

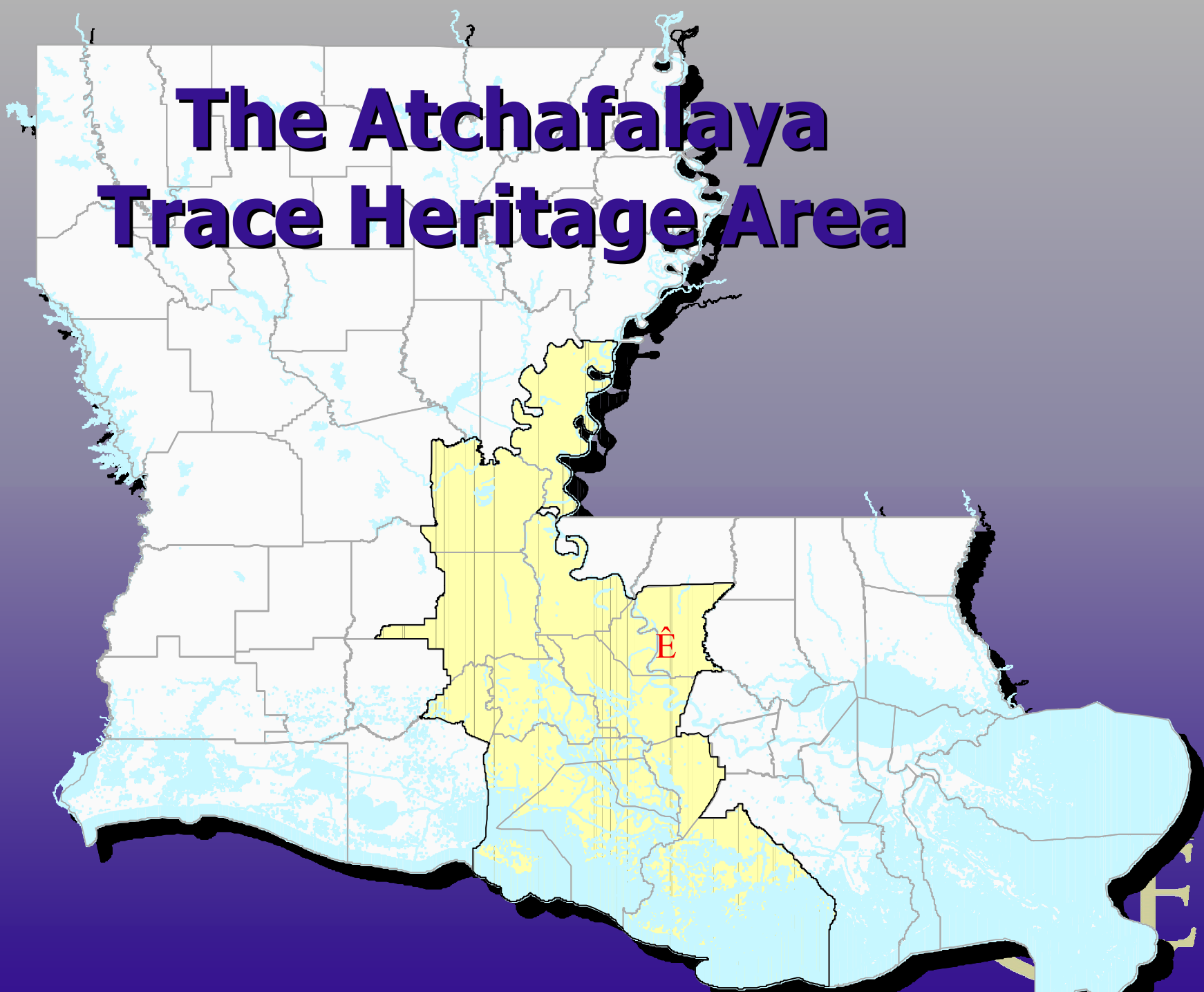
Louisiana Rural Tourism Conference

**“Developing Tourism
Opportunities and (by)
Preserving Community
Identity”**

Jason Stagg, Executive Director
Atchafalaya Trace Commission



The Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area



Heritage Areas

**VALLEY
BATTLEFIELDS**



**THE ATCHAFALEYA
TRACE**

What is a Heritage Area?

