

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Connecting a Proud Heritage To an Exciting Future

In 1984, the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor (IMCNHC) made history when it became the first heritage corridor in the nation. This was a fitting continuation for the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal, which opened in 1848 to connect the American heartland to New York Harbor and New Orleans. This plan serves as a roadmap for the IMCNHC and conveys an important part of the American story. The plan illustrates how the local coordinating entity will work within the heritage corridor to: tell its stories, recognize and protect its special places, enhance recreational opportunities, promote stewardship of its natural resources, while also promoting tourism and economic development.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal set the stage for Illinois to become the most populous inland American state and Chicago the greatest city of the American heartland. The implementation of this Roadmap For The Future has the potential to impact the lives of the over five million people who live and visit the 830 square mile heritage corridor. As Americans are inundated by new technology, the Roadmap will adapt using the appropriate technology, to connect people and create community within the heritage corridor.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal

At a stroke, the opening of the Illinois & Michigan Canal in 1848 made Chicago and northern Illinois the key crossroads of the American mid-continent. ‘The dream of the canal had animated every’ vision and underlain every plan for Illinois for 200 years before. As that vision was realized, the canal’s commissioners laid out a canal port that would grow into a great metropolis; their fellow citizens patented agricultural and industrial innovations that would make this the richest economic zone the world had ever seen. That Illinois is now the most populous inland American state, and Chicago, the greatest city of the American heartland, is directly traceable to the ninety-six mile canal that linked the Great Lakes to the Illinois and Mississippi rivers.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal has never attracted the recognition it deserves. Though few know today how vital the canal was, past residents of the Corridor knew it a century and a half ago. We cannot know Illinois’ history without understanding how the canal, as a symbol of the continent-straddling ambitions of America, made it possible for a great civilization to arise here.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal stretches ninety-six miles connecting Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River via the Illinois River. When the Illinois & Michigan Canal opened in 1848 it was the final link in an all-water route connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. The canal, designed to be 60 feet wide and 6 feet deep, drops 141.3 feet between Chicago and LaSalle and consists of 15 locks, 4 feeder canals (Calumet, DuPage, Kankakee, and Fox), and 4 aqueducts. Commercial traffic on the canal utilized 9 canal basins, 12 widewaters, sundry backwaters, three lateral canals, and two hydraulic basins. Eleven significant towns developed along the Illinois & Michigan Canal to take advantage of the enhanced transportation, six of them platted by the canal commissioners including: Ottawa, Chicago, LaSalle, Lockport, DuPage/ Channahon, and Morris.

The Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor

Passed by Congress and signed into law by President Reagan in 1984, the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor (IMCNHC) is the first national heritage corridor, becoming a new type of national park for the 21st century. This 830-square-mile region is a hundred mile corridor whose centerpiece is the I&M Canal. The Corridor's historic canal towns, nature preserves, state parks, museums, more than 80 miles of recreational trails, and the I&M canal itself collectively draw more than a million visitors annually.

A Story About a Passageway

The overarching theme of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor is the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway. The Illinois & Michigan Canal was carved through a glacial passageway that has been used by migratory birds, Native Americans, French fur traders, nineteenth-century pioneers, canal traders, and modern shipping industries. Today, the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor continues as a passageway for transportation and recreation. The transportation corridor includes highways Rt. 6 and Rt. 66, interstates I-80 and I-55, railroads, intermodal locations, and the Illinois Waterway and Sanitary and Ship Canal both of which replaced the Illinois & Michigan Canal. The visitor to the Corridor is yet another traveler through this passageway.

The IMCNHC Planning Team

In the National Heritage Areas Act of 2006, Congress reauthorized the IMCNHC and selected the Canal Corridor Association (CCA) to be the local coordinating entity and directed the organization to develop a plan to guide the work in the IMCNHC through 2021.

CCA reached out to potential partners and stakeholders throughout the area to become involved in the decision making process. Planning allows civic leaders, the business community, the non-profit community, and citizens to all have a meaningful role in coming together to create better places to live, work, and visit.

