



# Calumet National Heritage Area Initiative

[www.calumetheritage.org](http://www.calumetheritage.org)

16<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CALUMET HERITAGE CONFERENCE | The National Significance of the Calumet Region

## Report on Public Comment to Key Sections of the Calumet National Heritage Area Draft Feasibility Study

On October 21-22 and 24, 2015, as part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Calumet Heritage Conference, the public was invited to comment on key section drafts of the feasibility study to create a National Heritage Area for the Calumet region. Participants were asked to comment on preliminary presentations of the central themes and corresponding sites (or resources) that tell a nationally significant story, the boundary that encompasses them, and the goals and priorities for the region's future. Approximately 100 people gave their time and attention to reviewing the materials and providing valuable input.

### What is a National Heritage Area?

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are places designated by Congress that tell unique, nationally significant stories about America through their natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources. The first step to becoming a National Heritage Area is to complete a feasibility study, with guidelines developed by the National Park Service. The public comment meetings were a critical part of that process.

### Where were the public comment sessions held?

Public comment meetings were held at four locations throughout the region.

#### Wednesday, October 21

##### 2:00 - 4:00PM

Vodak - East Side Library  
3710 E. 106th Street  
Chicago, IL 60617

##### 6:00 - 8:00PM

South Suburban College, Room #2248  
15800 State Street  
South Holland, IL 60473

#### Thursday, October 22

##### 2:00 - 4:00PM

East Chicago Public Library  
2401 E. Columbus Drive  
East Chicago, IN 46312

##### 6:00 - 8:00PM

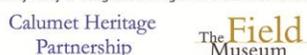
City Hall - Emergency Management Room  
100 E. Michigan Boulevard  
Michigan City, IN 46360

In addition to the public meeting venues, the materials for public comment were also distributed on October 24 at the day-long Grand Tour of the Calumet Region, also part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Calumet Heritage Conference. The materials were then made available on the Calumet Heritage Partnership website ([www.calumetheritage.org](http://www.calumetheritage.org)) for public comment through November 30, 2015.

### What information was presented to the public?

The presentation materials were generated by feasibility study working group members from the Calumet Heritage Partnership and The Field Museum, the feasibility study Themes Task Force, expert panel review, ethnographic research, community conversations, regional plans, heritage area consultants, and research in the region from scholars at The Field Museum.

The Calumet Heritage Partnership is a bi-state non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the unique heritage of the Calumet region. The Field Museum is a partner of the Calumet Heritage Partnership. Together they lead the feasibility study to designate the region as a Calumet National Heritage Area.



The Marquette Plan supports the bi-state effort of the Calumet Heritage Partnership to establish a Calumet National Heritage Area. The Calumet National Heritage Area Feasibility Study is a priority project of the Millennium Reserve.



The Field Museum gratefully acknowledges the following partners for their support of programs in the Calumet Region:



The same information was presented at each public meeting, which began with a Power Point presentation about the feasibility study process and the steps needed to become a Calumet National Heritage Area. Participants then reviewed preliminary text and photo panels for each section:

- An introductory panel that asked participants to review the study area boundary
- A panel explaining the overarching significance of the region
- Three thematic panels: *Nature Reworked: Calumet's Diverse Landscape* (Theme 1), *Innovation and Change for Factories and Workers* (Theme 2), *Crucible of Working Class and Ethnic Cultures* (Theme 3)
- A panel outlining the *Goals and Priorities for the Calumet Region*
- A map of the region populated with approximately 250 resources gathered to date with a corresponding inventory identifying each site by name, location, and related theme.

The meetings culminated with a group question and answer period. Participants were asked to record their thoughts and suggestions on comment cards as or after they reviewed the materials, or to give their input directly to project staff and Calumet Heritage Partnership board members on hand throughout the meetings.

In addition to the comments that were gathered at the meetings through discussion and conversation, a total of 39 participants responded in writing to the preliminary themes, resources, goals and priorities, and study area boundary:

- 30 people filled out comment cards at or after public meetings and Conference tour
- 6 responses were submitted through the online comment card form
- 3 responses were sent via email to project staff

#### **How will we use the public comments?**

The next step in the process of developing the themes will be for the Themes Task Force to review this report and make recommendations on how to best modify the themes. The input from all participants has been invaluable and, while not all recommendations are workable or consistent with each other, the body of feedback will help to guide the study process and will enrich subsequent drafts of the full feasibility study, due for public review in spring of 2016.

Already, the process of compiling and analyzing the public input has resulted in the formation of a set of principles on which the Calumet National Heritage Area should be based to help to illuminate the ways in which the central themes of national significance can connect more broadly to concerns of process, scope, and inclusion. The principles will guide the Calumet NHA in interpreting the region. The current proposed principles are as follows (not listed in order of importance):

- Tell stories through multiple viewpoints and provide the context that weaves them together
- Show how people's choices and actions shaped the region, and make it the place it is today
- Consider the historic and contemporary contributions of Native Americans to shaping the region
- Amplify local voices to tell a national story.

