

— DESTINATION —  
*Southern Maryland*

## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act Passed in Congress**

*Designation will boost awareness and federal support of Southern Maryland*

Hughesville, MD – [The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act](#) was included in the recently passed year-end government spending bill and will be signed into law by President Biden. This designation recognizes the unique significance of Southern Maryland to the nation's history. Becoming the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will bring together federal, state, and private resources to promote heritage tourism, conserve natural landscapes, and enhance the local economy. The legislation authorizes \$10 million in appropriations, of which not more than \$1 million may be used in any fiscal year.

The legislation was sponsored by Senators Cardin (*D-MD*) and Van Hollen (*D-MD*) and by Congressman Hoyer (*D-MD*) in the House of Representatives. In March of last year when this important legislation was re-introduced, **Senator Cardin** said that “a Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will boost awareness and federal support of a part of the state whose resources need to be better protected, whose story needs to be comprehensively told, and whose beauty needs to be more widely appreciated.”

When the legislation passed the House of Representatives in July of this year, **Congressman Hoyer** said that “throughout our history, Southern Maryland has also been the site of important milestones for our nation, from the first colony founded on religious freedom to the first person of African descent elected to an American legislature, from the first woman to petition for equal suffrage to the heroic efforts by those bringing the enslaved to freedom on the Underground Railroad. We have so much to preserve and share with our fellow Americans in Southern Maryland.”

Before the passage of this legislation, there were only 55 National Heritage Areas. National Heritage Areas require an Act of Congress and often take over ten years to achieve designation.

The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area has the distinction of designation within two years. Lucille Walker, executive director Destination Southern Maryland, credits “the federal representatives who worked so hard in the United States Congress to make this happen” as well as “broad bipartisan regional support and enthusiasm, including the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland and the Rural Maryland Council, and remarkable support within the Maryland General Assembly, county commissions, the Governor's office, the Maryland Tourism Coalition, and the museums, cultural organizations, parks, historic sites, and private and public partnerships throughout Southern Maryland.”

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In general, National Heritage Areas are partnerships among the National Park Service, states, and local communities in which the Park Service supports state and local conservation through federal recognition, seed money and technical assistance. Unlike lands within the National Park System, which are federally owned and managed, lands within heritage areas typically remain in state, local, or private ownership – or a combination thereof.

The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will include Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's counties. Becoming a national heritage area will raise the national and international profile of the region. It was in Southern Maryland, for the very first time, that any type of religious freedom was put into law. It is where the separation of church and state began. Additionally, the Piscataway, the Indigenous people, have survived against all odds and are creating a new legacy.

Southern Maryland is home to the National Marine Sanctuary of Mollusks Bay-Potomac River, with its ghost fleet of sunken ships. Southern Maryland includes a UNESCO Slave Route Project Site (in memory of “resistance, liberty, and heritage”), National Park Service Network to Freedom sites, the National Religious Freedom Byway, the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, and sites involved with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War, WWI and WWII. Southern Maryland continues to make history in innovation and technology and is where the first Mercury Astronauts trained. The State of Maryland began in Southern Maryland in 1634, and the original fort from that time period has been discovered in Historic St. Mary's City.

*Destination Southern Maryland is the public face of the Southern Maryland Heritage Area. This state based heritage area is one of the 13 Heritage Areas in Maryland. This organization represents Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. As a newly designated National Heritage Area, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will represent Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's and southern Prince George's counties with a mission to enhance the region through innovative heritage tourism experiences, comprehensive cultural and natural resource conservation, and excellence in educational opportunities. To learn more about Destination Southern Maryland, [visit our website](#).*

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