

**The Hudson River Valley Greenway and Beyond:
How a Word Can Change the Way We Think About Our Land**

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Introduction

“Most American places do not feel haunted...they do not play upon the imagination in such a way as to produce near tangible impressions of ages and people long gone.

The Hudson River Valley is a great exception to this American rule. The windows on all its eras are nearly always open, so that despite whatever modern progress its communities may make, it is never difficult for a visitor to conjure the faces and voices of the Valley’s past. This is the river of Franklin Roosevelt, of Frederic Church and Benedict Arnold and ‘Gentleman Johnny’ Burgoyne. Washington Irving owns it still, and Hendrick Hudson forever sails upstream toward its hidden heart.”(Scheller, 1988)

When I was in my early twenties, I found myself at the site of the Great Pyramids and Sphinx in Egypt. There, following a camel ride into the desert, I sat at an outdoor bar with friends sipping a beer, watching the sun go down and the sky turn dark. When the night had come, spotlights came on and a deep voice, in English, began telling the history of the pyramids. This *Son et Lumpter* production was my first awareness that landscapes are not simply views and vistas; our perceptions of them are shaped by history, and that if there is no context for a landscape, the viewer cannot fully understand what he/she is looking at. Why is this important? Because, as the National Park Service likes to say, people will not try to protect resources that they do not know are there.

Today we call these landscapes “Cultural Landscapes”, and it is under their umbrella that we have greenways, greenline parks, and living landscapes, among others. There are probably as many definitions of cultural landscapes as there are landscapes. Here are some:

-- *“Landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from the strata of memory as from layers of rock.”* (Schama, 1995)

-- *A landscape shaped through human intervention.* New York State Department of Transportation:

-- *“A way of seeing landscapes that emphasizes the interaction between human beings and nature over time; also—Any landscape people have created, modified or protected—from historic gardens and urban parks to conservation reserves, from neighborhood streetscapes to working farms and forests.”* The Institute for Landscape Studies, Harvard University

My favorite, however, is not a definition at all but a description from the American Battlefield Protection Program that tells the meaning perfectly:

“Battlefields are historic landscapes. Across farmers’ fields armies clashed and moved on, leaving only blackened earth, hasty burials, scattered bullets and shell fragments, the litter of combat. Residents returning to the site picked up pieces of their lives, rebuilt their burned-out homes and planted the fields anew. Hastily buried bodies were unearthed and interred in local and national cemeteries. Relics were discarded. Life went on.

“Yet the passing event fundamentally altered the relationship of the community to the land. Once obscure places became associated forever with the momentous events of America’s wars. So long as the memory is nourished, people will point and say that is where the battle happened.”(Lowe, 2000)

Background and Literature

Charles E Little, in his 1990 book *Greenways for America*, wrote that “There are a good many experts around the country who seriously doubt that the Hudson River Valley Greenway (HRVG), the most ambitious river-based greenway effort in the nation, can ever be more than a paper project—a greenway by declaration as opposed to organized effort that brings about a palpable change in land use throughout the corridor by physically weaving the parks and historic areas together. (Little, 1975)”

Little, the acknowledged godfather of Greenline Parks, the philosophical cousins of Greenways, was right to be skeptical of an effort to unite 154.8 miles of Hudson River comprised of 12 counties, 591,239 acres of riverfront and 3,967,930 acres of countryside, 100 National Historic Landmarks, 89 Historic District Districts and 697,828 acres of agricultural land (HRVG Study Figures).

Yet 23 years later, the Hudson River Valley Greenway still exists as a program of both the State of New York and the Department of Interior. Its staff is small, its offices modest, and many people who come into contact with it are unaware that it is a federal or state program. Yet its influence has far exceeded its Hudson River boundaries to include Greenway programs in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary.