- Recognition of a *living landscape*.
- Places where people continue to live, work, and play.
- Places where the common stories of the region can tie people of all cultures together.
- *Not a National Park (non-regulatory)*

What is a Heritage Area?

- **A Place**

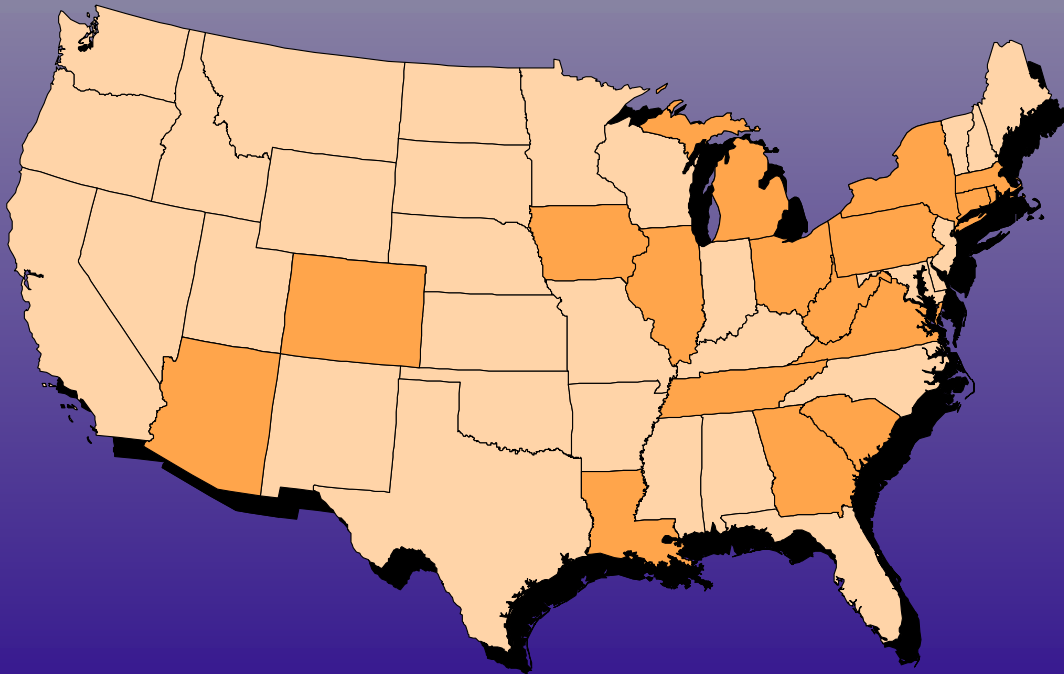
- Concentrations of important resources
- Known for unique culture and identity
- Good places to live and visit
- Regional

What is a Heritage Area?

- **A concept that combines:**
 - Resource conservation
 - Economic development & tourism
 - Outdoor recreation
 - Interpretation & education
 - Collaborative implementation among multiple interests

Heritage Areas Around the United States

- 23 Nationally Designated Heritage Areas
- 5 Established Statewide Programs



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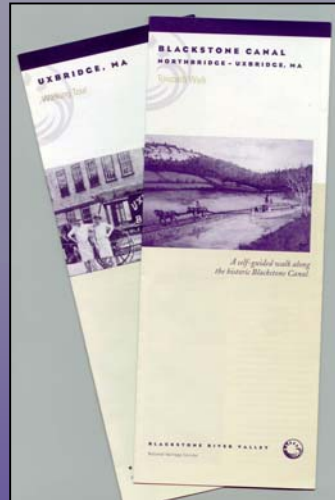
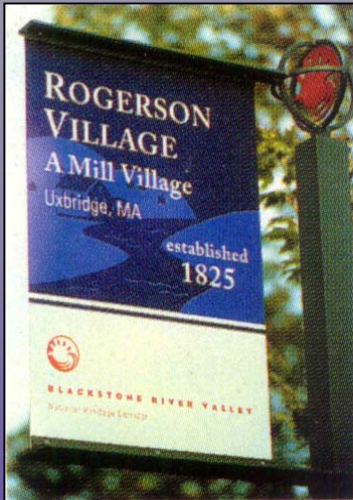
Lackawanna River Valley NHA

