Oil Heritage Region
Management Plan Augmentation
Executive Summary 2006

Prepared for the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry, and Tourism

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prepared by
ICON architecture, inc.
in association with
Vanasse, Hangen, Brustlin, Inc.
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The Oil Heritage Region is one of the most authentic and powerful of the heritage areas in the United States. The form and culture of this region bear the imprint of the oil industry: from the town centers that were developed with oil profits to the oil leases and equipment that dot the landscape and are often plainly visible from a road. The story of oil is interpreted in many venues, ranging from the state-operated Drake Well Museum, on the site where the initial well was drilled, to small locally managed museums and collections. Moreover, the area has a dramatic natural landscape that is increasingly appreciated by residents and tourists, oriented to the Allegheny River and its tributaries, including the Oil Creek Valley, the locus of “oil fever” in the second half of the 19th century.

This Management Plan Augmentation, prepared for the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism (Oil Region Alliance or ORA), is intended to assist this innovative management entity to most effectively use its resources to capitalize on these assets and accomplish its mission, while taking advantage of National Heritage Area designation.¹

Purpose of this Plan

This document augments a 2004 Management Action Plan (MAP) Update for the Oil Heritage Region. In 1994, the original Management Action Plan for the area led to the designation of Venango County and portions of Crawford County as a state heritage park by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This augmentation of the 2004 Update reflects the recent designation of the Oil Region National Heritage Area by the U.S. Congress. In the ten-plus years since completion of the initial 1994 Plan, and with the help of over $3.3 million in grants through the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program of the state’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, ORA has been instrumental in working with partners across the region, facilitating a total of $21.7 million of total investment in the key resources of this significant area. These investments have supported creation and expansion of an outstanding regional recreational trail system, improvements to interpretive venues, historic preservation projects, public environment improvements and economic development in the region’s historic downtowns, and expanded management capability.

With this strong record of accomplishment, as well as the passing of a decade since the completion of the original plan, the 2004 update of the Management Plan and this augmentation of that update take account of changed market conditions, evolving project needs, the opportunity to build upon the region’s successes, and the opportunities offered by national recognition.

¹ The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism (ORA) was created in 2005 and is the successor to Oil Heritage Region, Inc., but has greatly expanded capabilities. In this Executive Summary, reference to ORA encompasses accomplishments prior to 2005. The overall area is referred to as ORNHA.
Significance of the Oil Heritage Region

Oil was commercially recovered in the Oil Creek Valley of northwestern Pennsylvania beginning in 1859. The tools, the terminology, the extraction, the transportation, and the financial norms for the oil industry, which are used throughout the world today, were developed here in the latter part of 19th century. Heroes and scoundrels, enormous riches, violence, and environmental damage are part of this story.²

The commercial history of petroleum in the United States began at Drake Well along Oil Creek near Titusville, Pennsylvania. Edwin L. Drake, the agent for the Seneca Oil Company of New Haven, Connecticut, and William Smith, a salt well driller from Tarentum, Pennsylvania, successfully brought in the world’s first drilled well on August 27, 1859. The well depth of 69-½ feet produced 20 barrels per day for nearly three years.

Oil well drilling required suction pumps to remove natural gas from the wells, leading eventually to the early development of the natural gas industry. Natural gas was initially considered a hazardous and unusable by-product of the oil wells, but quickly became a significant lighting and fuel source in the region. In 1867, natural gas was piped to some of Oil City’s homes for cooking and heating purposes. The Emlenton Gas Light and Fuel Company was organized in 1882, the first natural gas company chartered in the state and only the third in the United States.

Drake Well Museum, operated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, offers powerful interpretations of the stories and resources of the oil industry. Other museums and visitor attractions, including the Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad that traverses Oil Creek Valley, site of many early episodes of frenzied exploration, provide important interpretation of the industry and local history. However, this region has an authenticity and powerful heritage that transcends any museum or historic site.

Across the region’s landscape are unique natural and man-made resources that are intertwined with the history of the oil industry and its remarkable heritage of boom and bust, spoils, and recovery. The permanent effects of economic prosperity that the oil industry brought are most evident in the four communities of the region—Titusville, Oil City, Franklin and Emlenton. Each of these municipalities feature extant oil related settings, landmarks, and distinctive residential, commercial and industrial architecture.

The remnants of the oil industry are also evident across the region. Abandoned boomtown settlements, oil farms, and inactive oil fields provide reminders of past lifeways. Of the more than 8,000 reported abandoned (oil and gas) wells in Pennsylvania, approximately 1,932 exist in Venango County, with 228 of those being slated for plugging.³ This situation is a reminder of the continuing environmental consequences of the region’s early oil boom. Sites of former refineries and operating oil leases that have been in continuous operation since the region’s boom days provide excellent opportunities to interpret the continuing legacy of the oil industry.

Finally, this region communicates a story of people who realized the opportunities (and experienced the tragedies) of a business that transformed whole societies as well as individual lives and entire landscapes. Traditions associated with oil heritage are carried on through festivals, events, and other activities including several Boomtown Days, Oil Field Picnic, and Oil Heritage festivals. This story of an industry of worldwide enormous economic, social, and technological significance can be powerfully understood in this corner of Pennsylvania.

² The text in this section is largely excerpted from a report commissioned by the National Park Service in 2000 that recommended support for designation of the Oil Heritage Region as a National Heritage Area.

³ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, August 13, 2004
Implementation to Date
in OHR Communities

The substantial implementation of the original Management Plan reflects the energy and progressive approach that has been taken by ORA in cooperation with its partners—non-profits, communities, and funding supporters.

Attractions and venues have been strengthened across the ORNHA since the completion of the original Management Action Plan, including new exhibits and facilities in Drake Well Museum, Oil Creek State Park, Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad (OC&TRR), Barrow Civic Theatre, DeBence Antique Music World Museum, Venango Museum of Art, Science & Industry, and the Emlenton Visitor Orientation Center and Pumping Jack Museum.

The environmental quality of downtowns has been improved in the region’s core communities—Titusville, Oil City, Franklin, and Emlenton—through streetscape, sidewalk, landscape, and some interpretive installations.