#### **What did we learn?**

What follows reports what people told us. Because we received input in a variety of ways, we've compiled it into the following summary responses, illuminated by a selection of quotes from participants.

##### **1) *Do the proposed themes capture what is nationally significant about the Calumet region? Do they help to tell the story of America?***

Responses to this question were generally enthusiastic, with the largest number of responses affirming that the themes capture what is nationally significant in the region. While twelve respondents gave fairly unequivocal endorsements of the themes, ten endorsed the themes and then offered suggestions for one or more modifications to fill gaps in thematic coverage to or change the emphasis. These suggestions were to make aspects of an existing theme more explicit, for instance calling out transportation as part of an industrial theme, or making

issues of race more clearly part of the content. The eleven responses that offered themes that were “missing” covered much of the same ground as those that suggested changes to existing themes. Areas of interest where these two kinds of suggestions match up included calls for themes of activism or agency, Native American history, race relations and race politics, deindustrialization and renewal, transportation, and concerns with specific places or areas within the larger regional boundary possibly not being represented by the themes.

Quotes that reflect participants’ input into the proposed themes:

“Yes, very much so. They are broad enough to capture the big picture and can be “drilled down” to more specific areas.”

“These themes are great. They encompass the unique elements of the region well. The working class + ethnic cultures theme especially captures something that is very much more on the surface here than in other parts of the country, especially with ethnicities that are not commonly represented in other places.”

“The national significance of the transportation history is not being captured: Henry Ford, development of flight, Robbins Airfield, railroads, section of route 30...”

“Where does Native American history fit in? There’s almost nothing here about the Potawatomi. “

“Why area appealed to some (Native Americans and steel), not others (farmers)...”

“We were the last western outpost of industry and people swarmed to be a part of it (to work here). But the unfortunate part of the story is that people—the Native Americans—were eradicated in that process.”

“Arts and heritage have not really been represented.”

“They do capture our significance...but how does this make us different from Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit...?”  
 “Issues around race in Northern Indiana, that’s all tied into this story. It’s crucial to the labor battles and struggles. We need to include that and make sure it’s captured in the themes.”

“Show how businesses disinvested in the area and where we are now. Understanding this could help businesses reinvest in the area. Don’t show only sad stuff, but some of the disinvestment that happened, e.g., slag dumping was commonplace because there was no EPA. Now there is EPA and restoration is a big activity and a recognized goal.”

“Build on assets (mentions housing and planning). The themes and stories have to resonate and be meaningful to local residents so they can workshop/work with it.”

“Hydraulic reworking for drainage/sewer -- should be recognized”

“The voice is too passive; the [feasibility study] materials need a more active voice to show that people make choices for the natural environment, industry, change, ...”

**2) Are there other sites that represent the proposed themes?**

While some of the sites mentioned during the comment period were already included in some form, we have added over 70 new sites to our resource inventory, due to the feedback from the public comment meetings, tour, and online comment period. These sites will be assessed for their national significance and connections to the central themes.

### 3) ***What do you think the goals and priorities should be for the proposed Calumet National Heritage Area?***

Participants offered a range of specific goals and priorities that we grouped together by type and we summarize the kinds of suggestions here. The most frequent suggestions went to the idea of educating youth and promoting their activism to address challenges within the region. Wayfinding and raising local awareness of the region's heritage was a popular priority, as was marketing the region and drawing more outside visitors. Other ideas that got multiple mentions include producing or promoting arts and culture offerings and events (architecture, storytelling, ethnic heritage street festivals, etc.); convening across civic boundaries within the region to promote collaboration, planning, and development; more unified ecological conservation, restoration, and remediation or more of these activities for named specific sites; promotional and capacity development help for cultural institutions that tell and preserve the regions story; and job/economic development.

#### *Selected quotes that illuminate participants' responses to the proposed goals and priorities:*

"For too long, the Calumet Area has been thought it was less than. Yet, it has a unique, multi-layered and fascinating history. The Heritage Area needs to draw together the various groups and individuals who are working for the same purpose. The area is divided racially, socially, culturally... the list goes on. The Heritage area is in a unique and extremely valuable position of being able to bridge those gaps. I hope the Heritage Area will include a component for conducting educational programs which will bring together elementary school children from across the area. I can see sponsoring art and poetry symposiums, storytelling festivals. The list is endless."

"To address the entire Calumet Region, not just those in Illinois and along the stateline with Indiana. There are areas to the south that reach throughout Lake County, IN and into Newton County, IN as well as the surrounding Indiana counties"

"I agree that the goal should be to make people aware of what is happening now to build on the past heritage and make this a great place to live."

"Can NHAs help with historical record nominations?"

