

APPENDIX 11: UPPER HOUSATONIC VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Sportsmen, historians, anglers, environmentalists, outdoorsmen, property owners, residents, commercial users, canoeists, birdwatchers, casual hikers, and others all see themselves as constituents of the river.

- The Housatonic River Restoration Plan, 1999



Housatonic River Valley view from October Mountain State Forest, courtesy of Diane Cote.

1.1 Introduction

Everyone who lives, works, and visits the region is a constituent of the Housatonic River, its surrounding landscape and its shared heritage. Housatonic Heritage's goal is to ensure that all constituents all have equal access to learn about, enjoy, and explore that heritage. This Interpretive Plan provides the blueprint for making that happen.

When Housatonic Heritage gathered small groups of its partners and stakeholders together for **interpretive roundtables** in January 2014, the idea of a regional interpretive plan was met with great enthusiasm. The partners and stakeholders brainstormed and offered updated ideas which were later prioritized by the trustees into a short list of action items (Section 10). The interpretive

roundtables were so useful that attendees called for similar quarterly gatherings to continue the dialogue about shared visions, issues, and solutions.

2.1 Significance of the region

The Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage area is comprised of 29 towns in northwestern Connecticut and southwestern Massachusetts. The region contains three ecosystems (Western New England Marble Valley, Berkshire Taconic Landscape, and Lower Berkshire Hills) which support 200 rare plant and animal species.

The valley's present-day picturesque landscape belies a frequently turbulent history of conflict, struggles for freedom, and environmental degradation. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, early white settlers pressured Indians off

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their land and schooled them in Christianity. None remain in the region today. In the valley's sparsely settled communities within the rugged hills and along the river, residents who had supported the American Revolution joined Shays' Rebellion when their hopes for freedom were not realized by the new U.S. government. Following the Revolution, a Sheffield slave won her freedom in a landmark legal case that effectively ended slavery in Massachusetts. Seventy-five years later, in 1868, W. E. B. Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, "by a golden river," as he later described the Housatonic.

While the eighteenth and nineteenth-century iron ore, marble, woolen, and paper industries made the region nationally prominent, they played havoc with the environment by opening mines and quarries, clear-cutting forests for fuel and grazing, and damming and polluting the Housatonic and its tributaries. By the early twentieth century, it was the electrical equipment industry, initiated with discoveries by William Stanley, which made the region famous and profitable; however, the clean-up of the toxic residue in the river is an ongoing struggle today.

About 150 years ago, the valley's hills, open farmland, and meandering rivers and streams attracted writers and artists who found inspiration in the natural setting. Vacationers and the social elite from Boston and New York soon followed and bought up the less-than-profitable farms for great estates. Wealthy art patrons built enormous summer homes and turned the region into a world renowned cultural center, particularly for music, art, and literature. Today, that cultural center fuels the economy.

It is these stories of the intersection of the land, human activity, and the quest for freedom that will be explored with a widening audience.

3.1 Planning Process

While focused efforts towards the Interpretive Plan didn't begin in earnest until the Management Plan was completed in June 2013, region-wide interpretation began twelve years earlier in 2001. Each year from 2001 to 2013, Housatonic Heritage and its partners collaborated on close to 100

programs ranging from hour-long heritage walks and interpretive paddling trips to a week-long course for teachers. The development process for the Interpretive Plan took these steps:

1. In fall 2013 staff assembled a list of ongoing programs and new projects that had been "on the table" as desirable future projects consistent with the unstated, but widely accepted, interpretation goals for the region. Although never given a formal "green light," these projects enjoyed general support, and had been identified through the management planning process as desired alternatives for Housatonic Heritage.
2. To evaluate and prioritize the list of "on the table" projects, Housatonic Heritage hosted two interpretive roundtables in January 2014, plus several one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders. At these lively sessions, museum and nature site directors, arts programmers, interpretation directors, an NPS representative, and community college staff heartily endorsed the existing interpretive goals for Housatonic Heritage's desired future described in Section 8. Then, participants proposed fresh ideas for adding or revising action steps to reflect current thinking and available technology. This new list of collaborative and inventive projects was subsequently prioritized by the Board of Trustees.
3. In March 2014, through an online survey, trustees narrowed the list of 45 projects to a list of 14 priorities. Housatonic Heritage held a follow-up conference call with trustees to ensure that they were indeed the top priorities for the organization. During that discussion, some new projects were combined and others were sequenced; all matched the goals of the organization and meshed with other ongoing programs. Therefore, the Action Items listed below in Section 10 are the result of the work of staff, the stakeholders and partners who participated in the interpretive roundtables, and the Board of Trustees.