Scranton, Pennsylvania



Blackstone River Valley NHA

Massachusetts & Rhode Island



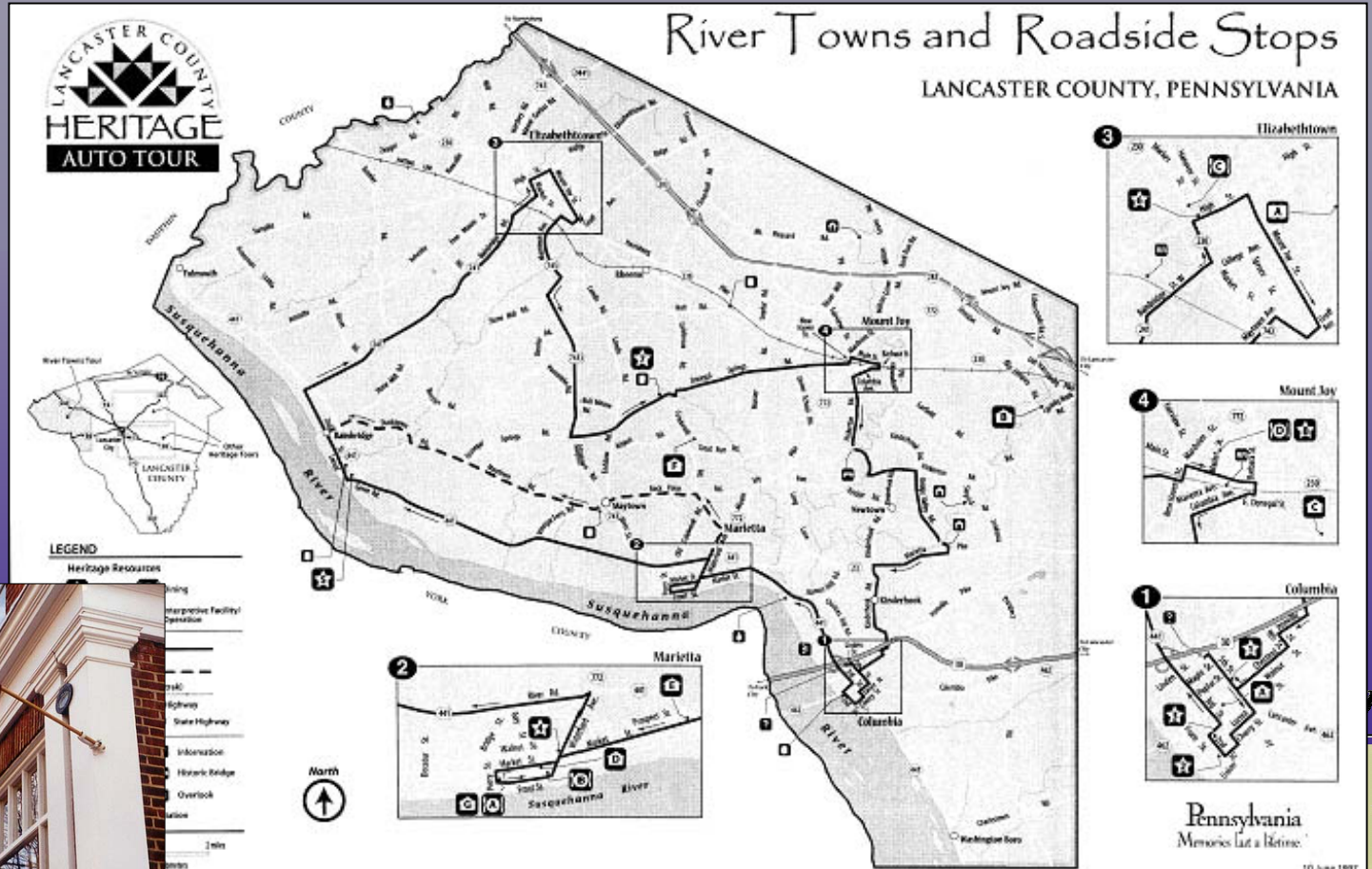
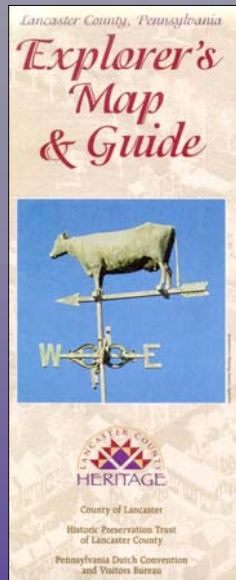
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor



Lancaster Heritage Program

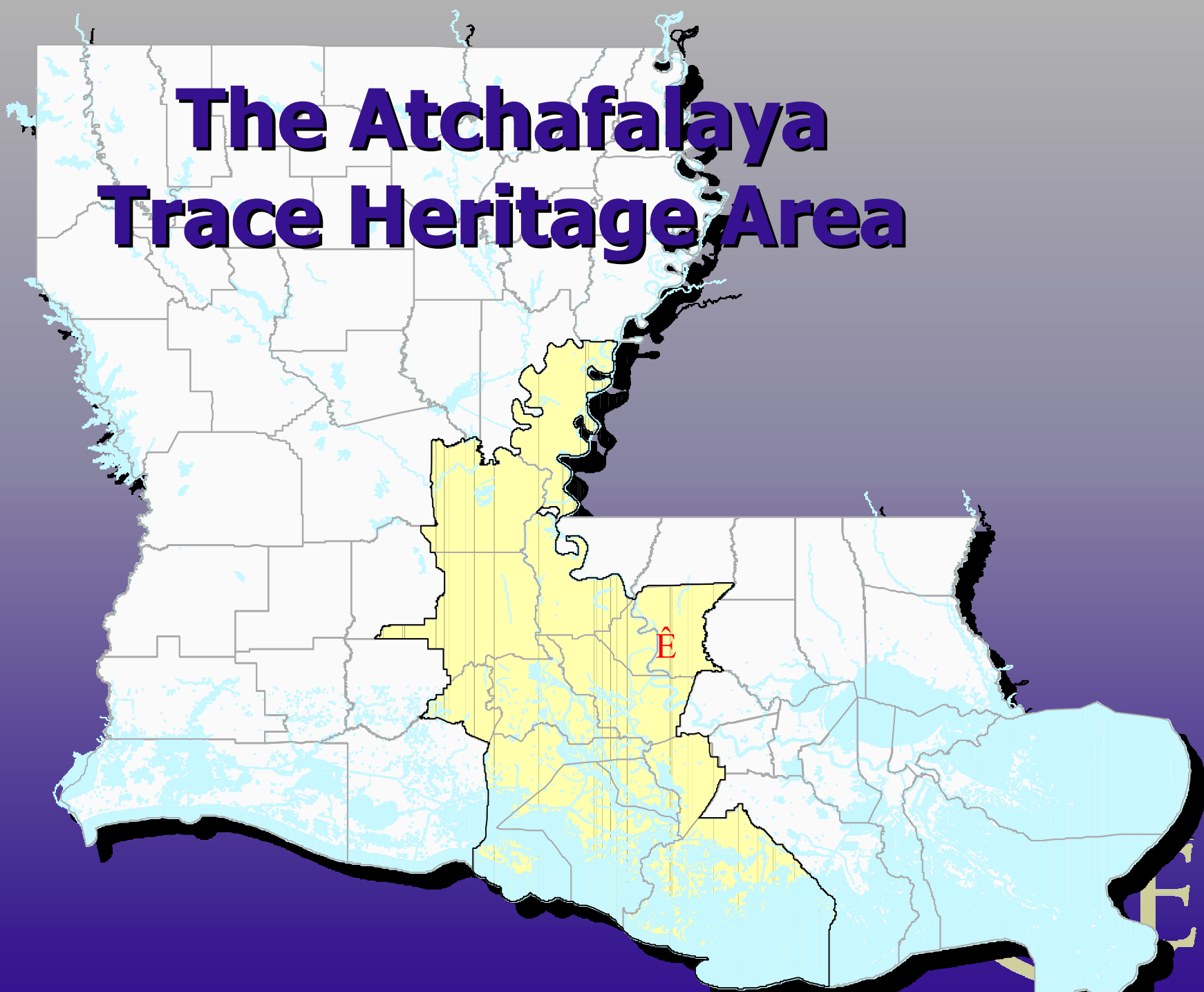
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania



What do they all have in common?