"A map + study needs to be created focusing on how do people "outside Calumet Area" be attracted to visiting and being engaged in the area... Unique festivals incl. Pierogi Fest or yearly Food Ethnic Fest." Need to see a yearly guide on what to do each month in the Cal region/area...the area needs more water activities, especially on Cal River. The areas local history museums need financial aid + presentation assistant."

"Have a youth committee for the heritage effort."

"Include a focus on arts and youth. Challenge the youth do videos presenting the issues of the region and what is the Calumet. Ask them what's cool about their area."

"Youth need to be engaged in something active and that makes a difference. Then bring history into that process."

" Keep the vision on learning about the local (just like the eat local promotional campaigns)"

"Regional heritage is not really talked about or taught in school. Other young people would be interested. "

"Wayfinding/heighten awareness of region's history and preservation of assets. One option - QR codes on signs to direct people to websites that explain that region asset and link to other nearby assets. Video, audio, etc., could be easily accessed this way. Explain economic benefits of this, too."

“Better open lands management: restoration of upland Wetlands for enhanced wildlife diversity and improved flood protection: invasive species removal systematically applied by the largest land managers.”

“Goals: 1. Improve the environmentally contaminated areas throughout the region and repurpose these regions for economic or recreational development. 2. The promotion of more jobs in the region. The region lacks well-paying positions. 3. Highlight the unique architecture in the region. 4. Promote the Native American Indian impact in the region. Priorities: 1. Each community should be engaged in the Initiative to promote cohesion.”

**4) *Boundary Discussion and Online Question 5: Does the study area boundary reflect your understanding of how far the Calumet region extends? If not where would you make changes to the boundary?***

At the public meetings one of the informational posters discussed the regional boundary of the study, and it was cited as a topic for potential discussion by the facilitator that opened the sessions. It was thus discussed as a distinct topic, even though it was not addressed on comment cards. Subsequently a boundaries question was added to the online comments page that was posted following the public meetings. In all these contexts there was discussion about whether this boundary would be appropriate as the boundary for a Calumet National Heritage Area, or was it drawn to large or too small. Those who would focus very narrowly on heavy industry question why it goes so far east and south, while those who lives to the east and south of the boundary asked why more heritage resources were not identified within the boundary line, and offered that there were more to be included on both sides of the study boundary line. The final placement of the heritage area boundary will have to depend on considerations of the relationship of areas near the edges to the final versions of the themes and the related resources or sites. One of the most contested areas was Park Forest Illinois, with those favoring the boundary being drawn to pull it into the region citing its planned community relationship to Pullman and Marktown, while those who felt it was not in the region cited its much later development date and being a bedroom community, so part of a post war national phenomenon, not a company town that was part of the rise of American manufacturing.

*Comments that reflect input into the study area boundary:*

“The borders of Cal Reg. on East/South/West sides are a bit larger than one who is from the area would define. Is bigger better?”

“The boundary is too big for telling the core industrial story.”

We call the region “Calumet” but what does that really encompass.”

**5) *Do you have any additional comments on the Calumet National Heritage Area effort to date?***

It is difficult to summarize a catch all category, but there were a few things that came up more than once. Respondents want to know how to stay connected to the feasibility study process; others want access to existing or future presentation materials. Some respondents cited public access issues at heritage locations that included poor signage, no parking, and decaying infrastructure. A few respondents suggested the heritage area would greatly benefit from making particular connections with local leaders and educational institutions. Finally, concerns about corporate/business interests were expressed. One was a caution to avoid spending public money on private interests, ultimately for private gain. Second, the opinion that large corporations return very little financially to the Calumet region where their facilities are located.

*Selected quotes that highlight additional comments:*

“The byword for this national heritage area should be DIVERSITY!... And you have also already noted the ethnic diversity/origins of its populations in the Region. But also the one element of it biological diversity that needs to be emphasized more is the *diverse origins of its component floras*.... So, whether one is talking about life, be it

human or nonhuman. Various forces and circumstances on this planet caused a diversity of life forms to converge on Lake Michigan's south shore. Where they remain—in all their diverse forms.”

“Don't forget about the role of educational institutions - Valparaiso U., Purdue, I.U., Chicago State. Also Park Forest planned community - homes & duplexes for returning WWII vets who would work in region's steel & oil industries.”

“Remember to point out and talk about the arts!”

“Educate, promote, preserve, enhance all that we were, are, and can be!”

“Promoting awareness ("getting the word out") about the unique qualities that make the Calumet Region a special place. Certainly, working with citizen groups, planning agencies and state & local governments to utilize these awareness promoting measures. This, in order to achieve mutual benefits. These mutual benefits can serve in promoting resource preservation, in enhancing (sustainable) economic value, and for other related purposes.”

“We need to get the word out [about the NHA feasibility study] more to everyday people on the street.”

“Very impressive efforts to gather and document who we are, what we have, and the history of both.”

“Access to heritage locations and decaying infrastructure are issues to people coming here: get lost coming out, roads with potholes, and no parking once you are here.”