Little says that that great landscapes carry with them great literature. He sought to prove his own point in a paper he wrote in 1975 for the Congressional Research Service (CRS): *Green-Line Parks: An Approach to Preserving Recreational landscapes in Urban Areas*. The paper was based on the premise that “The days of simply purchasing large areas for public parkland in or near urban areas may well lie behind us, no longer an option in a time of economic uncertainty....” In his paper, Little traced the history of landscape preservation in England’s Lake District, where “In the most elementary of terms, the primary implication is that there is a species of “public rights” in such landscapes that flows from the nature of the landscape itself.” (Little, 1975).

This concept, he wrote, was not new. In 1810, the poet William Wordsworth in 1810 wrote of visitors to the English Lake District

“who, by their visits (often repeated) to the Lakes in the North of England, testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy.” (as quoted by Little, 1975)

It would be decades later before the idea of “national property” took hold in America. When it did, the concept went in two directions: the designation of Yosemite as the nation’s first state park, and the creation of Olmsted’s “Emerald Necklace” around Boston. Each in its own way manifested Wordsworth’s doctrine.

The National Park concept was first espoused by George Caitlin, an artist worried about the effect of expansion on Native American cultures in 1860s:

As described by the Museum of the American West, “The more Caitlin traveled among Plains Indians, the more he became an outspoken advocate for the preservation of their culture. He believed that the Euro-Americans’ policies, alcohol and disease would wipe out the Indians, the buffalo, and the Great Plains as he knew them. To preserve this splendid world, he advocated that the Great Plains be set aside as a “nation’s park.”

More than any other source, this paper was informed by “The People of the Hudson River Valley”. Whether through the direct testimony of the speakers (including Pete Seeger singing his testimony in Beacon) the Hudson River Greenway process was driven by the Valley’s residents. Their thoughts are reflected in the two Greenway reports and this paper.

Next to them is Chuck Little, whose writings and wisdom have greatly influenced my (and countless others) thoughts on landscapes, and whose ability to think beyond current dogma is remarkable. I also have a wealth of Hudson River Greenway/Heritage Area materials, including drafts, reports, studies and letters, many of which are reflected this paper.

Goals and Objectives

This paper will explore the evolution of the Hudson River Greenway from a concept derived and nurtured from literature to a voluntary regional structure called for by the people of the Hudson Valley.

It will discuss the Council’s decision to create two Greenway organizations—the Council as a state agency and a Greenway Conservancy as a New York State Public Benefit Corporation with an attached not-for-profit, and how that affected the Greenway’s implementation.

Its implementation has also helped test the idea voiced by Charles Little that organizations with no power have a greater chance of succeeding than organizations with some limited authority, especially in states where Home Rule is part of a community’s structure.

The presentation will trace the Hudson River Greenway’s beginnings from three points of origin: the New York State Legislature and its State Urban Cultural Park legislation; the environmental community, where Scenic Hudson helped lead a series of meetings aimed at developing a regional environmental effort, and the philanthropic efforts of Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. to create a program of cultural tourism in the Hudson Valley that ultimately helped tie the disparate efforts together to present a Greenway agenda to then Gov. Mario Cuomo.

Finally, the presentation will discuss the implementation of the Greenway, its relationship to the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, its influence on Central European Greenways, and its successes and failures in working with what the author considers to be potentially the three most problematic constituencies in the Hudson Valley—Home Rule, tourism and agriculture. This will include a discussion of the Greenway Planning Compact, a legislative package of monetary assistance and programmatic carrots designed to entice communities into a regional planning process.

It poses these broad questions:

- Was Chuck Little right about the Hudson River Greenway? Can it only exist on paper?
- Is Chuck Little also right about his theory that organizations that have no power tend to be more successful than those that do?
- Can an effort as large and complex as the Greenway be fueled only by public hearings?
- Should the term “Greenway” be defined in projects such as the Hudson River Greenway?
- Can Greenways be successful in “Home Rule” states?

Methods

The primary methodology has been the review of documents, drafts, studies and other materials as they affected the development of the Greenway. In turn, those documents would elicit memories of the hundreds of meetings, hearings and conversations. I also talked with Klara Sauer, formerly of Scenic Hudson, whose reflections of the HRVG in its infancy and before, were especially compelling. Chuck Little’s article for the Congressional Research Service remains something that I review from time to time.