CCA held four rounds of public workshops throughout the IMCNHC between November 2009 and February 2011. Six resource committees were formed to assist in developing the plan and all stakeholders were invited to participate. The committees worked through the winter and spring of 2010 to develop goals and activities for the IMCNHC in the following six areas:

- Boundaries
- Conservation/Natural Resources
- Education/Interpretation
- Heritage Development
- Recreation
- Tourism/Economic Development

Additionally, a steering committee was formed with the purpose of providing direction and/or approval during the creation of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor's Roadmap for the Future.

The IMCNHC ROADMAP

The purpose of this plan is to guide and coordinate all stakeholders of the IMCNHC to effectively utilize local resources along with any federal investment.

This plan is designed to:

- Serve as a framework for the existing heritage work of the stakeholders in the IMCNHC
- Serve as a roadmap for all the stakeholders in the Corridor to work together building on mutual interests
- Focus on adding value to the existing work by identifying work which is better done across jurisdictional boundaries and in partnership
- Identify current needs and gaps in the existing work
- Articulate partners and resources which can be brought together to accomplish the work of the legislation

The IMCNHC Plan Foundation

Early in the planning process, through a series of public meetings, a vision, a mission, guiding principles, and goals were crafted.

Figure 1.1. Guiding Principles

Stewardship:

- We hold our history in high regard and will use it to inform our stewardship decisions.
- We will respect the environment and property, public and private.
- We will respect each community's needs and goals in a way that is consistent with the concept that the Corridor is a region consisting of many communities and places which are geographically, historically and culturally connected by the canal.
- We will consider sustainability as an important criteria in making plans, selecting projects and allocating resources.
- We will communicate to our partners and the public in multiple ways to reach as many as possible, using technology to bring the Corridor to the world.
- We will include all groups, including future generations, in our plans, goals and actions.

History:

- We will appreciate the area's history both before and after the canal was created.
- We will provide education about the canal and the Corridor.
- We will respect our history and culture through honest and authentic portrayals of places, people and events.
- We will use multiple forums and media to spread the word about the Corridor's history to as wide an audience as possible.

Economic Development:

- We will encourage and foster economic development opportunities in the Corridor.
- We will provide places where people can bring their families and friends for recreation and fun.

Vision Statement

The Illinois & Michigan Canal connected the Illinois River to Lake Michigan, bringing people and commerce to northeastern Illinois. The canal and the towns that grew up along it share a legacy. Through interpretation, preservation, and providing educational and recreational experiences, we see the Heritage Corridor creating economic development, recreation, and education opportunities for residents and visitors, making the Corridor more prosperous and a place where people enjoy the benefits created by the canal and take pride in the region's history.

Mission Statement

The mission of the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor is to: protect and preserve the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Corridor; advance and stimulate economic development and activity within the Corridor; create and enhance opportunities for recreation in the Corridor; and interpret and cultivate the history of the Corridor and its significance in the settlement and growth of the region and nation.

Guiding Principles

Twelve principles were agreed to around the topics of stewardship, history, and economic development. See Figure 1.1 for the list of guiding principles.

Goals

Six goals were established towards accomplishing the work of the IMCNHC.

STORIES Goal:

The rich and complex stories of the history and continuing importance of the I&M Canal Corridor will be told through increasingly accurate, compelling and interesting ways to larger audiences.

SPECIAL PLACES Goal:

The Corridor's distinctive sense of place and natural, cultural and historic resources will be recognized, embraced and protected.

RECREATION Goal:

The recreational amenities of the Corridor will be enhanced and expanded to facilitate their enjoyment by more people.

CONSERVATION Goal:

The stewardship of the Corridor's natural resources will be improved. Both the number of stewards and the commitment level and involvement of stewards will be increased.

ECONOMIC IMPACT Goal:

The Corridor's economic growth will be built through an increase in heritage tourism and heritage development. Historical and cultural based venues in the Corridor will be enhanced through increased interpretation, use of new technologies, and increases in visitor services and marketing. Entrepreneurial and family-owned businesses will be supported with increased tourism strengthening our historic downtowns.

