

CHESAPEAKE COUNTRY



Interpretive Plan *Scenic Byway* and Design Guidelines for the Mid-Shore Region

CAROLINE, DORCHESTER AND TALBOT COUNTIES, MARYLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHESAPEAKE COUNTRY CONTEXT

Formerly referred to as Michener's Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway, the Mid-Shore section of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway (hereafter "the Byway") spans 265 road miles in the center of the Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore. It traverses a series of scenic roads and historic travel routes through Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot counties. It consists of a main Byway route, along with Byway branches and sidetracks.

The Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway is part of a larger network of scenic Byways and trails within the Delmarva Peninsula, the geographic landform that includes Delaware and the Eastern Shores of Maryland and Virginia, with the Chesapeake Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east.

This Mid-Shore section is connected on the north to the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway, which runs along the Upper Shore from Kent Island through Centreville to Chesapeake City. To the south, it is connected to the Lower Shore section of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway.

In addition, the route overlaps with the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway in several locations, and it traverses two state heritage areas—Stories of the Chesapeake and Heart of the Chesapeake. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network overlays the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed and incorporates multiple sites along the Byway. Combined with the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, these overlapping designations and attractions create a complex decision-making process for travelers accessing the region's offerings.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERPRETIVE PLAN

The Byway committee has developed this interpretive plan as a tool to guide development of interpretive products and programs along the Byway. This document provides a filter for decision-making about the Byway, including design, funding and implementation priorities.

Each of the sites selected for interpretive development along the Byway will present the relationship of both residents and visitors to the central Byway theme. While the over arching theme is an important component of creating consistency, each site's unique features and relationship to the larger theme will be emphasized so that interpretation is both site-specific and theme-based.



GOALS FOR BYWAY INTERPRETATION

1. Use the Byway as a tool to increase awareness of the region's nationally significant maritime and agricultural heritage by developing a cohesive story that resonates with visitors through the interplay of Native American, African, and European cultures and their influence on modern life.
2. Facilitate an enjoyable, educational and safe experience for visitors by orienting them to facilities, services and attractions of the Byway.
3. Maintain positive working relationships with project partners.
4. Encourage Byway users to access the corridor in appropriate ways.
5. Position the Mid-Shore section as a unique part of the overall Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway experience.

THE PLAN PROVIDES

- Suggested themes and storylines for interpretation
- Interpretive program and project recommendations for the overall Byway, as well as for individual sites
- Concepts for linking interpretive and visitor information sites
- Design guidelines for interpretive and information signs

The guidelines include panel design templates, color and font preferences, and recommendations for development, design, and placement of interpretive and information exhibits.

VISITOR OBJECTIVES

The following objectives describe what the Byway committee wants visitors to know, feel and do as a result of visiting the Mid-Shore section of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway.

- a. Visitors will report a sense of positive intellectual and/or emotional attachment to Chesapeake Country and a desire to return.
- b. Visitors will be able to recognize at least one aspect of working landscapes and waterways.
- c. Visitors will know that the resources of the Bay have sustained people for at least 13,000 years, but everyone needs to do their part to keep harvests sustainable, so the bay can continue to support people for years to come.
- d. Visitors will be able to cite at least one way that the industries dependent on the Bay are connected to their lives.
- e. Visitors will know that the quality of the Bay environment has declined, threatening watermen and their culture and impacting the Bay ecosystem and those who enjoy the bay's bounty. Visitors can take actions to reverse this trend.
- f. Visitors will understand that development pressures threaten the visual character and land-based economy of the Eastern Shore.
- g. Visitors will feel compelled to think about what characteristics make the Byway experience unique, and whether they are worth preserving.
- h. Visitors will complement their heritage experience with other regional heritage experiences.
- i. Visitors will feel compelled to take action to protect or preserve bay resources, working land and waterscapes and know at least one thing they can do to help.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

According to the National Association for Interpretation, the professional organization for the field, interpretation is "a communication process that forges intellectual and emotional connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings of the resource."

