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The Value of Cultural Heritage Work Realized

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Nearly a year ago, I had the opportunity to share a centerpiece of the Northwest Colorado Cultural Heritage Program (NWCCHP): *Our Torchbearers*. By definition, a *Torchbearer* is one to lead or inspire others in working toward a valued goal. Building upon our NWCCHP interpretive themes; Forces of Nature and Ways of Life, we continue to share the rich and diverse stories and heritage assets of a five county, seventeen community region of Northwest Colorado. Our *Torchbearers* come in all sizes and capacity. Whether it is representatives of the town of Yampa, members of Hahns Peak Area Historical Society, Economic Development partners in Rio Blanco County or the staff at the Colorado Welcome Center in Dinosaur, the goal has remained the same; *interpret the vast heritage of Northwest Colorado and impart the authentic stories and vibrant legacy of the region while generating economic vitality within our communities*. To accomplish this goal, NWCCHP *Torchbearers* build resources such as gateway interpretive signs for their communities, create day trip itineraries for locals and visitors alike to explore the region and help to build a short video library for our website www.nwcoloradoheritgetravel.org. Check out the most recent video featuring the storied influence Arthur Carhart's time in the Flat Top Wilderness had on our nation's land preservation initiatives. And look for a new interpretive sign for the "Steamboat Barn," a public education project that shares the story of one of the Yampa Valley's most famous icons. Leadership of the Northwest Colorado Cultural Heritage Program and its *Torchbearers* is proud of its work in the region. And as a nonprofit organization we take, seriously, the need to have measurable outcomes to demonstrate success. But the impact of cultural heritage programming and projects can be difficult to quantify.

Benefits of Historic Preservation Edition 2017, released last month, at the Colorado Preservation Inc. (CPI) Conference is produced for CPI and funded by History Colorado. An expanded version from three previous ones that focused almost entirely on the impacts of the traditional built environment aspect of historic preservation. This edition looks at the full spectrum of heritage and preservation including Cultural Heritage Tourism, Colorado Creative Districts and Colorado Scenic Byways. Although some of the current data, specific to cultural heritage tourism, is being refined, excerpts from this report are encouraging to realizing NWCCP's goal to generate economic vitality in our rural communities. "Thirty (30%) of Colorado overnight leisure trips taken in 2015 had a specific interest in visiting historic places, up from 2009 when just 22 percent of trips had historic places as a specific interest." Additional research has shown cultural travelers spent an average of \$1,319 (2013) per trip, up from \$994 in 2009. This spending rate outpaced traditional leisure travelers nearly 2:1 in some areas. Data, specific to travel regions in Colorado remain elusive, but there is no doubt these number statistics would not be impressive if it were not for dedicated heritage and preservation Torchbearer's in Northwest Colorado. Thank You!