Dramatic progress has been made on implementation of region-serving bike and hike trails. These trails form a network that connect key destinations and are widely recognized for their quality and value, although work remains to be done to complete the system. The work supported by ORA includes lengthening the multi-purpose bicycle trail by 18 miles along the Allegheny River, adding a deck to a former railroad bridge in Belmar, and engineering for linkage of trail system throughout the OHR in cooperation with the Allegheny Valley Trails Association, municipalities, and Oil Creek State Park.

Regional branding is underway, although this still needs to be emphasized, strengthened and unified. ORA has adopted a unified logo which is helping to build a regional identity.

ORA has taken a major role in creating and supporting new regional events that deal with heritage and recreation. ORA staffed and coordinated the Venango County Bicentennial (2000), the first Victorian Architecture Conference (2000), Oil Region River Romp (annual since 1998), Hike for Heritage (since 1996), and Oil Region Road Tour.

ORA has supported diverse preservation activities, in addition to investments in venues that were mentioned above, including nomination and approval of 4 historic districts and other properties now listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Oil Region Multiple Property Documentation Form, and the installation of 8 PHMC markers.

Funding support has been provided for educational materials to enable publication, distribution, and printing of numerous educational and promotional books, booklets, brochures, rack cards, maps, placemats, sketchbooks, postcards, cassettes, CDs, and guides.
Summary of Recommendations

The plan update and augmentation have determined that ORA and the communities within the ORNHA have worked effectively to improve tourism and interpretive products, to encourage economic revitalization, and to take advantage of the region’s assets. Progress has been made to expand interpretation of the region’s history, although there is acknowledged room for improvement.

Perhaps the most dramatic change since 1994 has been the expansion of the regional trail network, which is widely recognized for its high quality and has the potential to further contribute to area-wide marketing and promotional efforts. Expansion of the recreational system, both on land and on water, combined with more aggressive cross-marketing of recreational and heritage resources, has the potential to contribute to visitor growth. With effective technical and financial assistance, these assets can and should encourage development of new niche accommodation products, expanding the number of visitors who stay in the region overnight, and generating new business opportunities.

Interpretation and Identity

The over-arching strength of the ORNHA is the authenticity of its resources and story; the region retains a cultural landscape that communicates the history of its primary industry and the impact of the oil industry’s development on its communities and people. Interpretation and identity improvements within the region should continue to build upon this authenticity by reinforcing those resources and venues that communicate most strongly the heritage of the region.

The primary attractions most closely related to the oil industry include the state managed Drake Well Museum, Pithole City Historic Site, and McClintock Well #1, the non-profit Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad, and Oil Creek State Park, providing a powerful image of a landscape of discovery. Additional oil-related interpretive venues of a smaller scale include the Pumping Jack Museum in the Crawford Center in Emlenton, exhibits in the Perry Street Station in Titusville, and interpretive sites along the OC&TRR route, including Coal Oil Johnny’s House at Rynd Farm, and the Petroleum Centre Station.

Several other venues display significant collections that have been enabled by oil wealth, including the Venango Museum of Art, Science, and Industry, the DeBence Antique Music World, Dan Hardesty’s Wild West Museum, the Tyred Wheels Museum, and the Venango County Historical Society.

Other interpretive initiatives are in process, including a proposed Mather Museum in Titusville in a rehabilitated block that contains the studio of the famous photographer, John A. Mather, and a potential natural gas museum or exhibit utilizing a significant collection of artifacts from the United Natural Gas Company collection, including operating equipment, maps, records, and other historical materials.

The emphasis of the 2004 Plan Update and this Plan Augmentation is to build upon the strengths of these core attractions and to build linkages among attractions in the region, as shown in Figure 1. This effort needs to be based on sound interpretive principles that are audience-and outcome-specific, with careful pre-and post-testing of interpretive and exhibit concepts.

At Drake Well Museum, large-scale changes to improve interpretation were recommended by the 2004 Plan Update and are being implemented. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is implementing a dramatic update of facilities, exhibits, and support facilities. This work includes a boomtown installation within the museum, coupled with a new audio-visual experience. Additionally, supplemental site interpretation—both waysides and an audio tour—are in progress.

Other core interpretive sites that should be enhanced with supplemental exhibits, audio interpretation, and supplementary guide materials, are Rynd Farm, Perry Street Station, the Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad, the Petroleum Centre area, and Oil Creek State Park. Relatively modest cost
improvements at each of these venues could improve the visitor experience and take advantage of the inherent quality of these sites and their existing interpretation.

A feasibility study is recommended for a natural gas museum or exhibit. The collection of artifacts from the United Natural Gas Company offers significant interpretive potential, and the study will determine the most effective approach to develop exhibits and archives for these resources.

The Oil Region Alliance should build upon the brand and identity of the region to connect interpretive venues to one another and to reinforce the sense of the region. This should include installation of orientation exhibits at each attraction that explain the relationship of the site to the region as a whole, completion of the system of orientation centers by addition of sites in Oil City and Franklin, and development of an extensive system of wayside exhibits, designed to a common standard and "appearance," to reinforce the regional brand.

Regional signage will enhance the regional branding through a system being designed concurrent with this update, to include signage systems for entry routes, tour route blazes, and identification signs for key municipalities.

**Figure 2** (Opposite Page):

**Recreation Recommendations**

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The region’s rich natural resources provide a natural setting that is an important counterpoint to heritage sites and is also an important visitor draw. Major parks, such as Oil Creek State Park and Two Mile Run County Park, provide recreational experiences, fishing sites, and overnight campsites and accommodations. The area is renowned for the scale and diversity of its fishing, with over 200 linear miles of designated stocked and wild trout waters, as well as river and lake fishing. Figure 2 shows the following recreation elements of the plan:

**Recreation**

The Allegheny River, which traverses much of the region, can and should be more intensively utilized for boating and fishing. The Plan recommends providing additional river access points in Emlenton, Kennerdell, and Oil City, enabling increased utilization by boaters and encouraging outfitters and recreation users to have longer stays in the region. Additionally, community castways are proposed on riverfronts in core communities and Oil Creek State Park and Two Mile Run County Park to expand recreational opportunities close to existing centers of population and recreational activity.

