

New 'Mormon corridor' heritage area will use past to mold future

Development » Plan outlines 10-year course for developing historic 'Mormon corridor.'

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The "Mormon corridor," a 250-mile swath of central and southern Utah, is dotted with small towns whose history will be preserved through a plan to increase tourism and economic development.



At least, that is the intent of the management plan for the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, which was created by federal statute in 2006, and covers parts of six southern Utah counties and communities along 400 miles of highway.

"This will enhance the experience of people visiting these areas of Utah and encourage research, preservation of cultural resources, recreation opportunities and economic development with an emphasis on crafts and practices once used by pioneers," said Monte Bona, director of the Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance, which spearheaded creation of the heritage area.



MPNHA Summary Plan



The alliance was created to promote the works of artisans along U.S. Highway 89 in the southern two-thirds of the state. Bona emphasized the heritage designation won't interfere with private property rights in the area.

The heritage area's purpose is to preserve and develop resources for research purposes and to enhance the enjoyment of visitors. It was created by legislation sponsored by Sen. Bob Bennett,

who believed much of early Utah's character and history was lost to people traveling the Interstate 15 corridor. The act was signed into law by President George Bush in 2006.

Snow College in Ephraim will serve as an anchor for the heritage area: It will house the \$13 million Karen H. Huntsman Library and Heritage Plaza, being built with help from the former Utah first lady's foundation.

A management plan for the area, which still must be approved by the Interior Department, also calls for creation of a "traditional building skills institute" that will be housed at Snow, offering workshops and a degree to "perpetuate the artisan and craft skills" associated with pioneers who settled in the area.

The management plan outlines a 10-year course for developing the historic area, which is divided into five districts, from Little Denmark between Mt. Pleasant and Manti on the north, to Under the Rim near Kanab at the state's south end. Some districts are already well-known: The Boulder Loop includes State Roads 12 and 24, already designated as Scenic Byways.

Cordell Roy, who works for the National Park Service and helped coordinate the project with the state, said the designation will help communities get funding to preserve and market their individual attractions.

"It will get people off of I-15 to experience that beautiful landscape," said Roy.

Up to \$10 million was authorized by the act creating the heritage area, but community chapters must provide matching funds. The long-term budget for all projects included the management plan exceeds \$50 million, according to the proposed management plan.

Bona said so far heritage groups in the area have raised about \$19.1 million toward the projects. "This is money put together by partners along the highways," said Bona

Roy said the existence of the Highway 89 Alliance helped with approval of the heritage area.

"The Mormon Pioneer Area is a little unusual, in my opinion, in that there is already an experienced management team in place and a fairly well developed plan, as well as several well developed funding sources," said Roy.

Rheta Cluff, manager of the Ephraim Cooperative in Sanpete County, which has been selling the works of local artisans for 25 years in a restored ZCMI department store, is excited about the heritage area designation. She said local artists and crafts people use the co-op to sell such wares as loom rugs, fine art paintings, quilts, and pottery, made in much the same way their Mormon ancestors used.

The upper floor of the building is also rented out for social functions including weddings.

Cluff hopes the heritage area will attract people interested in the area's history, like one young couple who she said recently dropped in for a visit.

"The woman said she never had so much fun shopping in her life," said Cluff. "That touched my heart because that is what we want. We are proud of our store and building and would like all to come and see it."

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