



CHAPTER VI: INTRINSIC QUALITIES **Along the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail**

This chapter addresses FHWA requirement #2 for a CMP which is “the assessment of the byway’s intrinsic qualities and their context”. The end product is typically a catalogue of the byway’s scenic, historic, natural, archaeological, cultural, and recreational qualities.”

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To receive scenic byway designation at the state or federal level, a corridor is evaluated in terms of its intrinsic qualities which are divided into six categories: archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic. Each intrinsic quality is measured by features or resources that are considered representative, unique, irreplaceable or distinctly characteristic of the region. A road must have significant resources in at least one of the six categories to qualify as a Scenic Byway, and a minimum of two or more to qualify as an All-American Road. In the case of the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, the trail has strengths in all six categories but, by far, its greatest strength is in its rich historical offerings along the entire route. The rich coal and railroad heritage of the region is evident at every turn in the road.

The challenge lies in selecting those qualities that best tell the story of a particular trail. Intrinsic quality resources must also be of interest to a variety of people. This means that the resource must be important to more than a small group such as a family or a particular interest group. Intrinsic qualities must also be accessible to a visitor while at the same time they should be protected and/or preserved so that others may experience them as well. And most importantly, intrinsic qualities must be capable of interpretation. In the case of this particular trail, information provided through multiple media sources should help one to better understand and interpret the significance coal has played in the lives of those in the coalfields of Virginia, and in the end, create greater appreciation for the significant role coal has played in the past and continues to play in the lives of those within the region and throughout the world.

There is also a need to prioritize which intrinsic qualities to focus upon. Not all can be interpreted. It is through the process of developing the corridor management plan that those involved begin to look closely at sites along the route and determine which ones to focus upon, which ones need interpretation, and which need protection. There will even be those that will be left in the background purely due to the fact that not everything needs to be interpreted or brought forth for “public consumption”. It is also recommended that priority be given to those intrinsic qualities that provide a high quality experience to the visitor, are integral to the story of the trail and also those able to provide for the visitor’s needs. Visitor needs could be in the form of education, handicap accessibility or it could be addressing basic needs such as food, lodging and gas.

On the following pages is an overview of the many intrinsic quality resources along the Trail focused primarily, but not limited to, those areas of historic significance along the Pocahontas to St. Paul Trail, the St. Paul Loop and the Norton Loop. Many will require interpretation, a safe pull-off area, or parking. Others should not be promoted or marketed until there is a means to protect either the visitor, the resource, or both. And in many cases, basic amenities such as restroom facilities, food and lodging in close proximity to the more popular sites will need to be addressed as more visitors begin traveling the route.