

Plans under way to commemorate War of 1812

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CHESTERTOWN — Kent County won't be left out of the state's spending plans for the bicentennial of the War of 1812.

In a recent set of press releases, the state tourism office announced a \$5.6 million grant award from the Federal Highway Administration for projects along the state's scenic byways.

It was part of this year's nationwide byway grant awards of more than \$40 million.

A state tourism press release then elaborated on Oct. 23 that \$1.8 million would be "for the Star-Spangled Banner Byway" and events surrounding the War of 1812's 200th anniversary.

The press release seemed to indicate that only the western shore counties where four War of 1812 battles were fought were to get funding for commemorating the fast-approaching War of 1812 bicentennial.

But actually, said Bill Pencek last week, there are multiple state and federal projects that overlap.

He has the tongue-twisting title of Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Department of Business and Economic Development, Division of Tourism, Film and the Arts.

However, he seems to be more excited in his role as the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission's executive director.

The part worth \$1.8 million involves the state's own Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway. It will be created in the counties along the Patuxent River, where many Royal Navy raids and several gunboat battles occurred; the

British invasion force's route from Benedict to Bladensburg (and on to Washington); plus the area surrounding the British march on Baltimore a month later and the Battle of North Point; and of course, Ft. McHenry, shrine to the national anthem.

This state byway has nothing to do with the Eastern Shore in the 1812 conflict.

The Eastern Shore will be part of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, created by National Park Service, Pencek said. The national historic trail will also include the state byway.

The two projects are starting up together and holding joint meetings in some cases, and he admitted last week it can be confusing.

The NPS heritage trail "absolutely includes Kent County," said Pencek. Better yet, as far as money, "Kent County is not going to be asked to put in at all."

During the war, Royal Navy sailors raided farms along the bayside and attacked Georgetown and Fredericktown. Later, they were defeated at Caulk's Field, near Fairlee, by local militia.

While those major 1812 sites happen to be on the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway, whatever may be included "doesn't depend on proximity to the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway," he added.

So, for example, Col. Philip Reed's tomb at IU Church in Worton could be part of the national trail.

The historic trail, he said, "is not synonymous with the byway. It's the state office of

tourism driving the Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway bus."

Meanwhile, the national trail was authorized in legislation signed by President Barack Obama in May. It will include places all around the state where significant parts of the War of 1812 played out.

"Its boundaries have yet to be defined (and) the NPS is driving the bus on completing the plan" for the historic trail, Pencek said.

Both projects need to begin with a so-called corridor management plan. The park service was convinced to have the Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway boundaries incorporated into the Star-Spangled Banner Historic Trail boundaries.

Both plans will be crafted at the same time through a joint set of public meetings, beginning in early December. Suzanne Copping, of the National Park Service Annapolis office, said there will be a meeting at Queenstown town hall, Dec. 7, from 1 to 4 p.m. to hear from people in Kent and Queen Anne's counties who are interested in or already involved with commemorating local events from the War of 1812 and life on the Chesapeake in those days. For more on the NPS and its plans, see www.nps.gov/STSP.

More meetings will be slated for 2010 and Pencek expects the planning to wrap up before June, 2011.

He said the "monster grant" includes near \$4 million to cover four other parts that benefit tourism throughout the state: a system of wayside signs like the Maryland Civil War Trail; a TV documentary highlighting the park service's historic trail, the Patuxent-to-Baltimore scenic byway, and the events 200 years ago; and a guidebook

with "lots of illustrations."

Finally, there will be "interpretive installations" or public art placed along the Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway in time for the 1812 bicentennial.

The NPS already has its eye on Kent. An archaeological survey of Caulk's Field,

where Reed's local militia fought off a force of British sailors and marines, has been funded by a \$40,000 National Park Service grant. The invitation to bid is being handled by his office, Pencek said, and while it hasn't gone out yet, it will soon.

In addition to the roadway-oriented byways there will be sections of water trail associated with the Star-Spangled Banner Trail, he said, supported by \$100,000 in grant money.

The overall \$5.6 million award also includes funding to set up the 140-mile Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad byway; linking the 325 miles of the Catoctin Mountain National Scenic Byway, the Antietam Campaign Civil War byway and the C&O Canal byway; and also state byway marketing.

Pencek is not kidding when he calls it the "monster grant." Four of the seven Maryland byway grants submitted to the Federal Highway Administration were approved; the other three combined total only \$168,000.

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