In recent years, due in large part to the efforts of the Allegheny Valley Trails Association, with financial assistance from many sources, including OHR, Inc., the region has developed an extensive network of high quality multi-use trails that attract bikers and hikers in increasing numbers. Analysis of visitor patterns to heritage and recreation attractions, including the many festivals and events across the Oil Region, reveals the numbers of recreational visitors are growing and are significantly larger than the numbers of visitors to heritage attractions.

The recreational trail system should be expanded and completed. The highest priority action should be the completion of the trail gap between Petroleum Centre and Oil City and the trail connection to Emlenton, which will require agreements to traverse the former Rouseville and Emlenton refinery sites. These connections would provide a nearly complete trail that would link the core communities and related activity centers in the region to one another in the north-south direction, along a dramatic bikeway through the entirety of Oil Creek State Park and parallel to the Allegheny River. Regional efforts should encompass extended connections to activity centers at the edges of the OHR boundary and beyond, including linkages to Spartansburg in Crawford County, Clarion County, Mercer County, along the Allegheny River, and to Foxburg.

Trail expansions should include spurs to connect to other destinations, such as Two Mile Run County Park, area downtowns, and other destinations of interest that are relatively close to the bike trail system, such as iron furnaces, historic sites, and scenic natural features. Where possible, such spurs should be located on dedicated rights of way, but can also be located on “share-the-road” marked lanes where dedicated rights of way are not feasible.

In combination, trail completions, extensions, and spurs could add as many as 100 miles of additional trails over time, and could be supplemented with trailheads, support services, and scenic overlooks.
Recreation Recommendations

Oil Heritage Region

ORA Recreation Program Initiatives
Inform travel and outdoors writers of recreational events and activities
Coordinate marketing of region at large recreational venues outside of region
Encourage and be involved in implementation of master plans for region's recreational venues
Co-sponsor fishing tournaments or multi-activity, outdoor sports theme festivals
Help coordinate extension of OC & T RR into Oil City and Franklin
Administer low interest small business loans for outdoor recreation businesses
Monitor privately funded construction of trail to Foxburg
Sponsor geocacher events
Encourage outfitters to widen shuttle services to also include bicyclists and hikers

Two Mile Run County Park
Watchable wildlife platform
Parkwide trail at minimum for bicyclists
Link park trail to Allegheny River Trail & OCSP
Increase environmental education programs
Add interpretive facilities along bike trail
Expand water sports and archery
Castaway
Bicycle recreation center

Allegheny River Trail
Extend trail east from Oil City to Tionesta and into Allegheny National Forest (20 miles)
Two Mile Run County Park
Install interpretive signage at appropriate sites, including waterfalls and iron furnaces
Develop trailheads at Emlenton, Kincordia, near St. George and Dotter
Watchable Wildlife Platforms

Franklin Vicinity
Castaway
Riverfront Park improvement
Complete trail through area
Develop Spur Trail in downtown
Develop Spur Trail in downtown
Install bike racks near downtown attractions
Support development of spur trails to increase regional connectivity

Oil Creek State Park
Castaway
Fishing, Park development or improvement
Complete trail through area
Develop Spur Trail in downtown
Install bike racks near downtown attractions

Oil City Vicinity
Castaway
Fishing, Park development or improvement
Complete trail through area
Develop Spur Trail in downtown
Install bike racks near downtown attractions
Develop White Water area
Continue safety improvements at Oil City Rapids
Augment Oil City marina amenities

Emlenton Vicinity
Castaway
Riverfront Park development or improvement
Complete trail through area
Develop Spur Trail in downtown
Install bike racks near downtown attractions
Increase parking for boat trailers

Sandy Creek Trail
Encourage extension of Sandy Creek Trail from Belmar Bridge west to Mercer County and Van East to Clarion Highlands Trail
Interpretive signage where trail crosses SGL 45

Oil Heritage Region
Venango & Crawford Counties, Pennsylvania

SGL 39
Woods Cemetery site - interpretive signage for mine drainage treatment site

Support development of spur trails to increase regional connectivity
Oil Heritage Region Management Action Plan Update

In conjunction with these expansions of the trail system, the area’s heritage attractions should be cross-marketed to recreational users through tourism promotional literature and installation of interpretive waysides along the trail system. An extensive system of wayside exhibits is recommended, branded to reinforce the sense of the larger region and its heritage resources.

Preservation
Existing Resources

In addition to an update of extensive documentation of the cultural resources listed in the 1994 plan, five newly listed Historic districts as well as properties have been determined eligible for the National Register. The Drake Well Museum and the Venango Museum store and continue to collect significant archival materials related to the Petroleum Industry. Resources associated with the Natural Gas Industry are stored in locations in Oil City and the newly opened Pumping Jack Museum. There are also numerous historic structures and sites that predate the era of oil discovery.

The Oil Region Alliance and its predecessor Oil Heritage Region, Inc. have guided most preservation activities in the region. Groups seeking financial support for their activities should follow the guidelines established by ORA. ORA is a consulting party to PennDOT’s proposed transportation projects and is directly involved with the NHPA Section 106 review process.

The increase of preservation activities since 1994 has led to the current initiatives in the region, most notably: the Route 8 & 62 Corridor Project; the rehabilitation of several individual buildings and structures in the areas of Rynd Farm, Titusville, and Franklin; and ongoing archival efforts by various institutions and individuals throughout the Oil Region.

