



## Section 5 Interpretation

The HSH offers visitors an amazing opportunity to travel through a largely undeveloped expanse of the Monongahela National Forest, to witness a forest in recovery, to ride beside the Cranberry Wilderness, to view wildlife, and to have unparalleled vistas of the surrounding mountains and valleys. Interpreting the natural, cultural, historic, and recreational qualities along the Highway is important to helping visitors understand and appreciate the resources.

In the 30 years since the completion of the Highway, numerous interpretive opportunities have been created based on its rich and abundant resources. These interpretive opportunities have been completed as ideas arise and funding is available. The Monongahela and its stakeholders recognize that there is a lot of potential for additional interpretive opportunities along the Highway. The intent of this section is to provide an overview of existing interpretive opportunities, identify a comprehensive theme, and highlight future opportunities for expanding interpretation using a variety of media.

### Existing Information & Interpretive Opportunities

#### *Overlooks*

Three of the four developed overlooks have informational signs about the landscape around them. Information focuses on natural and historic resources, as well as identifying geographic features. The design and content of the signs were implemented from Wayside Exhibit Plan for the Highland Scenic Highway completed in 1993 (Gross & Zimmerman 1993).

#### *Signs & Kiosks*

Kiosks are located at major junctions along the HSH. Information available at kiosks includes outdoor etiquette, maps, and area information. Signs are located at almost all trailheads, and kiosks are located at Cranberry Wilderness trailheads. At a minimum trailhead signs include detailed and overview maps and emergency information.



**Figure 1 Three Panel Kiosk at the North End of WV 150**



### *Trails*

There are numerous interpretive trails located along the HSH. Trail planning, development and interpretation are completed as funding allows, primarily on an individual basis. The signs along Black Mountain Fire Trail were conceived as part of a Wayside Exhibit Plan for the Highland Scenic Highway completed in 1993 (Gross & Zimmerman 1993). Interpretive trails along the HSH include:

- Black Mountain Fire Trail
- Honeycomb Rocks Trail
- Mill Point Prison Site
- Tea Creek Interpretive Trail
- Cranberry Glades Boardwalk
- Cranberry Nature Trail
- Falls of Hills Creek Scenic Area

### *Cranberry Mountain Nature Center*

Cranberry Mountain Nature Center is the primary visitor center located on the HSH. A variety of interpretive and interactive displays educates visitors about area wildlife, plants, and more. The Nature Center is also the base for a series of nature, historic, and culture based interpretive programs, including snakes of West Virginia, nature photography, historic murder mysteries, and native plants.



**Figure 2 Cranberry Mountain Nature Center<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Photo Credit: Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau



## Interpretive Theme

The comprehensive interpretive theme will guide the interpretive program for the entire HSH. Theme-based interpretation will enable visitors to make meaningful connections with the HSH's resources. One theme will provide a common thread that ties the whole experience together. This theme is particularly important for the HSH, which is comprised of two very distinct landscapes. The HSH theme incorporates input from stakeholder responses to letters and public meetings. Application of this theme, and supporting subthemes and storylines, will help unify the HSH experience and strengthen its identity.

### Theme

*The Forest Is Our Future.*

The theme for the HSH is *The Forest Is Our Future*. As you travel the HSH, you are either surrounded by forest or overlooking it. The forest is essential to historic settlement of the area, and it also includes the intriguing and related stories of how it has evolved through time, why it looks the way it does now, and where it is going.

### Sub-themes

Three sub-themes have been developed based on the past, present, and future of the forest. Below are the three sub-themes, with examples of storylines that may be appropriate.

- 1) *Past: Our forest has a rich history.*
  - a) Storylines will explore past uses and historic settlement in the area and how they were shaped by the surrounding forests and mountains.
    - i) Historic settlement: Subsistence farming, pastimes, and daily life in a remote mountainous area.
    - ii) Logging: Railroad logging, timber-based industry and manufacturing, logging camps and towns.
    - iii) Post-Logging: Wildfire, fire suppression efforts, forest restoration, Mill Point Prison
- 2) *Present: Our forest is resilient.*
  - a) Storylines will explore how the forest is comprised of recovering ecosystems, subject to a variety of influences and management strategies.
    - i) Influences: The forest is subject to influences beyond our control such as weather, acid rain, natural succession, and elevation
    - ii) Natural Resource Management: The diverse landscape contains a variety of wildlife and vegetation and forest products that are managed on a regular basis.
    - iii) Ecosystem Services: The area provides air and water filtration, variety of recreation settings, and solitude.

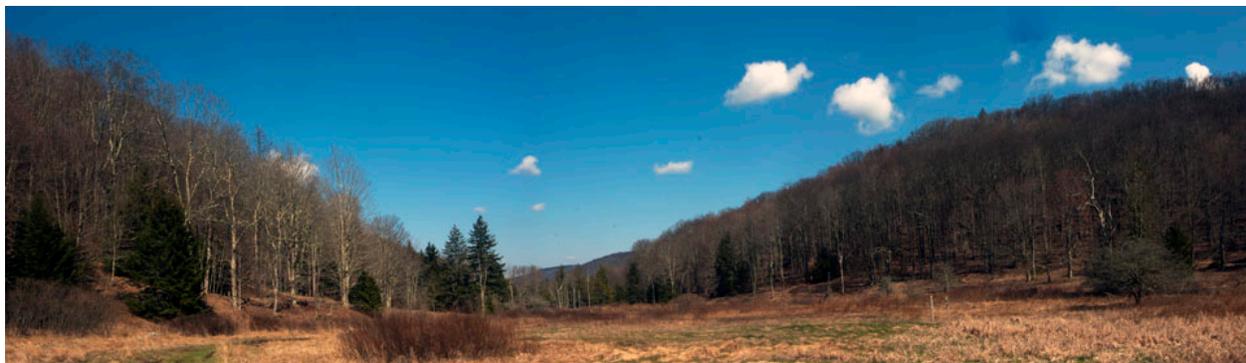


- 3) *Future: Our forest is dynamic.*
- a) Storylines will explore how current forest trends and how they may shape our forests in the future, and the challenges and benefits of change.
    - i) **Forest Health:** Overall forest health considers species composition, invasive species, and forest management.
    - ii) **Water:** The high elevation of the HSH and surrounding area is the origin of several rivers, providing habitat for fish and a host of other aquatic organisms, and drinking water for nearby communities.
    - iii) **Geology:** Several features tell stories of unique geological processes.

### **Interpretive Management Strategies**

The HSH currently has a variety of interpretive opportunities available. Comprehensive interpretation is key to bringing meaning to the HSH and its resources. The following recommendations will improve the overall interpretation of the HSH:

1. Obtain additional interpretive training for employees and partners
2. Improve interpretive opportunities and programs along the HSH
3. Replace interpretive signs as needed. After completion of an interpretive plan, replacements should be consistent with recommendations in the plan
4. Provide consistent HSH information (background, designations, special regulations) at each end and at the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center
5. Consider developing thematic tours emphasizing the unique intrinsic qualities
6. Develop an interpretive plan
  - a. Based on above theme and sub-themes
7. Seek additional funding for interpretive development and implementation



**Figure 3 Mill Point Prison Site**