4.1 Interpretive Framework

Housatonic Heritage’s interpretive framework is based around four key interpretive themes that were identified in the 2002 Feasibility Study conducted by the National Park Service. In 2012 these four themes were broadened to better reflect the evolution and increased breadth of the heritage area’s research interests and programming. The four key themes are these:

4.2 Creating a Cultural Center

The power of nature to rejuvenate and inspire led the Upper Housatonic Valley to become a nationally recognized center for the literary, visual, and performing arts. Independent-minded artists at the forefront of their fields found homes among the scenic landscape, opportunity for experimentation, and sophisticated audiences for their works.

The proximity to major urban centers attracted America’s most notable writers, performers, and artists, among them Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edith Wharton, Norman Rockwell, and Daniel Chester French. In the late 19th century, wealthy industrialists and financiers built 75 ostentatious “cottages” for summer homes. These wealthy families patronized the arts and inspired vacationers in the upper and middle classes to take in the fresh air while they enjoyed celebrated music and art. Housatonic Heritage encompasses Tanglewood, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, and a thriving creative economy.

4.2 Connections to the Land

The Upper Housatonic Valley has been devastated by centuries of extractive industry, but over time and through activism and dedicated conservation efforts, its reclaimed and restored historical, agricultural, and scenic landscapes are at the core of the region’s identity and economy. The restoration of the Housatonic River remains an ongoing struggle.

By the 1720s, Native Americans were pressured off the land and replaced by Englishmen who farmed and grazed livestock. The trees that farmers didn’t clear-cut were removed by the



Daniel Chester French's Studio at Chesterwood, Stockbridge, MA.

iron industry to burn for charcoal to fuel iron furnaces. More trees were cut by the wood pulp paper-making industry. By 1850, three-quarters of the region was deforested. Factory owners dammed the Housatonic and built reservoirs on its tributaries for waterpower. In the early 20th century, as factories and farms declined, the wealthy “cottage” owners bought up huge tracts of land to create scenic vistas. When the tax laws changed, many estates became state parks. Conservation advocates took the lead in preserving other lands. Today, three-quarter s of the land is covered with trees. Beginning in the 1980s, Community Supported Agriculture has returned vacant farmland to active farming.

4.3 Cradle of Industry

Innovation in the iron, wool, paper, and electricity generation industries led to prosperity as well as to exploitation of natural resources and pollution. The 21st century ushered in an era of economic distress that has been partially relieved by the development of an economy based on artistic

creativity and on the preservation and enjoyment of restored natural resources.

Two of America's earliest industries, iron and paper, were rooted in the Upper Housatonic Valley. In the mid-19th century, at the peak of production, there were 43 blast furnaces in the district making use of the region's high grade iron ore. They made armaments for the Revolution and later wheels for locomotives. In 1801 Zenas Crane established a paper making company that used nearby lime deposits in the rag bleaching process and Housatonic's pure water to clean paper. Today, the Crane Company still makes paper for U.S. currency. The electric transmission industry was centered in Pittsfield where General Electric purchased a plant; when it partially closed in the late 1970s as many as 10,000 jobs were lost, and the local economy was devastated.

4.4 The Pursuit of Freedom and Liberty

Since before the founding of the nation, many significant events that ushered in new eras of personal and political freedom, religious tolerance, enfranchisement, and civil rights took place in the Upper Housatonic Valley. In the eighteenth century, valley inhabitants denied human rights to local Native American and to African Americans they enslaved.

In 1783, Sheffield resident and slave "Mum Bett" brought a lawsuit against John Ashley in which she sued for her freedom. When the courts granted her freedom it became a landmark case; other Massachusetts slaveholders knew that their rights to hold slaves were indefensible under the new Massachusetts Constitution. With the ruling of this case and another, slavery died out in the state. During the same era, as religious feeling intensified, the Shakers set up a large utopian community in Hancock where they purchased 3,000 acres. By 1830 a total of 300 Believers lived there. The leader of the modern civil rights movement W.E.B. Du Bois spent his earliest years in Great Barrington and retained a deep affection for the town.

The themes are further explained in the Management Plan, specifically in Sections 2.6 (pages 14 to 21) and in Appendix 3 where matrices for each of the interpretive themes contains a cross-reference of detailed interpretive concepts and ideas with site-specific topics and stories.

