

Chapter 9

CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVES

Evaluation of the proposed Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area can benefit from a comparison with other alternatives. Three are considered here. First, the option of continuing with no special action is outlined. Second, the National Heritage Area alternative is described. Third, the possibility of taking action via a nongovernmental approach, such as self-designation as a heritage area or creation of a non-federal program, is considered.

ALTERNATIVE 1: CONTINUE EXISTING ACTIVITIES

Numerous programs and activities related to the cultural and natural resources of this southern portion of the Santa Cruz River watershed are already in place. Most, if not all, would continue for the foreseeable future whether or not a National Heritage Area is established.

At the federal level, Tumacácori National Historical Park is the centerpiece cultural resource program, and its land base and interpretive programs are currently being expanded. Saguaro National Park is steward to impressive stands of saguaro cacti and Sonoran Desert habitat. Coronado National Forest provides substantial recreational access to areas where both natural and cultural resources can be appreciated. The National Park Service is also developing local partnerships to establish the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail along a portion of the Santa Cruz River in the study area.

State programs are led by four state parks. The Tubac Presidio State Historic Park provides a strong complement to the Spanish-mission history theme of the National Park Service, with its focus on Spanish and Mexican period military history. Catalina State Park offers a mix of natural and cultural resources, the latter covering both prehistory and the 1850-1900 period during historic times. San Rafael State Park is in relatively early stages of developing interpretation of both ranching and natural resources in the sparsely populated upper Santa Cruz Valley. Patagonia Lake State Park is developing a visitor center to interpret the biological importance of the downstream Sonoita Creek State Natural Area.

Municipalities also have several strong programs that are underway or are being planned. The City of Tucson's Rio Nuevo Project will feature the Tucson Origins Heritage Park that will reconstruct and interpret 4,000 years of Native American history; Spanish and Mexican period mission, military, and civilian history; and the early Territorial period history of the Tucson area, with a focus on the role of the Santa Cruz River. The Pima County program, El Paseo de las Iglesias, will focus on the history and prehistory of the area between the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation and the A-Mountain area in downtown Tucson. Pima County is also developing a major interpretive program related to ranching at Canoa Ranch. At the northern end of the study area, the Town of Marana is developing plans for interpreting the long agricultural history of the Santa Cruz Valley. Oro Valley is working to preserve and conduct an adaptive reuse at the Steam Pump Ranch along the Cañada del Oro drainage.

The private sector is also involved in many activities within the study area. The Nature Conservancy has several preserves, landholdings, and conservation easements – the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve being the largest one that is open to public visitation. It features the natural resources of the Sonoita Creek riparian area, and it contains the remains of an early Spanish mission. The Audubon Society also has several small preserves along the Santa Cruz, and the Empire Ranch Foundation is restoring nineteenth century ranch buildings and developing an interpretive trail through the ranch. Private organizations work in many ways as partners with programs of various government agencies.

Within the study area, numerous individual projects have received funding from a variety of government and private sources. For example, grants have been received from the Arizona Heritage Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and from federal transportation enhancement programs.

All of these major programs and activities will likely continue without creation of a National Heritage Area. Other projects and programs of smaller scale will also likely continue, or will be developed. These activities will probably continue to have a project-specific focus rather than be tied to an integrated, regional program the National Heritage Area would promote. Continuing with the current approach to nature and cultural resource interpretation and promotion is likely to miss opportunities for synergy among the many ongoing activities. New opportunities are also likely to be missed.

ALTERNATIVE 2: CREATE THE SANTA CRUZ VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Creation of a new National Heritage Area would build upon all of the key current programs and activities outlined under Alternative 1. Several key new elements would also be expected.

The creation of a local management entity would serve to coordinate integrated planning on a regional scale. Because a heritage area includes such a diversity of stakeholders, a special-purpose organization (as described in Chapter 6) is viewed as the most effective framework within which to coordinate partnerships and planning among various levels of government and many kinds of private-sector involvement.

Under a new National Heritage Area, the local management entity would have access to technical assistance from the National Park Service. Further, the management entity would allocate funds to achieve the goals identified through the regional planning process. Such funds would provide the basis for building productive new partnerships, especially with the private sector.

The status associated with federal recognition and promotion of the Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area will be an important element in attracting potential tourists. Establishing this as a destination resource for regional-level tourism is a necessary outcome, and one that is greatly facilitated by the federal recognition process.

The cumulative effect of the creation of a new National Heritage Area is that substantially enriched programs for interpreting and experiencing natural and cultural resources will be

developed. The effort invested in the integrated promotion of the National Heritage Area also improves the likelihood of significantly greater economic development being an outcome.

ALTERNATIVE 3: CREATE A PRIVATE-SECTOR, SELF-DESIGNATED HERITAGE AREA

Cape Cod successfully pursued a nonfederal concept similar to what could be accomplished through creation of the Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area. The Cape Cod area had three characteristics or resources that do not appear to be readily available in the Santa Cruz Valley, however. First, there was already a strong sense of local identity within the Cape Cod area that was also broadly known outside the region. Second, an existing organization, Heritage Cape Cod, was already in place and was able to step immediately into a leadership role in implementing the program. Third, there was a strong source of funding through two agencies that have largely underwritten Heritage Cape Cod.

The grassroots nature of, and broad support received by, the present effort to develop a National Heritage Area shows there is potential for success with a nongovernmental approach in the Santa Cruz Valley. Selection of this local option would avoid the need to invest the time required to gain federal recognition. However, the lack of the three essential ingredients identified above for the Cape Cod case will be difficult to overcome.

Existing institutions that have participated in the process of creating a Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area all have missions that are compatible with the National Heritage Area. However, their missions are much more general and extend well beyond the geographic area envisioned by this National Heritage Area proposal. Therefore, a new institution would be needed. Further, there are no apparent sources of local funding that would support such a new organization or the heritage area itself. It is possible that the State of Arizona will develop a program of State Heritage Areas in the future, but that concept is only in the discussion stages. It is unknown if such a state-level program would include funding.

The absence of the status that federal recognition brings is also a hindrance to this local option. Finally, the absence of federal heritage area funding makes the development of cost-sharing partnerships much more difficult.

EVALUATION

Initial stimuli for exploring the National Heritage Area concept included awareness that this region is rich in natural and cultural resources and appreciation that many activities and programs already exist. There was also awareness that there were opportunities to do even more. Therefore, the status quo in this region is full of positives, although there is a significant recognition that much more is possible and a growing consensus that much more should be expected.

The National Heritage Area is a blend of private-public collaboration that invests control at the local level for establishing priorities and allocating federal monies. It benefits from the positive prestige of federal recognition.

A local, private alternative to creating a new National Heritage Area is not impossible. It would lack the prestige and financial support that would come with federal recognition. It would depend on a new local organization that would be challenged at the outset simply to ensure its own existence. Consequently, it seems unlikely that a local, nongovernmental approach would advance common goals more rapidly. In fact, it may be significantly less capable of doing so.

In conclusion, establishing a new National Heritage Area represents the best way to optimize the likelihood for success in creating a regionally integrated approach to nature and cultural tourism. Such regional integration and promotion are essential for achieving significant economic gains for the region.

