



2009 Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Interpretive Planning Workshop Series Summary Report

April 29, 2010

The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, a 290-mile land and water trail in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, was designated by Congress and signed into law in May 2008. Through public and private-sector partnerships, the Trail commemorates and works to preserve the stories, landscapes and lessons of the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812.

This report summarizes information gathered by the consultant team working with the National Park Service to develop an interpretive plan for the Trail. Eight interpretive plan workshops were conducted between November and December, 2009, in the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State of Maryland. Attendees were guided through a series of interactive exercises that identified interpretation challenges and opportunities, important stories, significant resources that best tell those stories, potential audiences, and strategies for connecting these audiences with both the stories and resources.

Input from workshop participants will provide guidance in the development of a plan that outlines interpretive services and programming, sites, and media to facilitate visitors' exploration of the Trail's physical settings, help them make personal connections with the trail's resources and inherent meanings, and improve their understanding of the surrounding landscapes, people, and contemporary and historical cultures of the Chesapeake region.

Workshop locations and Dates

- Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects headquarters -- Monday, November 16, 2009
- Southern Maryland area: Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum -- Tuesday, November 17, 2009
- Prince George's County, Maryland: Hyattsville Municipal Building, near the site of the 1814 Battle of Bladensburg -- Wednesday, November 18, 2009
- Alexandria, VA and Virginia area: Lloyd House, headquarters of Historic Alexandria -- Thursday, November 19, 2009
- Maryland's Eastern Shore area: Queenstown Town Hall -- Monday, December 7, 2009
- City of Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society -- Tuesday, December 8, 2009
- Baltimore County, Maryland: North Point State Park -- Wednesday, December 9, 2009
- Upper Bay, Maryland area: Havre de Grace Maritime Museum -- Thursday, December 10, 2009

To facilitate the understanding of the trail's significance and past initiatives, illustrated project overview boards provided answers to the following questions:

- A. What is the purpose and significance of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail?*
- B. Where is the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail?*
- C. Who is involved in the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and what other initiatives are occurring?*
- D. Why an interpretive plan, and how will it be used?*
- E. How is this workshop incorporated into the interpretive planning process?*

Attendees were provided the following handouts (See *Attachments*):

- 1) The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Information Sheet;
- 2) A copy of two of the project overview boards (*A* and *D/E*);
- 3) The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail NPS Unigrid Brochure; and
- 4) The Star-Spangled Banner Trail War of 1812 Chesapeake Campaign Driving Map.

Workshop Findings

Following is a summary by the consultant team of the information gathered from the participants during the workshop series.

1. What challenges and opportunities do you foresee associated with interpreting the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail?

Overall, the opportunities cited by the participants for interpreting the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail far outweighed the challenges in all of the workshops. Participants strongly support this effort as one that will provide ample benefits to the natural, historic, cultural and economic resources of the regions. Further, the opportunity exists for this Trail to integrate national history into local history, highlighting and celebrating the uniqueness of each community while also providing the larger, broader context (i.e., telling interrelated stories at a variety of sites). Notably, many workshop attendees clearly indicated that this Trail provided an opportunity to enhance and advance a visitor's education and recreation experience.

Many Trail workshop participants recognized that this National Historic Trail provides multiple opportunities to interpret and educate the public on military strategy and battlefields, yet also to more fully explain the role of the citizen throughout the events leading to the writing of the National Anthem in the context of the Chesapeake Campaign and the War of 1812. Other important interpretation opportunities include highlighting the role of the citizen and each community in the war's events and outcome, and how the geography and the landscape, particularly with regards to the Chesapeake Bay, the primary waterways of the Patuxent, Patapsco and Potomac rivers and the smaller tributaries, affected these battles, involved local residents, and shaped the events of the War. Increasing current local residents' knowledge of the events of the Chesapeake Campaign and the War of 1812 through interpretation that integrates national history into

local history was identified by participants as a desired interpretive opportunity. Other notable interpretive opportunities the groups identified include:

- Fostering local stewardship for the natural, cultural and historic resources along the Trail and within the communities themselves;
- Outreach to and education about the events of the Chesapeake Campaign and the War of 1812 and its resources for community members of all ages;
- Ability to supplement the local educational curriculum through the information provided and created in this effort; and
- The potential of the Trail as an economic generator for the many communities in the Commonwealth of Virginia, District of Columbia and the State of Maryland.