Preservation organizations are active in all of ORNHA’s major communities. Some of the numerous preservation organizations focus on the area’s built environment, but the majority of the groups are dedicated to preservation of significant archival materials. In addition to community groups several state agencies have also been involved in ORNHA’s activities. State organizations provide a range of services including technical assistance, National Register nominations, funding, and academic research. Additionally, the 2004 designation of the Oil Region NHA has created opportunities for federal assistance. The Philadelphia Office of the National Park Services has provided technical and administrative support. Other federal resources utilized include the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and The Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Elements of the Preservation Program

The Management Plan Augmentation for the Oil Region National Heritage Area proposes to recognize and build upon past preservation efforts and to refine the preservation process with a systematic approach that is integrated with economic development, as shown in Figure 3. Investing in the region’s core communities and the linkages between them will maximize the efforts of the preservation program and strategic economic development. To facilitate preservation efforts the following key program elements have been identified:

Resource Documentation consists of inventory programs to identify and document important properties within the ORNHA. The Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record is an important organization devoted to creating documentation and identification of historic structures. The National Register of Historic Places/Determination of Eligibility Requirement is usually part of the preservation process to review and mitigate the effects of federal projects on historic properties. Document cataloging and Conservation Programs and Centralized Archives and or Database Programs would help historical societies and public organizations make historical information more accessible to researchers and assist in cataloging.

Figure 3 (Opposite Page): Core Communities and Connecting Linkages

Legend
- Existing Rail Trail
- Proposed Rail Trail
- Proposed Oil Heritage Route
- Proposed Oil Country Trail
- OC & T Railroad
- Potential Small Community Initiative
- National Register Historic District
- National Register Eligible Properties
- National Register Individually Listed Properties
- National Historic Landmark

Note: Individual properties within Titusville, Oil City, Franklin, and Emlenton shown in Appendix A

Emlenton shown in Appendix A

Above: Ribbon cutting to open the new bike trail along the Allegheny River (ORA, Inc).
Core Communities and Connecting Linkages

Oil Heritage Region

Concept:
Retain recreation, interpretation, and accommodation elements of 2004 update, and modify plan to focus combined preservation and economic development assistance toward strategic investments in the region’s core communities and to connecting linkages.
Oil Heritage Region Management Action Plan Update

Programs and historic building tax credits could be part of a support package for developers of historically valuable properties. In conjunction with local media, the process of rehabilitating a threatened property could be exemplified in the style of “This Old House”.

Regulatory tools to preserve cultural resources—
A demolition delay ordinance can require a review period to demonstrate feasible alternatives to demolition of historic properties. Likewise the ORA could help pass an ordinance for modification of building exteriors in designated Historic Districts. Conservation easements or restrictions benefit the owner by providing tax cuts and ensure protection of the structure.

New Facilities
Several new facilities are recommended in the Plan Update. These include a potential natural gas exhibit and/or museum, and an archive facility.

Natural Gas interpretation is provided at exhibits at the Emlenton Visitor Center and the Drake Well Museum. While both venues feature the early natural gas industry in exhibits, ORA desires to explore a larger separate location that could include the United Natural Gas Company’s collection of operating equipment, maps, records, and other historical materials that is currently being curated. Accordingly, a feasibility study is recommended to determine the audience and their interests, specific interpretive themes, financial and operational structure, space and display requirements, and location for this potential exhibit or museum.

Supplemental archive space is needed to enable a repository for donations from private collectors, in the region and elsewhere, and to provide public access to these collections. Although Drake Well Museum, the Venango County Historical Society, and the Crawford county Historical Society have archive space, there are considerable private collections of artifacts, documents, and photographs associated with Oil Region heritage that may be either inappropriate or infeasible in these locations.

Planning Assistance to Communities—Community planning efforts would benefit from a Main Street Program—a formalized effort to emphasize storefront and adaptive reuse of existing commercial/residential structures in core communities’ downtown buildings. A small communities initiative could complement the Main Street program and could promote economic and visitor development. To identify community and business needs ORA should facilitate intensive community planning forums and creating preservation plans.

Building conservation technical assistance—a Code enforcement program, that would train municipal code officers in the new Uniform PA Building Code is one step towards easing the process of preserving and maintaining existing valuable buildings. Additionally, building owners, contractors and architects could be educated and assisted on restoration policy and techniques.

Education and recognition programs—Volunteer clean-up and documentation of cemetery sites as well as building upon current awareness programs could help spur local interest and involvement. Education programs for the community and schools would increase knowledge and historical appreciation.

ORA investment/partnership in rehabilitation projects—Pre-development activities like feasibility studies and architectural plans, as well as grant/loan

Top: The “Nitro” show at Drake Well Museum captures the attention of visitors of all ages and offers a glimpse of the region’s rough and ready past.

Bottom: “Pipeline Alley” is a knock-down exhibit that is assembled in Oil City during special events. This idea of a temporary attraction that can be both informative and exciting suggests the potential for traveling exhibits that could move to where the people are.
A need also exists for additional storage of official historical documents of both Venango and Crawford counties and several of the region’s municipalities, especially their pre-1900 materials. The Plan recommends conducting a feasibility study to determine the scope and scale of these requirements as well as the amount and location of space where such a facility might be located. Based on comparison to the current Drake Well Museum archive facilities, it is suggested that an approximate size of 1,500 square feet may be appropriate.

**Oil Boomtown**

The idea of a Boomtown attraction has a long history within the Oil Region, originating as part of the 1960’s era plans for both Drake Well Museum and Petroleum Centre. During the 1994 Management Action Plan and in the subsequent Interpretive Prospectus, several ideas were advanced for an attraction that could be a major visitor draw while interpreting the “rough and ready” side of the early oil exploration days.

This concept was revisited as part of the Plan Update, with the finding that the existing market does not appear to support a substantial investment in such a facility—either by ORA or by private investors. Such an attraction is expected to operate at a substantial deficit, making a major investment unattractive to either a public sector or private sector developer.

