

SUBMITTED TESTIMONY  
For the Record

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Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives

H.R. 2024  
The *Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act*.

June 15, 2021

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Subcommittee Chair Neguse and Subcommittee Ranking Member Fulcher, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, my name is Lucille Walker, and I am the Executive Director of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area (SMHA), also known as *Destination Southern Maryland*, a state-based heritage area of significant national importance. I thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of H.R. 2024, the *Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act*.

Before I describe the profound national significance of Southern Maryland, and the efforts to revitalize and enhance heritage tourism and economic development to this rural region, please let me first thank Representative Hoyer and Senators Cardin and Van Hollen, for their remarkable leadership on the issues so important to all of us today – how we can ignite and sustain economic innovation and rejuvenation in our communities, and in this case, our rural communities, by investing in our authentic heritage. We thank the Congressman and Senators for their leadership, support for this legislation, and their efforts on behalf of Southern Maryland as a whole.

I am here today as a spokesperson for this vital initiative, but I represent a unique coalition of partnerships: federal, state, municipal, community-based, bi-partisan, private, public, business-based, preservation-based, museum-based, art-based, educational, environmental, inclusive.

H.R 2024 will establish an historically rich and culturally diverse national heritage area to include Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and Southern Prince George's counties in the State of Maryland. Recognized in 2003 as vital to the heritage and history of Maryland, the current state-based Southern Maryland Heritage Area (which includes Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties) was established and certified as one of thirteen heritage areas in Maryland under the Maryland Heritage Area Authority. As such, this heritage area has had a notable impact within the region and the state. I would direct you to the economic contribution report for this heritage area completed for 2019 by the firm of Parker Phillips, Inc., included with this testimony. Utilizing the multiplier effect and data models developed by IMPLAN (the same economic impact assessment tool used by the National Park Service) this report concluded that the

overall economic impact of heritage tourism in Southern Maryland (not just the heritage area) as \$187 million, with \$25.3 million in state and local tax revenue, with 2,637 jobs supported and sustained. This initial report shows the promise of the region for further economic viability and growth, particularly as it relates to heritage tourism.

*Destination Southern Maryland* (the public facing name of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area) has a mission to enhance the region through innovative heritage tourism experiences, comprehensive cultural and natural resource conservation, and excellence in educational opportunities. This state heritage area lies entirely within the Atlantic Coastal Plain and is bounded by the Chesapeake Bay on the east and by the Potomac River on the west and south. Southern Maryland has a thousand miles of shoreline with fossil-laden cliffs, quiet tidal inlets and sandy beaches. Our job as a state heritage area is to tell what makes Southern Maryland unique, and to make sure all stories are told, all voices heard. We are a land of ancient history, natural history, Indigenous people's history, colonial history, African American history, agricultural history, history of religion, history of wars, history of shipwrecks, history of "where time and tide meet".

So, given that we are a successful state heritage area entity, why is it crucial to become a national heritage area? Because this region is one of the foundation stories of our nation. The story of Southern Maryland *is* the national story.

As a state heritage area, the stories of this region tend to stop at the borders of Maryland. This region needs to contribute to the national conversation. Without becoming a national heritage area, these critical histories will remain local rather than national. To fully develop and explore the heritage of this region, and to tap more fully into the economic potential, designation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is needed.

What are the national foundation stories of this proposed national heritage area?

To begin with, it is in Southern Maryland that religious freedom was codified into law for the first time in the entire Western World. The first time, ever, that any type of religious toleration, this founding principle, this basic human right, was put into law. This law, *An Act Concerning Religion*, also called the *Maryland Toleration Act of 1649*, provided the foundation for religious freedom within the United States Constitution. The founding principles of religious freedom and the separation of church and state began in the 1600s in Southern Maryland. This is stunning.

The proposed Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is a land of many firsts and contrasts.

It is where Maryland was founded in 1634 with the landing at St. Clement's Island, and where the first capital of Maryland (Historic St. Mary's City) was established. The original fort site of 1634 has been recently discovered and will provide a ten-to-fifteen-year archeological exploration. Significantly, this archeological and anthropological exploration will not only be of the colonial settlers but of the Indigenous population as well. The new "People to People" project will work directly with the Piscataway Conoy Tribe to interpret this contact between worlds. The proposed national heritage area will be critical to this exploration, as within the framework of the Southern Maryland National Heritage

Area all of these histories and impacts will be explored (Indigenous, European, and those of African descent) contributing to our understanding of the beginning of our nation.

It is also here in Southern Maryland that the first person of African descent ever served in a legislature in America, Mathias de Sousa (1642), and the first time a woman ever petitioned for the right to vote, Margaret Brent (1648). These are remarkable “firsts” and need to be further explored within the national context.

