

CHAPTER 9
TOURISM PROMOTION
AND MARKETING STRATEGY

Chapter Review

In this chapter we analyze the current and potential markets for the Heritage Park, and develop order-of-magnitude projections of visitation by season (peak and non-peak) for the new or adjusted system elements that we propose. We will also assess current promotion opportunities in the region and recommend a strategy to assure that information about the Park reaches the markets it is intended to serve. We further recommend methods for the Park to maximize its impact on area tourism development through relationships with area attractions, accommodations, existing transportation systems, visitor service facilities, information, marketing and promotional programs, and tourism development agencies.

Projected Attendance for the Thames River Heritage Park

	Current	With Visitor Center	With Visitor Center Plus	With National Heritage Park
Estimated Visitation	NA	175,000- 200,000	250,000- 350,000	300,000- 400,000
Heritage Park Components	550,000- 575,000	632,500- 661,250 ¹	660,000- 690,000 ²	715,000- 747,500 ³
Total Heritage Park Visitation Components	550,000- 575,000	807,500- 861,250	910,000- 1,040,000	1,015,000- 1,147,500

1/ 15 percent increase overall.

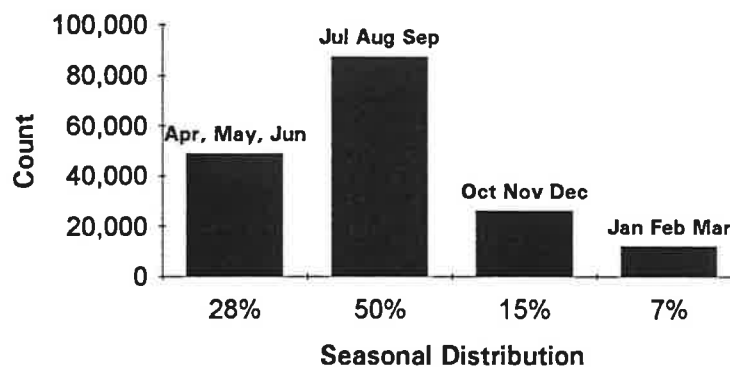
2/ 20 percent increase overall.

3/ 30 percent increase, plus potentially new sites and attractions.

Visitor Center Attendance Characteristics

	Approximate Total Attendance	Spring Apr, May, Jun	Summer Jul, Aug, Sep	Fall Oct, Nov, Dec	Winter Jan, Feb, Mar
Proposed Heritage Park	187,500	28%	50%	15%	7%
Visitor Center Attendance		52,500	93,750	28,125	13,125
For comparative purposes...					
Mystic Marinelife Aquarium	743,000	28%	45%	13%	14%

**Estimated Visitor Center Attendance
Distribution**



Current Tourism Promotion and Marketing Environment

Levels of visitation at area attractions have remained relatively constant since 1989. The major visitor attractions are still centered around Mystic, but there are significant attractions and visitor resources in the New London-Groton area. There could be a significant focus on improving and expanding visitor attractions in the region with the heritage park taking a lead role.

State Agencies (Tourism and Parks) will be involved in the direct promotion and marketing of the Heritage Park. The significant marketing and promotion resources of the State will be brought to bear on the marketing of the heritage park.

The Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District offices will be located at the Heritage Park Visitor Center. This should help to further focus tourism promotion and marketing for the Park.

The opening of Foxwoods and related development, and the emergence of Mystic Coast & Country as a significant marketing organization have added a new orientation to the current tourism product, and to the marketing and promotion context.

Mystic Coast & Country is a major marketing force, particularly with their significant investment in television advertising in the New York metro area. Heritage Park attractions fit into their basic marketing thrust.

The addition of new and expanded attractions will help to make the area a destination overnight area.

Individual Attractions/Local Tourism Agencies are developing long range plans for development.

The 1989 visitation projections in the original plan are still generally valid for the Heritage Park Visitor Center visitation.

Components of Tourism Marketing and Promotion Strategy

The key components of the marketing plan are illustrated by the following points:

Visitor Center On-Site

- **Personal contact with State Park Rangers**
- **SE CT Tourism District offices**
- **Printed Media**
- **A&T Interactive kiosk**
- **Interpretive displays (e.g., Estuary Model)**

Signage (see page 6-5 for illustration of signage types)

- **Interpretive Information**
- **Directions**
- **Consistent Design**
- **Focus on "Designated Sites"**

Printed Brochure (State Parks) for Heritage Park

- **Print Media (Brochure) at all sites within the Heritage Park**

Comprehensive Map

- **Auto tour**
- **Walking Trails**
- **Area Hospitality, Services, Retail, etc.**

Components of Tourism Marketing and Promotion Strategy (continued)

Utilize Existing Fulfillment/Distribution Channels:

- SE CT Tourism District**
- Mystic Coast & Country**
- State Visitor Centers**
- Other State Parks in CT**
- Regional/Local Tourism Agencies and Chambers**

Cooperative relationship with other local, regional and state tourism agencies

Organize a formal promotional campaign in conjunction with the Southeastern CT Tourism District

- SECTD Offices will be at the heritage park visitor center**
- Packaged Programs**
- Events-based (festivals, holiday-time, etc.)**
- Cross-selling attractions**
- Passport to Attractions**

MARKETING/PROMOTIONAL PLAN

ENTITY	PROMOTION/MARKETING
Visitor Center	Visitor Center Personnel Exhibits News Articles
Heritage Park Collaborators/Sites	Site Brochures Site Personnel Passport Promotion
SECT Tourism District	Area Guides Advertising Visitor Center Personnel
State Parks	Interpretive Guide Interpretive Map
State DoT	Highway Signage State Maps Highway Visitor Centers

MARKETING/PROMOTIONAL PLAN (continued)

ENTITY

PROMOTION/MARKETING

State Department of Commerce

**Television Advertising
Vacation Guide
Pre-planned Tours
Telephone Response
FAM Trips**

Mystic C & C

**Television Advertising
Print Advertising
Area Guide
A&T Kiosk
Joint Promotions with Travel Industry**

Travel Industry

**Joint Promotions with Mystic C & C
Distribute Brochures
Distribute Maps**

CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSION

Introduction and Summary

Several major study objectives have been addressed in this Thames Maritime Heritage Park Implementation Plan. First, the Plan has revisited and evaluated the original heritage park Master Plan, undertaken in 1988/89. Second, the Plan has introduced many important lessons that have been learned from a number of other comparable heritage communities and heritage park systems. Third, it has provided a road map in each of the key strategic aspects of the state heritage park (visitor center and interpretive orientation, collaborations, transportation, management, attractions development, and tourism promotion). Lastly, and perhaps most important for the long term, the Implementation Plan has addressed a question that was posed at the beginning of the study process by the State of Connecticut, the City and Town of Groton and the City of New London, namely:

“What would it take to maximize the economic impact of the Heritage Park on the region by making it a “major” attraction, beyond what we have planned so far?”

Throughout the Implementation Plan, an answer to this question has been suggested: Position this region to be designated as a National Heritage Area. In this concluding chapter we explain this important future opportunity and suggest what needs to happen next to put this long term strategy into action.

Immediate Steps for Action

Throughout this Implementation Plan, we have presented a variety of action steps organized along strategic lines. In this section, the most important and immediate of these strategies are highlighted.

Proceed to complete the Visitor Center and Groton-side state boat dock. Moving the Visitor Center development and boat-dock process forward will require: resolving a number of lingering issues; engaging an exhibit design firm to finalize the Center's interpretive approach and components; securing approvals (New London and State); and preparing construction documents.

Prepare an Organizational Plan. A source document should be prepared that establishes the framework for the governing body that will provide the long term stewardship of the Heritage Park by the proposed Thames Partnership Commission. The organizational plan will start with a clear mission statement, and will explicitly lay out the composition, roles and responsibilities for the Commission, for any committees that may be required (such as Executive, Education, Collaboration, Nominating, Resource Development, Marketing, etc.), as well as for other entities that will be directly involved in the Park management and operations ("Friends of...", municipal agencies, tourism district, etc.). An operating budget and program for State Parks should be prepared as part of the organizational plan in time for the 1994 legislative budget process.

Immediate Steps for Action (continued)

Convene Collaborator Meetings. There is an immediate need to bring the participating historic and cultural organizations together and facilitate consensus between and among them regarding their role and responsibility, and opportunities for the Park. These discussions should focus on interpretive resources, exhibit process for the proposed Showcase Gallery, and educational programming and grant/funding opportunities. The state legislation should be amended to authorize new method to classify site designation Prepare a detailed operational marketing strategy for promoting and advocating the park to the community .