- Use their shared stories to facilitate positive change (tourism, resource preservation, economic development, etc.)

The Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area



The Atchafalaya Trace Heritage Area

- The Atchafalaya Trace is composed of thirteen parishes in and around the Atchafalaya Basin:
Avoyelles, Assumption, Concordia, East Baton Rouge, Iberia, Iberville, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, West Baton Rouge, Terrebonne



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Nationally Significant Resources

- NATURAL
 - Largest river swamp in the country
 - Levee system
 - 30% of the Mississippi's flow
 - Ecosystem changing with siltation
 - Recreation/Crawfishing
 - Cypress Timber/Oil & Gas
- CULTURAL
 - Diversity
 - Food, Music, Art, Crafts



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TRACE

Program History

- Created by the Legislature in 1997
- Placed within the Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism
- Start-up funding in 1998
- First Commission meeting in 1999

Why a Heritage Area for the Atchafalaya?

- To preserve, interpret and share what makes the entire Atchafalaya region unique
- To enhance economic development
- To increase sustainable heritage tourism
- Louisiana's Grand Canyon?
- Reflected in the enabling legislation



Making the Legislation a Reality

- First step was to devise a Management Action Plan that detailed projects and initiatives
- Implement the Management Plan
- Achieve National Heritage Area Designation
 - Benefits

Challenges

- Rapidly changing ecosystem
- Projected flat economic growth
- Aging population
- Sprawl and inconsistent development
- Low regional awareness



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Goals

- Build Understanding and Identity
- Strengthen Place
- Expand Economic Opportunity
- Strengthen Community Capacity



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Implementation Approach

- An integrated approach--beginning with interpretation and education activities that will lead to the conservation of natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources
- Working in partnership with others across the region to boost local efforts while avoiding duplication.
- Always keep sustainable economic development in mind

RESULT: The Management Plan

- Just completed!
- Worked with Mary Means & Associates
- Took a little over a year to finish
- Published in the next few months

Next Steps for the ATHA

- IMPLEMENTATION METHODS
 - Initiate a non-profit Atchafalaya Heritage Trust
 - Convene State Working Group
 - Initiate the Heritage Enterprise Zone
 - Pursue national designation



Next Steps for the ATHA

- ACTION PLAN AND PROJECTS
 - Regional Projects for the first 3 years
 - Maps, guidebooks, web site
 - Core driving routes
 - Implement Interpretive Plan

What do all heritage areas have in common?

- Use their shared stories to facilitate positive change (tourism, resource preservation, economic development, etc.)



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How does this apply to me and this session's topic?

- The same principles of community authenticity, reconnected heritage, and shared stories can be applied and used anywhere...even an individual town
- Your community is held together and defined by its shared stories
- Lessons learned in applying these principles in the Atchafalaya Trace project



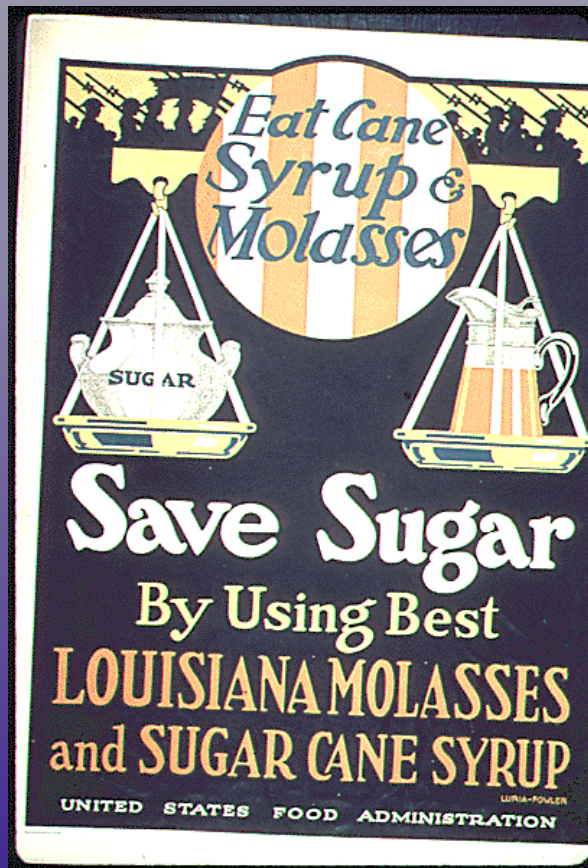
Questions to ask to get started:

- *"What makes my community unique?"*
- *"Why was my community established?"*

Using your stories like the heritage area...