Participants in some areas also noted the potential of trailwide interpretative initiatives to enhance the level of interest at current sites in their own communities. Participants in all areas viewed this Trail as an excellent opportunity to increase their visibility nationally and to increase visitation overall.

Participants highlighted these six challenges most frequently in discussing the success of the Trail:

- Intra-partner and external (general public/marketing) communication;
- Ability to inform the visitor of all the stories along the route and at each site in a cohesive manner;
- Coordination (especially regarding operations and maintenance) among multiple trail partners, agencies and sites, especially as this will entail crossing state and jurisdictional boundaries/ authorities;
- Visitor accessibility to the Trail's many disparate sites and resources; and
- Continued funding.

Other notable challenges included how to retain the interest of both the visitor and the partners upon conclusion of the War of 1812 Bicentennial, the difficulty in explaining the many events and outcomes of the War simply, and the best means for interpreting sites that are not accessible to the public. These challenges and how to address them sparked many lively discussions within the workshop sessions, as well as during break times and at conclusion.

Consultant Observations:

Throughout all workshop areas, this National Historic Trail is viewed as an opportunity for connecting the local community to its natural and cultural resources. Further, the local partners in each area who attended the workshops viewed their role in the implementation of the Star-Spangled Banner NHT as a unique opportunity to expand their community's awareness of their resources, as well as a means to introduce and highlight their community to others nationally. They spoke enthusiastically of local folklore, family genealogy, and places that embodied their sense of pride and excitement for the Trail. It was clear at each workshop that the attendees felt strongly that interpretation should not be restricted only to large, well-known sites, but should strive to connect to and raise awareness of many smaller, lesser-known resources within each community. In fact, few participants mentioned the importance of telling the larger story (of the National Anthem and the burning of the Capitol) or of specific battles, except in those areas where battles occurred (i.e., Bladensburg/Hyattsville, Washington D.C., the City of Baltimore, and North

Point, respectively). The consultants do not interpret this as a lack of interest altogether, just one that resonates as a higher priority in communities where such battles occurred, since the battle site offers a more tangible resource. The War of 1812 Bicentennial was seen as a positive vehicle by which many of the partners could contribute immediately with regards to interpretation. The prospect of the event raising awareness appeared to be an appropriate impetus for local residents to be both educated about and involved in the Star-Spangled Banner's many stories, resources and people. Commonalities among areas included placing interpretive emphasis on the story of the local citizen to best communicate historic events, the uniqueness of the region's waterways, natural landscapes and agrarian background, and the continued stewardship of resources at all scales. Participants in all regions recognized that funding and communication are common challenges that plague efforts of this scale nationwide, and that these issues must be addressed through this planning effort and subsequent initiatives (such as the General Management Plan, a marketing plan, etc.).

2. What should a visitor learn about the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail? What significant stories, messages, or perspectives should be presented?

The significant stories and primary themes of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail can help partners form a cohesive language around its many distinctly different resources. Further, these stories and themes can help inspire an intellectual or emotional connection between the visitor and the resource.

In all eight workshops, participants' desires to tell the stories "beyond the battles and feints" were overwhelmingly evident.

- Participants immediately identified the role of the local citizen in the War of 1812 as a primary story, including the roles of key soldiers, merchants and businessmen, citizens and privateers, women, and African Americans, both free and enslaved.
- Significantly, **local** stories were the overwhelming favorites of each workshop, as participants were clearly excited over the possibility of others learning about their local heritage and distinctive resources.
- The geography and landscapes of the area were also mentioned throughout the workshops, including the role the Chesapeake Bay and the Patuxent, Patapsco and Potomac rivers played in boat design, daily commerce, transportation, the evolution of the navy, and eventually, in the creation of the national anthem.
- The resiliency of the people of this nation was a leading story discussed at each workshop. This discussion frequently included the role of the citizen soldier, the rescue of U.S. documents during burning of the Capitol, the ever-present pride in the flag, and the growing recognition that, by successfully turning back the British yet again, our young nation was determined to advance our independence.

