and the kind of exciting opportunity that is a dream-come-true for preservationists, museum curators and historic site interpreters. Site director Melissa Beasley and Curator Kara Long are to be commended for managing this project with extreme precision. The support of the Foundation has also been essential from raising funds to support the restoration, advocating for continued funding from the state of Alabama and raising awareness about the importance of this historic site. When the restoration is complete and Pond Spring reopens, it will undoubtedly become an anchor attraction for the MSNHA. A site of this size presents many challenges including:

- Funding is not surprisingly at the top of the list of challenges. There have been threats to ongoing state financial support as the state’s government has struggled with budget challenges in recent years. Raising funds will also continue to be a primary activity of the Foundation.
- Funding is currently not available to develop an interpretive center to share the story of the site or to display any of the wonderful artifacts in the collection.
- Plans call for tour guides to be volunteers, which will require ongoing efforts in recruitment and training.

## Recommendations

1. **Develop interpretive panels to supplement the home tour** - It will likely be several years before funds are available to develop an interpretive center. Interpretive panels will provide a more cost-effective way to share additional information with visitors in the interim. A plan for exterior interpretive panels should be developed to discuss topics that are not addressed in the house tour and to include historic photos and documents. Panels could include topics such as the restoration of the house, earlier time periods of occupation, enslaved African Americans or how the property was landscaped with boxwoods. Interpretive panels can be constructed to be easily changed, allowing for new topics to be presented periodically.



Interpretive panels can provide additional information to supplement a guided tour.  
*Photo by Amy Webb*



2. **Include the story of enslaved African Americans in interpretation** - Although the time period for the Wheeler home's interpretation is the 1920s, research has already provided information documenting the enslaved African Americans who lived and worked on the property during the Sherrod family's ownership before the Civil War. Records show that in 1848 the Sherrod family owned 156 slaves. A slave dwelling remains and has been restored, and archaeological excavation has found the site of the slave village. As stated by historian and author John Hope Franklin: "Explaining history from a variety of angles makes it not only more interesting, but also more true. When it is more true, more people come to feel that they have a part in it." In recent years, managers of historic sites have come to realize the importance of telling the *whole* story of a place and have made great strides in particular in telling the stories of enslaved African Americans. This interpretation includes offering additional tours of the historic site, such as the *Slavery at Monticello Tours*, [www.monticello.org/site/visit/tickets-tours](http://www.monticello.org/site/visit/tickets-tours) or the *Voices of Drayton Hall* audio tour which is supplemented by a presentation called *Connections: From Africa to America* where a speaker tells about the site's research and shares historical documents with visitors, [www.draytonhall.org/visit/visitor\\_info/connections.html](http://www.draytonhall.org/visit/visitor_info/connections.html). As interpretive planning continues at Pond Spring, it is recommended the planners research how other historic sites interpret these stories and develop an engaging interpretive plan for Pond Spring.

## Ivy Green - Home of Helen Keller

Each year, thousands of visitors come from around the world to tour the Tuscumbia home of Helen Keller. As noted on the site's promotional brochure, "Since 1954, Helen Keller's birthplace has been a permanent shrine to the 'miracle' that occurred in a blind and deaf seven-year-old girl's life." The historic site is owned and managed by the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation. Visitors arrive by turning off of North Commons Street where they find a large paved parking lot in front of the home. A bricked path leads to the Keller home, built in 1820 by Helen's grandparents, and Helen's birthplace cottage - both featuring many original family furnishings. The famous well pump where Helen first understood communicated words is behind the house. A small museum is located in a room in the back of the Keller home and includes pictures, books and a multitude of items which belonged to Helen including her Braille typewriter. A small gift shop is located in the house. On the grounds are the Lion's Club International Memorial Fountain and a collection of sculptures presented by countries from around the world in honor of Helen. Public restrooms are located at the back of the property.



Tours of Ivy Green share the famous story of Helen Keller with visitors from around the world.

*Photos by Carolyn Brackett*

The guided tour of Helen's home focuses on her early life, recounting her birth as a healthy child in 1880 and the illness when she was 19 months old which left her blind and deaf. The story is told of her parents' efforts to find help for Helen, which led them in 1887 to hire Anne Sullivan as her teacher, and of Anne's success in getting through to Helen. The tour recounts some of Helen's remarkable achievements and worldwide fame in the years to come as she graduated from college, traveled the world, wrote books and brought recognition to the ability of the disabled to achieve great accomplishments. Following the guided tour of the home, visitors may continue on their own to tour the museum, cottage, water pump, memorial fountain and sculptures.

## Evaluation

The story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan - the Miracle Worker - is known around the world. The famous story gives the historic site the benefit of instant name recognition and public interest in visiting the site. The central challenge is finding a way to tell Helen's story - a story which stretched over a long life of 87 years and that spanned periods of great transition in the United States and around the world (1880-1968) and events that Helen was directly involved in, ranging from women's suffrage to expanding opportunities for the disabled to opposing war, helping found the American Civil Liberties Union, to joining the American Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. The limitations of space at the site make it difficult to tell Helen's whole story. There is no room to expand the museum (plans for a separate museum building were cancelled due to funding problems), and the house does not lend itself to a space to expand the story of Helen's life after she became an adult.

## Recommendations

The central recommendation is to tell a broader story that looks at the varied aspects of Helen's life. Visitors most likely remember the story of the water pump and Helen's breakthrough of understanding how to communicate. They are likely less familiar with her many accomplishments and sometimes controversial stands on various issues throughout her adult life. Telling this part of Helen's story will help visitors to see her as a woman who was engaged in the time in which she lived and who wielded great influence on world leaders and the public throughout her lifetime. Consideration should be given to how to broaden the story such as:

1. **Bring Helen to "life" with videos** - A quick internet search found several videos of Helen such as this one: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=plaMgD1VmmY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plaMgD1VmmY&feature=related). Currently the only film shown is at the Lion's Club "Knights of the Blind" display on the grounds, but the film shows an actress portraying Helen Keller giving a speech. Incorporating videos of Helen will help visitors better connect with her as a real person and not only a heroine.
2. **Organize the museum by themes** - The museum is in a small room at the back of the house. It currently displays a multitude of artifacts, pictures, newspaper clippings, letters and other documents. There is little interpretation or sequence of presentation to help visitors understand Helen's life. Using the existing artifacts (and finding others if needed to illustrate specific themes), the museum could be redesigned around specific themes for Helen's life such as *education, advocacy for the disabled, author, political involvement, faith, friendships around the world, special honors, etc.*

3. **Enhance interpretation at the cottage** - The cottage, located next to the Kellers' home, was the place where Anne Sullivan took Helen to first teach her to obey and then to teach her to communicate. The cottage is furnished, but visitors must peer through a glass door into the dimly lit main room. The two smaller rooms are barely visible through the windows and doors. Although a barrier is needed to protect the furnishings, an enclosed doorway should be installed that allows visitors to step inside. Brighter lighting is also needed. A small interpretive sign should also be placed next to the door with information about the cottage and its uses over the years.
4. **Adapt tours for the disabled** - Under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), historic house museums are considered on a case-by-case basis. Changes that would damage or destroy the historic character of the house (such as installing an elevator) are not required. However, since Ivy Green is the home of one of the most famous advocates for the disabled in our history, efforts should be made to accommodate visitors with disabilities including mobility, vision and hearing. Examples include: create photo albums of second floor rooms or outdoor sites to share with those who cannot climb the stairs or move easily around the property; offer a written tour script for deaf visitors, place benches around the grounds and add Braille to any interpretive signage.

### **W.C. Handy Home, Museum and Library**

William Christopher (W.C.) Handy is known worldwide as the “Father of the Blues,” building a national audience and contemporary style for what had previously been a regional musical form. Handy was born in 1873 in the small log cabin that was built by his grandfather, an African Methodist Episcopal minister. The site’s museum houses an extensive collection of Handy’s personal papers and belongings including handwritten sheet music, his piano and trumpet, photographs and personal papers. The library has many publications on African American history and culture. The site is owned by the City of Florence and is managed by the Arts & Museums Department which manages five of the city’s historic sites.



The Handy Home, Museum and Library tells of Handy’s humble beginnings and rise to international fame.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

The visitor entrance is at the side of the building next to the parking lot. Visitors may stroll through the museum and cabin and enjoy learning about Handy’s humble beginnings and his rise to international fame. It is especially interesting to learn that when a young W.C. bought a guitar, he was admonished by his father for bringing “a sinful thing like that into our Christian home.” Not to be deterred, he rose to fame through his interpretation of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century black musical styles through publishing, recording and performing. Upon his death in 1958 in New York, thousands came to honor this musical giant. Handy is honored in Florence each summer as the W.C. Handy Music Festival draws thousands to enjoy all types of music including the blues.

## Evaluation

The Handy Home, Museum and Library is a small site that could not handle large numbers of visitors all at one time. However, some increase in visitation would be welcomed and could be prompted by increased promotion, particularly connecting the site more strongly to the W.C. Handy Music Festival.