Results

In a time of tight budgets and government disfavor, the Greenway still exists. It has actually grown since it started, adding Saratoga and Washington counties to its membership. These initially were left out by the late US Rep. Gerald Solomon, who believed the Greenway was too governmental for his constituents.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the mid-1980s, Sleepy Hollow Restorations, Inc.(today Historic Hudson Valley ,Inc.(HHV) undertook a study of the Hudson Valley to demonstrate whether a regional cultural tourism effort could help preserve and enhance the Valley’s historic and cultural resources. Getting a positive response, within months Sleepy Hollow had resurrected the Hudson River Valley Association (HRVA), a sort of regional chamber of commerce stressing the economic possibilities of tourism, both cultural and otherwise.

At the same time, Scenic Hudson, under Executive Director Klara Sauer, had begun meeting with the Valley’s environmental community to discuss a regional approach to preserving the Valley’s resources. Klara would send minutes of her Annandale meetings to other interested parties most in the future of the Valley, chief among them Laurance S. Rockefeller and his

Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., foundation (JHPI). JHPI, under the guidance of Henry L. Diamond, a board member and former Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, undertook the task of bringing many of the interested parties together to write booklet called *A Greenway For The Hudson River: A New Strategy for Preserving An American Treasure*, and sent it to Governor Cuomo.

As Klara remembers:

“ You may recall, initially there were five of us who'd meet about every other month for over 2 years from 1986 – 1988 brainstorming about creating a regionally mechanism for igniting public imagination and support for protecting what's unique and precious in the H.V.

Ultimately we came up with the word Greenway that was being used in other areas of the country, especially by Patrick Noonan, President of the Conservation Fund.

In 1988 I hired Barry Didato who went around the Valley and made over 200 slide presentations; we also published a wonderful little booklet that [partially funded by National Geographic] gave examples of small greenways already underway in various places of the Hudson Valley and that were being created by local grassroots orgs. We also got New York State Council On The Arts to underwrite a brochure that was mailed to 8,000 interested or potentially interested people.

Barry and I lined up over 150 organizations to create the Greenway Coalition, which ultimately included IBM, Central Hudson, and several banks and businesses .In 1988 Marist Institute of Public Opinion conducted a poll the findings of which were released between Christmas and New Year's which demonstrated overwhelming public support for the Greenway. Everyone had a different idea of what it meant, and everybody LOVED the idea. This helped enormously when it came to lobbying the legislature and Cuomo, as did the Rockefeller report that was also released in the same time frame. Folks got really excited. This led to the Study Bill and you know the rest.”

I worked day and night on this initiative for nearly 6 years; this way when everything was done manually - no computers, no e-mail, everything was hugely expensive and time consuming. But, it was fun.”

The strategy worked, as Cuomo put the Greenway idea into his State of the State message on January 6, 1988. On August 16, 1988, Gov. Cuomo signed into law a bill creating the Hudson River Valley Greenway Council .Importantly, the legislation was introduced and championed by then-Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey, Chair of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, and who, in 1996 as a congressman, was to lead the effort to designate the Hudson River Valley as a National Heritage Area

In New York State it was a good time for a Greenway. The Environmental Quality Bond Act of 1986 had passed, making money available for purchase of lands, rehabilitation of historic structures, and upgrading of parks, marinas and public access areas along waterways.

In the late 1970s, New York State had passed a conservation easement law, allowing non-profit environmental organizations to purchase and receive easements, even if they were “in gross and in perpetuity”. New York State’s Urban Cultural Park Law designates certain urban areas as living landscapes and allocates monies for visitor centers and other amenities.

In a second addition of the report, published in 1989 by HHV, Rockefeller set the stage for an approach to creating a real greenway out of the legislation:

“The long tradition of American citizen action applies particularly to the Hudson. Much of the land now preserved for posterity was protected by private initiatives. The needs are different now, but there is still great power in citizens joining with their government to act. That is what the report is about. It is time to create a Hudson River Valley Greenway.”