The history and culture of African Americans in Southern Maryland is another essential component of the region. There are no histories in isolation. The proposed national heritage area is focused on contextualizing events, and not placing any event or history in isolation. In other words, no “silos.” European arrival affected not only the Indigenous population but also those of African descent. Southern Maryland is where a United Nations Slave Route Site of Remembrance is located at Historic Sotterley, signifying the resistance, liberty, and heritage of the African American story, as well as numerous National Park Service Network to Freedom sites. The proposed national heritage area will interpret the stories of notable individuals such as Josiah Henson (whose autobiography inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), Mathew Henson (an American explorer and one of the first people, and the first African American, to reach the North Pole), the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray (civil rights lawyer, activist, author, poet, and first female African American Episcopal priest), among many others.

The proposed national heritage area also includes the newly designated Mallow Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary, with its rich connections to the maritime history, military history, and Indigenous history. This region is also the site where the first astronauts trained at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station, where there are numerous National Park Service sites (including the Thomas Stone National Historic Site, a signatory on the Declaration of Independence), Dr. Mudd’s House where John Wilkes Booth fled after assassinating President Abraham Lincoln, the Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway, the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and many more. Southern Maryland is where the largest battle in Maryland was fought during the Revolutionary War (St. George Island), where major campaigns during the War of 1812 were fought, including when the British landed in Benedict, Maryland and marched to burn Washington, D.C. Southern Maryland is where African American soldiers were trained to fight for the Union during the Civil War (Camp Stanton) and where prisoners were held from the Confederacy (Point Lookout).

Southern Maryland has a rich tapestry of agricultural and maritime heritage that continues to this day. There is a distinct and unique Southern Maryland culture, including food, music, artistic traditions, watermen traditions, farming heritage, tobacco barns from the 1700s to the present day. And, winding through it all, Southern Maryland is where the first people lived and continue to live, a people who have managed to survive against all odds, creating a new legacy, the Piscataway Conoy Tribe.

In terms of numbers:

National Register Properties = 133

National Historic Landmarks = 7

National Facilities (parks, marine sanctuary, trails, etc.) = 13

State Facilities = 32

City/County Facilities = 34  
Open to the Public = 138

A draft resource inventory is included with this testimony.

The proposed Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will broaden the understanding of our national story and will enhance and promote the economic viability of this historically profound, yet not nationally known, rural region.

A Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Steering Committee was formed in 2019, and consultants were engaged to guide the region through the National Heritage Area Feasibility Study process. This study is now in the steering committee review stage before submission to the National Park Service for technical review.

Excerpted from the draft of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Feasibility Study:

*The National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines* (National Park Service, 2019) note that national heritage areas are “regions that have contributed in substantial ways to our national heritage.” The guidelines direct the study team to assemble and analyze historical information to define the study area’s contributions to the national story and to develop interpretive themes as the “organizing framework” that are “bridges to increased public understanding of the importance of the region and its theme-related resources.”

This directive was accomplished through a multi-step process that began with the formation of a steering committee which included subject matter experts and holding three public meetings in the fall of 2020. Meetings focused on reviewing themes developed for the Southern Maryland Heritage Area as the basis for identifying nationally significant stories and resources. Additionally, numerous plans for nationally significant resources were reviewed including the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan, Captain John Smith National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan, Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan, Mallow’s Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan, National Register of Historic Places nominations for many properties, and multiple documents researched and written by subject matter experts in the region. The proposed Statement of National Significance and five interpretive themes were presented in two public meetings in the spring of 2021 and were reviewed by the steering committee and a group of subject matter experts.

In accordance with the guidelines, the study team developed an inventory of historic, cultural, and natural resources to recognize the special places that underpin the region’s important stories. The resource inventory demonstrates the three purposes specified in the guidelines:

- 1) assess whether the region is a nationally distinctive landscape;
- 2) assess the presence of resources connected to the identified themes which retain integrity for interpretation; and
- 3) identify opportunities for conservation, recreation, and education.

## **Statement of National Significance**

The arrival of the first English colonists in 1634 to a land that was already occupied by Indigenous people heralded the beginning of experimentation, engagement, struggle, and progress with complex and interwoven notions of cultural dominance, political rights, race, religion, commerce, environmental impact, and military conquest. From these beginnings, the inherent struggle to widen the circle of rights, inclusion and opportunity is reflected in each era of Southern Maryland's history. Southern Maryland is a land of contrasts and contradictions. It is where religious freedom was codified into law for the first time in the western world and one's choice of religion did not disqualify participation in local government and where colonists forged new laws and new rights, but it is also where Indigenous people lost their rights and their homes, and where Africans were brought to these shores in chains without the basic rights of humanity. The region's geography set the stage for this ongoing story as history played out on the Chesapeake Bay landscape, where water touched all aspects of life. The waterways that helped sustain the Indigenous Piscataway are the same ones that carried British military forces to these shores in the War of 1812 and subsequently positioned the region for strategic military importance to the United States centuries later. The landscape and waterways that offered prosperity to many offered only enslavement to Africans captured and brought to these shores. Enslaved and indentured people worked these fertile lands, and trade flourished. Over time, a unique maritime culture emerged with new boats called skipjacks and a new name – watermen – coined for those who make their living harvesting seafood from the Chesapeake Bay, an economy that continues to the present. The centrality of tobacco, not only as a crop but a lifestyle, had far-reaching consequences in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as it became the region's economic foundation before eventually becoming part of the national movement to end its growth and use. The upward arc of inclusion is apparent in the determination of formerly enslaved African Americans to obtain an education and work toward full citizenship after the Civil War, and in the re-emergence of the Piscataway as an officially recognized tribe by the State of Maryland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Interpretive Themes**

### **Theme 1 - Piscataway People: The Land is Who We Are**

For thousands of years, Indigenous people called Piscataway have lived on the lands that now comprise Southern Maryland. Today, many Piscataway still live in Southern Maryland, the descendants of the people whose homeland is now shared with many others. Modern Piscataway have kept their culture alive, passing their history and tribal customs on to their children across generations. The Piscataway People remain a vibrant part of Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region.

