

MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (MPNHA)

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in partnership with

Preserving the pioneer story through national heritage areas

Most people know the National Park Service as the caretaker of Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and other landmark national parks, but its reach goes much further.

Beyond the borders of famous parks, the agency supports programs that help communities preserve history, improve access to public lands and revitalize local economies. These programs are often less visible, yet they shape the character and future of rural towns across the country.

One of the most meaningful examples in Utah is the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, which was recognized recently alongside other heritage areas in a National Parks Conservation Association article: (<https://www.npca.org/articles/10442-park-service-programs-you-benefit-from-but-may-not-know-about>).

Stretching through six central Utah counties, the heritage area connects the landscapes and communities tied to the migration of early Mormon settlers. With help from National Park Service partnerships, the area has been able to restore historic commercial districts, upgrade museums and enhance recreation opportunities while keeping local identity intact.

Mt. Pleasant's downtown revitalization is one such case, where funding and planning support has allowed historic buildings to be preserved while still meeting the needs of a living community.

Heritage areas like this one serve as a bridge between the past and present. They tell stories of settlement, cultural identity, and resilience while also providing practical benefits.

A visitor following U.S. Highway 89 through Sanpete County is not only traveling through scenic country but also through a living museum. Towns such as Spring City and Manti hold layers of history in their architecture, cemeteries and public squares and the heritage area provides resources to make sure those elements are not lost to time. The work includes projects as straightforward as bike paths that connect neighborhoods to historic districts or as ambitious as restoring entire facades to maintain authenticity. Each effort deepens the sense of place while also making the area more attractive for tourism.



Mt. Pleasant City's historic Main Street revitalization was made possible with funding and support from the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area.

The economic return from these programs is measurable. National studies have shown that every federal dollar invested in heritage areas yields more than five dollars in return, a figure that reflects increased visitation, business development, and job creation.

The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area has been especially productive in this way having leveraged \$5.4 million in National Park Service funding into \$67 million dollars in historic preservation and community projects within its borders since its founding.



The bike path shown winding along Mt. Pleasant's historic Coffee Depot connects the town to its neighboring community of Spring City, thanks to funding leveraged by the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage area.

In Utah's Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, this means more travelers stopping in small towns, visiting museums, eating at local diners and staying in locally owned lodging. The result is a stronger economic base for communities that might otherwise struggle to compete with urban growth along the Wasatch Front.

The value of these programs lies not just in economics or preservation but in identity. The Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area captures the legacy of a people who built towns, dug canals and planted orchards in a difficult landscape. Their story is woven into Utah's broader history and into the nation's story of westward migration. By protecting these places and sharing their significance, the National Park Service ensures that local residents and visitors alike can learn from and connect to that legacy.

At the same time, the work of heritage areas illustrates how federal programs can be locally driven. Projects are planned and executed in partnership with towns, counties and community groups. In Sanpete County, that has meant collaboration between city councils, historical societies and state partners to align preservation with community development. The approach ensures that the work reflects local priorities rather than outside mandates.

As the National Park Service approaches its second century, it faces a choice about how much weight to give these behind-the-scenes programs. Well known parks will always command attention, but the quieter programs, including national heritage areas, carry an outsized impact for rural regions.

For Utah, the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area represents more than preserved buildings or scenic drives. It represents a living link to the pioneer past and a strategy for sustaining the towns that grew from it.

The lesson is clear. When we support these programs we are not only protecting history. We are investing in the resilience of communities, the vitality of local economies and the ability of future generations to experience the stories that shaped the land. For central Utah, that story belongs to the Mormon pioneers and the work of the heritage area ensures it will not be forgotten.

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The Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area is a federally designated area of central and southern Utah running along the beautiful and historic U.S. Highway 89 — including the All-American Road Utah State Route 12, and Capitol Reef Scenic Byway Utah State Route 24, which both intersect with U.S. 89 and together form the MPNHA's Boulder Loop. The area includes the counties of Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane.