



## **SOUTHEAST** TOURISM SOCIETY

### **2017 Advocacy Scorecard**

Empowering frontline tourism leaders to speak to elected officials on tourism's importance to the vitality of their communities is one of the four pillars of 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 the economic growth of vibrant communities.

In 2017, 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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#### **Advance Federal Budget Priorities that Support Communities**

- STS issued statements defending funding for key federal agencies that were targeted for significant cuts or elimination by the Trump Administration. The President's FY18 budget plan called for significant cuts to the Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities and National Heritage Areas. We are happy to report Congress has not supported these funding requests and all the programs are looking at a maintained funding level or minor cuts in the final FY18 budget.
- In the FY18 appropriations bill, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is funded at \$275 million, \$125 million below the current level, but \$211 million above the President's budget request. Funding for state and local recreation and battlefield preservation programs are prioritized under the bill, which is important to communities throughout the Southeast.

- STS spoke up to support the Survey of International Air Travelers (SIAT), which is managed by the Department of Commerce's National Travel & Tourism Office and is the foundation for nearly all of travel and tourism's international visitation research. The President's FY18 budget request eliminated funding of the SIAT survey with the expectation that funding could be secured through Brand USA's ESTA allocation. Again, Congress has not agreed with this request. The Senate Appropriations Committee called for the continued funding of the program through Department of Commerce's appropriations and for the survey to be expanded to assess at least 2% of international air travelers.

### **Support Brand USA**

- √ The President's FY 18 budget request called for dismantling the funding framework for Brand USA by diverting the \$100 million in ESTA funding, collected from international visitors, away from the national destination marketing organization and into the budget of the Department of Homeland Security, which already receives \$4 of the \$14 fee. STS spoke in support of Brand USA's important work, as a result Congress did not support the request and Brand USA's funding framework remains unchanged.

### **Strong Investments in the Nation's Transportation Infrastructure**

- Recognizing that federal surface transportation programs are essential to the economic vitality of gateway communities, especially with respect to travel and tourism on public lands and that the National Park Service (NPS) faces a \$12 billion maintenance backlog of which nearly half are transportation projects, STS supported the introduction of the National Park Service Legacy Act, (S.751/H.R. 2584), which provides dedicated funding through 2047 to address the NPS deferred maintenance backlog. STS is continuing to support the legislation by rounding up state and local support and calling on the Southeast congressional delegation to co-sponsor this important measure.

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

- The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) establishes visitors fees to federal lands to fund programs to enhance the visitor experience. STS is working to provide a long-term reauthorization of the program and in the interim has secured an extension of FLREA fees through September 30, 2018.
- STS has been a strong supporter of the effort to expand the Ocmulgee National Monument in Georgia into a National Historical Park. H.R. 538, Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park Boundary Revision Act, was approved by the House of Representatives in January. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved the bill in May and it is awaiting consideration by the full Senate.

## **Reinforce the Connection Between Food, Culture and Tourism**

- ✓ Craft brewers, distillers, and wineries are a growing segment of the tourism industry. In many states and communities, craft beverage makers and local food products are key draws for travel, and are promoted in advertising and marketing strategies like ale trails. Yet craft beverage makers face challenges from a tax and regulatory code that has not kept up with the times and hampers the growth of these small businesses. STS supported the Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act (H.R. 747/S. 236), which would reduce excise taxes, eliminate red tape, and streamline regulations for craft beverage makers and help these dynamic businesses grow, foster collaboration, and promote their products and communities. The bill was included in the tax bill and signed into law by President Trump in December.

## **Strengthen the Federal Voice on Tourism Issues**

- A new co-chair of the Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus, Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV) took the helm in January. STS has established a relationship with the Congresswoman and her staff. And she spoke at the kick-off reception for the Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism.
- The 2017 Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism was the most successful to date with more than 60 participants visiting their Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill.
- Designated State Chairs boosted participation in the Summit and strengthened STS's advocacy network within STS's twelve member states.