Begin transition of Park governance to a permanent Thames Partnership Commission. Amend state legislation (1995-97 Biennium) to authorize creation of the new governing body. Convene community leaders to get their commitment to participate and support this effort at the board level.

Long Term Strategy

The Implementation Plan suggests that the resources — both financial and human — are not currently in place to embark on a major attractions development effort as part of immediate heritage park implementation. Rather, the plan suggests that the park proceed to design and construct an exciting visitor center “with sizzle” on the New London side of the river, and a boat dock on the Groton side. The plan outlines other strategies to organize the leadership of the region (cultural and civic) to steward the park, and to maximize the impacts that can be accomplished at such a level of development.

For the long term, while additional in-state resources may become available to enlarge the scope and magnitude of the heritage park, a far larger opportunity lies in the positioning of this region as a designated National Heritage Area.

One of the major lessons learned from other heritage communities is that when the National Park Service (NPS) is present in such communities, the resources, stability and clout that are necessary for heritage development are usually also present. Furthermore, because the financial and physical resources provided by the Park Service are generally not otherwise available, NPS involvement, can create new and potentially dramatic local economic impact.

In the past, the NPS has generally not relied on the participation of local resources to carry its projects forward. This is one federal agency that typically has brought its own funds, people, and facilities to make a project work. Once committed to a project, the Park Service tends to stay with it for the long haul (Lowell and Salem, Massachusetts are good examples of NPS efforts that have survived through difficult local conditions). As an important side benefit, the Park Service operates with impeccable standards of quality that tend to have dramatic quality-of-life impacts on local communities.

Long Term Strategy (continued)

The involvement of the National Park Service in a community or region requires extensive prior effort. The local area establishes its credibility by building sound organizational structures and by demonstrating community participation in existing heritage programs and projects. It is therefore critical to implement the "immediate next steps" outlined in this plan. These activities will respond to federal guidelines that require evidence of a high degree of participation by state and local community stakeholders. Serious collaborative discussions between and among the local municipalities, the state, and community business and civic leaders will show broad based involvement. While the current Heritage Park Advisory Board and its committees have met regularly, these meetings cannot be construed as broad-based participation of community leaders.

With an organizational structure and leadership base to work from, the community can then pursue the designation of a National Heritage area with greater confidence. The community will show its potential for capacity-building and community participation; its ability to collaborate from within; its desire to conserve and interpret treasured historical resources for increased public and economic benefit; and its intention to honor the community's historic fabric. If these are the long term goals that the Thames Maritime Heritage Park can achieve, then the process of securing designation as a National Historic Area will be a worthy endeavor, regardless of the outcome.

Conclusion

The work to prepare this Implementation Plan for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park has been productive and resourceful. Many strategic issues of implementation that were not clear in early 1993 when the study was initiated are now near resolution and/or in the process of moving ahead. As such, the Thames Maritime Heritage Park is moving toward reality as a state heritage park, for which many people in the state and region should be commended.

The final chapter of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park has yet to be written. This state heritage park represents the foundation for something potentially larger. With the emergence of the National Heritage Areas initiative, New London/Groton is well-positioned to use the Thames Maritime Heritage Park as a springboard for involvement of the National Park Service. What better place could there be for a national heritage area. The United States government has had, and will continue to have a dramatic presence in the region (Submarine Base, Nautilus Memorial, Navy Underwater Warfare Center, Coast Guard Academy, etc.). The history of the region is rich and nationally significant. The cultural resources exist and are being strengthened by the state heritage park. Economic development in the region has been directly affected by cutbacks in federal defense funding. Whether or not the designation as a National Heritage Area is achieved, the process of going for it will expand the capacity, stability, and impact of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park. What better set of arguments to advocate for additional federal involvement for quality-of-life improvement!

This, then, is the challenge facing the potential heritage area that is New London/Groton, Connecticut: with all that is about to be in place for a state heritage park, is the community now ready and willing to take heritage development to the next step? We believe that answer can and should be "yes" -- through the successful implementation of the strategies presented in this report.