SUSTAINABILITY Goal:

The work of the IMCNHC will be sustained after 2021 by continually engaging more people in increasingly intense roles, continuing to strengthen the collective voice of the region, continuing the coordination and celebration of the work, and securing sustainable funding sources.

Partnerships and Working Structure

Successful heritage areas have a strong grassroots base involving local residents, organizations, and non-profits groups in the operations of the heritage area. In addition, a close coalition between a strong grassroots base, local and state governments, and investors coupled with a small investment from Congress and some technical expertise from the National Park Service, creates a unique opportunity for meeting the challenges and needs of the resources and communities of a heritage area.

The plan proposes to establish an alliance of individuals and organizations, called the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor Canal Alliance. All stakeholders are invited to join the Alliance. There are opportunities available to become involved in the projects, programs, and activities of the heritage corridor whether you are a recreation enthusiast, a historian, or you are interested in the economic development of your community. Although members of the Alliance may have diverse objectives or interests they agree to work together towards a common mission.

Alliance members will come together around common goals forming committees and working groups. These committees and working groups will be flexible, able to adapt and change as the needs of the Alliance and the IMCNHC change. During the planning process five

initial resource committees and several working groups were identified to give structure to the Alliance. They are listed below.

Figure 1.2. Alliance Working Groups and Alliance Resource Committees

| Alliance Working Groups | Alliance Committee/ Resource Committees |
|---|--|
| Canal Working Group, Special Places Partners, Special Places Advocates | Resource Protection & Preservation Committee |
| Recreation Partners, Recreation Advocates | Recreation Committee |
| Conservation Partners, Conservation Advocates | Conservation Committee |
| Storytelling Partners, Education Partners | Education/Interpretation Committee |
| Tourism Alliance Working Group, Tourism Partners, Designated Sites & Events | Tourism Committee |

The Alliance through these resource committees and working groups will come together to enlarge and inform the IMCNHC coordinating structure. The coordinating structure is comprised of the Canal Corridor Association Board, a coordinating committee called the Alliance Committee and Alliance staff. Alliance members will populate the Alliance Committee.

As the Roadmap is implemented, the Canal Alliance will work to enable all opportunities within the corridor that meet the mission to become projects. Within the Roadmap, there is a management structure and processes to enable an objective approach to all potential opportunities generated by anyone in the Canal Alliance or interested in participating and aligned with the IMCNHC Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles.

Employing Strategies to Accomplish Goals

All strategies are really about resources. Our five strategies are different ways to maximize the resources of people and money. To accomplish our goals, the following strategies will be employed.

Partnership Strategy:

The Canal Alliance will engage with many partners to complete its work.

Communications Strategy:

The Canal Alliance will communicate effectively with many stakeholders through a variety of ways.

Activities Strategy:

The Canal Alliance will organize programs and activities that meet the identified goals.

Investment Strategy:

The Canal Alliance will raise the local match required by the federal government and strive to leverage additional funds. In addition, long-term, sustainable funding options will be explored and pursued.

Sustainability Strategy:

The Canal Alliance will involve as many people as possible through the above strategies and move them along a continuum of activity and commitment going from minimal interest to being involved and enthusiastic participants.

Potential Activities

Core Activities

Core activities are central to the mission of the IMCNHC and are ongoing. Some core activities were identified through public planning workshops and others meet the administrative requirements of federal funding and are necessary for continued local investment. The Canal Corridor Association (CCA) staff conducts day-to-day coordination of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor operations, actions, activities and business that will include an annual report, annual audits, and quarterly public workshops. The CCA will maintain or coordinate maintenance of the Corridor infrastructure including but not limited to interpretive and wayfinding signage, highway signage, radio transmitters, and other infrastructure created by IMCNHC funds. In addition there will be on-going communication to involve stakeholders and communication and coordination for the IMCNHC Alliance.

Potential Activities for STORIES Goal

The key to the national heritage corridor is telling the story of this nationally important place. We envision accomplishing this goal by working together on activities which: improve the accuracy of the stories, make the stories more compelling and interesting, and find new audiences for the stories.

- Create and manage Certification & Designation Programs for storytelling, education, visitor readiness and programming.

