

Integrating Heritage Resource Management And Rural Community Assistance

Strategic Purpose of Rural Community Assistance: Develop and enhance rural community vitality, resiliency, and economic opportunities within a sustainable natural resource framework. This requires support from the entire Forest Service, State Foresters, rural communities, other Federal and State agencies, community-based conservation organizations, and diverse groups willing to work together – including those working with heritage resources.

Desired Future Conditions:

- Increased use of the skills, knowledge, and abilities of local people;
- Strengthened relationships and communication;
- Improved community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability;
- Appropriately diverse and healthy economies, including increased family-wage jobs and locally-owned businesses; and
- Sustainable, healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits.

Long-term Outcomes:

- Rural communities with the capacity to manage change
- Sustainable resource management via collaborative stewardship

Rural Community Assistance Approach:

The Forest Service places emphasis on helping communities organize, develop broad-based local action plans, and take actions which build towards sustainable solutions for economic, social, and environmental concerns and opportunities. These community-level efforts are accomplished with the majority of the coordination and technical assistance being provided by employees located on National Forests working with thousands of partners nationwide, with direct interaction by State Foresters and other appropriate agencies.

Key principles which drive the Forest Service effort include:

- ? Focus on community-led and community-based efforts in rural America (not just the business sector).
- ? Be a part of a comprehensive approach and work cooperatively.
- ? Take strategic action addressing local needs (be "needs-driven" not "program-driven").
- ? Act for the long-term, sustainable solutions vs. the "quick fix" approach.
- ? Accomplish objectives through partnerships.
- ? Help communities capitalize on their natural resource-based potential and assets.
- ? Improve the integration of environmental and economic concerns and opportunities.

Success Stories

As rural community action teams take the time to reflect on their challenges, identify local assets, and develop strategic goals, they often find strong interest and support for including work on heritage resources as top priorities for their communities. The following examples show some of the diversity of the community-based heritage resource projects the Forest Service has enabled through the Rural Community Assistance programs.

- Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association via RCA assistance has established a multi-county “museum without walls” approach to highlighting the diverse history and cultures in the southeastern Appalachians, including the annual African-American “Gospel Explosion” – a concert series that spans two states, breaks cultural barriers, and celebrates African-American musical traditions. The City of Etowah Arts Commission started the historic preservation and tourism work with the restoration of the abandoned Louisville and Nashville Railroad and multiple communities have gotten involved in similar preservation projects under the umbrella of “the Overhill” and a regional approach to sharing their assets and resources. The communities are all seeing economic benefits from the regional marketing and long-term approach to developing their assets, but one of the biggest benefits is the new spirit of cooperation and collaboration that exists across the seven county area.
- The people of Klawock, Alaska, and the Raven-Finned Blackfish clan have been able to preserve a precious piece of their heritage while looking to the future of their community and continuing to honor their traditions thanks to the assistance from RCA programs. Under a grant from the Forest Service, the community hired a carver to create a new Raven-Finned Blackfish totem pole to add to their local totem park – until this happened in the early 1990’s there hadn’t been a new pole raised there in 50 years. While the carving was being done, the then-mayor of the community happened to discover an old village site AND an old Raven-Finned Blackfish pole. Following basic procedures, the town rescued the old pole and made it the centerpiece around which has been built a special museum that, along with the totem pole park, draws many tourists but more importantly, has renewed the spiritual life of the small community.
- The Castleland Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) area has used the RCA programs to help work with 75 rural communities in four counties in Utah, starting with the 1999 Heritage Industries Conference. Participants took the examples and ideas presented in the Heritage Conference and implemented them locally in via diverse partnerships and activities. Formal groups have formed in many communities to link businesses, local governments, and federal and state agencies. The partners work hand in glove to further the various heritage industries in their respective communities, whether focused on grazing, wood products, recreation, or other industries that are part of the unique culture and history of each county. Young people are becoming involved in learning heritage skills and knowledge.
- The Rose Hotel, along the Ohio River, in historic Elizabethtown, Illinois, is the oldest operating hotel in the state – operating intermittently since 1812, but operating only as a gift shop since the 1960’s. In the mid- to late-1990’s the RCA programs helped a Hardy County, IL action team reach their top goal of saving and restoring the hotel. Along with RCA grants, funds from the Internodel Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and other resources helped the State purchase the hotel and complete an architectural design and restoration plan. The Rose Hotel also serves as an anchor for other riverfront development including flood control measures, a small marina, excursion boat service, a small park, and other amenities such as coordinated landscaping and lighting.
- The stories of Idabel, Oklahoma’s past came to life during the town’s centennial celebration in 2002 with the assistance of RCA. Oral histories were collected for the basis of a multi-cultural folk life play, crafted with the help of professional artists and with the participation of just about everyone in town. Through the efforts of the Idabel Arts

and Humanities Council, the play took on a life of its own, becoming an integral part of the county's school curriculum and providing a theme for everything from cookbooks to workshops, story circles, potluck story swaps, and historical tours and markers. So much material was collected, and enthusiasm grew so high, that the project has become an annual event, with the economic bonus of attracting tourists for the ever-changing performances. In the process of helping people work together to research and produce the play, the Council has set a second, less tangible, stage for the future—where residents feel comfortable, included, and secure in their ability to contribute to the community. The folk life project has helped the people of Idabel develop skills and a greater understanding of their ancestors and of the importance of natural resources to past and future generations.

- In addition to a strong connection to natural resource industries and amenities, many western towns have come to value the portion of their heritage influenced by transportation development. For example, Butte Falls, Oregon has developed a “depot-style” library and a “caboose” museum through the use of RCA funds and community assistance efforts. The City of Custer, South Dakota, designed and built a Parkway and Trail along one segment of the 110-mile historic Burlington Northern Railroad. The Trail doesn't exceed 3 percent grade and is totally accessible. Along with the trail, Custer is focusing on a visitor center including a transportation museum. In New Meadows, Idaho, the local action team used RCA resources to take action on renovation and re-use of the historic Union Pacific Railroad station.