



House near Tunis Mills

SUMMARY ABSTRACT

Maryland's Upper Eastern Shore enjoys a rich heritage, a wealth of natural and recreational resources, and a unique culture. Rich agricultural fields meet more than a thousand miles of coastline here where water and land intertwine. There are few other places as special or as inviting as the Upper Eastern Shore.

Responding to public support, representatives of county offices and private groups have begun to develop a heritage area proposal for the Upper Eastern Shore. The participating four counties—Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot—possess unique historic, natural, and cultural amenities that can be used to draw heritage tourists to the area while preserving the region's quality of life. This report offers a vision and a beginning examination of ways to create unique visitor experiences, foster local private investment, preserve the local heritage, and enhance public awareness and appreciation for the Upper Eastern Shore.

The potential development of this region as a heritage area would be done in accordance with the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, which provides funding and technical assistance to developing heritage areas. Through a process of

recognition and certification, the Upper Eastern Shore Heritage Area can gain access to state funding directed toward activities which benefit the heritage area. This funding takes the form of grants, loans, and tax credits. Financial support is limited only by the state's debt-carrying capacity and the ability of local governments and groups to match the grants.

In addition to support from the four county governments, efforts thus far have received support from:

- Washington College;
- Chesapeake College;
- Numerous other public and private organizations in the region;
- Maryland Historical Trust;
- Maryland House Speaker Casper R. Taylor, Jr.;
- National Park Service; and
- United States Senator Paul S. Sarbanes.

A list of potential partners within the region is provided in Appendix D.

THE BENEFITS OF HERITAGE AREA DEVELOPMENT

The Upper Eastern Shore region can benefit from heritage area planning and management in the following ways:

- Increased state investment in local economies and infrastructure;
- Expanded preservation of historic sites and landscapes;
- More conservation of important natural resources;
- Strengthened and diversified local economies;
- Increased heritage tourism;
- Greater private investment and tourism industry development;
- Increased sales, accommodations, and property tax revenues;
- Improved awareness of an American history that extends over more than 400 years;
- Enhanced cultural resources;
- Increased recreational opportunities;
- Strengthened communities;
- Development of local crafts and arts; and
- Maintaining quality of life.

Any project providing far-ranging benefits requires costs. For the expense of developing and managing a heritage area, the region will benefit through coordinated planning efforts. An increase in tourism on the Upper Eastern Shore is inevitable. The potentially harmful effects are not. Unmanaged tourism can burden local infrastructure and harm historic and natural sites through overuse. Sensitive

and responsive planning can mitigate these effects and foster improvements of regional amenities. Thus, heritage tourism can be a boon, not a nuisance, to the region by preserving important resources while maintaining the quality of life for residents. The purpose of management planning is to anticipate and manage changes to achieve a balance between the needs of the residents and the interests of the visitors. This will require creativity and far-sightedness on the part of the management organization and continued funding commitments from local governments. In the end, the region will benefit, and the investment will bring a healthy return.

HOW IT WILL WORK

A central coordinating body will ultimately be needed to develop heritage tourism programs in the region. One new task for such a body will be developing interpretation programs that link sites across the region that share a common history. For example, the history of life on the water is a dominant theme for this region. This history can be presented at places such as Chestertown and the old Customs House; Kent Narrows, where old packing facilities used to be; Oxford, which was a shipbuilding center in colonial times; and West Denton, the site of steamboat landings 100 years ago. This report identifies almost 75 sites that can be used to tell the story of life on the water.

Other key themes to be interpreted are *Colonial and Early National History*, *Nature*, *Agriculture*, and *Religion*, along with supporting themes of *African American Heritage*, *Small Town Life*, and *Prehistory*. Places where several themes can be interpreted will be targeted for planning and investment. This report identifies the following places where three or more themes can be interpreted:

Chestertown, Centreville, Church Hill, Crumpton, Denton, Easton, Federalsburg, Georgetown, Grasonville, Greensboro, Hillsboro, Kent Island, Millington, Oxford, Queen Anne, Queenstown, Ridgely, Rock Hall, St. Michaels, Tunis Mills, and Wye Mills.

Other tasks to be undertaken across the region include encouraging greater collaboration among existing tourism attractions such as museums and recreational areas; working to stimulate more tourism business development to provide such amenities as accommodations and restaurants; and working with local governments to assure adequate planning and investment in protection and development of special resources from historic sites to greenways.