## Recommendations

1. **Connect the site to the music festival** - The W.C. Handy Music Festival draws 250,000+ people annually to enjoy a wide variety of music over a 10-day period. Currently the W.C. Handy Home is found on the festival's website ([www.wchandymusicfestival.org](http://www.wchandymusicfestival.org)) under "links" and in the Calendar of Events under "Handy Extras: Museums" where it is listed with other museums in the area. A stronger connection between the site and the festival should be made by requesting a link directly from the home page to the Handy Home website and including information about the historic site on the festival's Facebook page.
2. **Include music in the tour** - As visitors enter the museum, hearing W.C. Handy's music will help engage them in the spirit and legacy of this uniquely American form of music. Installing stations where visitors can sit and listen to some of Handy's recordings will undoubtedly enhance their experience.

## Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum

The Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum claims a unique place in Alabama history as the only structure in the state designed by world-famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Built in 1939 for Stanley and Mildred Rosenbaum, the home remained in their possession until 1999. Especially remarkable is the Rosenbaums' commission of Frank Lloyd Wright in 1949, ten years after the home's completion, to design an addition to accommodate their family which by then included four sons. The home was purchased by the City of Florence in 1999 which undertook a meticulous restoration.

The home is built in the Usonian style, the name standing for United States of North America. Wright created the style during the Great Depression to be cost effective, one story structures set on concrete floors with a heating system of hot water pipes imbedded in the floor. The Rosenbaum home is considered one of the finest examples of Usonian architecture with its construction materials of cypress, glass and brick and minimal furnishings - some designed by Wright especially for the house.

Visitors to the site are treated to a customized guided tour. As noted by Barbara Broach, Director of Arts and Museums for the City of Florence, tour guides ask visitors about their interests. The tour is tailored to those interests which can focus on Frank Lloyd Wright, the Rosenbaum family or the architectural specifications of the house. The home currently draws about 5,000 visitors annually.



## Evaluation

The Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum is a treat for visitors to discover in their visits to the MSNHA and Florence. A check of reviews on TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)) confirms the site's appeal with comments such as "A must see! I got a personal tour of the house by a very friendly and knowledgeable docent." "Our tour guide, Pat, was a gracious host--a true Southern lady who took enormous pride in the house and also related personal stories of the Rosenbaums." "This is the only FLW house open to the public in the entire southeast and the public is allowed generous access to the rooms and grounds."



Visitors come from all over the country to see the home designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

## Recommendation

1. **Place an interpretive sign or kiosk on the grounds** - The Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum is open every day except Monday, making it very accessible to visitors. The addition of an interpretive sign or kiosk with video showing pictures of the inside of the house and providing some of the history would be helpful for visitors who arrive when the site is closed (particularly in the summer months when the site closes at 4 p.m. but daylight extends for several more hours.) As noted by one reviewer on TripAdvisor: "Unfortunately, the home wasn't open for viewing, but not to be deterred after making the 8 hour trek, we perused the entire exterior of the home, snapping away at every possible angle...and as any FLW fan knows, there are plenty."

## Historic Sites and Museums

### Alabama Music Hall of Fame

After many years of planning, the Alabama Music Hall of Fame ([www.alamhof.org](http://www.alamhof.org)), located in Tusculmbia, opened in 1990 to much fanfare and excitement. The site honors music in three ways - exhibits in the 12,500-square-foot exhibit hall, bronze stars on a walk of fame and induction into the Hall of Fame. Visitors can tour exhibits including the Hall of Fame Gallery featuring portraits of inductees, exhibits on popular, country and gospel music and a section on the Muscle Shoals Sound highlighting the studios and performers who made the sound world famous. Exhibits include personal memorabilia from singers, producers and songwriters and unique artifacts such as the group Alabama's tour bus, handwritten lyrics, performers' instruments and stage costumes and recording equipment from local studios.



Alabama Music Hall of Fame  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

Although the Hall of Fame was supported by the citizens of Alabama through a statewide referendum approving its financing, and the site has continued to be supported each year with state funding, the attraction is now facing the prospect of closing. In 2011, \$400,000 was requested in state funding; however, the state budget cut \$310,000, placing the site in jeopardy. A nonprofit organization has been formed to address current and long-term funding issues. A new executive director, Wiley Barnard, began work in August 2011. Barnard's extensive experience in working with nonprofits will be very helpful as the board and staff develop strategies to keep the site in operation. Barnard's plans include creating rotating exhibits and bringing in traveling exhibits to attract new and repeat visitation and to bring the site alive with more opportunities to hear music while viewing exhibits.

### Evaluation

The Alabama Music Hall of Fame is a key resource for the MSNHA, bringing together in one place stories of the many types of music emerging from Alabama. Currently the museum does not have an inventory of the collection or records of artifacts that are on loan. Artifacts on display in exhibit cases are endangered due to incorrect lighting. Executive Director Wiley Barnard's vision of creating a more engaging, interactive experience will take the attraction to the next level to bring the musical story to life for visitors - and undoubtedly will increase visitation to the site.

### Recommendation

The Alabama Music Hall of Fame is currently in what can fairly be termed a crisis - faced with closing if funds cannot be raised for continued operation. Obviously all efforts in the coming months must focus on this issue before plans can move forward for further development. Nashville's Country Music

Hall of Fame and Museum's response to funding difficulties may provide an example which the Alabama Music Hall of Fame could emulate. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum faced serious financial challenges after a large, new facility was constructed with new exhibits, and more personnel were hired to staff the site. To address this situation, the board of directors (led by board chairman Vince Gill) called on the country music stars who were honored at the attraction to help. The result was the highly successful "All for the Hall," a concert at Nashville's downtown arena featuring country music stars including Keith Urban, Rascal Flatts, Allison Kraus, the Oak Ridge Boys and others. Tickets were priced to be family-friendly (\$25-\$35) and special VIP packages were also offered. The first two concerts raised about \$1 million and a third concert is scheduled for January 18 2012.

<http://countrymusichalloffame.org/recent-press-releases/view/1729>



## **Decatur: Planned Museums**

Although Decatur was described by local leaders as a sports town with tourism focusing on fishing and soccer tournaments and renting the banquet hall at the marina, much effort is also invested in preserving local historic structures and actively promoting the community's history to visitors. A landmark in Decatur is the **Old State Bank** built in the 1830s and currently the first stop on a Civil War Walking Tour of the town. The building is restored and furnished with antiques and is open for tours Monday through Friday.

Currently, the City of Decatur is managing a federal transportation grant (TEA-21) to purchase and renovate the town's 1904-1905 **L&N Union Station** in the next two years. Plans call for using some or all of the depot for an interpretive center. Funding sources for space planning, interpretive planning and exhibit design are currently being sought. The City of Decatur is considering the purchase of the Cashin Sykes house and developing it as an interpretive site because of the couple's role in the Civil Rights movement and in education in Decatur. There have also been discussions about the development of a series of museums in the historic downtown on various themes such as Civil War, Jewish history, Civil Rights and others. (The Blue and Gray Museum of North Alabama, located downtown in a Civil War relics store, is included in the town's promotional brochure. It was not included in the assessment visit, and therefore is not part of this evaluation of museums.)

## **Evaluation**

Decatur officials have put tremendous effort into preserving the downtown and promoting the town's history through thematic tours and events. The commitment to including diversity in the telling the town's story with the publication of the *African American Pioneers Brochure* is commendable. Efforts are also under way to submit Old Town - a historically African American neighborhood - to the National Register of Historic Places.

Decatur is also one of only two dozen towns in Alabama to be a Certified Local Government, a designation given through the National Park Service which creates opportunities for technical assistance and federal funding through the Alabama Historical Commission.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the idea of developing a collection of museums in downtown Decatur be approached with extreme caution. Instead of opening a collection of museums and incurring significant costs to keep them in operation, it is recommended that the depot building be used as the community's primary museum and be designed to give visitors an overview of the many stories that Decatur has to tell. The museum experience could be supplemented with a series of interpretive signs placed at important locations downtown and in the community. Several audiotours are already available, and development of the museum and interpretive signage can be coordinated with these tours. (See section on Planned and Proposed Museums for more recommendations.)



## Colbert Ferry, Natchez Trace Parkway, National Park Service

The Natchez Trace Parkway travels through three states (Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama) for 444 miles as it traces 10,000 years of history. Established as a unit of the National Park System in 1938 and officially completed in 2005, the Parkway commemorates the most significant highway of the Old Southwest.

The natural travel corridor that became the Natchez Trace dates back many centuries. It bisected the traditional homelands of the Natchez, Chickasaw and Choctaw nations. Only 33 miles of the Natchez Trace are located in Alabama, but along this route there are some of the most significant and interesting stories of Native American history along the Tennessee River.