The four key themes are conveyed through a wide variety of interpretive techniques. In 2013, they included tours, lectures, guided walks, trails signs, bike and hike trails, motor coach tours, riverwalk signage, paddling guides, books, podcasts, performances, and exhibitions. Currently, sites in the region are developing an animated DVD on iron production, a smart phone app designed to provide an interactive experience, and the use of interpretive re-enactors at historic sites.

5.1 Housatonic Heritage's Desired Future

In ten years, the heritage area will have a multidimensional audience which will include full-time residents as well as visitors, young and, affluent and non-affluent people, and those with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Specifically, the desired future for Housatonic Heritage interpretation encompasses three elements:

5.2 First is the desire for a "visitor centered" heritage area achieved through increased engagement of the people who live in the region year round. Within this vision is the expectation that more diverse local audiences—young, old, and of various ethnicities and economic groups-- will not only see themselves reflected in heritage offerings but also will have the opportunity to actively engage in planning heritage programs that enhance their lives. The assumption is that the tourists and seasonal residents already take full advantage of heritage activities; in fact, these activities are a key reason for the visitors' presence. In addition, it is an accepted truth in natural and historic heritage education, that when young people have the opportunity to get on the river or care for artifacts, they become stewards of heritage preservation and education as their lives move forward. A substantial portion of heritage education and the development of stewardship in

the Housatonic Valley must to be directed toward our young people.

5.3 Secondly, Housatonic Heritage sees its future as being the catalyst organization that unlocks the potential for region-wide organizations of all sizes to increase activities and audience. As an umbrella organization that works collaboratively to facilitate and exchange ideas and services, Housatonic Heritage will help modernize communication by introducing the how-to of using digital media and the opportunity to join Housatonic Heritage’s digital forward motion. Specifically, Housatonic Heritage will serve as the catalyst for change by offering an investment of resources such as a well-timed infusion of funds.

5.4 Thirdly, Housatonic Heritage envisions a future in which it tackles the behind-the-scenes work to promote region-wide themes and interdisciplinary learning. Housatonic Heritage will assemble the key players in the disciplines of culture, art, history, and science so that they can discuss how visitors might learn about region-wide themes, relationships among the sites, and interdisciplinary connections. Moreover, Housatonic Heritage will take a leadership role in creating and hosting the premier website for all heritage activities and sites.

6.1 New Vision/New Audiences

Baseline data about visitors is essential to measure the success of efforts to increase audiences. Yet, Housatonic Heritage knows of no single number of visits to the heritage sites in the region. Some sites boast tens of thousands while others serve a few hundred. Other resources, like hiking trails, have no formal entrances where visitors can be counted. Yet, observation and input from partner organizations describes an audience is largely homogeneous, middle class, and white. If Housatonic Heritage is to reach new audiences, one goal must be to provide the data needed to assess current audiences and to estimate the populations that are not reached.

In other words, accepting “new vision/new audiences” means that Housatonic Heritage must either

become the organization that does the work, or become the conduit to the organization, that is expert in market research to inform audience development. This would include baseline profile and information about the desired audience. Further, focus groups or surveys will be needed to understand how to deepen the commitment from the current customer base by identifying additional ways to serve them.

The 2010 U.S. Census indicates that 131,219 people live in the region, with the overwhelming majority (93% - 128,405) being Caucasian or white. Other ethnic groups include Hispanic/Latino (<1% or 4,530), Black or African American (<1% or 3,572) and Asian (<1% or 1,611). All other ethnic backgrounds, or those who identified themselves as having two or more races, make up the balance.

Given the lack of ethnic diversity, virtually all of the interpretive materials produced in the region are geared to an English-speaking audience. And, it remains likely that interpretive programming will continue to be developed for the predominantly white, English-speaking residents. However Housatonic Heritage has a unique opportunity to reach an ethnically diverse audience as we create programming specifically targeted to youth--an audience that transcends all ethnic and socio-economic groups.

Of greatest importance to interpretive programming is age-diversification. Of the region’s total population, 15.4% (23,563) of residents are between the ages of 5-19. This age group (includes kindergarten through 12th grade) has been repeatedly identified by Housatonic Heritage programming partners as a desirable audience. This impressionable and frequently underserved age group has been sought after as a means of engaging family members, extended family, and as a means of building long-term relationships and stewardship for heritage assets.

One of the challenges faced by the region’s heritage institutions is that substantial audience and visitation data for events, programs, and activities has not been compiled regionally since 2000, making any existing data outdated. Most partner organizations don’t have the resources to capture visitor data and can

only provide anecdotal evidence of their audience at events and activities.