Despite the apparent difficulty of achieving a feasible major Boomtown attraction venue in the short to medium range in the OHR, the work of the Plan Update has concluded that the core idea associated with the Boomtown—communicating the dynamism of the early days of oil exploration to enhance the visitor potential of the OHR—is still a good one. The challenge is to find an approach to this type of interpretation and attraction that can fulfill several objectives:

- **Raise the visibility of the OHR and its interpretive themes.**
- **Engage more visitors than the current 15-20,000/year level of current museum patronage, taking advantage of the visitor market segments within OHR that have future growth potential, including visitors to regional events and recreation users.**
- **Limit the amount of financial risk for ORA—in terms of development and operating costs—to levels that are commensurate with likely resources of the organization and benefit that can be achieved from such an approach.**

The Plan Update suggested that ORA not invest in development of a major permanent Boomtown attraction until one or more of the following conditions has occurred: (1) Improvement of market conditions; (2) Public entities such as PHMC and/or DCNR have the financial capacity and interest to develop a permanent, independent attraction as part of their facility enhancement; (3) Other funding sources, public or private, emerge with a strong interest or capability to develop/such an attraction; (4) ORA has the capacity to undertake the risk of sponsorship and operations of a Boomtown attraction. In the meantime, the following actions are recommended that are consistent with the above objectives:

**Expand boomtown interpretation at existing interpretive venues.** Just as Drake Well Museum’s 1961 plan envisioned a “modest” Boomtown on site, additional interpretation and exhibits that are less costly than the 1961 proposal should be added to either the museum interior or grounds. Partially in response to this recommendation of the 2004 Plan Update, the front lobby of the museum and entry is being redesigned to extend it out onto the forecourt of the museum building and to simulate a boomtown street, with exhibits on either side to explain the uses and activities that characterized the period. This approach will enhance the attractiveness and effectiveness of the museum instead of a “stand-alone” fee attraction that would require its own staff and would require considerable operating expense. Also, storefront exhibits would be far less costly than a stand-alone facility that would require “real” buildings, separate infrastructures and services, and its own staff. In addition, design of audio interpretation should be explored—such as
Reserve a site for future possible Boomtown development that has mixed-use potential and can accommodate phased development. The Oil Region Alliance should consider acquiring a site that is sufficiently large and suitably located to enable a staged development. Initial stages might include economic development or other uses, including the relocation here of historic buildings threatened on their original sites, such as the Neilltown Church. Total development build-out might be a sufficiently long time in the future that a Boomtown attraction could be considered when and if some of the conditions defined for a permanent Boomtown attraction have come to pass.

Accommodations

As part of the Plan Update, a special study of accommodations across the ORNHA was undertaken to determine market potential for new facilities and to define an appropriate strategy and action program. This study was prompted by local concern that existing facilities seemed inadequate to provide for peak festival events, such as Applefest, and a desire to attract new facilities that will support increased economic benefits associated with overnight tourism.

The findings of this study were that the 449 existing conventional hotel/motel rooms in the ORNHA had average annual occupancy rates below 50%, meaning that such facilities were typically below the national occupancy average of 60% and struggle to achieve overall positive operating characteristics. These rates, plus the lack of any planned development that would fundamentally alter market dynamics, mean that demand for such conventional facilities would be likely to correspond to Commonwealth and national trends in the general lodging sector.

Since completion of the study in 2004, several additions to the regional accommodations supply have occurred. As of August 2004, the Comfort Inn in Titusville opened, adding 48 rooms and an indoor pool to the OHR supply of accommodations. And the OC&T Caboose Motel in Titusville opened in 2005 and operates seasonally. In 2006, construction has started on a 60 room Holiday Inn Express in Seneca.
However, there is an emerging trend in the region for expansion of specialty lodging accommodations to take advantage of unique sites, accommodation concepts, or market niches. There are 63 existing specialty units in the region, with an additional 44 units in planning or development stages. These additions to the supply of accommodations include the Treehouse Cabins in Two Mile Run County Park, a high-end lodging facility in the Galena Signal Building in Franklin, and expansion to other bed and breakfast (B&B) facilities in the region. The Plan Update recommends ORA actions to expand accommodations:

The Oil Region Alliance should set a goal to encourage growth in the ORNHA supply of specialty lodging. The Plan Update recommends a goal to increase total current planned/existing supply by another 65 rooms (or by about a 60% increase over the total of existing and currently planned specialty accommodations) by 2010.

Sponsor an OHR Hospitality Initiative designed to support the growth of the OHR lodging industry. The impending functional integration of agencies to create ORA presents a special opportunity to create such an initiative, which would also blur the lines between heritage, economic, and tourism development. Under leadership provided by ORA, the Hospitality Initiative would offer direct services to two major audiences: current hospitality facility owners/operators, and prospective operators/investors who are considering entry into the market. The initiative would also augment other OHR efforts by ensuring that ongoing festivals, events, and other visitation-oriented initiatives maintain a focus on expanding overnight visitation.

The Hospitality Initiative will warrant a dedicated full-time employee to add a level of energy and productivity to the project that may not be possible without dedicated staff. The position may not need to be permanent, but would likely require tenure of at least five years in order to meet the suggested objectives. Functions of the proposed ORNHA Hospitality Initiative may include:

**Identify, market, and facilitate real estate opportunities for lodging development.** By working with realty professionals to maintain lists of potential hospitality-oriented development opportunities in the region, the initiative can help ensure that key opportunities are identified and matched with interested investors.

**Provide funding assistance.** On an ongoing basis, the initiative should identify state and local funding sources for particular projects, including tax credits where applicable. The OHR Hospitality Initiative should consider offering a revolving loan program to help finance high-potential hospitality projects that are otherwise undercapitalized. The Oil Region Alliance could also supplement loans with grants, subject to funding availability, for preservation associated with development of niche accommodations facilities.

**Provide marketing assistance to new and existing operators.** The initiative would serve as a clearinghouse for understanding and targeting potential markets, with an emphasis on developing the region’s portfolio of niche and other accommodations.

**Assist in product development.** The initiative can serve as a product development resource for new or repositioned products. As part of this effort, it will be important to understand why particular strategies have worked well in other places, and how they may need to be adapted in order to have a high probability of succeeding in the Oil Heritage Region. If ideas are found that resonate well with the business community (for example, emulating Vermont’s system of B&B’s connected by trails) and are deemed worthy of pursuit, the Hospitality Initiative can serve as an organizational hub for creating the necessary infrastructure, networks, packaging, etc.
Oil Heritage Region Management Action Plan Update

The survey will also facilitate the calculation of total visitation to the region. The proportion of visitors staying in hotels/B&Bs will be adjusted for frequency of visitation (which is tracked separately for daytrip and overnight visitors), and applied against the region’s lodging occupancy data to derive a total visitation number.