The Parkway hosts about 13 million users a year. Only about 6 million are recreational visitors, as the others use the Parkway for commuting purposes. Colbert Ferry is one of few large developed areas along the Parkway. The site allows boat access to the Tennessee River and offers picnic areas, restrooms and bicycle-only campgrounds.

### A Fascinating Story to Tell

Colbert Ferry at mile post 327 on the Parkway, located in Colbert County, Alabama, is the site of George Colbert's Stand. Here, George Colbert, a half-Scot half-Chickasaw chief, operated a ferry across the Tennessee River from 1800 to 1819. Colbert Ferry is a site that has the potential to interpret an interesting story for visitors to experience.



Site of Colbert's Stand  
Photo by Katie Allen

It was at this site that George Colbert once charged Andrew Jackson \$75,000 to ferry his Tennessee Army across the river. His stand, or inn, was a place for riverboat men, money-laden businessmen, Native American Indians, and outlaws to share a spot of fellowship on a long, hazardous road. George Colbert was known for his negotiations with the United States for Chickasaw rights as the tide of settlement advanced from the east. His successful farm post showed his people the way of the future.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service



Photo by Katie Allen

The site is also along the North Alabama Birding Trail and attracts birders for the easy access to wooded habitats, excellent views of Pickwick Reservoir and shoreline trees which serve as great habitats for rare bird sightings. On summer weekends, the picnic area is full of people enjoying the scenery, and during the spring and fall, motorcyclists enjoy the scenic ride along the parkway as the seasons change.

The Natchez Trace Parkway is a unique asset that tells an incredible story and provides recreational access to many activities. The MSNHA should make every effort to support future plans for development and programming of Colbert Ferry and other sites within Alabama.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Develop a visitor center along the trail in Alabama.** Unfortunately, there is no visitor center along the Alabama portion of the Parkway. The closest visitor information stations are located about 50 miles to the north at Meriwether Lewis Park in Tennessee and 50 miles to the south at the Parkway Headquarters in Tupelo, Mississippi. Currently there is a contact station at Colbert Ferry that is closed due to budgetary constraints. This building has the potential to be updated to provide interpretive materials about the site and the Parkway as well as provide information about visitor services for the Northwest Alabama area. The contact station at Colbert Ferry is also due for ADA upgrades to provide accessibility to the restrooms and building. As the National Park Service continues to make upgrades, careful consideration should be given for the best use of this facility to meet the needs of visitors.
2. **Restore and enhance interpretation at Colbert Ferry.** The National Park Service has installed an interpretive sign that includes an audio component telling the story of George Colbert and his stand. The sign's text and pictures have weathered and are difficult to read. At the picnic area there are several interpretive signs in good condition that give information about the birds in the area as part of the North Alabama Birding Trail. There is no interpretation of the site of Colbert's Stand. The inn burned, and there are few remnants of the building. The National Park Service traditionally does not rebuild buildings or replicate historical features; however, the site should be creatively enhanced to give the visitor an experiential tour of what the stand looked and felt like for travelers who stayed there in the past.

### **Case Study: Benjamin Franklin's Ghost House—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

A brick courtyard is the site where Benjamin Franklin's house and print shop once stood. Although both were razed in the early 19th century, the house is known to have been three stories high, about 33 feet square with 10 rooms. In 1976, a steel "ghost structure" outlining the frame where Franklin's house once stood was constructed to give visitors a sense of the building where Franklin lived. At ground level visitors can look through windows (with concrete "awnings") to see the foundation, wells and privy pits of the demolished house.

### **Case Study: Blue Heron Mining Camp, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, Kentucky**

Blue Heron, or Mine 18, is an abandoned coal mining town and was a part of the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company's past operation located in southeast Kentucky in the present-day Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area. The mines operated from 1937-1962. During that time, hundreds of people lived and worked in this isolated community on the banks of the Big South Fork River.

When the mine closed in 1962, the buildings were either removed or lapsed into decay. Today, the site is interpreted as an outdoor museum with new structures that are open, metal shells of buildings, referred to as "ghost structures" built on the approximate site of the original buildings.

Each structure is themed around a different aspect of community life such as the school, church or woman's life. Stories are told by the former residents whose voices are heard in an audio program where they share their memories and feelings about life in Blue Heron. In addition to the audio program, each structure contains an exhibit case housing photographs and everyday items which are relevant to the building's theme. The site also includes a model of the town at its heyday in the 1950s and a model of the coal tippie and bridge.

Source: [www.nps.gov/biso/historyculture/blueheron.htm](http://www.nps.gov/biso/historyculture/blueheron.htm)

3. **Reach out to the bicycle community to collaborate on events, races and camping trips to Colbert Ferry to utilize the bicycle-only campground.** Colbert Ferry has a unique feature in its bicycle-only campground. The scenic parkway is a draw to bicyclists taking long distance trips. The Parkway is also about 20 miles from Sheffield, Tuscumbia, Florence and Muscle Shoals. There is an opportunity to encourage community and visitor involvement in experiencing the recreational assets through bicycling and history by visiting historic sites along the Parkway and through the nearby towns. The W.C. Handy Festival's Three State Century Ride is an example of a successful community biking event paired with a festival that takes riders along the Parkway and through local communities. Look for additional opportunities to capitalize on the Parkway's scenic ride for community events that will attract visitors throughout the region.
4. **Continue to cultivate community partnerships and volunteer groups to ensure that the Natchez Trace Parkway is recognized as more than a road.** While visiting Colbert Ferry with Supervisory Park Ranger Terry Wildy, she commented that "the community sees the Parkway as just a road." The MSNHA should partner with other organizations to help incorporate the Parkway as a natural and historical asset that is important to community identity and to demonstrate that the Parkway is more than a road.

5. **Build partnerships for the Natchez Trace Parkway.**
- **Reach out to the Natchez Trace Compact.** This ambitious group is made up of representatives from communities that surround the Parkway in Mississippi, Tennessee and Alabama as well as the tourism departments of the three states. The compact’s mission is to “attract more visitors to travel the Parkway and take the time to explore all there is to see and do along the way.” The Compact has an outstanding website ([www.scenictrace.com](http://www.scenictrace.com)) that is full of great information about the Parkway, surrounding communities and interactive maps and itineraries. It is recommended that Florence, Muscle Shoals, Tuscumbia and Sheffield take full advantage of this site by posting attractions, places to eat and stay, as well as upcoming events. To date the “Community” pages for these towns currently do not have anything listed under attractions, lodging, restaurants and upcoming events.
  - **Pursue the formation of a Friends Group.** Friends Groups can be valuable for a range of activities from fundraising to maintenance to providing volunteer staff. Friends Groups are also a great way to involve active community members and provide education about particular assets. A formal Alabama Friends of the Natchez Trace Parkway could be very valuable to change the misconception that it is “just a road.”
  - **Use the National Park Service *Call to Action* as an outline for potential partnerships within the MSNHA.** In August 2011, the National Park Service released a *Call to Action* as the basis for ushering the NPS into the next century of stewardship engagement. The NPS has outlined goals and objectives to connect people to parks through partnerships, youth engagement and supporting new, interactive programs in parks that provide different learning experiences about nature, history and civic life. Many of the goals provide support to reach out to diverse populations, school-aged children and to foster stewardship with communities and residents close to parks. The formation of the MSNHA is well timed as the National Park Service moves forward to meet the goals and objectives of their *Call to Action* by 2016. The Natchez Trace Parkway should look for opportunities to meet these goals and objectives through partnerships formed with the MSNHA and showcase these efforts and successes as part of this National Park Service initiative. For more information about the National Park Service *Call to Action*, visit: [www.nps.gov/calltoaction](http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction).



### Case Study—FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway

The FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway is a National Park Service Blue Ridge Parkway approved partner organization dedicated to preserve, promote and enhance the Blue Ridge Parkway for future generations. The FRIENDS group has had great success working on behalf of the Blue Ridge Parkway in ways that the National Park Service may be limited. Examples of their work include:

- In 2010, the FRIENDS were awarded \$10,000 based on their youth-engagement efforts. They plan to use these funds to further develop youth-oriented volunteer experiences and address the Blue Ridge Parkway's volunteer needs.
- In 2002, the FRIENDS group was instrumental in working with local land trusts and landowners to ensure that threatened viewsheds were preserved from development through conservation efforts. As a result of their advocacy, one of the Roanoke Valley's most scenic Parkway views will forever be preserved.

For more information visit: <http://friendsbrp.org/>

### LaGrange College Site Park

The LaGrange College Site Park sits on the spur of the Cumberland Mountain overlooking the Tennessee River Valley eight miles southeast of Muscle Shoals in Colbert County. The park site as well as the surrounding privately owned land was a bustling resort community in the 1820s after land was taken from the Chickasaw Indian Nation. There are several relics that point to this past including the LaGrange Rock Shelter, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and originally inhabited by Paleo-Indians over 9,000 years ago.

The LaGrange College Site Park is the site of Alabama's first chartered college that opened January 11, 1830 and was under the direction of Reverend Robert Paine. In 1855, the State of Alabama took control of the educational facility and named it LaGrange College and Military Academy. The Military Academy was successful until the start of the Civil War. Many of the enrolled students and the men of the neighboring town left the area virtually deserted, and on April 18, 1863 Union soldiers burned LaGrange and the town. Today, visitors can walk the land where LaGrange College and the town once stood. The park is open daily for visitors year-round and has a visitor center that is open Sundays from 1-4 p.m.



LaGrange College Site Park Visitor Center  
Photo by Katie Allen



Owned and operated by the LaGrange Living Historical Association, the site includes a monument commemorating LaGrange College and an antebellum cemetery, a log house built in 1908 was moved to the site for a visitor center and a barn and smoke-house are filled with tools and hardware from many periods of history. A log house built in 1880 was moved to the property from Tuscaloosa County and is used as a bed and breakfast, and a miniature wedding chapel that was once a one-room log house was moved from the Flatwoods Community in Fayette County.

LaGrange College Site Park offers overnight accommodations from April to October in the bed and breakfast that can sleep six for \$80 per night. The bed and breakfast has attracted visitors from around the country and is mostly occupied on summer weekends. The site also offers a full-service wedding package that includes a reception, photographer, stay at the cabin and wedding officiated by L.C. Lenz, an ordained minister who estimates they have a wedding each month in the summer.



View from LaGrange College Site Park  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The LaGrange Living Historical Association, a nonprofit membership organization, holds community events and living history demonstrations throughout the year. LaGrange's Christmas in the Country event draws the local community. LaGrange's annual Recall LaGrange is a major event in which the Civil War skirmish between Union and Confederate soldiers is reenacted, ultimately ending in fire blazing. The event draws many visitors to see the living history, listen to live music and see live demonstrations of blacksmithing.

Visitors can access more information about the LaGrange College Site Park on the site's website, Facebook and from the Colbert County Tourism and Convention Bureau. Site maintenance and improvements are funded with revenues generated through the LaGrange Living Historical Association and the fees from bed and breakfast rentals and wedding packages. Future plans include a walking trail to the Indian Shelter, expanding the property through land acquisition and rebuilding the college and the town spring.

### **Recommendation:**

1. **Focus efforts on accurate interpretation of LaGrange College.** The site provides an interesting story, and the scenic views are an added draw. However, the collection of buildings from other places and time periods is distracting from the experience of visiting this historic site. It is recommended that focus be placed on telling a historically accurate story of the college and the surrounding settlement. The LaGrange Living Historical Association should work to showcase artifacts from LaGrange College and seek help from expert museum designers to ensure that these artifacts are conserved and displayed in a meaningful. The Association should also investigate the feasibility of interpreting the actual site where the college buildings once stood. Whether it is interpretive signage along a walkway through the original campus or the reconstruction of elements of the campus, the focus of the site should be on the LaGrange College.



## Jesse Owens Museum and Memorial Park

The museum and memorial park, located near Danville and Oakville, includes a state-of-the-art museum that pays tribute to Jesse Owens, gold medal winner at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. With exhibits including interpretive panels, pictures, artifacts, recordings and a research center, the museum traces the story of Owens' life, focusing on his triumph at the Olympics - a particularly sweet victory at a time when Hitler and the Nazi Party was rising to power. The site also includes a welcome center at the property's entrance, a replica of Owens' birthplace, a replica of the 1936 Olympic torch and recreation facilities including a playground, ball fields and picnic areas. The museum attracts between 25,000 and 45,000 visitors annually. In 2010, visitors came from 38 states.



More volunteers are needed for the Jesse Owens Museum.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

The museum is managed by a nonprofit organization. There is no admission charge. The museum is supported by funding from Lawrence County government and from sales in a small gift shop. Grants are also obtained for specific activities such as an \$8,000 grant from the Alabama Office of Tourism to place a billboard on Interstate 65.

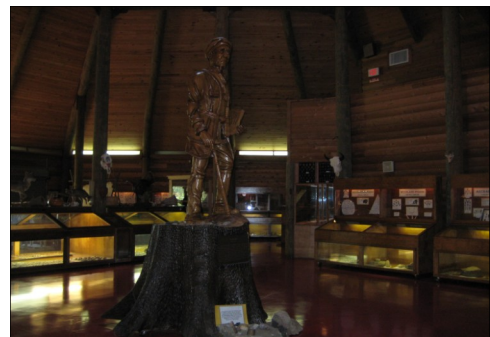
Of great concern for this outstanding museum is the fact that there are only four volunteers. There are also three employees who have been funded by the North Alabama Regional Council of Government, although their hours were reduced in the past year due to budget cuts. The volunteers' dedication is laudable - there is even a sign on the entrance door inviting visitors to call if the museum is not open when they arrive and guaranteeing that a volunteer will arrive within 15 minutes to open the site.

### Recommendation

1. **Help Recruit Volunteers.** It is strongly recommended that the museum be placed on a *priority* list of heritage sites and that efforts are made to help spread the word that more volunteers are needed. (See section on Build a Volunteer Network.)

## Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center

Located near the Jesse Owens Museum, this state park includes 2,000-year-old Indian mounds. The museum building is constructed in the style of a Cherokee Council House and exhibits thousands of artifacts that have been loaned or donated. Lawrence County has the state's largest Native American population, and the education center is the recipient of federal funds to provide educational programming on Native American history at local schools. An annual Multi-cultural Indian Festival draws thousands to enjoy and learn about the art, history and culture of Southeastern Native Americans.



A statue of Sequoyah is the centerpiece of exhibits at Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center.  
*Photo by Carolyn Brackett*

The site's executive director Casey Reed explained his plans for additional interpretation of the museum's exhibits, noting that if a visitor is accompanied by a tour guide they can learn from the exhibits but currently there is not enough interpretation for a self-guided tour. On the day of the assessment team's visit, Mr. Reed was preparing for a presentation at a local school the next day. His description of the presentations he makes to school groups was fascinating and showed how these presentations bring to life the stories surrounding the artifacts.

## Recommendations

1. **Film School Presentations.** If it is possible to film one or more presentations, showing these on television monitors in the museum would provide new insights about Native American history for visitors.
2. **Add directional signage at the entrance.** Visitors turning into the entrance of the site find a series of small signs with names of Native American tribes along the driveway path. Continuing down the driveway, visitors come to the Indian mounds which have an interpretive sign. Signage needs to be added along the driveway to let visitors know where the education center/museum is located.

## Recreation and Natural Resources

### Bear Creek Lakes

Bear Creek Lakes is a water control project managed by the Bear Creek Development Authority under the direction of the state park service in conjunction with the Tennessee Valley Authority in Franklin County. The mission of the Bear Creek Development Authority is to supply clean drinking water from the reservoirs, preserve the watershed and provide safe and accessible recreation. The Bear Creek Lakes are made up of four lakes located in a secluded natural area with a wide range of family outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities. These include boating, sand beaches, group pavilions, swimming areas, modern waterfront cabins, hunting, developed camping, picnicking and hiking. Bear Creek has been successful in attracting visitors during the summer months and weekends. It is estimated that most visitors are coming from a 50-mile radius and mostly from Southern Mississippi.



Lakeside cabins are popular at Bear Creek Lakes.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The Bear Creek Lakes are rated as some of the cleanest recreational waters in the South, and fishing and boating are very popular. There are eight public boat ramps to access the lakes. Additionally, the Bear Creek Floatway is considered one of the best trips a canoeist can take in Alabama. This 30-mile float stream is considered a Class I course with the exception of two falls that are Class IV. Releases from Upper Bear Reservoir are made to provide adequate flow on all weekends and holidays from Memorial Day thru Labor Day.

