

American Heritage Rivers

The American Heritage Rivers initiative, announced by the President in 1997, offers special recognition to outstanding stretches of America's rivers. Designated rivers receive federal assistance in the form of programmes, grants and technical assistance from existing federal resources:

- economic development and small business grants and loans
- **information and maps** to help communities identify and evaluate historic, environmental and economic resources
- community outreach and planning assistance to ensure a well-defined action strategy and a broad base of support
- **training** in the use of soil and water quality information and in environmental monitoring techniques
- **interpretive assistance** to develop a framework for communicating the importance of the community's river heritage
- technical and financial assistance
- economic modelling

The Aim of the initiative is "to support community-based efforts to restore and protect the environmental, economic, cultural and historic values of rivers". In 1998 126 nominations from communities across America were submitted to an Advisory Committee appointed by the President. In reviewing the nominations, the Committee sought rivers that demonstrated cultural, historic, economic and environmental significance and strong grassroots support. Fourteen rivers were subsequently designated.

The overall purpose is to encourage local communities to build a closer relationship to a local river, regardless of the current status of the river.

For each Heritage River, a federal employee is named as a 'river navigator' to help communities identify existing federal programmes and resources that can help with action plans. Focused support is available to designated rivers for a period of up to five years.

The Hudson River, New York – a designated American Heritage River

The Hudson River has been the focus for several similar initiatives in recent years including:

- The Hudson River Estuary Management Plan
- The Greenway Program
- The State Heritage Area Program
- Coastal Management Program

All of these programmes involve a wide range of organisations working in partnership including industry, environmental organisations, sportsmen, local government, State agencies and citizens.

Designation as an American Heritage River brings the involvement of Federal government in existing projects. Additional benefits include extra capacity in nine key areas for development¹ including tourism development. Federal assistance in tourism will augment work already completed by the Hudson Valley Tourism Development Council. This body, representing both public and private sectors, has developed eight Heritage Areas, "each with its own community driven plan and visitor centre, providing stepping stones for visitors travelling in the Hudson River Valley". Another separate but complementary initiative in the lower Valley, the Hudson River Valley Greenway, aims to "connect the valley's residents with its natural, cultural and historical resources" through the development of hiking, biking and water trails. Another stated aim is to protect, develop and interpret the history, culture and environment of the Valley.

Further tourism development under new federal designation will include:

- Interpretive assistance
- Increasing levels of funding to local authorities and non-profit organisations for survey, preservation and restoration of historic structures and landscapes
- Introduce sustainable forms of transport
- Facilitate natural and cultural resource interpretation
- Promote the region as a historic, cultural and recreational resource
- Promote public-private partnerships.

¹ Resource Protection and Management; Public Access; Community and Waterfront Development; **Tourism**; Agriculture; Transportation; Navigation; Community Planning; **Education**