

Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area

National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Environmental Assessment

This study report has been prepared to provide Congress and the public with information about the resources in the study area and how they relate to criteria for designation of a national heritage area.

This study report was prepared by Dale E. Nimz, Ph.D., historic preservation consultant, Cathy Ambler, Ph.D., associate historian, and Mike Houts, M.A., mapping technician. The study was commissioned by the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance with the support of the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area Planning Committee.

Additional information about the study and electronic copies of the report area available at the heritage area website www.bleedingkansas.org.

Abstract

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This National Heritage Area (NHA) Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment analyzed the resources within a twenty-three county area of Kansas according to the National Park Service (NPS) interim criteria for a national heritage area. This study assessed the ten interim criteria for national heritage areas regarding resources, themes, potential management alternatives, government and community commitment, level of public support, and other relevant factors as required.

This study makes the following conclusion: the proposed Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area meets all ten criteria to be eligible for designation. The natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources present form a cohesive nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. Because there is already a foundation of stewardship and appreciation, a national heritage area for resources conservation, education, and heritage celebration could be very effective.

Two boundary proposals are presented that differ in size and number of resources included. The first represents the smallest area and number of resources that will provide a representative visitor experience for all themes and the most essential theme-related resources. The second provides the most complete visitor experience with increased opportunity for resources protection, interpretation, recreation, heritage celebration and community involvement. The larger area is also likely to have a higher level of public support and opportunity for private, foundation, and community partners and consequently a higher level of potential for leveraging funds provided by the federal government. There is substantial public interest in the project and an opportunity for more involvement as the process continues. A management entity, the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance, has been identified to undertake the purposes and activities of the National Heritage Area.

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

“Bleeding Kansas” is the popular phrase describing the conflict over slavery that became nationally prominent in Kansas just before and during the American Civil War. Pro-slavery settlers from the South and anti-slavery activists from the north came to the territory because it was located at the intersection of Northern and Southern expansion. In the Kansas Conflict, Americans first fought to uphold their different and irreconcilable principles of freedom and equality. Born in that early conflict, Kansas became the strategic center of an emerging continental nation. Today the struggle for freedom is an ideal still associated with the real problem of democratic nation-building.

There are many stories to tell of Kansas’s role in the events leading to the Civil War and the enduring struggle for freedom that followed. Designation of the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area will strengthen the regional effort to document and interpret the significant role of Kansas in the political struggle that culminated in the Civil War. A substantial number of cultural and natural resources dating from the territorial and Civil War period can be found in eastern Kansas today. Interpretation of these buildings, landscapes, sites, and geographical features provides a conceptual framework for understanding the area’s critical contribution to the history of the United States. Together, the natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources in this area form a cohesive nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. Just as important as the political conflict, the struggle to adapt to the physical

environment affected the development of agriculture, transportation, trade and business, and social and cultural patterns in rural and urban places in Kansas. These resources may be cooperatively preserved, interpreted, and celebrated through designation as a National Heritage Area.

This feasibility study was commissioned by the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance (TKHA) with the support of the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area Planning Committee (BKNHA). The purpose of the study is to provide Congress with an analysis to determine if the resources in the study area are suitable and feasible for designation as a National Heritage Area. The major components of this report are a National Heritage Area feasibility study and the associated Environmental Assessment. The study was completed January 30, 2004. The study team included representatives of the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area planning committee and the consultants—Dale E. Nimz, Ph.D., historic preservation consultant, Cathy Ambler, Ph.D., associate historian, and Mike Houts, M.A., mapping technician.

Background of the Study

Investigating Kansas’s contributions to the conflict over slavery and the struggle for freedom that followed the Civil War required a review of the extensive literature on the events that occurred in Kansas Territory and the people that participated in the making of a free state between 1854 and 1865. This time period was selected as the most important to evaluate the national contribution of Kansas and Kansans to the trends leading to

the Civil War and subsequent nation-building. During this period, European American settlers first experienced the challenge of adapting to the relatively treeless landscape and harshly variable climate of the Great Plains. In making a free state, they joined Native Americans and African Americans in the work of recreating a landscape of farms and towns like that of the eastern United States. The study process included the steps of outlining a chronology of events, selecting potential unifying themes, selecting a study area based on the preliminary analysis of history and the concentration of resources, comparing potential management strategies, developing alternative national heritage area boundaries, assessing the national significance, suitability and feasibility of designating the study area as a National Heritage Area, and assessing the potential impacts of alternatives through an environmental assessment.