### **Theme 2 - Sea Change: Time and Tide Shape Land and Life**

Water has shaped land and life in Southern Maryland for millennia. Water first supported a place for life more than 10 million years ago when a shallow ocean teeming with life covered

this land. Waterways were so important to Indigenous peoples that their name – Piscataway – means “where the waters meet.” Water provided the avenue for change with the arrival and settlement of Europeans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both indentured and free, and the unwilling arrival of enslaved Africans. Water made Southern Maryland a harbor for ships from the Revolutionary War through World War II. Water is the source of Southern Maryland’s unique maritime culture as the region became a center of fishing, crabbing and oyster production, and culinary seafood specialties emerged. Southern Maryland’s aquaculture is celebrated and commemorated today with many historic sites, museums, tours, festivals, and events. Today, thousands of miles of shoreline continue to be important for recreation and business as well as the focus of environmental restoration and conservation.

### Theme 3 - Tobacco: A Growing Concern

For almost four centuries, tobacco was the economic foundation of life in Southern Maryland. The reach of tobacco’s influence touched all people: honored as sacred by the Piscataway, bringing prosperity to whites and servitude to enslaved African Americans, and influencing cultural norms well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tobacco’s demands were great – exhausting the soil, forcing unending labor from the enslaved, and finally, destroying the health of its users.

### Theme 4 - Spirit of Faith, Spirit of Law, Spirit of Progress

Freedom, liberty, rights, opportunity, tolerance, control, subjugation ...These high ideals and harsh realities collided in Southern Maryland as the new colony’s governance directly addressed religious freedom for English colonists while soon creating systems and laws that would marginalize the Piscataway and enslave Africans. For the ensuing four centuries, the effort to define or defy circumstances of faith, law and opportunities for progress continued in response to treaties, war, emancipation, segregation, and campaigns for rights and recognition, over time widening the circle of beneficiaries of the original colonists’ vision for their new world.

### Theme 5 - Defense of a Nation

Armed conflicts have touched Southern Maryland from the time the area was first occupied. The region played a critical role in establishing and securing a new nation in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and dealt with the struggle of a nation torn apart by Civil War. Southern Maryland contributed to defending American ideals in 20<sup>th</sup> century wars and continues to safeguard the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As was mentioned previously, there is a current state-based heritage area in place, which has been very helpful to the region. However, the state heritage area alone cannot elevate the profile of Southern Maryland on a national level and bring to the national discourse the primary ideas and histories of this region. Additionally, the current state-based heritage area includes sections of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary’s counties, with southern Prince George’s County not included in any current state or federal heritage area program. With the designation of a national heritage area, the complete counties of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary’s will be included, as well as the southern tier of Prince George’s County.

With this inclusion, a more complete story can be told. This is especially significant for telling a more comprehensive story of African American and Indigenous histories within the region.

Southern Prince George's County is a distinct entity within its county, as it is aligned with the agricultural and historical history of Southern Maryland rather than the more industrial and urban history of the northern section of the county. Specifically, with the designation of a national heritage area, important sites with valuable national stories (which are currently not included within a state or federal heritage area) will now be woven into the narrative. These sites include, but are not limited to, the Mary Surratt House and Museum (1843), Compton Bassett (1783), Darnall's Chance House Museum (1742), the National Colonial Farm at Piscataway Park (National Park Service), the Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center, the Fort Washington Park (National Park Service, 1814), the St. Thomas' Parish National Historic District, the Patuxent River Park and Jug Bay Natural Area, the historically black communities of Aquasco, Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor, to name only a few.

The timing of this legislation, H.R. 2024 *The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Act*, is also very important. The State of Maryland was founded in Southern Maryland in 1634, and the 400<sup>th</sup> commemoration of this founding is only thirteen years away, in 2034. The designation of Southern Maryland as a national heritage area will present a compelling avenue for building momentum and interest in this commemoration, with subsequent economic benefit to the region.

Distinguished members of the Subcommittee, national heritage areas are catalysts for our communities. The proposed Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will provide an enhanced economic platform based on its profound historical context, heritage, conservation and tourism potential to the rural areas of Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's and Southern Prince George's counties. This designation will also provide our national dialogue with an essential part of our nation's story, often unknown or overlooked.

The proposed Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will be a key national resource, and vital to the understanding of who we are, who we were, and who we want to be as a nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.