Also located within the 8,000 acres of managed land is the Bear Creek Education Center. The Center is located on a 371-acre peninsula on Bear Creek Lake and is owned and operated by the Bear Creek Development Authority. The education center offers customizable itineraries for adult and youth groups that range from confidence and team building exercises to environmental education. There is also a 19<sup>th</sup> Century farm that offers living history demonstrations. The education center facilities include a rustic dining hall for up to 100 and two dormitories for up to 44 people. Center staff has found that word of mouth has been the best approach to attracting groups. The Center has worked with city schools in Huntsville and Birmingham and is busy throughout the school year with groups coming for a day or as long as a week. The Bear Creek Development Authority is governed by a Board of Directors is made up of mayors and elected county officials of the communities and counties (Franklin, Marion, Winston, Golden, MS) in which Bear Creek lies. Unfortunately, in the next fiscal year, the Authority's budget has been zeroed out and the facilities including the Education Center will rely solely on service fees.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Improve wayfinding signage to Bear Creek.** The rural drive through Franklin County to the beautiful Bear Creek Lakes showcases the beauty of Alabama, but signage gives the visitor very little in terms of direction. The Authority should work with the Alabama Department of Transportation to identify prime locations for wayfinding signs that can direct visitors to the lakes more effectively.
2. **Involve the local community with the formation of a formal Friends Group.** Friends groups are an important asset to any public recreation area. They provide thousands of dollars in volunteer hours and fundraising annually to support the maintenance and improvements of areas like Bear Creek Lakes. By securing formal nonprofit status, the group could pursue grants and other partnerships to enhance the recreational assets of Bear Creek.
3. **Develop programming for the campground.** The Bear Creek Education Center is a great interpretive resource. The center generally works separately from the recreational activities on the lake, but there is an opportunity to make connections with visitors at the Bear Creek Lakes through programs at the campgrounds, beaches or events at the education center. The education center could offer night hikes, campfire programs, historic walks or fishing demonstrations, among other activities. Cross-marketing is a great way to promote the resources available at the education center while providing a memorable experience for Bear Creek Lake visitors.
4. **Investigate the feasibility of rentals or outfitters at Bear Creek Lake.** Canoe, kayak and paddle boat rentals were available at the Bear Creek Lakes at one time, but Shannon McKinney, Administrator for the Bear Creek Development Authority, stated that there was a need for education for safe use of water crafts. Shannon noted that the Authority is open to working with concessioners or outfitters to provide the education, guides and rental boats for visitors. The Authority should reach out to prospective outfitters to provide rentals for guests. Outfitters would be ideal to provide convenient shuttles for visitors coming to float on the Bear Creek Floatway and to help develop safe water trails on the lakes and give guided tours.

## Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve



Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve is a 413-acre, privately protected scenic area that serves as a sanctuary for native plants and animals. With assistance from The Nature Conservancy of Alabama, this piece of land is protected in perpetuity through a conservation easement and allows public access to 15 miles of hiking, camping sites, picnicking, and creek wading – all free of charge. Jim and Faye Lacefield lovingly own the Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve and welcome visitors, provide maps and drinking water and maintain the primitive campsites. Cane Creek Canyon is off the beaten path but worth the visit to see this unique natural setting.

### Recommendations:

- 1. Improve signage.** Although the preserve sits about ten miles off of U.S. Highway 72 and U.S. Highway 13, the only directional signs are small, hard to read and not conveniently placed. Upon entering the property, it is unclear if you have entered the preserve or are trespassing on private land. It is recommended that a larger sign be installed at the gateway of the preserve to guide visitors onto the property and into the parking area.
- 2. Improve entrance road.** The entrance road is well-worn and rutted and is in need of repair.
- 3. Design a website and post hiking trail maps.** The preserve has an online presence in the form of references from online photography blogs and hiking group websites, but it is important for the potential visitor have an online portal where they will be able access information as they plan their trips. It is recommended that the preserve create a website with information about the hiking trails, camping, directions and upcoming events.
- 4. Actively pursue connections with other green spaces to ensure protection of wildlife habitats.** As a virtually untouched wilderness that provides a lush hub for plants and animals, it is important that this area remains healthy to provide viable ecosystems for its inhabitants. The preserve is a successful example of how conservation can benefit a community and preserve the environment through partnerships. It is recommended that the Friends of the Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve and other organizations, such as the Muscle Shoals Environmental Alliance, pursue opportunities to make connections with surrounding green spaces and promote educational opportunities for conservation throughout the region.



Hikers at Cane Creek Canyon Preserve enjoy scenes such as this beautiful waterfall.

*Photo by Katie Allen*



## McFarland Park

McFarland Park is a great city amenity located along the Tennessee River and close to downtown Florence. Owned and managed by the Florence Parks and Recreation Department, this family-oriented park offers 60 campsites (both primitive and RV accessible), sports fields, picnic shelters and playgrounds, boat ramps and fishing piers, paved jogging trails and a marina. The park hosts numerous festivals and events that include the W.C. Handy Three-State Bike Ride, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks and BassMasters Fishing Tournaments.



McFarland Park offers many scenic views.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The park also has a significant history dating to 8,000 BC. Located near the mouth of the Cypress Creek, this area was prime land for hunting and fishing along the river. Many Native American tribes made their home in the area now called McFarland Park, and it is a valuable natural asset for visitors today to experience life by the river.

### Recommendations:

1. **Interpret history for all ages through accurate experiences.** McFarland Park presents an opportunity for Florence to continue its interpretation of Native American history with interpretive, experiential demonstrations at the waterfront. There are tipis on a playground that allude to Native American heritage; however tipis were used by the Plains Indians, but most likely were not used in this area of the country. There is no interpretive signs that accurately give information about the site's history and the heritage of living on the river. There are opportunities to provide information on Native American heritage and the connection with the river through living history demonstrations and interpretive signs.



Tipis were used by the Plains Indians and do not provide an accurate depiction of Native Americans in this part of the country.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The nearby Florence Indian Mound also provides a preserved glimpse into the customs of the area's Native American past. Located near the banks of the Tennessee River, the site is the Tennessee Valley's largest domiciliary mound. It is a typical example of the work of the early Native Americans who lived in Alabama before the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Creek nations inhabited this region. McFarland Park has the opportunity to make connections on-site to the Indian Mound with maps and self-guided tours that will draw visitors to the mound and its museum.



2. **Make bicycle/pedestrian connections to downtown Florence and Florence Indian Mound.** With McFarland Park’s close proximity to downtown Florence and the Florence Indian Mound and Museum, it would be a great additional experience to make safe bikable and walkable routes that connect all of these features.

The city of Florence has included in its Comprehensive Plan ([www.florenceal.org/City\\_Departments/Planning\\_Department/City%20of%20Florence%20Comprehensive%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Draft.pdf](http://www.florenceal.org/City_Departments/Planning_Department/City%20of%20Florence%20Comprehensive%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Draft.pdf)) the use of greenways to serve as wildlife corridors, development buffers and multi-purpose trails to interconnect public parks and open space areas. Florence specifically intends:

- “To reduce the dominance of the automobile in development decisions and reduce the impacts of automobiles on the environment by encouraging development that will improve accessibility options for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.”
- “Florence will place great emphasis on improving its pedestrian and bicycle facilities citywide. Physical accessibility should be maintained between park and recreation facilities and the rest of the city, including by means of bicycle and pedestrian access and circulation.”

The safe connections for pedestrians and bicyclists between these natural amenities and cultural resources with the downtown provide an added opportunity for families to learn about the area’s culture while enjoying physical activity.

## Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 35,000 acre Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge that is minutes from Decatur’s downtown and easily accessed off of Interstate 65. The refuge has about 600,000 visitors annually with the major draw being the thousands of wintering waterfowl that collect on the refuge’s open waters. The refuge has five established short nature trails that wind along the water, crop fields and woodlands. The Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk trail is on the North Alabama Birding Trail. The Visitor Center is easily accessible off of Highway 67 and offers wildlife exhibits, maps and information about the refuge and its wildlife and also has a 126-seat auditorium. A short walk from the Visitor Center is the Wildlife Observation Building that offers a large, glass-enclosed room with seating and spotting scopes for viewing waterfowl and wading birds.

The Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association raises funds to support projects and provides volunteers to work at the Visitor Center. The refuge also has several interns who work on various projects, and Eagle Scouts often fulfill badge requirements at the refuge. For 20 years, Wheeler Refuge has hosted the area’s third graders for environmental education.



The Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association provides volunteers to work at the Visitor Center.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

The Wheeler Refuge has an information radio station for interstate travelers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides a website. Supervisory Ranger Teresa Adams noted there is an opportunity to make more connections with the neighboring town of Decatur. Currently, the refuge is not in contact with the city government or the tourism organizations. The refuge holds many public events including National Public Lands Day and a recent 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary event, but it is apparent there is a need to raise public awareness of these events and to attract local residents.

### Recommendations:

1. **Expand cross-marketing and outreach efforts.** With close proximity to the interstate and assisted by a short-range informational AM radio station, Wheeler attracts a lot of visitor traffic from the interstate. Unfortunately many local residents are not aware or do not access this expansive wildlife refuge or attend its events. Teresa Adams noted that the refuge does not do much marketing and outreach due to budgetary and time restraints. The refuge should take full advantage of the partnerships the MSNHA provides by capitalizing on the marketing and outreach services the local tourism groups and civic organizations offer to advertise public events and facility amenities to the local community and visitors. The Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association is an excellent resource to look for volunteers to build partnerships with other organizations to leverage resources and publicize community events, such as National Public Lands Day or new happenings at the refuge, through the updating of a refuge’s Facebook page or a Twitter account.
2. **Take advantage of the auditorium.** A 126-seat auditorium in the visitor center is equipped with audio/visual capabilities. The auditorium is underutilized, creating an opportunity to hold events related to wildlife and conservation for the community and visitors. Examples of possible events include film festivals and competitions, film screenings, prominent lecturers or speakers, photography and art displays and book readings. Neighboring colleges and universities, artist networks and environmental organizations are a few examples of the partners that may be interested in using this space. These types of events open the doors of the refuge to the neighboring community for education, inspiration and networking.