- The stories and unique qualities of your community should be at the heart of not only your tourism strategy, but also:
 - Community re-development efforts
 - “Design Guideline Notebook”
 - Sustainable growth strategies
 - Conservation priorities

Using your stories...



- Principle of using stories as your most important resource (your starting point) can be applied in two ways...

Planning for new tourism opportunities:

- First:
 - is to let the stories drive your tourism master plan (management plan)
 - Let the stories decide which sites and resources you invest in
 - *"Interpretive plan"*
 - Let the stories drive your marketing and promotion

Why?

- Because of the growing market of *heritage tourism*:
 - *Travel that allows visitors to experience places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past*
- Authenticity is the key
 - “A slice or the real America...”
- Sophisticated traveler
- Time to reinvent yourself as something more authentic?

Where is this being done in the Atchafalaya Trace?

- St. Martinville
- Morgan City
- Opelousas/Eunice
- Plaquemine
- Simmesport



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Planning for new tourism opportunities:

- Second: (What we learned from the heritage area planning process):
 - “Back up a step” and lay foundation
 - Reconnect people with their surroundings
 - Build community pride and ownership
 - Focus on positive aspects
 - Use stories to get the community to actually be involved in the planning process

Planning for new tourism opportunities:

- ADDED BENEFIT TO SECOND USE OF STORIES IN PLANNING:
 - Reconnects people to their community and restores a sense of *pride in place*
 - Community realizes that these things should be done for themselves FIRST
 - A community full of pride automatically attracts tourists and new residents
 - Why is there no litter in Texas?

Things we'd do differently:

- More awareness before workshops
- Have residents do asset inventories
 - *Disposable Camera Brigade*
- Connect people with their own stories
- Collateral pieces to get the word out
- Familiarization tour

How does all of this really work?

- Interpretation is the tool or mechanism that puts your stories to work for you



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INTERPRETATION: What is it?

- "...a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource."
- *from the National Association for Interpretation*

Interpretation should:

- Provide more than just information
- Stir individuals to action
 - Tell the story of who you are



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Interpretive Planning

- 1. Overview and interviews with key people; research and collection of stories
 - Use of folklorists
- 2. Interpretive plan goals and main themes
 - Themes: what are the main messages you want to repeat?
 - What are the core characteristics of your area?

Atchafalaya Trace Themes

- General Themes:
 - Dynamic relationship of man and nature
 - Ingenuity and resilience
 - Cultural convergence
 - Cultural expressions
 - Resources and their management

Interpretive Planning

- 3. Storyline development and interpretive sites
 - What individual stories help repeat the message of the themes?
 - What sites or resources actually tell these stories
 - Ex: sugar cane

Atchafalaya Trace Storylines

- Levee construction and flood control
- Old River control system
- Multiple cultures and their interaction
- Music
- Hunting and fishing
- Pirogues



Interpretive Planning

- 4. Implementation strategies
 - Enhancing existing sites
 - New interpretive installations
 - Educational projects/lesson plans
 - Communication devices and media
- 5. Final Interpretive Plan

Interpretive Planning

- Visitor expects to see an alligator, taste gumbo, or eat crawfish
- Leave having experienced that, but also learning much more



Interpretation Elsewhere



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TRACE

Interpretation Elsewhere



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Interpretation Elsewhere



Interpretation Elsewhere



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Interpretation Elsewhere

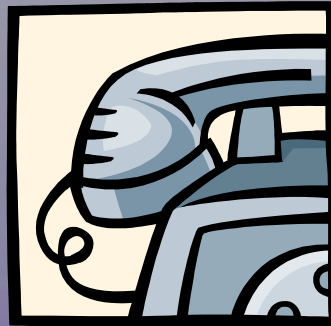


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In closing, remember...

- Your stories are your greatest asset.
- Infuse them into everything you and your community leaders do, and you'll have:
 - A more authentic tourism product
 - A more livable and lovable community
 - A greater sense of pride in your residents

CONTACT US



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