There has been limited success to engage youth through school-based programs and school field trips. Due to the evolution of Common Core teaching requirements, it has been widely recognized that the number and frequency of school programs will continue to dwindle. A core concept of this Interpretive Plan “Engage Youth” will be developed in concert with educators, interpretive programmers of partner organizations (the proposed Education Summit), and through collaboration with Housatonic Heritage as a regional coordinator.

Housatonic Heritage proposes to help reinvigorate a program sponsored by 1Berkshire called the Berkshire Audience Initiative (BAI). Currently dormant because of lack of funding, the partners who spearheaded the establishment of the BAI include the City of Pittsfield, the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, and the Berkshire Visitors Bureau. Housatonic Heritage’s role would be to bring additional partners to the table, including possibly the Western Connecticut Convention and Visitors Bureau, and to provide some financial resources to help get the program up and running.

7.1 Challenges in Interpreting the Region

While the region offers untold potential for interpretation and collaboration, there are challenges created by geography, available technology, and the nature of tourism in America.

7.2 The region’s sixty-mile length is a substantial distance for partners to travel for in-person collaboration and research. While digital connections make communication easier over long distances, in-person meetings are better at fostering working partnerships. Typically, visitors cannot comfortably travel the entire length of the region in one day if they stop for programs along the way.

7.3 Cell and internet service are spotty. For example, there is no cell service in downtown Stockbridge, the region’s biggest art and cultural center. As a result, Housatonic Heritage partners

find it essential to continue to produce print brochures.

7.4 There is a distinct lack of diversity in the tourist population in the U.S., in general. Not surprisingly, then, the scenic and cultural attractions entice a seasonal (summer and autumn) audience that is comprised largely of white adult visitors and vacationers, as well as affluent second- home owners from the New York and Boston areas. The staffs of heritage sites often expend most of their budgets and energy serving the large seasonal audience, leaving little for the smaller numbers of less affluent multi-aged year-round, ethnically diverse, residents.

8.1 Goals for Interpretation

Following are three goals for interpretation for the Housatonic Heritage region for the next five years that, when followed, will ensure that the desired future is achieved. If new proposals do not advance these goals they will not be considered.

8.2 Increase and broaden the region’s audience

by spearheading and supporting audience research and providing a top-notch website that promotes all programs and links all sites. Housatonic Heritage’s role will be:

- developing a deeper knowledge of our current and desired audience base and assist organizations as they evaluate efforts to increase audience participation
- focus on development of the Housatonic Heritage website as the region’s premier source for all heritage programs and opportunities
- participate in region-wide efforts to increase youth visitation through web-based activities.
- Create links and story lines among heritage sites that are thematically similar.

Programming ideas related the interpretive themes identified in the Management Plan (Appendix 3 – Creating a Cultural Center) that would bolster ongoing efforts to broaden the region’s audience include:



Paddling in Hinsdale Flats

- Explore and discuss the Upper Housatonic Valley's contributions to and impact on American art and artists, the American identity, and national consciousness.
- Explore the history and artistry of the artists of the Upper Housatonic Valley. Put each into context and include notable works and performances. (Cross-pollination of themes to engage audience of the other themes.)
- List notable artists who made their homes (full or part time) in the Upper Housatonic Valley who had significant impact on American art and culture, such as Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Norman Rockwell. Describe why they were drawn to the area. (Connection between thematically linked sites.)
- Describe how artists in the Upper Housatonic Valley had impacts on the American imagination and influenced American literature, painting, fashion, and folk art and the economy and financed homes, businesses, and public buildings, and influenced the local architecture and landscape. (Interdisciplinary interpretation.)

- How did paved roads, railroads, and the condition of late 19th century cities affect the development of the arts in the Upper Housatonic Valley? How did the arts affect landscape, land ownership, population, and economy? (Interdisciplinary interpretation.)

8.3 Engage youth in understanding the region and interesting them in stewardship. Since today's youth are tomorrow's caretakers, it is essential to the future of our region's heritage that youth learn to appreciate and support the regional resources. The teacher participants in the Upper Housatonic Valley Experience consistently report that their students (and typically the teachers themselves) have never attended many of the natural and cultural resources in their own vicinity.

Programming ideas related the interpretive themes identified in the Management Plan (Appendix 3 - Connections to the Land *and* Cradle of Industry) that that may be of particular interest to the target age group include:

- Explain how the Housatonic became polluted. Describe and illustrate the effect of polluted rivers and industrial waste on a population.