The auditorium at Wheeler Refuge offers an opportunity to hold events for the community and visitors.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

## Case Study: American Conservation Film Festival

The American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) was started by a group of volunteers who shared both a devotion to film arts and a commitment to conservation. They also shared belief that attitudes about the environment are shaped by experiences in it and that people and their cultures are an essential part of Earth's biosphere.

The venture was begun in 2003 with a partnership between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Conservation Training Center and Shepherd University, both located in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. From the outset, ACFF struck a chord with local filmgoers and tourists from the Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland regions. ACFF has expanded its audience by keeping ticket prices low and presenting many of its films free of charge. The festival now attracts more than a hundred quality submissions each year, reflecting the festival's strong and growing reputation with professional filmmakers. They appreciate ACFF's way of making the filmmakers and their work the focus of the Festival. ACFF rolls out the carpet for its filmmakers by hosting special "meet the filmmaker" events and filmmaker forums, and by providing lodging and other amenities that few festivals offer. ACFF also invites guest lecturers to help frame the topics of films that illuminate pressing environmental issues.

For more information about the American Conservation Film Festival, visit:  
[www.conservationfilm.org](http://www.conservationfilm.org).

3. **Showcase wildlife photography.** Photography is encouraged in the refuge. There is a fully enclosed, permanent blind near the observation pond that may be reserved with a special use permit. The beautiful scenery and active use of the photographers' blind provide an opportunity to integrate wildlife and art to instill a sense of stewardship in natural resources. The refuge should reach out to local photography clubs to organize community workshops at the refuge, wildlife photography exhibits and nature photography award competitions. This would be an interesting way to integrate nature into art and engage the community in events at the refuge. Photographs can be displayed throughout the Visitor Center, in downtown museums and galleries and can be showcased during events at the auditorium.

### Local Photography Resources:

North American Nature Photography Association  
Huntsville Art League  
The Shoals Artist Guild

[www.nanpa.org](http://www.nanpa.org)  
[www.huntsvilleartleague.org](http://www.huntsvilleartleague.org)  
[www.shoalsart.com](http://www.shoalsart.com)

Additionally, Flickr™ is an image and video hosting website managed by Yahoo! and available to users at no charge. Several photographers have already posted their photos of Wheeler Wildlife Refuge. This is a good place set up a site and to promote the refuge to photographers. When photographers visit the refuge, be sure to invite them to post their photos to the Flickr™ site.

4. **Repair streaming video connections.** Streaming videos of natural habitats show the ever-changing wildlife events year-round. The Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association installed a camera that captures wildlife movements and streams the video into the Visitor Center, but unfortunately there have been some issues with protecting the connecting wires from damage. These types of streaming videos can be easily placed on the Internet as well and allow for potential visitors to get a glimpse of what is happening on the Refuge. When the thousands of wintering waterfowl descend on Wheeler Refuge's Flint Creek, people can see this from their home computer and think about their plans for their next trip.

## Delano Park

Delano Park is a true testament to the outstanding work a group of dedicated citizens can do when they recognize a need for a community. Delano Park has been a community park since the 1880s as it was meant to be the centerpiece of New Decatur. As the city grew up around it, the park fell to disrepair and became known as an unsafe place.

Over the past decade, volunteers who formed the Delano Park Conservancy have worked to restore this 30-acre park. Park facilities include a pavilion, a one-mile paved bike trail, restrooms, tennis and basketball courts and picnic tables - typical of many city parks. The major draw is the Universally Accessible Playground which provides at least 70% of all children with play activities, even those with disabilities. There is also a splash pad that draws a crowd during the hot summer days. With a map of Alabama on its surface, it also provides a geography lesson. A sophisticated rose garden provides a garden oasis in the center of the park. Unfortunately due to disease, the roses had to be taken out, and a year must pass before replanting. The most impressive feature of the park is the Riverwild. Part park, part sculpture and botanical garden and part restoration, the space creates an accessible area for children and their families to learn about native plants, the importance of preserving the river and its heritage and the natural history of the Tennessee Valley. The Delano Park Conservancy is continuing with the programming of the Riverwild and hopes that it will be a place for storytelling, education and community gathering for people of all ages. To date, Riverwild has held one event that attracted over 700 people to hear stories and music. With three local schools around the park, there is great potential for this to be an experiential outdoor classroom.



Sculptures are a highlight of a visit to Delano Park.

*Photo by Katie Allen*

## Recommendations:

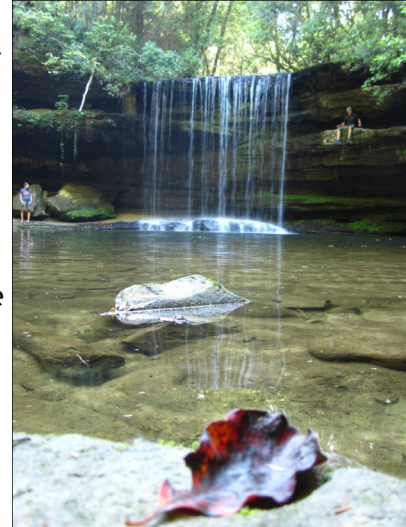
1. **Delano Park Conservancy should continue to creatively raise funds.** The Conservancy has raised an impressive amount of funds, both through grants and donations, to construct and program this special city park. The Conservancy should continue to look for creative ways to partner and leverage resources throughout the MSNHA to continue to build funds to maintain and implement their program plans. Examples of creative funding ventures in other areas have included:
  - A community in Pennsylvania held a log-cabin raising then auctioned the cabin online with proceeds going to the local redevelopment efforts.
  - Gateway communities surrounding the Waterloo State Recreation Area in Michigan held a Gateway Groove concert and silent auction at the local vineyard and winery. The \$50 ticket price benefits the Gateway Communities Initiative, a group dedicated to marketing western Washtenaw County and eastern Jackson County recreation areas and surrounding communities.
  - The Franklin Land Trust partnered with the Berkshire Brewing Company to create “Preservation Ale,” where proceeds from the brew went to fund conservation efforts in Pennsylvania.
2. **Continue to partner with Decatur Parks and Recreation to build connections throughout the city.** The Decatur 2010 Comprehensive Plan has the goal to construct a citywide pedestrian/bikeway path to connect existing neighborhoods. The Conservancy should continue its partnership with the Decatur Parks and Recreation and pursue avenues to make connections from Delano Park through the city for bicyclists and pedestrians.

## Bankhead National Forest

William B. Bankhead National Forest is Alabama’s largest National Forest with 181,230 acres. The National Forest is located in Lawrence and Winston Counties and contains the Sipsey Wilderness Area. Known as the land of 1,000 waterfalls, Sipsey Wilderness Area has access to Alabama’s only National Wild and Scenic River, the Sipsey River. Bankhead National Forest has about 200,000 visitors a year, though there is no formal counting method. The Sipsey Wilderness Area has over 50 miles of hiking trails along the river and in the wilderness and over 100 miles throughout the entire National Forest. Many visitors come to see “The Big Tree” - a 500-year-old poplar tree that reaches 150 feet high. The North Alabama Birding Trail is part of the wilderness area as well. The Owl Creek Horse Camp offers trailer and horse hitches for camping and day-use, many of the trails in the National Forest are open to equestrian use. The Flint Creek Multi-Use Trail provides 15 miles of trails open to ATV riders. Owl Creek, Clear Creek and the Flint Creek Trail provide many miles for mountain bikers to explore as well. The Sipsey River is also used by canoers and kayakers, and there are several put-ins throughout the wilderness area.



Most of the site’s visitors are from the southeast, generally Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee and Arkansas, and they stay for a day to weeks. The Forest offers overnight facilities with an abundant number of primitive campsites and two campgrounds with water and electricity hookups throughout six developed recreational sites. Visitor information is provided at the ranger station located in Double Springs in Winston County. The U.S. Forest Service manages a website for the Forest, the main outreach method for providing information to prospective visitors.



The Sipsey Wilderness Area has over 100 miles of hiking at Bankhead National Forest.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

### Recommendations:

- 1. Partner with surrounding gateway communities from all access points.** The town of Double Springs is considered the “gateway to Bankhead National Forest,” however there are several other gateways that should be partners with the Forest Service as these communities provide important services – lodging, food, gas, etc.–that visitors need before and after their trips to the forest. The town of Moulton would be the gateway from the MSNHA to the forest. When entering Moulton, there is a U.S. National Forest Service information sign, but upon speaking with a ranger from the Forest, this sign is inaccurate, and there is no Forest Service information in Moulton. It is important for surrounding towns to understand their role as a gateway community in providing services for visitors and in turn, understanding that the Forest provides tourism and recreation choices that attract business and tourists for a diversity of interests that result in economic growth. Bankhead National Forest staff should reach out to surrounding towns to talk about this relationship and next steps that are possible to support each other as they support the needs of visitors.
- 2. Improve visitor wayfinding.** Visitor information is not user-friendly and is hard to decipher. The Forest has had some major trail closures due to tornado damage over the last year; however, on the website there is no clear information telling prospective visitors that some of the most popular trails are closed. Upon visiting the ranger station in Double Springs, the ranger on duty provided a map and very helpful information about which trails are the most scenic and how to get there. However, once on the road, the map did not accurately show where the trailheads were located in relation to landmarks on the map. It is suggested that better hiking maps be created that are accurately drawn and provide precise directions to trailheads.