- Develop and manage outdoor interpretation and wayfinding for this outdoor museum.
- Encourage the development of I&M Canal Books.

Potential Activities for SPECIAL PLACES Goal

- Update the Historic Landmarks Nomination for the Corridor.
- Develop strategies towards assisting the owners towards the ongoing maintenance and development of the I&M Canal.
- Support the preservation of the eleven canal towns.

Potential Activities for RECREATION Goal

Recreation on the original canal tow-path trail is a perfect introduction to the canal stories for a large audience of people who are interested in walking, bike riding, or running.

- Encourage amenities for the bicycling market.
- Identify the need for trails to fill the gaps and advocate for them.
- Research the need for bicycle rentals.
- Develop bicycle tours in the Corridor.
- Include trail patrols and trail tenders in the IMCNHC Volunteer program.
- Promote other recreational activities that cause people to visit the canal.

Potential Activities for CONSERVATION Goal

The IMCNHC natural resources attract both residents and visitors, but our objective will be to integrate educational awareness of environmental concerns through recreational exposure in order to develop a vested interest sufficient for volunteers to take stewardship.

- Include conservation stewards in the IMCNHC Volunteer program.
- Develop kids programs for environmental education and stewardship training.

Potential Activities for ECONOMIC IMPACT Goal

- Develop and maintain a marketing plan and program for the Corridor.
- Maintain a training/technical assistance program to strengthen and enhance cultural, historical, natural, recreational and economic resources.

Potential Activities for SUSTAINABILITY Goal

- Develop and maintain a diverse Corridor-wide volunteer program.
- Develop and maintain an internship program.

The Local Investment

The local “1 to 1” match which is required in the IMCNHC legislation (Section 125) will be met and exceeded in five different ways:

- Raise unrestricted donations from individuals, corporations, foundations, and local and regional governments.
- Secure grants to fund a percentage of Alliance projects.
- Record IMCNHC related projects of partners that are already funded and meet the mission of the legislation and can be counted as local match.
- Solicit Alliance partner projects that meet the mission of the legislation with some existing funding and provide IMCNHC funds to complete the projects.
- Provide the promise of federal funds as the “seed monies” to assist in getting relevant projects funded with matches.

Evaluation of our Work

Everyone who steps forward to preserve and interpret relevant sites of this nationally significant Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway story is committed to doing good work. Routine evaluation of our individual and collective efforts not only will provide investors with important feedback, but also documents adjustments that improve what we do, how we do it and how we can enhance good work even further.

The evaluation plan will

- Alter and enhance, on an annual basis, the activities and strategies that the Canal Alliance is undertaking to do a better job.
- Collect the data necessary for a longer-term evaluation of the program by the National Park Service for reporting to the US Congress and other investors.

Based on current evaluation standards, in 2018, three years before the end of the current legislation, the National Park Service will begin an evaluation of the success of the IMCNHC Roadmap for the Future.

Sustainability after 2021

Sustainability of the local coordinating entity is vital for the sustainability of the work of the national heritage corridor. The work of the

Canal Corridor Association (CCA) as the local coordinating entity is necessary if the nationally important story is to remain as the main contribution to the region's uniqueness. Individual organizations, community leaders, site managers, and landowners who chose to preserve and interpret this national treasure operate independently out of necessity and with limited resources for the broader work. Seamless visitor experiences and a regional perspective of the story necessitate coordination by an entity without the encumbrance of competing interests.

To sustain the key activities of the CCA, stable funding sources and an increasing number of stakeholders and partners must be found.

In Conclusion

The creation of this plan involved a diverse local population that included a substantial number of local experts. This inclusive involvement generated a plan designed to give focus and a process to reach the mission identified in the IMCNHC legislation. Its success lies with the commitment of the owners and managers of the resources in the IMCNHC and with the stakeholders who have the passion and energy to make the region a better place to live, work, and visit. The Canal Corridor Association, as the local coordinating entity, and the National Park Service, as the federal agency, will work to add value, create opportunities for successful projects and provide seed money to help enable these local efforts.

Figure 1.3.
Map of IMCNHC with new boundaries. (Next Page)