



Wabash  
River  
Heritage  
Corridor  
Commission

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**For Immediate Release:** August 11, 1997

For information: Tom Kidd, DNR Division of Outdoor Recreation, 317/232-4070

## **Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission seeks input on the American Heritage Rivers program**

Three meetings will be held in August to seek public input concerning the possible participation of the Wabash River in the American Heritage Rivers program, Nancy Grenard, president of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, announced today.

The American Heritage Rivers program, unveiled by President Clinton in his State of the Union address in February, is a national initiative giving special recognition to river communities for their efforts to restore, protect and vitalize their streams.

"The president will designate only 10 rivers this year to participate in the American Heritage Rivers program. In addition to being a unique honor, the designation could provide communities with the guidance they need to receive federal assistance for important conservation, restoration, economic development and recreation projects," Grenard said.

"The American Heritage Rivers initiative does not create a single new federal rule or regulation. It will, however, focus existing resources on rivers selected to participate in the initiative," said Larry Macklin, director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and a member of the Wabash River commission.

"Meetings are scheduled in Huntington, West Lafayette and Vincennes so Hoosiers all along the 510 miles of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor can attend. The commission hopes people will learn about this national initiative and express their views," Macklin said.

The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission was established in 1991 by the Indiana General Assembly to help communities preserve and improve the river corridor. Members are appointed to the commission by county commissioners from the 19 Wabash River counties.

Meetings are planned for 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. as follows:

- August 18...Huntington College Habecker Dining Commons.
- August 19...West Lafayette City Hall.
- August 21...Vincennes University Learning Resource Center, Room 117.

More information about American Heritage Rivers can be obtained from the program's web site at [www.epa.gov/rivers/](http://www.epa.gov/rivers/).



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The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission was formed when a new section IC 14-6-36 was added to the Indiana Code. House Enrolled Act No. 1382 was a result of the 1991 General Assembly; the applicable Indiana Code was amended by the 1997 General Assembly (HB1251).

VISION -- The vision of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission is to help local communities preserve, enhance, and interpret for educational and inspirational benefit the unique and significant natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor; promote public/private partnerships; create a corridor identify; expand a variety of opportunities and linkages; and encourage a broad range of economic development improving the quality of life for present and future generations.

MISSION -- The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, representing the Wabash River Heritage Corridor, shall protect and enhance the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources and encourage sustainable development of the corridor.

This will be accomplished by stimulating public interest, encouraging the exchange of information, and supporting the establishment of common goals and cooperative actions of people and communities within the Wabash River Heritage Corridor.

CORRIDOR DEFINITION -- As defined by IC 14-6-36, the "Wabash River Heritage Corridor means that strip of land in Indiana abutting the Wabash River, the Little River, and the portage between the Little River and the Maumee River." Corridor counties are the nineteen counties containing any portion of the defined Corridor.

## Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission - Continued

### Goals for WRHCC as Defined by Indiana Citizens in Public Meetings in 1992/93

- To promote the improvement of the natural environment of the corridor.
- To promote the improvement of recreational opportunities in the corridor.
- To increase public awareness of the corridor as a whole.
- To encourage that recreational areas and trails are acquired and developed in the corridor without the use of eminent domain.
- To promote the development of a better environmental ethic in the citizens and communities of the corridor.
- To promote better cooperation between all of the groups and individuals with an interest in the corridor.

### Accomplishments of WRHCC include:

- *Wabash River Heritage Corridor Plan* published (public input meetings held in 1992/93)
- *L'Esprit de Ouabache* Newsletter distributed annually
- Brochure designed
- WRHCC website initial design proposed
- Worked with State Legislature in 1995 on State River designation
- List made of owners of property adjacent to the river to add to Newsletter mailing list
- Inventory of significant sites as proposed by local residents included in Corridor Plan
- Lesson unit designed for 4th graders
- Identification of funding sources developed and shared
- Grants workshop held for WRHCC Commissioners
- Other funding sources identified
- Information about environmental/conservation programs provided to property owners
- Logo and letterhead designed
- Revised grant rating formula to more broadly disperse grant funds
- Meetings held outside Indianapolis in Wabash, Miami, Huntington, Knox, Miami, Cass, and Carroll Counties
- Worked with State Legislature in 1997 to clarify governance issues and membership
- Assisted DNR Grants Staff in the awarding of \$2.123 million in WRHC grant funds for projects totaling \$3.427 million

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In the State of the Union Address in February 1997, President Clinton announced that he had directed his Cabinet to design an initiative to support communities in their efforts to restore and protect America's rivers. The White House subsequently convened an interagency task force to develop what has come to be known as the American Heritage Rivers initiative. The charge of the interagency task force is to integrate the environmental, historic and economic programs and several federal agencies to benefit communities. The agencies designing this initiative include the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Interior, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Army Corps of Engineers and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The American Heritage Rivers program is:

- **COMMUNITY-LED** The American Heritage Rivers Initiative assists broadly supported community-based efforts to revitalize local rivers and their related communities and waterfronts.
- **FLEXIBLE** The American Heritage Rivers Initiative is responsive to the diverse needs of different kinds of communities, from the core of our cities to remote rural areas.
- **COORDINATED** The American Heritage Rivers Initiative integrates state, local, federal and private expertise and resources to achieve community-identified complementary goals including natural resources management, economic development, environmental protection and historic preservation.
- **BROAD** While designated rivers receive focused support, information and services are accessible to all river communities.
- **PARTNERSHIPS** The American Heritage Rivers Initiative encourages investment in river communities, promotes the pooling of resources and actively seeks out others to support river community efforts.
- **ACTION-BASED** The American Heritage Rivers Initiative supports efforts that directly result in improved river health and revitalized local communities.

Clarification to the Federal Register Notice of May 19, 1997

The proposal outlining the American Heritage Rivers initiative first appeared in the Federal Register Notice on May 19, 1997. The following points are intended to clarify issues raised since that time.

- The American Heritage Rivers nomination is a voluntary, community-defined effort.
- The American Heritage Rivers initiative imposes no new federal regulations for individuals or state, tribal and local governments.
- Nominations for designation as an American Heritage River must demonstrate broad support of the local community.
- Foreign governments and their international organizations will not have a role in sponsoring a nomination to be an American Heritage River nor will they have any authority granted to them as a result of an American Heritage Rivers designation.
- Any community which nominates a river for designation and has its river designated, may have this designation terminated at its request at any point in the future.
- A local mechanism will be required that allows members of a community to comment on the nomination of a river or river stretch by their community.

Benefits of Designation

1. **Presidential Proclamation** Communities designated as American Heritage Rivers will receive recognition by proclamation of the President of the United States.
2. **"River Navigator"** Each designated river will be assigned a "River Navigator" to help implement the community's vision and provide a single contact/liason for all federal resources.

3. **Coordinated Delivery of Federal Services** Programs exist in numerous federal agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Army, Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Protection Agency and others to support rivers. An interagency task force, established to oversee the development of the initiative in Washington, DC, will reduce duplication in and of programs, coordinate and leverage streamlined resources, and pay particular attention to designated rivers.

The interagency task force will work with each River Community as it is designated to identify technical and funding needs. First, a team of planning and technical assistance experts will help each designated River Community assess its strategy and implementation plan to identify technical assistance and funding needs. Then, federal agencies will commit field staff and resources to the teams, which will also include non-federal partners, such as state, local, tribal governments and nongovernmental organizations, as well as other partners. Technical assistance, education, funding and high quality aerial photography and maps will help identify and evaluate historic, environmental and economic resources. Planning assistance and community outreach will ensure a well-defined action strategy and a broad base of support. Training in soil and water quality testing will help communities develop a baseline against which to measure progress and environmental monitoring will help communities develop a report card on river conditions and trends. Economic modeling will help communities assess benefits and costs of proposed river projects. Interpretative techniques will identify the unique aspects of the American settlement of the community. The teams will help to implement the "Good Neighbor Policy" (discussed below). Through the establishment of these teams, federal agencies will seek stronger intergovernmental partnerships with state, local and tribal governments to streamline and speed the delivery of services and programs. Individual program services will be simplified and expedited, within existing laws and mandates.

4. **"Good Neighbor Policy"** Federal agencies will commit to a "Good Neighbor Policy" under which they will help ensure that their actions have a positive effect on the natural, historical, economic and cultural resources of American Heritage River communities.

The interagency task force will develop ways to inform communities and federal agencies about American Heritage Rivers goals and objectives to ensure that federal actions are complementary to these goals. The "Good Neighbor Policy" will require the federal agencies to identify ways to inform local groups regarding federal actions and will require agencies to consult with American Heritage River communities early in the planning stages of federal actions and take into account the community's goals and objectives.

5. **Private Sector Opportunities** The Administration will encourage nongovernmental organizations, businesses and other partners to work with state, tribal and local governments to restore, protect, and revitalize American Heritage Rivers that run through their communities.

There are many citizens, nongovernmental organizations and local, state and tribal governments working to restore and revitalize their river communities. The Administration is creating the American Heritage Rivers initiative to help these communities restore and protect their river resources in a way that integrates natural resource protection, economic development, and the preservation of historic and cultural values. This initiative proposes to assist these communities through better use of existing programs and resources and coordinating the delivery of those services in a manner designed by the community, or "bottom-up."

Additional information can be found at: <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/heritage/rivers.html>

**The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission will be holding public meetings to discuss a nomination of the Wabash River as an American Heritage River.**

**August 18 - Huntington College Habecker Dining Commons**

**August 19 - West Lafayette City Hall**

**August 21 - Vincennes University Learning Resource Ctr, Rm 117**

**All meetings will be from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.**