## Joe Wheeler State Park

Joe Wheeler State Park is a 2,550-acre resort park, owned and operated by Alabama State Parks that sits along Wheeler Lake two miles from Rogersville, off of U.S. Highway 72 in Colbert County. One of the 2010 Top Ten Natural Destinations in Alabama, as determined by the Alabama Tourism Department, Joe Wheeler State Park had 265,770 visitors in 2010, a decline from the previous year of 310,567. A unique feature is the miles of shoreline with a 75-room hotel on the water. All rooms have lake views. The resort lodge offers convention facilities, a dining room open to the public and swimming pool and offers wireless Internet in the lodge lobby, dining room and convention center.



The hotel at Joe Wheeler State Park offers lake views from all 75 rooms. *Photo by Katie Allen*

There are ten lakeside cottages located at First Creek with heat and air conditioning, TV and kitchen. There are an additional 30 brick cabins located near Wheeler Dam that are equipped for basic housekeeping and cooking. These are a favorite of fishermen for the easy access to the boat ramps to Wheeler and Wilson Lakes. Cabins are available to rent March-October and have been at full occupancy during the 2011 season. The resort park also has a marina with yearly covered and open slips for rent. The marina offers a fuel island for boat travelers along the Tennessee River as well as pontoon boat, flat bottom fishing boat and paddle boat rentals. A concessioner provides boat tours by appointment. There are 116 campgrounds sites scattered among the towering pines which offer full hook-up, including sewer for RVs, and primitive camping areas near the river are also available. The park has about five miles of hiking trails and a 2.5 mile multi-use trail that is popular with mountain bikers. There is also an 18-hole championship golf course.

The annual budget for Joe Wheeler State Park is an estimated \$3.7 million dollars with funds appropriated from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through special funding sources such as cigarette tax, license and user fees and federal funds, in addition to the user-generated funds from entrance fees, rentals and other recreational fees. The park often draws anglers for bass, bream and catfish. The Great Loop Cruisers Association holds its annual rendezvous at the park where up to 250 boats dock and hold events during their continuous journey to circumnavigate the waters of eastern North America, along the Atlantic Seaboard, across the Great Lakes, through inland rivers and around the Gulf of Mexico. The park also has held a popular British car show and classic boat show.

Currently, the park is upgrading all 75 hotel rooms to improve amenities and make them more energy efficient. The park hopes to upgrade the camper campgrounds to 50 amp service and to provide wireless Internet connection. Many visitors find information about the park through the website managed by Alabama State Parks and the Facebook page which often offers specials, events and information. Park Superintendent Tim Haney sits on the MSNHA Steering Committee, the Colbert County Tourism Board and works with the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association.

### Recommendation:

**Develop and introduce a “green” program at Joe Wheeler State Park.** According to a study by National Geographic Society and the U.S. Travel Association, the majority of the traveling public (71%) indicates it is important that their visits to a destination not damage its environment. The upgrade of hotel facilities for energy efficiencies presents an opportunity for the resort to support this interest by “greening” its facilities, programs and operations to further reduce costs and impacts to the environment.

#### Case Study: Green Hotels Association

Green Hotels Association (GHA) represents hotels who are interested in becoming environmentally friendly. The three main tenets of the association are saving water, saving energy and reducing solid waste while saving money. Member hotels take myriad actions to meet the goals, including posting signs that say “drinking water served on request only” on the hotels’ restaurant menus, offering towel rack hangers and bedding changing cards asking guest to consider using bed linens more than one time. For more information, visit [www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com).

### Richard Martin Trail

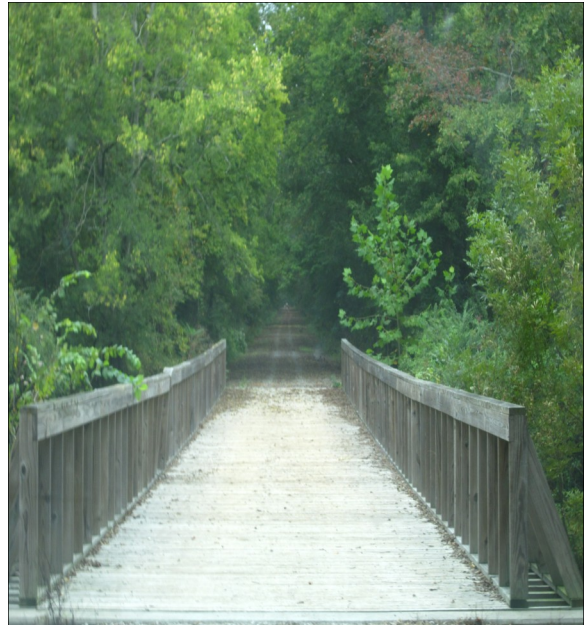
The Richard Martin Trail is evidence of the dedication and commitment of volunteers. Spearheaded by Richard Martin, this Rails-to-Trails project was made possible by donations and grants obtained by the Limestone County Parks and Recreation Board, a nonprofit volunteer organization. The trail runs 10.2 miles in Limestone County from the Piney Chapel Road Trailhead outside of Athens to Veto, Tennessee, just over the state line. The trail is open to hiking, biking and horseback riding. The trail winds past the site of the Civil War Battle of Sulphur Creek and provides access to wetlands where hundreds of varieties of birds nest and feed. There are three trailheads to access the trail: Piney Chapel Road, Elkmont, and Veto. Piney Chapel Road, a short distance from downtown Athens, provides horse trailer and car parking and restroom facilities. Elkmont is the most popular trailhead, about six miles from Piney Chapel Road, as the trail is located near the downtown area’s ample parking for cars and horse trailers as well as supplies at the nearby shops.



The Richard Martin Trail is open to hiking, biking and horseback riding.  
*Photo by Katie Allen*



The end of the trail at Veto, Tennessee provides restrooms in the newly renovated 1880s church. Near Veto is access to the Elk River where kayaks or canoes can be launched to float down to the Tennessee River. The Richard Martin Trail has been successful in drawing visitors through its many annual events including Sassafras Tea Day in March that includes an early wildflower walk and fresh brewed sassafras tea from the trail's sassafras trees, a Horse and Buggy Day that draws many area equestrians and spectators, a June National Trails Day hiking event, and October brings the beautiful fall colors and the Fall Walk and Ride where the trail is opened for a bus for limited-mobility senior citizens to enjoy the foliage. In August 2011, the Trail also held a 10K Walk/Run, hosting over 400 participants on the trail.



Richard Martin Trail  
*Photo by Katie Allen*

With easy access from Interstate 65, the Richard Martin Trail attracts many travelers throughout the region looking for a day hike. The Richard Martin Trail website, the Limestone County website and the Richard Martin Trail Facebook page offer information about events on the trail. Interpretive signs give information about history and wildlife. The Board has acquired funding for signage and is working with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Alabama Department of Transportation to design and ensure the best placement of signs from highways to the trail. The Limestone County Parks and Recreation Department recently completed a Two-Wheel Bike Trail that leads bicyclists along 85 miles of rural roads in the county designated by general bike route signs and “share the road” signs for safety.

### Recommendations:

1. **Continue to peruse the installation of signage for the trail.** Directional signage to the trail is a major component to attracting visitors to the trail. Trail signs should be placed strategically on major traffic routes and from downtown areas to guide travelers to the trailheads. The Board should continue their conversations with the Alabama Department of Transportation to install directional signs.
2. **Look for safe pedestrian/bicycle connections between downtown Athens and the trailhead.** A contributing element to the Virginia Creeper Trail’s success is the strong connections with the neighboring towns. These towns embraced the trail as a popular visitor attraction and soon saw themselves becoming part of the destination. Downtown Athens is located a short distance from the Piney Chapel Road trailhead and offers local food and shops for visitors to enjoy. The Board should investigate how to better connect the Richard Martin Trail with downtown Athens for bicycle and pedestrian use, whether with sidewalks, a designated greenway or facilities for bicycles such as bike lanes. The Kodak American Greenways Program can provide assistance in the planning and implementation of greenway expansion or enhancement.

## Kodak American Greenways Program

Eastman Kodak Company, The Conservation Fund and the National Geographic Society team up each year to present the Kodak American Greenways Awards Program. One major element of the Program involves “seed” grant awards to organizations that are growing our nation's network of greenways, blueways, trails and natural areas.

