

Southern Maryland Heritage Area Tourism Management Plan Executive Summary DRAFT

Context

The concept of a Heritage Tourism Management Plan and Program within the Southern Maryland Region began some 10 years ago, due largely to the efforts of a committee composed of representatives of state, county, municipal and private agencies formed to gauge its feasibility. The concept emerged from these earlier deliberations to include the entire three county area of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties as the defined Heritage region since many of the region's historic and cultural resources were widely distributed in their locations.

Background

In April 1999, the "Southern Maryland Heritage Partnership" was formed to assume leadership in developing a Heritage Tourism Management Plan in pursuit of official status under the terms of the *Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Development Program*. The first major step taken by the Partnership was to apply for status as a "Recognized Heritage Area" (RHA) according to the terms of the *Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Areas Development Program*. To secure "recognition," the Southern Maryland Heritage Partnership demonstrated that the region has the basic requirements for a successful heritage tourism development program including a unique heritage, numerous historical, natural, cultural, recreational, interpretive and organizational resources, a strong commitment to the heritage area's success, effective local leadership, and a sound record of resource stewardship.

In order to become a "Certified Heritage Area" (CHA) the Management Plan must meet certain specific requirements for jurisdictions participating in the *Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Areas Development Program*. This Management Plan is designed to meet those requirements. It contains a statement of the area's vision and goals, a discussion of the area's heritage significance, documentation of its resources, an assessment of current development and land use issues, an overview and assessment of interpretive resources and

programs, a market analysis, evaluation of linkages, and an assessment of leadership and organizations involved in heritage tourism and economic development. This Management Plan also presents strategies or actions for enhancing heritage resources and achieving optimum visitation to the region. It recommends improvements to physical linkages (roads, trails, river routes, etc.) and non-physical linkages (partnerships, visitor services, etc.) to enhanced the visitor experience, advance economic development strategies, and provide for stewardship and preservation of key heritage resources.

The Process of Developing this Plan

In December 2001, the Heritage Partnership undertook the preparation of this Southern Maryland Heritage Tourism Management Plan (Management Plan) to secure State Certification. The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Steering Committee was formed at the outset and has led the effort to prepare this Heritage Tourism Management Plan. The Committee's broad membership represents dozens of organizations from Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. Over the past 15 months, as the Management Plan has evolved, the general public, state, county and municipal officials, organizations and groups, as well as the Heritage Management Plan Steering Committee, have been consulted regularly or have been active participants on the team developing the Management Plan. The Steering Committee's broad membership represents dozens of organizations which will benefit in numerous ways from successful implementation of the heritage region concept in Southern Maryland.

The Steering Committee hosted a series of public workshops in November and December of 2001 in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. At each workshop, community organizations and county residents were invited to participate in discussions of what key heritage themes best told the "story" of Southern Maryland. Participants agreed that agriculture, maritime history, and eco-tourism are the predominant elements of the region's identity and that all three counties have an abundance of significant

resources to support these as well as other key heritage themes for the region. Workshop participants were also asked what they considered to be the region's strongest assets in terms of natural, cultural, recreational, and historic resources. Following this discussion, participants were asked what they considered to be the greatest opportunities for enhancing heritage program development in the region and what they considered to be the most critical challenges to development of the region's heritage program. The Steering Committee utilized the results of these workshops to help build a thematic framework to organize the region's heritage resources into a cohesive story, and to guide the process of developing strategies to insure the long-term success of the Heritage Area through implementation of the recommendations contained in this Heritage Tourism Management Plan.

Plan Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this Plan are intended to provide the framework for determining the most appropriate projects that will best support the goal of enhancing the visitor experience in the region. Equally important, they serve as guideposts to provide long-term direction to the entity or entities that will ultimately be charged with managing the wide range of activities associated with the ongoing development of the Southern Maryland Heritage Tourism Program.

Although the management plan is essentially a five-year program, the goals and objectives will remain valid and provide guidance beyond that initial period, even as management strategies evolve in response to changing circumstances over time.

The goals and objectives of this plan are proposed within a framework of six major topic areas. Each of these areas represent core components or key elements of successful Heritage Tourism Management Programs. Although no one topic area can be considered of greater importance than another, each has an important, and often mutually supportive, role to play in development of a balanced and comprehensive program strategy.

These six major elements include:

- **Interpretation and Education**

The development of interpretive and educational projects, programs, and activities designed to strengthen the traditions and authenticity of the

heritage area, and improve the understanding of visitors and residents of the significance of Southern Maryland's heritage resources to Maryland and the nation.

- **Linkages, Infrastructure and Facility Development**

The development of efficient transportation and wayfinding systems, thematic tours, interpretive facilities, information centers, and gateways to improve movement, connectivity, and visitor support within the Heritage Area.

- **Community and Economic Development**

The development of strategies that are scaled to the overall character of southern Maryland and support heritage tourism in the region, to enhance public and private investment in community revitalization and economic development.

- **Preservation and Resource Stewardship**

The development or enhancement of preservation mechanisms, programs and initiatives for local jurisdictions, preservation organizations, and individuals to improve conditions for long-term heritage resource stewardship and protection.

- **Marketing and Outreach**

The development of marketing strategies, public awareness campaigns, and outreach programs that promote the Heritage Area to a wide audience and increase visitation to southern Maryland.

- **Managing Implementation and Partnerships**

The development of an effective management platform, management strategies, and cooperative partnerships to ensure successful implementation of the goals for heritage tourism in southern Maryland.

