



Martin O'Malley, Governor

PRESS RELEASE



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MARYLAND HERITAGE AREAS AUTHORITY RELEASES STRATEGIC PLAN *PROVIDES VISION FOR HERITAGE TOURISM IN MARYLAND*

CROWNSVILLE (March 24, 2010) – The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority today released its Strategic Plan for 2010-2020. The plan, which received extensive public input over the past two years, is designed to assist the Maryland Heritage Areas Program in meeting the challenge of managing a mature system of state Heritage Areas and sustaining that system over time.

“I’m very pleased to release this plan, which provides a vision for heritage tourism development in Maryland and a blueprint for using our resources wisely to support local heritage area efforts in creating distinctive visitor experiences and protecting Maryland’s natural, historic, and cultural resources” remarked Authority Chairman Matthew J. Power. The plan was unveiled at the Annapolis Maritime Museum’s *Oysters on the Half Shell* exhibit opening. Development of the exhibit was funded, in part, with Maryland Heritage Areas Program grant funds.

Tourism is a vital contributor to Maryland's diverse economy. In 2008 alone, Maryland tourists generated \$1.8 billion in state and local tax revenues and created 146,000 jobs – 95% of which represent small business enterprises. Heritage tourism activities, such as those supported by the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, have been shown to attract visitors who spend more and travel longer, resulting in a more sustained and significant impact on the financial well-being of Maryland communities.

Begun in the spring of 2008, development of the strategic plan was led by the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Heritage Tourism Program and overseen by an interdisciplinary team of state and local tourism, heritage area, scenic byway, and natural resource conservation representatives. Funding for the plan was provided in part by a National Park Service Preserve America grant. A full version of the plan is available at http://mht.maryland.gov/heritageareas_plan.html

Chief elements of the plan include:

- **Statement of Three Focus Areas.** The plan cites three categories of Heritage Area activity that will become the principal basis on which the success of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program will be evaluated over the next ten years, including: 1) Developing Heritage Tourism Product; 2.) Building Partnerships; and, 3.) Sustaining Regional Identity.
- **Identification of Strategies.** The plan identifies strategies in the areas of management, stewardship, heritage tourism marketing and product development, and communication and a proposed schedule for gradual implementation over a ten-year period.
- **Program Performance Measures.** The plan outlines how the Program will evaluate management effectiveness and program outcomes.

“By setting priorities and providing a focus for the future, the plan helps our many state, local government and non-profit partners to work together effectively while also giving them flexibility to determine and respond to local needs,” said Chairman Power. “The hard work begins now, as we start to implement the plan strategies.”

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program was created in 1996 to help communities use heritage tourism to strengthen their economies through the development, protection, and promotion of cultural, historic and natural resources. The Maryland Heritage Areas Program was recognized with a Preserve America Presidential Award in 2007 and has served as a national model for heritage tourism development. Since the Program’s inception, the MHAA has awarded over \$18 million in financial assistance and leveraged approximately \$70 million in non-state funds for heritage tourism projects and activities. Today, 23 counties and Baltimore City have Heritage Areas within their boundaries.

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