(Material is understandable to this age group, and lends itself to hands-on exploration.)

- Enumerate species that thrive in Valley ecosystems. Explain why this is significant. (Material is understandable to this age group and lends itself to hands-on exploration.)
- Explain Native American technologies for food growing, processing, storage as well as tool, utensil, and building construction. (Material is understandable to this age group and lends itself to hands-on exploration.)
- Explain how charcoal is produced and how its effects on the land. (Material is understandable to this age group and lends itself to hands-on exploration.)

8.4 Connect sites, resources, and themes by embracing digital media. Modernize communication via digital and social media for publicity and education. Use these methods to link sites and regional themes so that Housatonic Heritage can truly be “a catalyst for sharing our heritage,” which is the main objective as expressed in the Management Plan.

Programming ideas related the interpretive themes identified in the Management Plan (Appendix 3 – Connections to the Land *and* Cradle of Industry) that that may most benefit from being connected via digital media may include:

- Track the water power system from mill ponds to river dams to storage reservoirs and locate what remains today. (Interactive digital map, utilizing FLASH technology)
- List the authentic natural and built environments of the Upper Housatonic Valley and describe the ways that those landscapes are maintained. (Interactive digital map, utilizing FLASH technology.)
- Explain how the land is different today than in 1700. (Animated virtual tour that provides visualization of lands then and now.)
- Describe the negative impact of transportation

routes such as the Western Railroad in the 1830s and the Jacob’s Ladder Trail in 1910 on the natural environment. (Interactive website.)

9.0 Alignment with NPS “Call to Action”

These goals for interpretation reflect the guiding principles and interpretive trends described in the report of the NPS initiative “Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement.” With innovative communication and education strategies, the NPS seeks to engage diverse communities as it strengthens partnerships that enhance the larger role of the parks and heritage areas as places of learning American values, civic engagement, and stewardship. These same principles will continue to shape Housatonic Heritage’s future. Specifically, the Housatonic Heritage Interpretive Plan is aligned with the following Call to Action goals:

#3 History Lesson: Exciting and involving new audiences with a range of interpretive methods is the key to this NPS goal, and its emphasis on including everyone underpins the Housatonic Heritage Interpretive Plan and goal number 1.

#5 Parks for People: Improving “close to home” recreation and natural resource enjoyment is consistent with Housatonic Heritage’s first goal which describes the expansion of the audience for recreation, heritage, and cultural opportunities within the heritage area.

#13 Stop Talking and Listen: The recommendation for park and heritage area personnel to learn about the opportunities to connect diverse populations to historic and natural resources by listening to those constituents is an integral part of the Interpretive Plan’s goal number 1.

#16 Live and Learn: This goal to introduce children to the nation’s historical and natural heritage parallels the Housatonic Heritage goal number 2 of Engaging Youth in programming and stewardship.

#17 Go Digital: Like the NPS, Housatonic Heritage plans through its goal number 3 to reach new audiences through digital media by providing current

visitor information in an interactive format that is friendly and flexible for both online and mobile use.

The matrix “Approaches and Trends in the NPS” is included with the Interpretive Plan. This plan also embraces these trends as an approach to NHA wide interpretation. They are included as guiding principles to our member communities and partners.

10.1 First Priority Actions to Achieve Stated Goals

Below is the implementation strategy for achieving the three Housatonic Heritage interpretive goals within the framework of the four interpretive themes identified for the region. The plan is for Housatonic Heritage to continue its key role as the leader that brings stakeholders to the table, coordinates efforts and funding, disseminates information, and partners with its member organizations.

The strategy is to spend the first five years improving the website, gathering baseline audience data, and engaging local youth. In the subsequent years, armed with real data and real experiences, Housatonic Heritage will focus on other new local audiences.

I. Increase and Broaden the Region’s Audience.

10.2 Improve the Housatonic Heritage website.

There was unanimous agreement from stakeholders and trustees that improving the website was the number one priority. The goal is to ensure that it is the “go-to” place for information about heritage activities, sites and events throughout the region. It will link to all properties and resources, ensuring that the website is a place to learn more about the “real thing” as opposed to “Berkshires hype.” The content on the site will be targeted to residents as well as visitors, but may also be relevant to a national and international audience researching the region’s heritage, with no intention or opportunity to visit. Some of the site may be developed by teens as they engage work with sites; in any case, the website should be “youth relevant.” A challenge will be to identify Housatonic Heritage partners as individual sites as well as part of the region. In addition, Housatonic Heritage will offer technical assistance and support to act as a catalyst by bringing heritage

sites together to make the region’s websites more attractive, interactive, and interconnected and by encouraging partners to share information and links with each other so that the story of particular sites can be seen in the context of the entire region. *Begin fall 2014.*