THEMATIC STRUCTURE FOR THE MID-SHORE SECTION OF THE CHESAPEAKE COUNTRY SCENIC BYWAY

The following central theme and sub-themes developed through the interpretive planning process will guide all Byway interpretation. The complete thematic structure appears in the interpretive plan document.

Central Theme

The communities of the Chesapeake's Mid-Shore region share a distinct and vibrant culture, built around their dependence on the natural resources of working waterways and landscapes. People from across the region, nation, and even the world depend upon the Bay and its landscapes for food, recreation and renewal.

Sub-Themes

- 1. Abundant Harvest, Fragile Resource**
Nature-based industries require hard work and independence and teach valuable skills.
- 2. Navigating the Eastern Shore**
Navigating the waterways and transporting farm products on roads and rails continues to be a key part of life on the Eastern Shore.
- 3. Isolation Fosters Resilience**
Community bonds help individuals survive in isolation.
- 4. Open Landscapes Support the Economy**
Farming and fishing keep the landscape scenic.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A variety of Byway-wide and location-specific recommendations were developed to improve the visitor experience, as well as phasing recommendations.

Culinary Enhancement

Tabletop media, including table tents, place mats, coasters, and graphic tabletop surfaces will introduce Byway themes to unsuspecting visitors, particularly relevant at area restaurants. A culinary passport is a potential collaborative product of all three regions of the Byway.

Web Presence & Social Media

The plan describes specific methods to achieve a relevant and useful web presence for the Byway.

Online Portraits and Portrait Panels— Faces of Chesapeake Country

In the interest of making Byway themes personally relevant, we suggest highlighting historic and contemporary notable people whose lives and contributions have direct relevance to Byway themes (with a heavy emphasis on working watermen and farmers). These Byway “portraits” would have both online and printed components.

Murals, Sculptures and Other Public Art

Building on existing Byway accomplishments, further installation of Byway-themed public art provides yet another layer of visitor attraction and interpretation methods.

Themed Itineraries

Print and online itineraries provide visitors with a jumping off point for exploring the Byway’s stories and destinations. Initial suggestions for ways to organize the itineraries are included in the plan document.

Trail-Based Mobile Tours

Web-based self-guided tours are recommended for multiple locations along the Byway. These provide a way of delivering interpretive content when personal interpretive programs are not available, or when staffing levels are not sustainable.

Interpretive Training and Coordination

Equipping the cadre of volunteers and staff members at destinations across the Byway with adequate training in interpretive techniques and

Byway-specific messages will help the Byway meet its goals. Opportunities for various destinations and organizations to coordinate on Byway-related initiatives and projects is also recommended.

Immersive Experiences

Farm and water-based experiences provide visitors with a deeper Byway experience. The Byway should support these opportunities through marketing and interpretive training, wherever possible.

Water Trails Collateral

A series of water trails throughout the Eastern Shore connects visitors to water-based experiences. Cross-promoting with the Byway would enrich the visitor experience and would help to deepen the visitors’ appreciation of place.

Gateway Monuments

Wherever possible, communities along the Byway should improve the sense of arrival through gateway structures, including signing, that tie into Byway themes.

Highway Signage

Byway partners should continue to work with the Maryland State Highway Administration to secure Byway identification signage along major highways and Byway routes.

Thematic Site Installations

Some publicly accessible locations would benefit from a greater level of site development to provide a more inviting interpretive experience. Recommended interpretive elements include site furniture such as thematic benches and tabletops, as well as other thematic objects as appropriate.

Byway Orientation Hubs

Byway orientation signage is needed at main Byway access points with a high pedestrian component.

Wayside Story Point Exhibits

Wayside exhibits are recommended for Byway destinations with a more detailed story to tell. The plan offers detailed recommendations for specific stories to tell at various locations, and how those stories help support interpretive goals and visitor objectives.