The maximum grant award is \$2,500 and can be used for a multitude of creative endeavors. Eligible projects could include activities such as green- or blueway or trail mapping, ecological assessments, surveying, conferences, and design; developing brochures, interpretive displays, audio-visual productions or public opinion surveys; building a foot bridge, signage or other physical improvement or addition to a green- or blueway; planning a bike path; and many other creative projects. In general, grants can be used for any appropriate expense needed to complete, expand or improve a greenway including planning, technical assistance, legal and other costs.

[www.conservationfund.org/kodak\\_awards](http://www.conservationfund.org/kodak_awards)

- 3. Identify outfitters, trailside attractions and trail tips on trail websites.** The Limestone County Parks and Recreation website provides information about canoeing and kayaking on the Elk River, camping at the Cowford Campground and current events on the Richard Martin Trail. This website could go one step further and identify goods and resources that support any of these activities and more that visitors may choose. The Board should work with nearby canoe and kayak outfitters (several are located near Veto, Tennessee) to provide paddle boat and tube rentals for float trips down the Elk, look into the feasibility of providing bike rentals for the Richard Martin Trail and support the local businesses of the surrounding towns by listing local restaurants, shops, and lodging. The Board should also look for potential fishing guides, birding groups or equestrian clubs that may be available to provide additional activities along and near the trail to provide a multitude of different experiences. Providing this information on the website and other sites that promote the amenities for Limestone County will assist visitors in creating itineraries for several days' worth of activities resulting in more spending in the area.

## Case Study: The Virginia Creeper Trail—Abingdon to Damascus

The Virginia Creeper Trail stretches 34 miles from Abingdon to Damascus along the Whitetop Laurel River and up to its highest point Whitetop Station near the North Carolina state line at Whitetop, Virginia. The Virginia Creeper Trail is open to hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. With the development of the trail, the towns realized the demand for visitor services. These towns and others along the trail offer bike rentals and shuttle services, good, lodging and specialty shops. They have also marketed the trail with additional recreational opportunities such as fly fishing, hiking, and horseback riding. It was estimated that in 2004, the Virginia Creeper Trail generated \$1.59 million in annual spending supporting 27 new full-time jobs (*United States Department of Agriculture, Trails and Economic Development, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2007*).



# Appendix

Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area  
September 20-23, 2011  
Assessment team:  
Carolyn Brackett, National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Katie Allen, The Conservation Fund

**Itinerary for Carolyn Brackett**

**Tuesday, September 20**

- 3:00 p.m. Arrive Shoals Marriott, Florence
- 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Driving tour - FAME, The Village, Sheffield  
*Judy Sizemore*
- 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Reception - Rogers Hall, University of Northern Alabama  
*Gateway Committee, Dr. and Mrs. Bill Kale, Dr. John Thornell, Dr. Tanja Blackstone, Randy Pettus, Laura Webb, L.C. and Louise Lenz, Barbara Broach, Chris Ozbirn, Joann and Dutch Maxwell, Melissa Beasley, Kara Long, Barry Morris, Judy Sizemore*

**Wednesday, September 21**

- 8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Angie Nutt, tour escort*
- 8:30 a.m. Tour Florence, UNA
- 9:00 a.m. Frank Lloyd Wright Rosenbaum House Museum, Florence  
*Barbara Broach, Weston Metcalf*
- 9:30 a.m. W.C. Handy Home and Museum, Florence  
*Barbara Broach, Weston Metcalf*
- 10:00 a.m. Pope's Tavern, Florence  
*Weston Metcalf*
- 11:30 a.m. Ivy Green, Tuscumbia  
*Elizabeth Hargrove*
- 12:30 p.m. Tennessee Valley Museum of Art, Tuscumbia  
*Mary Settle Cooney, Robert Steen, Richard Sheridan, Tori Bailey, Rex Burlinson, L.C. and Louise Lenz*
- 2:00 p.m. Ritz Theatre, Tuscumbia  
*Mary Settle Cooney*
- 3:30 p.m. Red Bay Museum, Red Bay  
*Scotty Kennedy*

6:30 p.m. Alabama Music Hall of Fame - dinner  
*Wiley Barnard, Judy Sizemore, Barry Morris, Angie Nutt,  
Steve and Commissioner Rhea Fulmer, Charles Rose, Barbara*

*Broach*

Thursday, September 22

8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Barbara Kelly, tour escort*

9:00 a.m. Pond Spring, Courtland  
*Melissa Beasley, Kara Long*

10 a.m. Decatur driving tour  
*Barbara Kelly*

10:30 a.m. Princess Theatre, Decatur  
*Lindy Ashwater*

Noon Old State Bank, Decatur - lunch  
*Melinda Dunn, Peggy Towns, Lindy Ashwander, Barbara  
Kelly, Phil Wirey, Wally Terry, Daniel Tidwell, Judy Sizemore*

3:00 p.m. Jesse Owens Museum, Danville  
*Nancy Pinion*

4:00 p.m. Oakville Indian Mound and Museum, Danville  
*Casey Reed*

6:00 p.m. Courtland Museum, Courtland - Dinner  
*Melissa Beasley Judy Sizemore, Robby Rebman, Jim  
Felder, Barbara Kelly*

Friday, September 23

8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Angie Nutt, tour escort*

8:30 a.m. Rogersville - downtown tour

9:30 a.m. Athens - Alabama Military Museum and Archives, Athens  
Visitor Center, Ft. Henderson/Trinity School site  
*Richard Martin, Sandra Thompson*

11:30 a.m. Mooresville - walking tour  
*Vene Sneed*

12:30 p.m. Limestone Bay Trading Company, Mooresville - Lunch  
*Richard Martin, Cayce Lee, Tisha Black, Vene Sneed,  
Sandy Thompson, Diane Hutchins, Wendy Clem*

2:30 p.m. Decatur/Morgan County Chamber - wrap up meeting

3:30 p.m. Depart

## Itinerary for Katie Allen

### Tuesday, September 20

- 3:00 p.m. Arrive Shoals Marriott, Florence
- 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Driving tour - FAME, The Village, Sheffield  
*Judy Sizemore*
- 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Reception - Rogers Hall, University of Northern Alabama  
*Gateway Committee, Dr. and Mrs. Bill Kale, Dr. John Thornell, Dr. Tanja Blackstone, Randy Pettus, Laura Webb, L.C. and Louise Lenz, Barbara Broach, Chris Ozbirn, Joann and Dutch Maxwell, Melissa Beasley, Kara Long, Barry Morris, Judy Sizemore*

### Wednesday, September 21

- 8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Judy Sizemore, tour escort*
- 8:30 a.m. Colbert Ferry, Natchez Trace Parkway  
*Terry Wildy*
- 10:00 a.m. Bear Creek Educational Center, Russellville  
*Shannon McKinney, Patrick Shremshock*
- 12:30 p.m. Good Springs - Lunch  
*Barry Moore, Stratt Byars, Greg Smith, Don Hastings, Howard Hutcheson, Jimmy Johnson, Johnny Mack Morrow*
- 2:30 p.m. Cane Creek Preserve, Tuscumbia  
*Jim and Faye Lacefield, Charles Rose*
- 4:00 p.m. Spring Park
- 5:00 p.m. Florence Indian Mound, Florence
- 6:30 p.m. Alabama Music Hall of Fame - dinner  
*Wiley Barnard, Judy Sizemore, Barry Morris, Angie Nutt, Commissioner Rhea Fulmer, Barbara Broach, Charles Rose*

Thursday, September 22

8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Judy Sizemore, tour escort*

9:00 a.m. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Decatur  
*Teresa Adams*

11:00 a.m. Delano Park, Decatur  
*Barbara Kelly*

Noon Old State Bank, Decatur - lunch  
*Melinda Dunn, Peggy Towns, Lindy Ashwander, Barbara Kelly, Phil Wirey, Wally Terry, Daniel Tidwell, Judy Sizemore*

2:00 p.m. Bankhead Forest, Double Springs  
*Jean Allan, Joey Tetlow, Beth Alexander, Rita Patterson*

4:00 p.m. LaGrange College Site Park  
*L.C. and Louise Lenz, Sten Palmgren, Robert Steen*

6:00 p.m. Courtland Museum, Courtland - Dinner  
*Melissa Beasley Judy Sizemore, Robby Rebman, Jim Felder*

Friday, September 23

8:00 a.m. Depart hotel  
*Judy Sizemore, tour escort*

8:30 a.m. Joe Wheeler State Park, Russellville  
*Chad Davis*

10:00 a.m. Richard Martin Trail, Athens  
*Richard Martin*

11:30 a.m. Mooresville - walking tour  
*Vene Sneed*

12:30 p.m. Limestone Bay Trading Company, Mooresville - Lunch  
*Richard Martin, Cayce Lee, Tisha Black, Vene Sneed, Sandy Thompson, Diane Hutchins, Wendy Clem*

2:00 p.m. Depart





**NATIONAL  
TRUST  
FOR  
HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION**

**THE CONSERVATION FUND**

---

*America's Partner in Conservation*