It also helped that the 1987 President’s Commission on American’s Outdoors had called for a “prairie fire” of support for the creation of greenways across the United States.”

➤ **The Greenway Comes Alive (But Is Still Not Defined)**

The first formal meeting of the Hudson River Valley Greenway study council was held March 7, 1989 in the Senate Conference Room of the New York State Capitol. One of the most important items to arise from the meeting was the decision to include all of the counties along the Hudson River from Battery Park in New York City to the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, or, as the Greenway later discovered, from Battery Park in New York City to Battery Park in Waterford. This was important, as the definition of the “Hudson Valley” was different from agency to agency, and usually did not include Rensselaer or Albany counties. The Greenway added those two and parts of Saratoga as well for both political (Albany as state capital) and geographic reasons.

At that meeting, the Council also made a commitment to hold extensive public hearings as part of the Greenway process. Also discussed, but not recorded in the minutes, were proposals to create more of a regulatory process, including a moratorium on development along the river. This was not seen as a viable alternative, and was never seriously discussed again.

The Greenway study process that followed was designed to be “totally transparent and relentlessly positive”. While some background studies were prepared, the Hudson River Greenway’s engine was powered on the fuel of public comment at its hearings—over 17—up and down the river over a two year period.

It was during the hearing process that we discovered the inherent power of the word “greenway”. Our enabling legislation did not give a definition for the word. Other definitions were sited, but during the hearing process each speaker carried with them their own internal definition. The Council came to realize that defining Greenway would limit it. Undefined, it could accommodate many varying ideas. Thus the final legislation does not define “Greenway”.

The testimony delivered was primarily the wish list of a population that yearned to be able to get to the river; to have trails and bikeways running along it; to maintain the rural character of what we termed our “countryside” area, and to help prevent the next “big thing” that could ruin the character of the Valley.

That one decision was to serve the Greenway well. When the Greenway study began, the Greenway shared office space with the Commission on the Adirondacks in the 21st Century, headed by George Davis and chaired by the late Peter Berle. (The Greenway staff watched in awe as George Davis received word that he had received a McArthur Foundation “genius grant” for his previous work in the Adirondacks).

The Adirondack project was very much oriented toward studies and less so by public hearings. That led to inevitable comparisons with the Greenway’s public hearing approach, prompting the Capital District Business Review on May 14, 1990, to note that “...the Greenway Council, while no less vigilant in its goal of protecting the land in the river valley, took a different tack....That one difference, involving the affected municipalities rather than holding them at arm’s length—bodes well for the Greenway.”

And the hearing path worked at both the micro and macro levels. The Greenway process made friends. The Greenway was supported by nearly every newspaper in the Greenway area. Potential adversaries--sportsmen, farmers—were generally won over by the openness of the process. One newspaper reporter, suspicious of the Rockefeller origins of the Greenway, was told he was welcome to come in and peruse our records rather than go through a freedom of information act process. Because we were pretty small as a state entity we were able to do things like that. It made us friends. At a micro level, the testimony gave us our direction. Our decision to call for a “planning compact” among Greenway communities, for example, came directly from testimony in Troy from John Buono, then the Rensselaer County Executive:

“I view the Greenway as an opportunity to develop a treaty among all of the governments, councils, private landowners and others who have a real or potential impact on the Hudson River Valley” (Troy, June 16, 1989). That became the basis for the Greenway planning compact called for in the resulting Greenway legislation.

➤ **The Greenway Legislation**

The final Greenway report called for the creation of a Hudson River Greenway Communities Council, a state agency that would primarily be the regional planning entity, and a Greenway Heritage Conservancy to develop Hudson River Greenway water, hiking and biking trails, and to work with the region on a regional tourism strategy.

Two organizations were recommended after Greenway staff visited California, where a Coastal Conservancy worked with trails and water access, and a Coastal Commission dealt primarily with planning and regulatory issues.