Consultant Observations:

At the outset of every workshop, it was apparent from many participants' comments that, to a great extent, interpretation of the Chesapeake Campaign has largely been understood to primarily encompass battles, tales of commanding officers and enlisted men, and

military strategy. However, once participants were encouraged to consider what other aspects of life are both affected by and involved in fighting a war, including specific impacts on their community, they spoke of stories beyond battlefield interpretation to more intimate, personal accounts that captured the uniqueness of each community's culture and background. Each area voiced the desire to interpret the broader story of the Star-Spangled Banner through the different perspectives of local areas, thereby immersing the visitor in the area's significance to the growth of the nation overall. Further customizing of these stories into broader categories of interest was also suggested, again as a means of organizing content and communicating the desired messages and significances of each area (social, historic, environmental, etc). Participants in at least four of the workshops spoke of the events of the Chesapeake Campaign as the turning point for the nation as it began the conflict unprepared, but concluded as more united. Participants in two of the eight areas proposed that the trail's interpretive messages could be better understood if framed in the context of war today versus the 1800's. Each area highlighted its own geographically significant stories and people, again underscoring the desire to retain the human perspective throughout the interpretive services and programming.

3. Where are the places (and types of places) that best teach these stories?

While many sites currently exist for telling the stories of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, participants named and generally agreed upon approximately a half-dozen sites within their area that provide historic and landscape integrity and cultural richness, as well as encourage further exploration to secondary sites. Sites listed seemed to appeal to the range of visitors, such as historians, residents, recreational users and international.

- Many participants were keenly aware that the condition of the War of 1812 resources varies across their region; therefore, people often looked to interpretation along the Trail as a tool for facilitating the enhanced conservation and awareness of lesser-known sites.
- A number of participants expressed the desire for greater accessibility to sites along waterways, as many people spoke of the importance of showcasing the water (Bay, wetlands, and rivers) in interpreting various aspects of the events of the Chesapeake Campaign and the War of 1812. Accessibility was discussed as providing a variety of options, while increasing the current number of access points, including boat launches, canoe/ kayak launches, picnic/ observation/ play areas along the banks, and walkways and bikeways.

Consultant Observations:

At each workshop, participants often generated a list of 20 to 30 potential places for interpretation and visitor experiences. However, in every setting, only six to eight sites were overwhelmingly viewed (based on Sticky Note votes) as the best of the area, either due to established staffing, funding or general knowledge and recognition of the site or landscape regionally or nationally. (Note: As the consultant team discovered during a site

visit, the integrity and accessibility of these sites vary widely, from Fort McHenry to the 1817 Aquila Randall obelisk monument, ranked #6 out of 23 sites mentioned in the North Point workshop.) One workshop location noted places that could be best accessed by a water trail, providing a unique experience that other locations did not consider when selecting the best sites for interpretation. To the consultant, this indicates that the water trail of the Star-Spangled Banner NHT may be lesser known to partners. Since Trail visitors may only have a few hours to visit these places and learn the stories, it became apparent in the course of the workshops that interpretation at these premier sites should receive highest priority (to ensure the stories are told to a majority of visitors), while other sites could be highlighted for those visitors and residents with special interests. At two workshops, participants volunteered that perhaps a Star-Spangled Banner NHT visitor center should be considered in the future to provide a richer educational and interpretive experience about the Trail's many stories, people and significances for both local residents and visitors. Both built and natural landscapes were mentioned consistently in all workshops as desirable places for interpretation. Realizing that the Trail traverses diverse areas within the region, the attendees often selected their premier landscapes (cemetery, state park, waterway, historic homestead) as often as their most significant structures.

4. How many different types of visitors should we expect? How can these different types of visitors best learn the stories of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail? What types of activities, programs, media, etc., can enhance visitors' experiences at these places and reinforce visitors' understanding of the many stories of these places?

The workshops' *Visitor Experience* exercises encouraged participants to consider the diverse types of visitors and their expectations and needs. From these answers, participants then discussed the array of appropriate interpretive services, locations, and delivery methods (personal guided tours, or non-personal delivery systems such as signs, brochures, downloadable media, etc.).

- Participants' **analyses of visitor types** were remarkably consistent throughout the region, with special emphasis on and repeated acknowledgement of
 - organized groups (including not-for-profit and recreational),
 - education groups (especially K-12),
 - accidental tourists,
 - local residents (Trail neighbors),
 - historians and self-described history buffs,
 - military-affiliated visitors,
 - virtual (Internet-based) visitors,
 - motor coach/ bus tours
 - international visitors, and
 - convention/ conference attendees (and their families).