Based on the recommended approach, the regional visitation estimate would be determined by estimating the proportion of total visitors that stay at lodging facilities in the region and apportioning the proportion of those visitors who are tourism/travel visitors, as opposed to business or other non-tourist travelers and then, based on the regional survey, determining ratios of the overnight tourism visitors to day-trip visitors.

Once these estimates are made, factors can then be applied, based on the survey data, to estimate expenditures by each type of visitor, total tourism expenditures, and the derivative consequence of these expenditures on local employment and tax revenues. When this procedure is continued for several years, basic trend line information will be available that will enable ORA to meet its tracking objectives.

Help the region in leveraging overnight visitation from visitors to its many events and festivals—The initiative’s work will naturally lead to an ever-increasing understanding of the OHR overnight visitor market. By serving in an advisory capacity for future event/festival planning and other visitation-related efforts, the hospitality initiative could help the region optimize its overnight visitor yield from the annual event calendar.

Economic Impact System

In response to ORA’s request for a cost-effective approach for tracking the economic and fiscal impacts resulting from increased area visitation, the Plan Update includes a detailed methodology for this process that will enable estimates of job generation and tax revenue contributions as a performance measurement tool. The recommended methodology is designed to provide a relatively simple, reliable, and effective measure of economic/fiscal impact.

The plan recommends a general approach that would estimate total area visitation based on benchmarks determined from a periodic visitor survey. The survey would analyze visitor behaviors, including the likelihood that visitors will frequent particular attractions and/or patronize the region’s lodging facilities. The recommended survey instrument will enable differentiation between daytrip and overnight visitor patterns, including such factors as frequency of stay, distance traveled, preferred activities, demographic qualities, etc. The survey

Top: The former Galena Signal Building, adjacent to the Venango County Courthouse, is being rehabilitated for residential and upscale accommodations. This is a prime example of private reuse that takes advantage of the region’s rich architectural heritage to create a unique venue and attraction.

Bottom: The owners and operators of the brewpub in Titusville have accomplished an excellent rehabilitation of an historic property that contributes to the vitality and activity in the center of this community.
Partnerships

Existing Relationships in the ORNHA

The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & The Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program (PHPP) has been the primary source of continuing funding within the OHR to date, providing nearly 70% of funding. Of the remaining funds, nearly half come from private sources, over a third from local government agencies, and the remainder through other state agencies. Based on the emphasis of the Plan and its funding strategy, the types of priority relationships should be continued going forward include the following:

The Oil Region Alliance—ORA will add the benefits being able to finance implementation, generating income from preservation projects, and creating growth in tourism support businesses.

Key OHR visitor interpretive venues and institutions—Many visitor attractions in the OHR spend funds that will be coordinated with ORA investments and supplement ORA activities. This shared management should include collaborative efforts like cross-marketing, events, and shared funding, if applicable.

Recreational Interests—Existing partnerships with key regional recreation attractions should continue. The Allegheny Valley Trails Association (AVTA) has received over $5.5 million in funding making the organization pivotal in continuing trail improvements, maintenance, and increasing recreational usage. ORA’s role as a means of support and funding “gaps” has benefits for all of the region’s assets. The Oil Creek State Park is an example of the advantages of partnerships between various agencies, as it has become a major visitor destination. Two Mile Run County Park is increasingly important both as a visitor destination and as an opportunity for cross-marketing of heritage resources. Additionally, many other recreational assets stand to gain from improved partnerships with existing commissions and agencies.

Hospitality Industry Interests—Increased visitation to the region will benefit both the Hospitality industry and provide economic data to be analyzed to reveal larger patterns that can nourish economic growth across a variety of tourism sectors. To create a framework that strengthens the existing hospitality industry and generates future development, the ORA should create a formal association of accommodation providers.

Corporate, business and private real estate interests—ORA should collaborate with the private sector. Appropriate opportunities for partnership could be adaptive reuse projects, such as the Route 8/62 project currently underway.

Foundations, philanthropic, and corporate interests—Philanthropic interests in the OHR have funded numerous improvements and initiatives. The ORA should continue to engage this groups while looking to involve larger foundations in western Pennsylvania that support projects similar to the OHR. Additionally, the ORA should actively pursue contacts within the oil and gas industry—including national and international corporations to generate support for regional long-range projects.

Partners for river-based initiatives—As the ORA implements expanded river recreation opportunities, a number of organizations will need to become involved. These parties will range in type from the public partners for permitting and water edge modifications to private outfitters for sporting and recreation activities.

State agencies—As noted state agencies have been among the most important partners of OHR, Inc. to date and will continue to be engaged in the activities recommended in the Plan Update.

Local preservation interests and civic organizations—Community-specific entities that have supported preservation activities and are involved in important heritage resources will continue to play an important role. Private collectors and interest groups should also be considered as valuable prospective partners.

New Partnership potentials with NHA designation

The broad range of partnerships that exist in the region, as noted in the previous section, should be continued, but NHA designation will add increased opportunities. The largest benefit will be the eligibility of the ORNHA to receive up to $1 million in federal funds in any given year not totaling $10 million over 15 years. This funding will make a significant impact even if the maximum amount of funding is not received. Additionally, NHA designation may increase the competitive advantage of ORA for federal assistance funds.
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OHR MANAGEMENT

Oil Region Alliance
The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is the management entity for this Plan; a new entity created by merging Oil Heritage Region, Inc., Venango Economic Development Corporation (VEDC), Oil City Community Development Corporation (OCCDC), and the Oil Heritage Region Tourist Promotion Agency (OHRTPA). This consolidation is a unique, multi-functional management entity that has little, if any, parallel in the U.S. heritage movement. The Oil Region Alliance has broad capacity in tourism, community development, and heritage preservation, a targeted action area, financing and operation capabilities, experience in property development and management, and the ability to demonstrate leadership that will engender confidence from public and private sector partners.