The BKNHA Planning Committee organized a public involvement strategy to encourage the broadest opportunities for citizen and organizational participation. The Committee identified key contacts in state and local government as well as organizations interested in the state's history, natural and cultural resources protection, tourism, business, and industry. Testimony presented to the Kansas Legislature Joint Committee on Economic Development resulted in a grant for part of the cost of the feasibility study from the Kansas Department of Commerce. In the 2003 Kansas economic revitalization plan, Governor Kathleen Sebelius included the study in the state-wide tourism strategy because the benefits of a National Heritage Area designation will help meet the important goal of rural economic development.

Preparation of the feasibility study has been expedited to coordinate with the Kansas

Sesquicentennial. The Sesquicentennial will be observed in 2011, but activities begin in 2004 with the sesquicentennial of the Kansas-Nebraska Act which created Kansas Territory. The Kansas motto, "Ad Astra Per Aspera" (to the stars through difficulty), is a reference to the seven-year struggle to make Kansas Territory a state.

Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom Study Area and Related History

Beginning in 1854, the conflict in Kansas Territory defined the era of "Bleeding Kansas" in national history. Impassioned abolitionist, Free State, and proslavery settlers fought over the admission of a new state to the Union. Men and women, European, African, and Native American, New Englander, Westerner, and Southerner, abolitionist, free-state, and proslavery settler, all envisioned a different future for Kansas. For more than six years, the fate of Kansas Territory and the nation hung in the balance. Free State settlers prevailed to make Kansas a free state.

The Free State leaders articulated and forcefully defended a lasting ideal of freedom and equality in opposition to a fraudulently elected proslavery legislature. This ideal first was expressed in a proposed Topeka Free State constitution drafted in 1855 and enacted in an election that selected a Free State governor and legislature. From that time until 1858, there were always two governors, competing congressional delegates, two capitals, and two legislatures. The Kansas Conflict turned violent in 1856 with a series of murders, attacks on Lawrence, Osawatimie, and other Free State settlements, and skirmishes between Free State and proslavery forces. Daily newspaper stories and congressional debate about these

events made “Bleeding Kansas” the center of national attention. By making “Bleeding Kansas” a political issue, the newly formed Republican Party almost won the presidency in its first major election campaign. The conflict over whether Kansas Territory would be admitted to the Union as a slave or free state was the beginning of a conflict that culminated in the American Civil War. The Kansas Conflict changed United State history and led to a new understanding of freedom.

Themes

Themes and sub-themes are the organizing framework for promoting the interpretation of related natural and cultural resources. For each sub-theme, the feasibility study has identified important cultural resources that can serve as the basis for interpretive programs. Stories illustrating the theme of “Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom” can be categorized in at least five major sub-themes:

Kansas Territory: Its Geography of Rivers, Trails, and Railroad Development. People of diverse backgrounds followed the rivers and trails into the eastern third of present-day Kansas, the study area for the Bleeding Kansas Heritage Area. Following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, European Americans from both Northern and Southern states battled to occupy Kansas Territory. Free State activity was based in the towns of the Kansas River valley and its tributaries. Kansas was the stage for a nationally important conflict and resolution in which both sides tried to settle the issue of freedom versus slavery by gaining control of this strategic territory. In addition to portraying the political conflict, the selected assets of the heritage area will recreate the effect of the physical environment on agri-

culture, transportation, trade and business, and social and cultural patterns in rural and urban places.

The Kansas Conflict: Bleeding Kansas. The Kansas Conflict dramatized the failure of the political system to resolve the sectional conflict over slavery and the future of the United States as a nation. The controversy over “Bleeding Kansas” contributed to a significant change in the political party system—the emergence of the Republican Party, the most successful third party movement in U.S. history. The Kansas Conflict ensured that slavery would remain the central political issue in the United States until resolved by the Civil War. But even after the Civil War ended in 1865, the struggle for freedom was far from over. “Bleeding Kansas” gave birth to both a political ideal and a political tradition that has inspired the struggle for equality up to the present.