- Overwhelmingly, participants emphasized **hands-on events and self-selected/self-guided programs or activities** as the preferred strategies for ensuring a rich visitor experience at each site. Attendees in all eight workshops recommended memorable immersive or interactive offerings such as customized

tours, living history reenactments of battles and other events, water-based activities such as boat tours, family-oriented activities such as geocaching, and educational programming, especially the integration of War of 1812 topics into school curricula. Incorporating themed recreational or sports-related events was also highly recommended, with examples including triathlons, kayak races and bicycling tours.

- Participants also observed that to optimize visitor experiences, **good communication** is an absolute necessity, from basic information and identification (who, what, when, where) to targeted marketing, interpretive media and publicly accessible web-based communications and social media. Regardless of the location or type of activity, participants observed that visitor experiences should be enriched and complemented with interpretive messaging, most likely through a combination of wayside signage, downloadable guides, updated web pages and/ or brochures. Many mentioned the local library and locally sponsored events as the best method for communicating to and involving local residents.

Consultant Observations:

Recreational and accidental tourists seemed to be the visitor types that were most often top of mind for workshop attendees, due to their current prevalence in many communities. The ideas for how best to improve these visitors' experiences were technologically focused and customizable. Realizing that most visitors have a specific interest and limited time, workshop participants offered ideas on how best to inform these self-directed visitors (i.e., self-accessed downloadable info, self-guided tours, etc). Many participants suggested events that were themed and thereby would attract certain interest groups of visitor types (such as tri athletes, kayakers, re enactors, etc.). Others identified possible activities or programs that could attract and be administered by current organizations in the community such as Boy Scout troops. Potential activities or programs specifically tailored to the local resident/ trail neighbor centered on recreational activities (i.e. kayak events, bike criterium) and festival/ celebrations that highlight local resources. Some participants noted the difficulty with establishing local programs to facilitate stewardship of the Trail over the long-term.

5. It takes many partners to interpret the resources along the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail effectively. Who else should be involved in developing and implementing the interpretive plan?

The eight workshops clearly demonstrated that each region is fortunate to have a strong core of supporters who appreciate how the Trail can inform, inspire and educate, and yet also understand the enormous effort associated with implementing the Trail's interpretive, physical and management requirements in the coming years.

- Participants noted that the implementation of an interpretive plan for the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail will require thoughtful coordination among federal, state, county, and city governments and agencies, non-government organizations including numerous partner non-profits, businesses and local

residents due to both the land and water routes and the many sites that exist along the Trail's 290 miles.

- At the conclusion of each workshop, participants were asked to provide names of additional potential partners they thought should be involved in the Trail and/or its interpretive plan. Responses included suggestions spanning all sectors (private, public, and non-profit) currently or potentially interested in the natural, cultural, recreational and historic resources of each region. Partnerships formed and guided by this interpretive plan will be the primary strategy for ensuring an enjoyable Trail experience for visitors.

Consultant Observations:

While all participants listed numerous business, community groups, civic leaders and other knowledgeable and influential citizens in their area (on average, 20 to 30), the plan must thoughtfully identify those leaders who can best facilitate the *interpretation* of these resources specifically (rather than operations and maintenance, for example). It seems that, currently, the partners are unsure of their role and how best to engage visitors in a manner that is consistent across the many communities. The plan must articulate roles and opportunities for interpretive services and media that will be applicable and appropriate for all partners, so as to offer a clear understanding of how best to tell the Trail's many stories region wide. Coordination will need to occur between the National Park Service and its local partners on a consistent basis (perhaps through a full-time position, such as a partner coordinator) to ensure that the interpretation needs are being understood and prioritized among the many sites and organizations.

Workshop Transcripts

Complete transcripts of all the workshop proceedings (verbatim as captured on flipcharts in live workshop settings by the consultant team) are provided as addenda to this report. These workshop transcripts, identified as "meeting minutes," are posted on the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail website for public review and comment (<http://www.nps.gov/stsp>).

Attachments:

- 1) The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Information Sheet;
- 2) Project overview boards (*A* and *D/E*) utilized during the workshops.