Given the eventual size of the Greenway budget (always around \$1 million), two organizations may have been unwarranted. But because the Council was a state agency and the Conservancy a public benefit corporation with a non-profit attached, the Greenway had (and has) an enormous amount of flexibility.

The essence of the legislation was a two-step process where communities could voluntarily agree to use Greenway criteria and apply for assistance and grants, and the grant of additional incentives to encourage communities in the Greenway to adopt more extensive planning programs that took into account five Greenway Criteria: Natural and cultural resource

protection, regional planning, economic development, public access, and heritage and environmental education. For communities that choose to participate, a variety of financial and procedural benefits are available.

The Greenway tested this new legislation by choosing “model communities” in each Greenway county. In Newburgh-Beacon, the Greenway established a joint, cross river, model project and connected the two riverfront communities by a “Trail of Two Cities.”

Currently, 261 of the 324 communities within the Hudson River Valley Greenway Area have passed resolutions in support of designation as Greenway Communities, a good indication that the Greenway’s light touch continues to work.

The first true Greenway compact plan was done by Dutchess County. It is explained at the Greenway’s web site:

A Model Greenway Compact: Dutchess County’s Greenway Connections. Dutchess County developed the first model compact plan in 2000 that serves as the benchmark for future compact planning. Dutchess County’s Compact, *Greenway Connections*, has translated into numerous intermunicipal partnerships and projects, and has served as a guide for the coordination of state, county and local government priorities.

Twenty-nine of the 30 communities in Dutchess have adopted the Compact and more than half have undertaken revisions to their comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to implement it. At the same time, the County has appropriated \$5 million and committed an additional \$2 million to its open space and Farmland Protection program. Projects completed and pending will protect 2,465 acres of farmland through PDR and 556 acres of public open space through fee simple acquisition.

The initial success of these county programs have led municipalities in Dutchess to appropriate more than \$9.7 million in matching local funds for open space and farmland protection.

The Dutchess County Greenway plan, spearheaded by then Commissioner Roger P. Akeley and John Clark, now the Planning Commissioner, defined Greenways as “connections between people and places, both cooperative agreements among neighboring communities, and paths where the natural and human landscapes coincide.”

It was in Dutchess County that one of the key “carrots” was tested for the first time. The Town of Milan was sued by a gravel pit operator because it had put restrictions in new legislation adopted by the Town Board. The New York Attorney General, as per the legislation, went to court for the town and was successful. That provision was another direct outgrowth of the public hearing process, as several town officials testified that they were afraid of getting sued if they put Greenway criteria in their plans. Other areas with Compact Plans Now include Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange and Ulster Counties. More complete information on today’s Greenway may be found at <http://www.hudsongreenway.ny.gov/home.aspx>

A word about Home Rule. ...At first the Greenway was prepared to view Home Rule as an adversary, something to be fought. We came to realize, however, that one of the biggest

impediments to good planning was money, and that \$30,000, plus staff planning assistance, changed our relationships with communities for the better. Municipal leaders wanted to plan well, but they couldn't afford to.

The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area: “The Landscape that Defined America”

America's environmental movement began in the Hudson Valley—twice. The artists of the Hudson River School helped to create America's first environmental ethic in the early 1800s. Thomas Cole, Frederic Church and others were the first to show Europeans -- and Americans -- an American landscape of beauty, not the dark forested lands that came with the Puritan vision of America. The importance of their work went beyond the landscapes they painted:

The rise of a native school of landscape painting in New York in the middle decades of the nineteenth century must surely be reckoned as one of the most important developments to have taken place in the still short cultural history of the United States. Not only did the creation of a distinctive style of landscape painting hold enormous significance as a manifestation of increasing maturity in the field of art, it was a palpable embodiment of a host of ideas either deeply held or deeply pondered by the American people at the time. Major human concerns—relating to God, nature and morality, as well as to the nation's mission and the future, the management of its resources, and the achievement of social stability and happiness—all found their way into works of art. (Roque, 1987)

Schama's “strata of memory” runs deep in the Hudson Valley, a fact that Congress legislatively recognized in creating the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. It is not just the Hudson River School that gives the Valley its sense of history and place. Besides Cole and the Hudson River School, Congress identified the Knickerbocker writers, the Revolutionary War, the iron, textile and collar and cuff industries, the women's labor and education movements, the Dutch and Huguenot settlements of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the patterns of settlement themselves throughout the Valley.

