

Summary of Comments Received at Public Open House Workshops and Stakeholder Meetings

Public Scoping Open House Workshops and Stakeholder Meetings (Fall 2010)

The NPS initiated external scoping with the public and stakeholders for the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway CMP in the fall of 2010. The objectives of external scoping were to obtain information regarding:

- the issues related to management of the Trail/Byway
- the range of management alternatives that should be considered in the CMP to address those issues
- the range and nature of impacts that should be used to evaluate and compare alternative management actions

In October 2010, the NPS mailed a public scoping newsletter to over 3,000 email addresses. The newsletter provided an overview of the Trail/Byway route; statements of the Trail/Byway purpose and significance; and an overview of the CMP planning process and milestones. It also invited the public to attend upcoming public scoping open house workshops.

In November 2010, the NPS hosted four public scoping open house workshops attended by 141 people at locations along the Trail/Byway:

- November 3, 2010 – Anacostia Watershed Society, Bladensburg, Maryland (32 attended)
- November 4, 2010 – Conowingo Hydroelectric Plant Visitor Center, Edgemere, Maryland (32 attended)
- November 8, 2010 – North Point State Park Visitor Center, Darlington, Maryland (32 attended)
- November 9, 2010 – Benedict Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad, Benedict, Maryland (45 attended)

The primary purpose of the public scoping open house workshops was to gather ideas from individuals and communities on how the Trail/Byway should evolve. Each public workshop began with a presentation providing an overview of the Trail/Byway purpose and the planning process. After the presentation there was a question and answer period during which the NPS answered many questions posed by the public. Participants also had an opportunity to learn more about the Trail/Byway by viewing a series of poster-size maps and text boards before and following the presentation. Cards were available for the public to provide additional comments by answering a series of questions.

In November 2010, the NPS also hosted three stakeholder workshops attended by 38 people at locations along the Trail/Byway:

- November 3, 2010 – Huntley Meadows, Alexandria, Virginia (13 attended)
- November 4, 2010 – Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland (13 attended)
- November 9, 2010 – Dumbarton House, District of Columbia (12 attended)

Each stakeholder workshop began with a presentation providing an overview of the Trail/Byway purpose and the planning process. After the presentation the stakeholders engaged in a facilitated discussion focused on identifying planning issues; who needs to be involved in the planning process; Trail/Byway resources, stories, and audiences; and other topics of interest to the stakeholders present at each workshop.

Summary of Comments Received

▪ Overall Trail Experience

Visitors should have a unified Trail/Byway experience following the historic travel route of the British and American forces with side tracks that connect the many places where the War of 1812 stories can be told. The Trail/Byway experience should transport visitors back to the time when much of the corridor was rural with some agriculture, focusing on its cultural history – African American, European American, and Native American. Visitors will want to hear stories through the most authentic places where the events of the war occurred – particularly where sites retain historic integrity – some occurring in nodes that would offer key experiences along the route. Creating the Trail/Byway experience should be about making connections among these places. Visitors arriving at one site should learn about the connections to other sites, encouraging multiple experiences and enhancing understanding of the story. The Trail/Byway should move people along it, providing opportunities for them to do as many things as they want.

Water segments of the Trail perhaps offer the most opportunity for a traditional “trail” experience; many water stretches retain the integrity of landscape most visitors envision when they think of a traditional trail.

▪ Trail Planning, Development and Management

NPS should continue to have overall responsibility for Trail/Byway planning, development, and management. Trail planning should reach out to as many partners as possible, including the individual sites, local government agencies, local community groups, and others. Planning should focus on identifying the connections needed to develop the Trail/Byway and the steps needed to make the connections happen. Individual sites along the Trail/Byway should determine which parts of the story they like and can tell and how they fit into the overall effort.

Many plans are underway or have been recently completed by public agencies and partners involving War of 1812 resources, trails, and protection efforts along the Trail/Byway. The NPS should incorporate

the recommendations of these plans, as appropriate, into the overall management plan for the Trail/Byway. The plan should also address enhancing public understanding of how the various planning efforts relate to and integrate with the Trail/Byway, particularly plans for greenways and other trails, such as the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

The Trail/Byway management program should have a granting capacity to fund activities consistent with the management plan, such as educational programs and operating funds for sites, with both matching and non-matching grants. The sites will need to be flexible and prepared to respond to changing funding priorities over time.

Long-term management of the Trail/Byway will likely require different stewards for different parts of the route. There may be a need for a volunteer corps to meet management needs. NPS is the logical entity to coordinate the activities of the Trail/Byway stewards and volunteers.

Trail development should focus on quick and easy things first.

- **Orientation to the Trail and Trail Marking**

Most visitors do not know what a national trail/byway is and the story is big and complicated. Anything to make the experience simpler and more comprehensible is desirable. The Trail/Byway website should provide a virtual tour with an interactive map enabling visitors to click on an area, find out what happened there, and then obtain through links more information about places to visit. Designated visitor centers should provide basic orientation, perhaps at Ft. McHenry and at as many as six other sites where the War of 1812 story could be told quickly. A guidebook should provide the means for following the Trail/Byway with waysides from place to place. Waysides are especially needed, along with additional media that tell the story such as brochures and videos, where historic sites are compromised today and along route stretches that have little remaining critical resource mass. Directional signage will be essential along the Trail/Byway, particularly to aid visitors who travel the route into confusing sections of Baltimore and the District of Columbia. On the watertrails, beacons or buoys are needed to encourage boaters to visit land-based sites.

