

Linking Up the Landscape: Interpretive Plan and Visitor Readiness Assessment for the Musconetcong Watershed Kick-Off Meeting Minutes

Meeting Information:

July 27, 2022, 1:00pm to 4:00pm
Asbury Mill, Musconetcong Watershed Association

Attendees:

MWA: Tom Dallessio, Tomas Gonzalez, Alan Hunt, Ray Merrell
MRMC: Pam Bailey (Hampton Borough), Charlie Fineran (Allamuchy Township)
Hunterdon County Historical Society: Janice Armstrong
Lake Hopatcong Foundation: Kyle Richter
Warren County Department of Planning: Al Krouse, Ryan Conklin
Washington Township Land Trust: Kim Kaiser
Hunter Research: Rachel Craft, Patrick Harshbarger, Jim Lee
History in the Making: Darcy Hartman

Meeting Summary:

1. Introductions – Alan Hunt gave a brief overview of the MWA-sponsored project and its funding sources, which are the New Jersey Historic Trust and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Hunter Research with sub-consultant Darcy Hartman are the consultants. Patrick Harshbarger from Hunter Research is the project manager. The goal of the project is to be able to show people what to see & do in the Musconetcong Watershed; inform about its importance; and inspire conservation action (e.g. stewardship, volunteering, participating in local councils, etc.). The effort is inclusive of historic sites, recreational access areas of all types, and sites with environmental and cultural significance.
2. Interpretive Projects Overview and Status
 - a. GIS Database, NPS-style Map and StoryMap
 - i. Hunter Research displayed the most recent map that has compiled select information from a GIS database into an NPS-style map for the unigrid brochure (see below).
 - ii. Hunter Research detailed how the data in the GIS database will be incorporated into an online StoryMap and how this data can be filtered/layered per the user's needs
 - b. Unigrid Brochure – Musconetcong Wild & Scenic River
 - i. Hunter Research displayed a sample NPS unigrid brochure to show how narrative and photographs will be integrated into an informative handout for visitors
 - ii. Unifying themes covered in the brochure will also be incorporated into the interpretive plan
 1. On the Water
 2. On the Land

3. A Heritage Deep and Strong
 4. Working in Partnership
- iii. Visitor Readiness Study and Interpretive Plan (see below)
- iv. Asbury Gristmill Exhibit
 1. Hunter Research briefly described how the Asbury Gristmill will house an exhibit, a project to be completed at a later date
 2. The MWA plans to use the gristmill as a visitors' center for the watershed and office space
3. Interpretive Planning – Presentation (see presentation handout)
 - a. Methods mentioned by participants: use of QR codes to link signage to online content, oral histories of people who worked what land and mills, a “kids trail” audio podcast or scavenger hunt, scenic byway waysides / interpretive signage installation, access point / wayfinding signage, common identity / branding, linkage with Junior Ranger programming and content.

(Break – brief tours of the gristmill)

4. Review the List of Sites for Visitor Readiness Study – Are We Going to the Right Sites/?
 - a. Additional sites suggested included Bread Lock Park, Rutherford Hall and the centers at Lake Hopatcong (visitor center at State Park, Canal Museum, Train Station), Penwell
 - b. Sites participants noted as being underutilized and lacking good interpretation were Point Mountain Reservation and Saxton Falls
 - c. Participants noted interpretive efforts at Hampton Borough Park with the installation of signage about Lenape settlements
 - d. Participants also noted ongoing efforts to list the Musconetcong Valley Church and Cemetery on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places
 - e. Participants noted several regionally and nationally linked trails that pass through the watershed that can be focuses of interpretation
 - f. Participants noted the need to include the watershed's staffed sites: Lebanon Township Museum, Waterloo Village, and resources at Lake Hopatcong State Park including the small visitor center and canal museum
 - g. Look for synergies with: Warren Heritage Scenic Byway which parallels the Musconetcong; existing Blue Sign (HMDB.org)
 - h. Consider interpretation of kilns, which are omnipresent but often overlooked.
5. Sample Visitor Readiness Form – Are We Asking the Right Questions?
 - a. Participants received copies of sample visitor readiness forms during the presentation and were encouraged to offer feedback both during and after the meeting
6. Asbury Gristmill – Hub for Exploring the Musconetcong
 - a. See above for preliminary discussions about the future use of the mill

- b. MWA noted a desire to staff the mill on a regular basis following exhibit development
7. Wrap Up and General Discussion
- a. In addition to the sites participants recommended (see above), they also suggested the interpretation of resource groups like spring house, furnace and lime kiln sites
 - b. Farming/living off the land was suggested as an additional interpretive theme
 - c. Some discussion focused on the Warren Scenic Byway, the administrators of which are currently exploring opportunities to fund wayfinding, interpretive kiosks, audio guided tours, etc. for travelers to navigate the byway
 - d. Participants suggested collecting inventories of already installed signage and markers (likely available by municipality or county)
 - e. Participants discussed interpreting historic districts throughout the watershed in meaningful ways (i.e., markers/signage, audio tours, etc.)
 - f. More in-depth discussions about partnerships (financial, advertising/branding, staffing, etc.), branding consistency, and partner capacities, strengths, and limitations should be a focus of conversations throughout the development of the interpretive plan