10.3 Participate in MESH (a proposed social media hybrid website about Berkshire events aimed at 18-35-year olds) based on the capabilities of the Housatonic Heritage redesigned website. *Begin summer 2016*

10.4 Develop an understanding of current audiences through baseline data on current audiences and attendance at events. This requires helping to revitalize the dormant Berkshire Audience Initiative sponsored by 1Berkshire. *Begin fall 2014.*

10.5 Develop open house weekends to coincide with fall heritage walk weekends. Encourage partners to offer some heritage walks especially for families with young children and advertise. A good model is the Connecticut Open House Day of art, history and tourist sites, which is Saturday, June 14 in 2014. Held before the tourist season begins, the mostly free programs target residents. The program is now in its tenth year. *Begin late spring 2015.*

II. Engage Youth

10.6 Establish a Youth Advisory Council to guide the Board of Trustees with insights into the issues and topics relevant to this age group which was deemed a highest priority for two reasons. First, Housatonic Heritage now engages adults, almost exclusively. Secondly, it is good practice to ask the audience what they want and not to guess at their needs. How this advisory group is to be assembled will require some preparation: it may be by invitation to specific clubs, for community service credit, or an opportunity for existing volunteers. Alternatively, it may be an “open call.” *Begin planning spring 2015.*

10.7 Evaluate two existing programs that involve schools: the week-long Upper Housatonic Valley Experience (UHVE) for teachers and the writer-in-residence program. While the UHVE is the most

expensive program to sponsor, there has been no substantive evaluation to assess its impact since its inception in 2003. Presently, teachers are so enmeshed in curricular mandates that they cannot access the new resources they have learned about. The writer-in-residence program, which linked a writer at the Melville home with a local high school, is an excellent and flexible model that could be used with artists or playwrights. First, however, it requires an evaluation and more input from educators regarding how to shape the most effective program possible. *Begin fall 2014.*

10.8 Host an Education Summit with heritage partners, K-12 schools, family/youth advocacy groups, Greenagers (teenaged volunteers for the environment), the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Berkshire Community College, and the University of Connecticut to discuss how to work together. Over the past decade, school participation at sites has declined while family and online interest has increased. The core questions will be: are heritage school programs (ranging from class visits and writers in residence to interactive field trips and rich web materials) desirable and viable in 2015 and, if so, how should Housatonic Heritage and partners collaborate to make them happen? What role will families and youth (outside the classroom) play? This "summit" may take the format of a large day-long meeting or it may be a series of more intimate "education roundtables" of ten participants each, modeled after the successful interpretive roundtables hosted to prepare this report. *Begin fall 2015.*

10.9 Offer a grant round for youth programming in order to encourage heritage sites to invest in a youth focus. The grant guidelines will be written broadly so that partners may interpret and develop as they see fit, including the expansion, reinstatement and redevelopment of past and current programming specifically targeted to a youth audience. A heritage youth summit may inform both our partner organizations and our grant program as to how best to attract and engage this age group. *spring 2016.*

III. Connect Sites, Resources and Themes

10.10 Create an online interactive digital map/app of the region that contains hike/bike/walking/ADA compliant trails and perhaps other heritage resources. It will promote universal access for disabled individuals and will have a downloadable/podcast and web-based version (available via WIFI) to accommodate visitors in areas with no cell coverage. The map will be accessible via computers, tablets, and smart phones, and it will be integrated into the new website. The first step is to determine whether it should be only walking trails or whether it should also include thematic trails like Iron Heritage trail as well as heritage sites. *Begin fall 2015.*

10.11 Evaluate these two successful models for dissemination: the smart phone self-guided tours of Great Barrington and the interpretive signage at Beckley Furnace with QR codes. Determine if these 2013 pilots ought to be expanded. *Summer 2015.*

10.12 Continue the Barn Census Project which is now waiting funding. Using a Vermont barn census project as a model, researchers will identify GPS coordinates for barns so that visitors can find and learn about the structures and their need for preservation. This "research to interpretation" model will spawn a region-wide interpretation project that will, if successful, inform a program of stewardship and preservation. The barn inventory will be published digitally and in print. *Ongoing.*

