



2020 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 2020, 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

Preserve and Promote America's Cultural, Historic and Natural Resources

√ After a four-year effort, the Great American Outdoors Act was approved. The law establishes a dedicated public land maintenance fund within the U.S. Treasury that provides 50% of the unallocated receipts the government receives from oil, gas, coal, alternative or renewable energy development up to \$1.9 billion per year over five years for a potential total of \$9.5 billion. Under the legislation, 70% would be allocated for NPS projects, 10% for Forest Service, 10% for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 5% for Bureau of Land Management, and 5% for Bureau of Indian Education schools. The Land and Water Conservation Fund section would provide permanent, mandatory LWCF funding at the authorized annual amount of \$900 million. LWCF is funded by fees and royalties for off shore energy production in federal waters but has never received full funding.

Investing in Economic Recovery: The Critical Role of Tourism

√ Tourism was one of the industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel spending declined 42% from 2019 and according to the U.S. Department of Labor one-third of the jobs lost due to the pandemic were in the travel and tourism sector. Despite this devastating impact, tourism organizations were largely left out of the coronavirus stimulus programs. STS worked hard to ensure that Congress

recognized the vital role tourism plays in driving economic recovery in communities and to ensure tourism organizations of all sizes and shapes were included in the end of year stimulus package. Our efforts paid off when several provisions we advanced were incorporated into the bill. The community-focused tourism provisions, included:

- Expanding and improving the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), the legislation provides \$285 billion for the PPP program and extends it through March 31, 2021. The bill also makes some improvement to the program, including:
 - **Eligibility for Tourism Offices.** Expands PPP eligibility to tourism offices that are organized as non-profits, 501(c), organizations and quasi-governmental entities with less than 300 employees or less (both full time and part-time).
 - **Provides Eligibility for a Second Loan.** Targeted to smaller, harder-hit businesses, organizations with 300 employees or less, and that have experienced a 25% decline in gross receipts in any quarter in 2020 may receive a second PPP of up to \$2 million.
 - **Simplifies the forgiveness process for loans of up to \$150,000** and revises the loan processing fee tiers to incentivize lenders to make loans to underserved and undermanned businesses.
 - **Repeals the requirement for PPP borrowers to deduct from forgiveness the amount of their Economic Injury Disaster Loan.**
- Extends to **state and local governments** the use of Coronavirus Relief Funds until December 31, 2021.
- **Extends unemployment benefits** by 11 weeks and provides enhanced weekly benefits of \$300.
- **Creates a New Grant Program for Shuttered Industries.** Under the Small Business Administration, provides \$15 billion in new grants for concert venues, performing art centers, theaters, and museums with 500 or less full-time employees and at least a 25% decline in revenue, among other qualifications.
- Provides \$20 billion for the **Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program.**
- **Extends the Employee Retention Tax Credit** through July 1, 2021
- Provides **100% business meal deductibility** in 2021 and 2022

Strengthen the Federal Voice on Tourism Issues

- √ STS renewed partnership agreements with three key federal agencies: National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The agreements set a foundation for STS, the federal land management agencies, along with STS members, to engage in a variety of activities to support tourism and conservation. These may include participation in forums, meetings, conventions, and seminars; training, learning, and development programs; collaborative research, promotion, and public engagement; and special events and commemorations, such as the US Semiquincentennial. The agreement also affirms the shared commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism.

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 Southeastern states have at least one federally designated Scenic Byway or All-American Road. Revitalizing the National Scenic Byways Program has been a priority for STS over the last three years. The FY21 federal budget included \$16 million in funding for the National Scenic Byways Program. The first time in nine years the program has received any funding.

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, restaurateurs, craft brewers, distillers, vintners, farmers markets, 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, 2020. The omnibus appropriations bill, which was approved in December included a provision to permanently authorize the **Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act**.

Showcasing the Southeast's Natural, Cultural and Historic Tourism Assets

- √ Legislation was approved in December to redesignate two exceptional National Park sites to better tell their stories and drive increased visitation:
- The New River Gorge National River in West Virginia as a National Park & Preserve.
 - The Jimmy Carter National Historical Site in Plains, Georgia as the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.