

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area to Hold Garrett County Event

What is a Heritage Area, and what does it mean to you? Did you know that much of western Maryland is included in two different kinds of heritage areas? An upcoming event will answer these questions, and more.

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area (AFHA) invites community members to attend their annual Stakeholders Meeting, being held in Garrett County April 30 and May 1 at the Wisp Resort. The event will include tours and informational meetings, and is hosted by Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area, a program of the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce.

"The Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area is very excited to host the Annual Meeting of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area in Garrett County and look forward to creating further opportunities to collaborate and promote our heritage." said Dawn Hein, Director of the Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area, a program of the Chamber of Commerce.

The Stakeholders Meeting will take place at Wisp Resort, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday, May 1. The agenda will include a presentation about Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, which develops forest heritage in Garrett and Allegany Counties of Maryland and 16 counties in the highlands of West Virginia, as well as accomplishments of the AFHA AmeriCorps team. The program will also include updates on tourism and forest heritage activities in Garrett and Allegany Counties.

Following a sandwich lunch, the featured panel will discuss different heritage areas and what they can offer to local communities. The panel will include guest presenter Jeremy Morris from the Wheeling National Heritage Area, along with Phyllis Baxter from Appalachian Forest Heritage Area that is seeking national designation, and representatives from two Maryland State Heritage Areas, Deidre Ritchie from Canal Place Heritage Area and Hein from Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area.

"This meeting will share some of the exciting things going on in our area, and talk about more ways that we can work together across county and state lines," said Baxter. "We are very excited to bring this annual event back to Maryland." The annual AFHA stakeholders' meeting is held in a different county each year, and was last in Maryland in 2010 at Cumberland.

On Wednesday, April 30, participants may participate in tours of Garrett County sites. The tours will start in Oakland from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. with visits to the Oakland B&O Museum, Garrett County Historical Society Museum, and Garrett County Museum of Transportation.

At 2:15 the group will caravan together from Oakland to tour the Kindness Demonstration Area of Garrett State Forest, led by Forest Manager John Denning. This 1.25 interpreted trail explains forest management and wildlife improvement practices at “the birthplace of forestry and conservation in Maryland.”

The tour will continue about 3:30 p.m. to visit Blue Moon Rising eco-friendly vacation village. Garrett County’s newest Eco-tourism destination is operated under sustainable policies, and is developing programming for residents and visitors.

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is a two-state initiative that celebrates the central Appalachian forest -- its history, culture, natural history, forest management and products. This grassroots partnership works in West Virginia and western Maryland to explore the relationship between the Appalachian highlands forest and the people who live within it. Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is based out of Elkins, West Virginia where they operate the Appalachian Forest Discovery Center in the Darden Mill, Railroad Ave and First Street, which will be open with regular hours starting April 25.

The Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area is a program of the Chamber of Commerce which supports heritage tourism in Garrett County through technical assistance and grant opportunities with a focus on heritage related initiatives that preserve valuable heritage resources and enhance tourism in the County. As a state certified heritage area, effort is made to create public and private partnerships to preserve historical, cultural and natural resources focusing on under-utilized resources fostering a greater sense of community pride.

The public is welcome to participate in the tours and the stakeholders meeting. RSVP to help coordinate tours and for Wednesday lunch count is appreciated, and can be emailed to info@appalachianforest.us or call 304-636-6182. For more information www.appalachianforest.us

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