The Oil Region Alliance Agenda
The Oil Region Alliance will continue to manage the OHR, incorporating the functions that have, to date, been previously fulfilled by Oil Heritage Region, Inc. These include collaboration with the entity’s Board, development of budgets and project proposals, solicitation of funds from the state and other entities, and the management of planning and implementation projects of many types. These activities will be focused on the actions delineated in the prior plans as well as this Plan Update. The expanded capabilities of the Oil Region Alliance may enable a range of new ventures that would have been difficult with the predecessor OHR, Inc.:  

- Build a consolidated identity—using the common logo and related initiatives to build the brand recognition of the region.
- Develop products to support ORA and provide ongoing revenue—an example of such a product would be audio tours of key sites, mentioned as part of interpretive recommendations. Such a service would combine tourism and heritage development. These products could be made available for Drake Well Museum, Pithole, Petroleum Centre, and walking tours in core communities. The Oil Region Alliance might finance development of these products and then advertise them at these locations, receiving a proportion of the fees that would be charged to visitors who elect to purchase these services.
- Pursue unique projects that are of interest to more than one agency—Such projects could combine, for example, economic development, heritage preservation, and interpretation. A good example would include a staged approach to portions of the former Rouseville or Emlenton refineries that could pursue brownfield incentives for remediation, preservation of the signature refinery smokestack, interim economic development, and holding a site in reserve for possible utilization for a boomtown attraction in the future should appropriate circumstances evolve. This would combine an economic development initiative that could be an effective use of the VEDC capabilities with a longer-term heritage initiative that could benefit from OHRTPA and ORA capabilities.
- Undertake longer-term technical assistance programs that are multi-purpose—two examples would include the recommended hospitality assistance program and the economic impact assessment system. Other technical assistance programs for preservation and education, as begun by OCCDC and the partners, should also be continued and developed in coordination with the Alliance’s long-term activities.
- Develop new revenue sources to support the Oil Region Alliance and its heritage efforts—VEDC and OCCDC manage certain properties and derive income from them. Where the ORA makes investments in properties where private value is added, the entity could negotiate for portions of the rental income stream at the appropriate time. This is a model that could be effectively used for investments in major properties in the community (for instance, along Routes 8 and 62) that are forecast to generate a private return in the future and would not be feasible without start-up assistance.
- Undertake event sponsorships and participate in events outside the region—With a higher regional profile, the ORA could solicit sponsors for key events that could defray the costs of these events and potentially contribute earned income.
- Expand partnerships with other collaborating entities to take advantage of the larger capabilities of the Oil Region Alliance—These entities include, but would not be limited to, visitor interpretive venues and institutions across the region, recreational interests and operators, hospitality industry interests, corporate, business, and private real estate interests, foundations, philanthropic, and corporate interests, partners for river-based initiatives, and state agencies.
Costs and Phasing

Costs

Costs for the recommended actions summarized in Section 1.4 have been estimated to establish planning level budgets for activities and projects that represent reasonable levels to accomplish purposes of the Plan Update. It is highly likely that specific line items or sub-categories may change as more becomes known about the needs of future implementation.

Table 1 shows three sets of costs grouped under the broad ORNHA goals:

- Costs for the last ten years (1994–2004), based on actual expended or committed monies by ORA and partners.
- Cost projections for the next ten years (2005–2016), based on estimates of ORA and partner contributions provided in the Management Plan Augmentation.
- Summary aggregate costs through 2016, representing the sum of the two decades.

### Table 1: Estimate of all Prior, Projected, and Cumulative Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OHR Goals</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>OHR, Inc.</th>
<th>PARTNER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>ORA</th>
<th>PARTNER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>OHR, Inc. &amp; ORA</th>
<th>PARTNER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>OHR, Inc. &amp; ORA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
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<td>$672,343</td>
<td>$5,316,120</td>
<td>$15,515,094</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
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<td>$7,143,707</td>
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<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>$3,576,000</td>
<td>$11,414,303</td>
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<td>Preservation</td>
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<td>$1,523,500</td>
<td>$761,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>$746,145</td>
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<td>$3,330,000</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>
In each case, costs were shown in total for each project and summed for each goal, without regard for the source of this funding. Then, the amount that ORA has contributed, or ORA might contribute, to support activities under each goal was estimated, inclusive of matching contributions to these funds. The basis of this estimate was a general extrapolation of the funds that OHR, Inc. has typically received through the Pennsylvania Heritage Park Program, assuming that this flow of funds continues over the next ten years. Finally, an estimate was made of the funding gap between the total aggregate cost estimate and the amount assumed to be available through PHPP and matching sources. This amount will have to be met by non-ORA sources. It is important to note that in the previous decade, non-OHR, Inc., or “Partner” expenditures, represented nearly three times the total of the combined amount contributed by OHR, Inc. funds from the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program and the required match. The projections for the future show that this ratio is likely to continue for ORA.

Potential contributions by partners to meet the funding needs recommended in the Plan Update are likely to be supported through other public sources, including: (1) support for trails, recreation, and transportation-related projects that have previously been provided through state-administered Transportation Enhancement funds; (2) direct interpretive and site improvement initiatives of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission at Drake Well Museum, Pithole, and McClintock Well #1; (3) other special purpose grant and aid sources.

Additionally, since the 2004 MAP Update several factors affecting overall costs have changed. Economic Development and Tourism costs were lessened, as intervening circumstances have made the Rousesville long-term development approach unlikely. Interpretation cost estimates have been changed to reflect that the scope and cost of the rehabilitation for the Drake Well Museum has increased. The Weaver Building project will not be implemented—its removal will reduce costs by over $4.3 million. Costs associated with education could increase to relieve the modest levels of expenditure. Preservation costs were increased to reflect the program of activities defined in the Plan augmentation.