Other Key Elements of this Plan

- **Clusters and Corridors**

Investment in heritage resources to increase visitation to the region is focused through delineation of a Heritage Area Boundary. The SMHA boundary is comprised of eleven clusters and several corridors. Each of the eleven clusters represent a concentration of heritage resources (e.g., museums, historic sites,

parcs, etc.). The corridors between these clusters represent key linkages that connect various components of the heritage region.

- **Projects**

A recreated 19th century steamboat wharf, a state-of-the-art eco-tourism center complete with living exhibits, trails, and a twenty-four-hour “eagle cam,” and a variety of unique, guided, theme tours are just a few of the nearly one hundred projects that have been identified and will be considered for implementation as part of this Heritage Area Tourism Management Plan.

These projects were developed under the umbrella of several “themes” that together tell the region’s story. These themes include: Tobacco and Agriculture, Maritime History, Eco-Tourism, African American and Native American History, Colonial Settlement, War and Conflict, and Recreation and Trails. Additional projects that support visitor infrastructure and marketing and awareness were also identified.

Nearly all of the proposed projects identified in Sections 12 and 13 of this plan bring together government agencies, businesses, and private organizations in partnership to preserve and promote Heritage Area resources for the benefit of its residents and visitors. These projects will play a key role in shaping the future success of the Heritage Area as a unique place to live, visit, work and do business.

Targeting Investment

In addition to outlining the boundaries of the overall Heritage Area, the Management Plan must also designate Target Investment Zones (TIZs) within those boundaries. A Target Investment Zone is a specific priority area designed to attract significant private investment. A number of the incentives available through the Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Areas Program are limited to TIZs to encourage demonstrable results and return on public investment within a relatively short period of time. TIZs therefore contain a concentration of projects that are designed to ‘jump-start’ interest and draw visitors, but most importantly, these projects have been evaluated to ensure that they are feasible and able to be operational within a five-year period.

New TIZs will be designated throughout the life of the Heritage Area as each TIZ completes its series of projects. However, it is crucial that these first Zones

be comprised of projects that are able to ‘hit the ground running’. Eight TIZs have been selected from a candidate list of sixteen identified in the Southern Maryland Heritage Program “Recognition Application”.

The proposed TIZs were selected based on the collective potential for the projects located in each area to achieve the goals of the *Maryland Heritage Areas and Tourism Development Program*. Candidate projects within the TIZs include trail segments and facilities, interpretive facilities, and community revitalization projects. Projects in each TIZ have the potential to leverage private investment and provide a return on public investment.

The eight proposed TIZs include:

- Indian Head in Charles County
- Port Tobacco in Charles County
- Friendship Farm Park in Charles County
- Portions of the Towns of North Beach and Chesapeake Beach in Calvert County
- Portions of the area of Solomons in Calvert County
- Leonardtown in St. Mary’s County
- Piney Point in St. Mary’s County
- Portions of Historic St. Mary’s City in St. Mary’s County

Management Framework: A Platform for Implementation

Broadening visitation to the Southern Maryland Heritage Region and accomplishing the many other related objectives identified in this plan will require a cooperative effort among its partners, who will implement specific projects and programs to achieve the objectives and advance the strategies of the Management Plan. Implementing the Management Plan also will require commitment of significant financial resources from a variety of sources. These financial resources will be used to fund the staffing and operations, program activities, and capital projects required to implement this plan.

Creation of a “Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium” under the leadership provided by the Southern Maryland Travel and Tourism Committee is proposed as part of this plan to lead implementation efforts. The consortium would effectively serve as a “partnership forum” that can better support program implementation. Such an organization will bring

together existing heritage program supporters and providers to enhance opportunities to leverage greater benefits from their initiatives and activities through mutually support. With non-profit corporation status through the involvement of the Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland, such an organizational partnership could seek funding for projects from both government and non-profit organizations alike. Such a forum is therefore recommended as the best means of piloting efforts to implement this plan.

This organizational structure will serve to inform, coordinate and unite the efforts of various organizations currently engaged in promotion of various aspects of the heritage area story to improve overall effectiveness. Key organizations, among others, include the Southern Maryland Travel and Tourism Committee and the Southern Maryland Museum Consortium. The structural framework should also serve as a basis for integrating new partners into policy, planning, and implementation decisions.

Expected Outcomes

The Southern Maryland region encompasses an abundance of historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources reflecting distinctive rural landscapes and historical development along the shorelines of tidal creeks, rivers, and bays. These resources reflect Maryland's beginnings, from 17th-century European settlement and the earliest footholds of religious freedom, to the booming prosperity of 18th- and 19th-century tobacco plantations and the unique culture of the Bay's watermen and boat builders. Visitors to this region can trace Maryland's beginnings through these resources, as well as the prehistoric culture of the Chesapeake Bay region.

Implementation of this plan is designed to showcase the region's history and the many resources of interest in the region. It is designed to provide a better understanding of the full picture of Southern Maryland's heritage. Sites connected with themes which today are not ready for promotion to tourists, such as some War of 1812 and Civil War sites, will increase the depth and draw for heritage tourists. Better linkages both across land and along the extensive water perimeter of Southern Maryland will enhance and add variety to tourist offerings. The quality of life for residents will be enhanced by recreational opportunities and by conservation and

protection policies adopted by the three counties to ensure the quality of the scenic, historic, and natural environment.

Broad community support, from businesses and organizations to governments and individuals, will continue to be necessary to insure the integrity and longevity of the Heritage Area. Public workshops, community presentations, and project newsletters have all been used as tools to inform the region's residents during the process of developing this Heritage Tourism Management Plan and such tools will need to continue to be used by the "Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium to build public support for heritage tourism initiatives in the region over time.