The Underground Railroad in Kansas. The activity of the Underground Railroad in Kansas was significant, but not well documented. After the Free State movement in Kansas gained national attention, runaway slaves or “freedom seekers” began to make their way to Kansas Territory. Resident “conductors” and their supporters established secret networks that passed escaping African American men, women, and children northward over a regional system of trails and then to freedom in the North. Those active in the Underground Railroad in Kansas Territory faced particular dangers because of the conflict between antislavery and proslavery settlers for control of Kansas Territory.

After statehood was achieved in Kansas, the Free State heritage became an ideal grasped by less powerful groups such as women, African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants to legitimize their own enduring

struggle for freedom. At this time, the detailed research and an inventory of cultural assets is not available to fully support the interpretation of two additional sub-themes: African Americans and the Struggle for Freedom, Native Americans and the Struggle for Freedom. African Americans and their allies continued to press for voting rights and equality in Kansas, but that struggle was de-emphasized in the greater process of nation-building. Native Americans resisted the expropriation of their land reserves and many threats to their cultural identity. Interpreting the post-Civil War history of Kansas in terms of these sub-themes is an important area of work to be investigated and implemented in the management plan for the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area.

Affected Environment

The study consultants defined the study area after preliminary investigation of historic and cultural resources associated with the themes determined by the Bleeding Kansas Planning Committee. The study has documented a significant assemblage of resources in the following counties. The Bleeding Kansas heritage study area comprised twenty-three counties in eastern and southeastern Kansas.

Allen	Anderson	Bourbon
Cherokee	Clay	Coffey
Crawford	Douglas	Franklin
Geary	Johnson	Labette
Leavenworth	Linn	Miami
Neosho	Pottawatomie	Riley
Shawnee	Wabaunsee	Wilson
Woodson	Wyandotte	

Management Alternatives

Two primary management alternatives have

been considered: the no action alternative and the designation of a National Heritage Area. The first assumes that there will not be any additional federal action in the study area other than through the use of existing authorities. All current activities associated with the protection of natural and cultural resources would proceed as they do now without an overall framework that could guide such efforts as they relate to the Bleeding Kansas and Enduring Struggle for Freedom theme. The “no action” alternative was unacceptable primarily because it would not result in a cohesive organization of resources through an integrated interpretive program and “no action” would likely result in the further loss of Bleeding Kansas heritage resources.

Designation of the Bleeding Kansas National Heritage Area will result in greater funding and organizational capacity for resource protection and interpretive programming. The BKNHA Planning Committee considered the possibility of management by a currently existing institution or an existing state agency, but chose to pursue management of the heritage area by a specific non-profit corporation, the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance.

RESULTS OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Many essential cultural resources in the study area (as well as others yet to be developed and interpreted) represent the heritage area’s distinctive and unique contribution to American heritage. These assets are worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation and continuing use. The historic and cultural assets in the heritage area retain a high degree of integrity and many sites have exhibits and educational events that interpret the heritage area themes. Many of these

assets along with natural and recreational resources will help to recreate the experience of physical and mental struggle that was necessary because of the challenge of adapting to the treeless landscape and harshly variable climate of the Great Plains and recreating a landscape of farms and towns like that of the eastern United States. Because there is already a foundation of stewardship and appreciation by residents and visitors, planning and programming could be enhanced by the combined efforts of public and private sectors under the broad organization of a Bleeding Kansas Heritage Area.

Based on the information collected and analyzed in this study, the proposed Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area meets all ten criteria to be eligible for designation. A local management entity, the Territorial Kansas Heritage Alliance, has been identified to undertake the purposes and activities of the national heritage area. The heritage area is strongly supported by local, state, and national legislators, has widespread public support, and should be submitted for National Heritage Area designation by the U.S. Congress at the earliest possible date. The “Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom” theme provides a focus for future natural resource protection efforts and recreational opportunities in the feasibility study area. This feasibility study report will be sent to the National Park Service for review. Congressional legislation will be prepared to designate the Bleeding Kansas and the Enduring Struggle for Freedom National Heritage Area. Following Congressional designation, a detailed Management Plan will be prepared, as required for other designated heritage areas.

This study has documented the rich history

of the Kansas Conflict and the consequences of that conflict for the enduring struggle for freedom. For many people, Kansas symbolized the struggle for freedom. For this reason, the history of “Bleeding Kansas” is a nationally distinctive history based on cultural resources that are representative of nationally important events and social movements which have had a significant impact on the formation of our national story.