The Oil Region Alliance should plan to continue its role as a conduit for grant assistance for programs that capitalize on oil heritage resources. For this reason, the cost estimates include allowances for technical and financial assistance for educational, cultural, and preservation programs and grants. It is likely that such activities would be supplemented by other assistance that may be available from state, federal, or non-profit sources. All such assistance, as well as related staff cost, has been defined by overall allowances over the ten-year period of this Plan Update.
Phasing

Continued implementation of the OHR Management Action Plan, as modified by this Plan Update, may be considered as a series of phases that can overlap and respond to changing circumstances and funding opportunities that may emerge. The largest change since the 2004 Plan Update has been the designation as a National Heritage Area. A summary of the central tenets of each phase, as described in the 2004 Plan, as well as changes that have occurred is provided below:

Short term (2004-2007)

The intent of this phase is to adapt the emphasis of activities in the OHR to reflect the recommendations of this plan, while continuing to implement work in process. Key actions should include:

a) **Build Regional and Operational Identity.** A new logo and identity was adopted by the ORA and is used for all ORA projects and publications, ORA has organized into divisions, the website has been redesigned and updated, and NHA designation was received at the end of 2004.

b) **Strengthen Program Management Capacity.** Actions should include launching the OHR Hospitality Initiative, providing technical and financial assistance to new niche accommodation initiatives, and implementing the economic impact assessment system.

c) **Extend and Amplify Recreational Assets.** The Oil Region Alliance should continue to collaborate and support AVTA and its partners. Key priorities should include interpretive installations along trail systems and new scenic overlooks, completion of the trail link between Petroleum Centre and Oil City, development of programs and infrastructure improvements along the Allegheny River, and links between the trail system and core community and recreational areas. Engineering is underway on the trail from Oil City to Rynd Farm; federal transportation funds of $1.3 million have been appropriated for its subsequent construction.

d) **Reinforce the Region’s Heritage Venues.** The immediate emphasis should be to assist in implementing cost-effective enhancements to DWM, OCSP, and OC&TRR, including support from the Alliance for pilot audio interpretation projects. The Sesquicentennial of Oil celebration in 2009 (referred to as “OIL150”) will be here before we know it, and the region can use this event to increase awareness of the area’s heritage and to increase outreach to potential oil industry sponsors. The Alliance should apply market knowledge to improve exhibit/education programs in other interpretive venues and should define appropriate assistance for other proposed heritage venues, including the Mather Museum in Titusville, and the potential natural gas exhibit or museum. Funds have been identified for the improvements to the Caboose Motel and the OC&TRR special events car, Drake Well Museum has secured most of the required funding, and a staff coordinator has been appointed for the Sesquicentennial.

e) **Continue to lay the groundwork for New Venues and Ventures.** These include the short- and long-term use of the former Pennzoil refinery site at Rouseville, with its potential for a future interpretive use, OC&TRR extension to Oil City and Franklin, and a Mobile Boontown Exhibit. The Weaver Building has been dropped from the plan.
**Mid-Term (2008 - 2011)**

The focus of this phase should be, while continuing to implement work in process from Phase I, to evaluate and refine operational processes and personnel, build new alliances and strengthen existing venues, and to implement or begin ventures defined in the plan.

a) **Expand the recognition, brand identity, and management capacity of ORA.** The Oil Region Alliance should continue activities started in the previous phase and adapt its operations to adjust to new opportunities. *HR 5883, the Drake Well Sesquicentennial Commemorative Act, as introduced in Congress in 2006 indicates that this celebration will be administered by a new Federal Commission linked to ORA.*

b) **Continue to Reinforce Core Community Centers.** Actions should include enhancement of community riverfronts, including castways and park improvements, coordination of spur trail improvement, and support for rehabilitation of key buildings and areas.

c) **Expand Regional Trail System Connections and Amenities and New Recreational Facilities.** During this phase, ORA should assist in development of trails to region’s edges and beyond, assist in expanding trailheads and associated services, provide assistance in expanding existing recreation venues, and work with appropriate entities to assist with development and marketing of mountain bike/All Terrain Vehicle areas and water-related facilities.

d) **Focus on packaging recreation and heritage experiences.** Activities should include developing and marketing sojourn type excursions, creation of new products such as Elderhostel and other educational programs in the region, and work with niche and other accommodation facilities in packaging coordinated experiences to attract visitors.

e) **Update and improve interpretation in the region.** This activity should encompass appropriate update of the region’s interpretive plan to reflect the market, support of improvements at key interpretive venues, and completion of development, as feasible, of new interpretive venues, such as the Mobile Boomtown, other boomtown alternatives to the extent feasible, and the Rouseville and Emlenton refinery sites.

f) **Develop additional revenue sources for the Oil Region Alliance.** This could include expansion of new merchandise and publication offerings as well as partnership income producing ventures.

**Long-term (2012 and beyond)**

This phase anticipates completion and expansion of many programs, ventures, and physical infrastructure proposed in Phase I and II, as well as building upon the organization’s efforts to achieve sustainability through income generating programs.

a) **Expand Activities for Broader Community Benefit.** The Oil Region Alliance should continue to develop new educational and recreational improvements and programs by working with educational, interpretive and recreational venues in region to strengthen and add programs and activities.

b) **Develop long-term use/operation for new ORA ventures.** As proposed ventures mature, including the Rouseville site, and Mobile Boomtown or other boomtown alternatives, define new directions that have the potential for revenue and positive community impact.

c) **Seek ORA Sustainability.** During this phase, ORA should evolve into a sustainable organization that has direct sources of revenue. The Oil Region Alliance should continue to provide ongoing coordination and assistance for programs to support its mission goals—working towards supplementing grant and philanthropic contributions with sources of earned income.

By the last Phase, and, periodically throughout the implementation process, it will be appropriate to re-assess progress on this plan to adapt to the changed circumstances within the ORNHA and beyond.
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**Consultant Team**

ICON architecture
Jonathan S. Lane AIA AICP, Principal
Ahmed Kaddoum, Graphics and Urban Design
Caitlin Bowler, Planner
Richard Perkins, Graphics and Web Design
Levi Tofias, Research Assistant
Katrina Marhefka, Graphic Design

VHB
Rita Walsh, Senior Preservation Planner

National Park Service
Peter Samuel, Technical Liaison

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