10.13 Gauge the appetite for a common system or an inter-related system of digital access to collections and archives. Convene heritage partners to discuss collections software, inter-connectivity issues/ease of use, and discuss the potential upside (and potential downsides) for creating an integrated regional approach to aggregating, publishing, linking, and sharing digital collections. This is particularly important for the very small institutions. If an outcome is to collaborate, select best overall collections software (based on criteria established at these joint meetings), then proceed with Housatonic

Heritage funding software, providing a collections specialist “rider” position. The point is to have the conversation about integration and collaboration or linking at a time when organizations are making decisions in this regard. *Spring 2015.*

11.1 Staffing

The Action items represent all new work and will be added to ongoing programs. Since Housatonic Heritage staffing is likely to remain at two part-time staff, with the addition of contractors, until Spring 2015 when the newly accepted Management Plan releases additional funds. At that time, Housatonic Heritage and its Board of Trustees will determine how to acquire skill sets in interpretation, youth leadership, and digital media. These skills may come through contracting or a shared position with a community college or other partner in which students can learn while they are producing.

12.1 Budget

The projects identified in the Interpretive Plan add minimal capital expense. Much of the work will be organized and executed by staff and partners, but some will require the specific assistance of contractors with designated expertise. The digital component provides the opportunity to seek new sources of funding and different support models. At the outset, instead of tapping familiar grant-funding sources, Housatonic Heritage will seek partnerships with local colleges where students can earn credit for digitizing content and for creating within the digital medium. Other ideas are to explore corporate underwriting and an earned income model.

13.1 Evaluation and Conclusion

The Interpretive Plan will be evaluated and updated annually to ensure that the acquisition of new audiences, well-served, remains the target goal of Housatonic Heritage. In the big picture, the Board of Trustees and Council of Overseers will look at numbers and attendance at programs and websites to assess the Plan’s effectiveness.

It is essential to find the best method for determining the success of these new projects. While there are a number of analytical tools to quantify visitors’

page views, time spent on websites, numbers of student visitors and interns, volume of rich media created, minutes of videos put on websites, numbers of virtual tours--it is important to choose carefully which metrics provide useful data and to decide what constitutes success. In addition, Housatonic Heritage and its partners need to consider how to measure a shift in demographics over time and to measure an increase in visitation. It is clear that evaluation and audience surveying must be ongoing and a regular part of the work of Housatonic Heritage and its partners. *Begin fall 2014.*

14.1 Second Priority Action Items

So many good ideas were generated at the January 2014 interpretive roundtables that Housatonic Heritage does not want to lose sight of the ones that didn’t make the top priority list. These second tier projects are listed here because they may be recalled or substituted as need, time, and money require.

I. Increase and Broaden the Region’s Audience by serving as a catalyst for audience-building initiatives:

14.2 Hold a competition to redesign the Housatonic Heritage website. Ensure that it includes short videos which are standard fare on websites and Facebook these days. Ask youth to make a short video describing what individual sites mean to them and then provide the weblink.

14.3 Because visitors want to share experiences instantly, such as sending a photo to a friend, create programming to enhance and harness that experience. Create a Housatonic Heritage Pinterest (or similar photo sharing platform) of the region.

14.4 To develop new audiences, first engage with the new audiences (the estimate is that 90% of Housatonic Heritage audiences are white). There is no substitute for talking new potential audiences and not presuming their desires and needs. Examine models for community engagement programs and convene experts in a workshop about working with new multicultural audiences, including international visitors. A regional organization called “Multicultural Bridge” does training.

14.5 Consider Spanish and other language translations for interpretive materials, including print and digital.

14.6 Because sites are far-flung and tucked away outside of town centers, develop some light-hearted publicity in the towns, like a pop-up kiosk where visitors can take a fun quiz along the “guess where I am” theme.

14.7 Convene organizations to discuss how they can expand their missions and audiences by manifesting a public educational, informational or inspirational presence on the roadside or in unexpected outdoor places to capture an “accidental” audience. These public displays should be conceived as ways to break the boundaries between the interpretation of history, science, and art.

14.8 Make a ‘Brew Trail’ of local heirloom brewers for adult audiences as a means of bridging this audience to other interpretive programming.

14.9 With regional partners, discuss the efficacy and desirability of regional signage and make a recommendation about whether a plan should be developed.

II. Engage Youth

14.10 Add more age-appropriate marketing for youth. Show them in authentic experiences with the tag line “Get your hands dirty.”

14.11 Celebrate youth by having a teenager engaged at a site and ask a friend to film their experience, along the lines of “show what you love about the Upper Housatonic Valley in 3 minutes.” Post on the Housatonic Heritage website.

14.12 Create the place where students can meet their high school’s community service requirements. Bidwell House offers a two-week internship for a \$200 stipend. At the end of a few days, interns are able to give tours. Bartholomew’s Cobble has students conduct tours because they, too, learn material at the lightning speed and retain it. Housatonic Heritage could host a portal for internship and mentorship opportunities for youth.

14.13 Housatonic Heritage could serve as a clearinghouse for interns placed by colleges where the tuition/stipend is paid by the college. Housatonic Valley Association had a successful arrangement with Columbia University where student tuition paid stipends.

14.14 Host a program of moonlit night walks or hikes for young adults in their 20s.

14.15 Give free tickets to sites and events to families of high school graduates whose schools use Tanglewood for graduation exercises.

14.16 Get young people out on the river because it is the actual experience of being on the water or out in nature that leaves the impression. Challenge school systems to give every student an “on the water” experience before they graduate.

14.17 Hold training for Housatonic Heritage partners about the Common Core standards. Use Hope Sullivan, IS23 arts school, as an advisor to inform and assess proposed future educational programming initiatives.

14.18 Recognize that school is only one facet of young peoples’ lives. Create a forum around the topic of attracting youth with at-risk youth leaders, youth advocacy organizations, clubs, church groups, scouts, etc. Chesterwood has had experience with AmeriCorps volunteers.

14.19 Analyze the success of existing stewardship programs as potential models for youth involvement. Expand Greenagers program or model to Art-agers or Histagers, or even Heritagers. Perhaps Greenagers could pick different sites and cross over from environmental work to history work. Use Berkshire Community College as a showcase for students’ work.

III. Connect Sites, Resources, and Themes

14.20 Create an informative pop-up “heritage mobile” (van or similar motor vehicle) that can be driven to events to distribute information on regional heritage events. Visitors can try to stump the driver with trivia questions.

APPENDIX 11: UPPER HOUSATONIC VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA INTERPRETIVE PLAN *continued*

14.21 Produce brochures that describe “what’s nearby,” e.g. list the hiking trails close to Bidwell House museum. In general, sites could promote what is near them.

14.22 Support sites with their digital media program by providing staff support where there is no dedicated staff. There is a need for Housatonic Heritage to help the sites stay current and to be continually evaluating and adapting to new technologies.

14.23 Create a video game about the region with assistance from an RPI professor who lives in the region.

14.24 Sites want to talk more about the connections of the river or the inspirational landscape to the arts. For example, Daniel Chester French moved a barn so he would have a view of Monument Mountain, and he sculpted the landscape by creating walks and garden rooms on his property. Themes like the power of nature, the nature of power (water power), and the power of place have yet to be woven among the interpretations at the region’s sites. Housatonic Heritage could consider an art in nature trail that explores inspirational sites and themes. Other unifying themes might be Transcendentalism or industry within the landscape in which industrialists created a miles-long river/land system of reservoirs, factories and mill ponds that all affected each other.

14.25 Enable geocaching of the entire heritage area that leads people from story to story. Consider a heritage reward for achieving a number of caches. Engage at the level of finding the geocache but then add heritage connection.

14.26 “Get heritaged” became the slogan of sneaking in heritage information by engaging people for one reason and adding heritage into the experience.

14.27 Create a “Lending Library of Interpretation.” Exchange expert interpreters from site to site so that, for example, an environmentalist explores

the land around the large estates and art experts talk about the historic houses. One successful example of interdisciplinary interpretation occurred when a Housatonic Valley Association representative gave a program at Chesterwood. Birding could occur at Chesterwood.

14.28 Provide heritage sites with information about the relevance, importance, and process of making websites compatible for mobile phones to increase visitation. Provide incentives and tools to help heritage sites develop mobile compatible versions of their websites.

14.29 Hold a seminar to demonstrate the potential of “Google Analytics,” a free service offered by Google to enable sites to learn how people are using their websites. Participants will learn how to analyze website visitor information, content, interest and engagement, paying particular attention to the treatment of graphics and the gathering of new audiences. Follow-up to disseminate what was learned.

14.30 Housatonic Heritage could produce a glossy annual magazine for non-digital readers with real articles about what children and youth are doing. Ask established writers living in the Berkshires to contribute articles and sell advertising. Alternatively, make it look like a newspaper so it appears like it is the latest version. Possibly contracting with or collaborating with *Orion* magazine.