The Knickerbocker School, our the first American literary movement, coincided with the Hudson River School and illustrates how the layers of history and memory overlap different parts of our heritage. Washington Irving is considered by many to be the first American man of letters and its first short story writer; James Fenimore Cooper wrote the first novel of the Revolutionary War; Clement Moore (or Henry Livingston) wrote “The Night Before Christmas; William Cullen Bryant and Lydia Child were among America's first abolitionists.¹

Again in the 1960s, the Hudson River Valley helped create modern environmental law when the Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference—now Scenic Hudson and celebrating its 50th

anniversary-- was formed to protect Storm King Mountain from the hydroelectric pumped-storage facility proposed there by Con Edison. The project was ultimately withdrawn after a 17 year legal battle which culminated in the historic Hudson River Settlement Agreement. The litigation spawned by that fight ultimately led Congress to pass the National Environmental Policy Act,(NEPA) the cornerstone of all subsequent federal environmental law). That statute led directly to the “little NEPA’s of the states, such as the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act Equally important, the Storm King case established the rights of citizen groups to take part in legal actions concerning the environment.

Nearly 40 years after *Storm King*, the Hudson River Valley stands as one of the most “designated” areas in the United States. The National Park Service calls it “the landscape that defined America.”² In describing the valley the Park Service wrote: “The outstanding scenic quality of the Hudson River Valley inspired the works of early American writers, artists and designers, contributed to an appreciation of the natural environment, fostered early environmental activism, and is reflected in existing historic properties.”

It is also wonderfully ironic that Wordsworth’s belief in the expression of public rights in private lands should gain legal approval in a case involving the Hudson Valley.

Under the heritage area legislation, the Greenway Council and Conservancy were designated Management Entities of The Heritage Area. There were two aspects that made Hudson Valley different:

--The congressional designation was made before, not after a Natural Resource Study was prepared. Generally it is the other way around, as the resource report justifies the designation. The timing was right, however, for Congressman Hinchey to get a designation, however, and so he did.

--The HRVNHA actually has some modest teeth in it:

Sec. 908(b). Duties of Federal Entities.--Any Federal entity conducting or supporting activities directly affecting the Heritage Area, and any unit of government acting pursuant to a grant of Federal funds or a federal permit or agreement conducting or supporting such activities, shall to the maximum extent practicable--

1. consult with the Secretary and the management entities with respect to such activities.

2. cooperate with the Secretary and the management entities in carrying out their duties under this title and coordinate such activities with the carrying out of such duties; and

3. conduct or support such activities in a manner consistent with the management plan unless the Federal entity, after consultation with the management entities, determines there is no practicable alternative (emphasis added).

(National Park Service, 1998)

➤ **Awash in Heritage Areas**

If you live in Waterford, New York, you may be at the epicenter of the National Heritage Area world. That is because you could paddle from Waterford to New York City; from Waterford to Canada, and from Waterford to Niagara Falls, and never leave a National Heritage Area (some portage required).

This wealth of history and culture includes the HRVNHA, the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership, and the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, representing some of the richest cultural fabric of any such area in the nation. Here is a brief description of each:

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. Visitors to the Erie Canal are often surprised that the Canal is a subsidiary of the New York State Thruway. And is in the center of a statewide system of water, walking and biking trails. The Canalway is run by the New York State Canal Corporation, a subsidiary of the NYS Thruway Authority. It includes 524 miles of Canal along the Erie, Cayuga-Seneca, Oswego and Champlain Canals; 4,834 square miles, and 2.7 million people in 23 counties. What makes the Erie Canal so interesting, however, (aside from the mule Sal, which is as much of a brand as you could wish for) is the fact that the Commission has established a Erie Canalway Heritage Fund, and not-for-profit whose purpose is to raise funds for canal projects and programs in the face of dwindling federal funds. As one Board Member said at a recent meeting: “We have to find our Laurance Rockefeller”.

The Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership (CVNHP) The national heritage area includes the interconnected waterways of Lake Champlain, Lake George, the Champlain Canal and portions of the Upper Hudson River in Vermont and New York.

Congress authorized **The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area** in 2008. In its enabling legislation, Congress spells out the purposes of the heritage area, the requirements of the management plan, the roles and responsibilities of the commission and the local coordinating entity, and other regulations concerning funding, property rights, and assistance through other federal agencies.

The public has supported the establishment of a national heritage area since 2000, when local leaders met with National Park Service officials to discuss the concept. This interest is related to a number of planning and heritage initiatives, including the Urban Design Project of the University of Buffalo, the Bi-national Niagara Tourism Alliance, and the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative; and efforts to redevelop and promote Niagara Falls by the City of Niagara Falls, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, USA Niagara, and the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation.

➤ **Greenways Go Abroad to Help with the “Velocity of Change”**

A remarkable lesson learned by the Hudson River Greenway people was how easily the Greenway traveled across local, state, federal and international boundaries. After reading the materials below on the Greenway’s international influence, it is hard not to come to the

conclusion that our European partners, particularly the Eastern European countries, have, in some cases, gone far beyond the efforts of their American friends.

We also recognized a profound sense of history among the eastern Europeans. One Czech mayor told us of a fire 500 years ago that killed many in his village. By the end of his description he had tears in his eyes. Greenways can do that.

Who can resist, for example, the Iron Curtain Bikeway?

Bill Moody, formerly of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, likes to call the results of the fall of the Iron Curtain the “velocity of change” that was going to overtake Eastern Europe without careful planning.

If the communities of the Hudson River Valley were built upon the concept of Home Rule, the communities of Central Europe, after the fall of communism in 1989, were built upon no concepts at all. The fall of communism in 1989 left, literally, a blank slate upon which to build a program to preserve the lands that had been hidden to the world by communism for 40 years.

A report in 2000 by the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, a foundation-supported initiative of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for environment and civil society in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania, described the situation this way:

With the collapse of communism, the situation for citizens groups and environmental conservation changed rapidly. The environment was a major issue in the first elections in 1989 and 1990. New civic groups mushroomed throughout the region. However, the concept of a private, voluntary, nongovernmental sector working on social problems was largely alien to the region. The organizations had limited experience in proposing constructive alternatives to government policies and practices. There was no adequate legal framework sanctioning the nonprofit sector, no existing infrastructure, few trained leaders, no experience with Western-style fiscal and management practices and no funding for such organizations. There was, moreover, a severe legacy of distrust and totalitarian conditioning to overcome. Four decades of centralized decision-making had undermined individual creativity and initiative.

What was left was a landscape that in many ways was environmentally devastated in terms of air and water pollution, but also one that was remarkably intact in terms of history and culture, and a fierce love on the part of its citizens for the history and beauty of the countryside.

The Czech Republic. Into this background stepped the Hudson River Valley Greenway, encouraged by a Czech-born resident of the Valley, Lubomir Chmelar and his wife, Tíree. Representatives of the Hudson Greenway made several trips to the Czech Republic, one in which nearly two dozen valley representatives spent a week touring Czech towns and villages and explaining the American Greenway process to the Czechs.

The Hudson River Valley Greenway was asked to help design a strategy that would enable the development of cultural tourism and at the same time preserve the unique cultural and natural heritage of what was then Czechoslovakia. Through a proclamation signed by then Gov. Mario Cuomo, with financial assistance from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Hudson and Czech Greenways became partners.