- **Telling the Trail/Byway Stories**

The most compelling War of 1812 stories will interest visitors most. The Trail/Byway's partners will tell the stories, interpreting resources and events. Currently there are many areas along the Trail/Byway where the War of 1812 story is not being told, such as in the Upper Bay, Northern Neck, the District of Columbia, and the city of Alexandria).

Because visitors will only hear parts of the story at each site there will be a need for more interpretive media than typical brochures. Technology offers many new opportunities, such as a Trail/Byway website and use of smart phones. Museums would be perfect venues for hosting traveling exhibits for using/coordinating interactive media. Local libraries could also host traveling exhibits.

There is a general need for interpretation for arriving boaters at launch sites – such as at Jefferson Patterson Park – to make them more welcoming and to tell the Trail's stories.

- **Educational Programs**

Educational programs in the schools offer a highly effective means of enhancing public understanding and awareness of the War of 1812 and the Trail/Byway. Curricula should be developed, integrated with state programs, including lessons plans for site-based educational programs that could be available to teachers on the Trail/Byway website. Engaging teachers in person at workshops offered at evocative partner sites, and led by people who know the War of 1812 stories, would enhance use of the curricula.

- **Visitor Facilities**

A few major or overarching gateways along the Trail/Byway should capture visitors and send them to specific sites. Each site should provide appropriate facilities for visitors. All sites along the Trail/Byway should have restroom facilities. Many the sites and places of interest along the Trail/Byway are not visitor ready and will need upgrading/repairs to make them attractive.

Water trail segments of the Trail/Byway need additional facilities to support visitor use. While a well developed network of public access already exists along the route, many public access sites have not had proper maintenance and more are needed to increase opportunities for visitors to get out onto the water. The recently completed Maryland Water Trails Plan provides a good initial assessment of public access needs, but has not identified all access needs and water trails of potential interest along the Trail/Byway, such as a water trail and associated desired enhancements along Bear Creek. In general, the water trails network needs more campgrounds to support multi-day trips, particularly water-accessible campsites, of which there are currently very few.

Where the Trail/Byway passes through wildlife management areas there is typically no interpretation and few facilities. These sites will need interpretive signage, parking, and information for boaters about amenities and conditions such as water depth.

- **Trail/Byway Access and Visitor Safety**

Visitors should have safe multi-modal access along the length of the Trail/Byway. Currently the road network composing the route in many areas is inhospitable to pedestrian and bicycle travel. Recently completed bike and pedestrian plans for many communities along the Trail/Byway identify existing hazardous conditions, desired improvements, and prioritized actions for enhancing safety. In general, bike lanes and separated trails for walking are needed to provide a safe travel experience along the route. Where possible these should use existing parkland, getting travelers completely off the road. Connectivity to the Trail/Byway would be enhanced by providing links to other walking/biking trails in both rural and urban areas.

Where travel along urban sections of the route is particularly confusing, brochures showing site locations along with bus and rail lines with colors would be very helpful for visitors. Development of these materials should be coordinated with local transit agencies, such as the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

- **Community Impacts**

Future development and management of the Trail/Byway should respect local character and have a “delicate footprint” on rural communities. Trail planners should design visitor facilities and promote attractions along the Trail/Byway in a manner consistent with and supportive of local plans. As facilities are planned and developed that will attract more visitors to rural areas, the concerns of local residents should be considered and potential impacts to communities should be avoided or mitigated. Some residents along the Trail/Byway are concerned that – once facilities are developed and people become aware of new recreation opportunities – large numbers of visitors and related traffic will adversely affect their community. Tour buses could have difficulty safely traveling rural roads and could interfere with local traffic. Increased traffic could conflict with farm equipment on rural roads. Visitors could trespass on private property. There is concern that development of Trail/Byway facilities will require taking private property.

As planning for the Trail/Byway continues, NPS needs to make it very clear to local communities how the Trail/Byway will develop and be managed over time, including identification of as many specific projects where possible.

- **Marketing the Trail**

Consistent long-term marketing will inform people about the Trail/Byway and attract them to the recreation and educational opportunities it offers. Without organized marketing the bulk of visitors will be “accidental”; few people will set out to drive/paddle the entire route. One entity needs to take the marketing lead, coordinating the efforts of the states and the partners to encourage joint promotional activities. The priority should be to inform people about the Trail/Byway and to attract visitors of all ages to it using a wide variety of tools, such as a single website, outreach to traditional media and new social media, a coordinated calendar of events and programs, and special events. The audiences are those that many Trail/Byway partners are already trying to capture. The Trail/Byway offers a new tool for attracting them.

Marketing the Trail/Byway should also specifically focus on the people who live in the places where historic events occurred along the route. By enhancing local knowledge about the War of 1812, support for the Trail/Byway in local communities will grow. Most residents do not know about the history right around them and they are generally unaware of what local attractions are doing to preserve history and promote public awareness of the events associated with the War of 1812. Most residents have not heard about the Trail/Byway. They would be interested in the potential for enhancement of local recreational and education opportunities.

- **Economic Development**

The Trail/Byway has potential for generating a lasting economic benefit to the communities along its route. It will add another tourism experience, enhancing communities as destinations that are “crossroads of history” that visitors will stop and visit rather than places through which they drive. Local communities are interested in where the Trail/Byway will be and how it can interface with other

recreation and historic opportunities that can be marketed to attract visitors by connecting tourism experiences. Communities are also interested in developing opportunities for visitors to have a good meal and possibly go shopping as they travel the route.

- **Archeological Resources**

Archeological resources related to the War of 1812 have generally not been well documented along the Trail/Byway. Survey work is needed at many sites.