2019 Advocacy Scorecard

Empowering tourism community leaders to speak with elected officials, the media, and the public on the importance of tourism to the vitality of their communities is one of the four pillars of the Southeast Tourism Society’s mission. While the importance of advocacy is widely recognized, assessing its impact can be difficult. Advocacy is a long-term endeavor. It is measured in small steps that add up to progress in the form of informed policymakers, stronger coalitions, and laws and government policies that drive economic growth and vibrant communities.

In 2019, Southeast Tourism Society worked to advance a number of issues critical to community-focused tourism. Listed below is the progress made, large and small, on those issues.

★ denotes a step forward
✓ denotes a policy goal achieved

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**Boost International Travel to the US: Maintain Brand USA**

✓ Since 2011, Brand USA has served as the nation’s destination marketing organization, providing an essential platform for promoting the wonders of travel to the U.S. to international travelers. Brand USA is designed to complement the efforts of corporate tourism to ensure that communities large and small, rural and urban are able to leverage the economic benefits of international tourism. Brand USA’s authorization and funding framework were set to run out at the end of 2020. Ensuring Brand USA’s continuation has been a top priority for STS.

A provision was included in the end of year appropriations bill to extend authorization of Brand USA through 2027, as well as a $7 increase in the ESTA fee that will allow the current funding framework to be maintained.

**Preserve and Promote America’s Cultural, Historic and Natural Resources**

✓ For two years, STS advocated for a public lands package of more than 100 bills, many of which were important to individual communities and the entire tourism sector. The legislation included important measures to:
• Permanently authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, (LWCF) which was established in 1965 to provide funds and matching grants to federal, state, and local governments for parks, outdoor recreation programs, and to conserve forest and wildlife areas. LWCF is funded by fees and royalties for off shore energy production in federal waters.
• Direct the National Park Service to establish a National Reconstruction Era Network.
• Expand hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities on federal lands.
• Increase the size of the National Park System by over 42,000 acres.

Specific provisions that impact STS states, include:

**Georgia**
• Expand Ocmulgee National Monument into a National Historical Park and authorize a special resource study to evaluate potential park expansions, which would protect vulnerable land and allow visitors more opportunities for outdoor recreation.
• Expand Fort Frederica National Monument from 250 acres to 305 acres.
• Readjust the boundary of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield to add eight acres and include the historic Wallis House and Harriston Hill in the unit.

**Kentucky**
• Designate Camp Nelson, a top Civil War recruiting station and training facility for the Union’s African-American soldiers, as a National Monument.
• Preserve the Mill Springs Battlefield, the site of the first significant Union victory in the Western theater of the Civil War, as a National Monument.

**Mississippi**
• Designate the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home in Jackson as a National Monument.

**North Carolina**
• Designate Wilmington as an “American World War II Heritage City.” The community was home to the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, which was created under the federal government’s Emergency Shipbuilding Program and built 243 ships in the five years it operated, it was also the site of three prisoner-of-war (POW) camps that housed Nazi prisoners.
• Extends authorization of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area for two years and expands its funding cap by $2 million.

**South Carolina**
• Re-designates the Reconstruction Era National Monument in Beaufort County as a National Park.
• Establishes the Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park
Tennessee
- Expand Shiloh Military Park to include Davis Bridge, Fallen Timbers, and Russell House (part of which is also in Mississippi) as nationally significant battlefields.
- Designate Parker’s Crossroads as an affiliate of the National Park System.
- Approve a special resource study to evaluate the suitability and feasibility of designating President James K. Polk’s home as a unit of the National Park System.
- Names a bridge on the Foothills Parkway for Dean Smith.

Virginia
- Designate the George C. Marshall Library in Lexington as the National George C. Marshall Museum and Library.
- Expedite access to national parks for Good Samaritans and other eligible search and recovery organizations after they sign a liability waiver.

West Virginia
- Expands the funding cap for the Wheeling National Heritage Area by $2 million.
- Establishes the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area.

Revive America’s Scenic Byways
- National Scenic Byways recognize and protect historic, scenic, and culturally significant roads across 46 states. The recognition brings substantial recognition and economic benefits to nearby communities by attracting visitors who spend money on local businesses and services. Although the program has been inactive since 2012, Scenic Byways remain an important component of the Southeast’s tourism infrastructure – all 12 STS states have at least one federally designated Scenic Byway or All-American Road. Over the last year, STS has worked to advance legislation to direct the U.S. Department of Transportation to reopen the nominations process to the National Scenic Byways Program. The effort paid off in September when the legislation was signed into law. The focus now moves to securing dedicated funding for the program.

Strengthen the American Battlefield Protection Program
- The protection and commemoration of nationally significant battlefields, forts, and associated sites serve to honor and shape the shared recollection of our culture and history. The narratives showcased by these sites promote patriotism and a fuller understanding of the American story. The National Park Service’s Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants have been used to preserve 30,000 acres of hallowed ground in 20 states. The battlefields protected as a result of the program are some of the most important in American history, including: Antietam, MD; Appomattox and Fredericksburg, VA; Charleston, SC; Chickamauga, GA; Gettysburg, PA; Princeton, NJ; and Shiloh, TN. STS advocated for the Preserving America’s Battlefields Act, which increases the authorization of the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program to $20 million a year. This includes up to $2 million a year for restoration and interpretation of high priority battlefield sites, which will help to transform these battlegrounds into compelling historic tourism destinations. The legislation was signed into law in December.
Address the National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Backlog

Each year, more than 318 million travelers visit national park sites, spending more than $20.2 billion in local gateway communities, but this vital tourism segment is threatened by the backlog of deferred maintenance on the national parks, which is currently estimated to cost $11.9 billion to address. The growing list of infrastructure repairs includes: visitor centers, historic buildings and landmarks, campgrounds, trails, roads, bridges, rest stops, and electrical systems. STS has been working with a broad coalition to support bipartisan legislation to direct offshore and onshore mineral royalties, that are not otherwise dedicated to other purposes, to fund public land deferred maintenance. The House bill has 329 co-sponsors and the Senate bill has 49 co-sponsors. Both bills have been approved at the committee level and are awaiting consideration by the full House and Senate. We have one more year to get this legislation over the finish line.

Support Giving Visitors A True Taste of Southern Hospitality

Food is an essential element in telling the story of a community. Drawing on history, culture, and local agriculture, chefs, restauranteurs, craft brewers, distillers, vintners, farmers markers, and culinary shops are illuminating rich traditions and agricultural resources of their communities and the region. By connecting tourism, these small businesses and creative professionals are expanding their audience while helping to deliver extraordinary travel experiences. Craft brewers, distillers, and wineries are a growing segment of the tourism sector. In many states and communities craft beverage and local products are key draws for travel, and are promoted in advertising and marketing strategies, such as ale trails. But craft beverage makers face challenges from a tax and regulatory code that has not kept up with the times and hampers their growth. STS supported the Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act, which reduces excise taxes, eliminates red tape, and streamlines regulations for craft beverage makers. Unfortunately, the Act was approved for two years and was set to sunset on December 31, 2019. A provision in the end of year appropriations bill extended the Act for one year, but this is not enough time for implementation and for small businesses to fully leverage the benefits of the law. STS will be advocating for a long-term authorization of the Act.