Whereas the people of the Czech Republic have emerged from the darkness of communism to the sunlight of democracy, and whereas, the beauty, history, culture and natural resources of the Czech Republic are now available to the world community....whereas, there would be no greater demonstration of the power of greenways to bring people, ideas and nations together than the joining of our two greenways, Now therefore I, Mario M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York, proclaim that the Hudson River Greenway and the Greenway of the Czech Republic shall be joined together in spirit to become the Czech-Hudson Greenway.” (Cuomo, May 1993)

That twinning took place in the Greenway offices on top of the Empire State Plaza. Czech and American miniature flags were in front of the participants. The Czech President, Vaclav Havel, had already signed a Czech version which we never saw. The Hudson River Greenway visits to the Czech Republic and Slovakia resulted in the untranslated use of the word “Greenway” to describe projects, rather than its native translation of “Zelene Stezky”.

The Czech Greenway adopted an intensive campaign to meet with local elected officials, the tourism industry and the central government. These efforts have resulted in among other things, a Prague-Vienna Greenway Trail, a Moravian Wine Trail and a leading role in the development of Greenways throughout Europe.

Today, Czech Greenways, part of the EPCE in the Czech Republic, describes its efforts this way:

Development of the Prague-Vienna route through the Czech Greenways is part of a broader purpose: to create a model for sustainable regional development, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, and promotion of local and regional identity.

The Amber Trail Greenway. The Amber Trail Greenway begins in Krakow, Poland, crosses Slovakia and ends in Budapest, Hungary. It is based upon the experience of the Czech Greenways, but in many ways is more complex because it deals with three different countries. The name, Amber Trail, derives from the ancient Amber Trail that merchants in the region used to exchange goods and ideas. Here is how the coordinators of the program describe it:

The Amber Trail Greenway resonates with the numerous roles played by trade routes in earlier times -- economic, communication, religious, military, diplomacy, cultural exchange

and social interaction. Trade relations were always accompanied by exchange of information for building local understanding about the wider world in terms of social, intellectual, religious, cultural and economic issues. By building strong local partners committed to sustainable development, the Amber Trail Greenways seeks to create a rich resource of practical action and good practice at the level of a micro-region. “Amber” initiatives are focal points for local economic development rooted in political awareness and protection of the history, culture, tradition and nature of the place. The challenge now is to make the linked local projects of the Amber Trail attractive to visitors and connect them to other local initiated heritage trails and regions in other parts of the world.

The report continues:

*From Cracow to Budapest and back, a renewed spirit of cooperation along this historic corridor empowers people and communities to generate sustainable economic development while protecting, restoring and preserving traditional cultural and natural values and landscapes. The ATG provides the framework for local regional and cross-border cooperation expanding upon a historical context while building bridges to the future.
(Amber Trail Greenway Report, 2001)*

One such bridge was being built one evening two years ago in a small Slovakian village with a project funded through the Amber Trail Greenway program. It was called the “listening project” and it taught elected officials how to listen to what their constituencies were saying.

It is worth repeating that this is from an area that 24 years ago, had absolutely no framework at all for governance, let alone regional planning.

Acknowledgements

Reviewing the materials I remembered how efforts like the Greenway require countless meetings, mostly at night, along a 150-mile corridor. It was not unusual for staff to leave the office at 4, be in Westchester County at 6 or so, and be back home by midnight. Happily, the HRVG Council had enormously dedicated staff.

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Special note: The original members of the Hudson River Valley Greenway Council were Barnabas McHenry, Chair; Anna Buchholz, supervisor of the Town of Poughkeepsie; Joan Davidson, President of the J.M. Kaplan Fund; John C. Egan, Commissioner, New York State Office of General Services; Constantine Sidamon-Eristof, attorney; Richard Jenrette, Chair of the Equitable; Thomas C. Jorling, Commissioner, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; Orin Lehman, Commissioner, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; NYS Senator Franz Leichter (D-NYC); Francis Murray, Deputy Secretary to the Governor for Energy and the Environment; Klara Sauer, Executive Director, Scenic Hudson; Richard Schwartz, businessman; Gail Shaffer, NY Secretary of State; Vincent Tese Commissioner, NY Department of Economic Development, and Franklin White ,Commissioner, NYS Department of Transportation.

