

A Conservation Strategy for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

Introduction

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail commemorates the voyages of Captain John Smith and his crew as they explored the Chesapeake Bay between 1607 and 1609. The more than 2,000-mile trail was established in 2006 as part of the National Trails System and became America's first national water trail. Managed by the National Park Service, the trail traces Smith's routes and the key rivers linked to them, helping visitors imagine the world he encountered more than four hundred years ago. Modern-day explorers travel the trail on land and water, enjoying a variety of recreational experiences at places reminiscent of the Bay in the seventeenth century. The trail is a touchstone for the nation's past, but also a means to experience the Chesapeake's natural beauty and to learn from American Indians who continue to live in the region today.

This document sets out a long-term strategy for conserving lands important to the visitor experience of the John Smith Trail. Its purpose is several-fold:

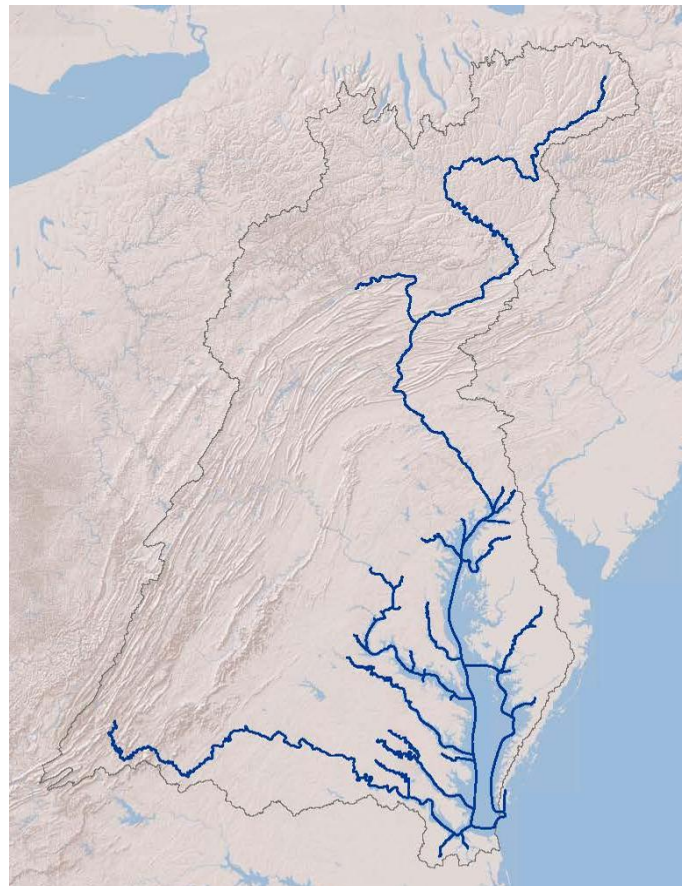
- * Further define the trail's most important resources and their locations, based on parameters set in the trail's *Comprehensive Management Plan*.
- * Set out a consistent approach for assessing trail resources and their conservation needs.
- * Encourage local, state, and federal partners to protect trail resources as a core part of broader land conservation efforts.
- * Provide guidelines for implementing conservation through collaborative actions of the National Park Service and its partners.

In short, this *Conservation Strategy* provides the means for defining priority conservation areas relative to the trail and designing appropriate conservation methods. Its focus is on saving the places that enrich visitor experiences and recreation along the trail and that contribute synergy to the many programs working to improve quality of life along the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers.

Foundation

The *Comprehensive Management Plan* (CMP) for the John Smith Trail was finalized in February 2011 following an intensive public planning process. The CMP is the overarching guide for trail development, management, and protection. Implementation plans, including segment plans and this *Conservation Strategy*, build off the CMP and are covered by it for compliance purposes (i.e. NEPA and section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act). The CMP sets out the following parameters of particular importance to this document.

Figure i-1. Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail





Trail Resources

The CMP defines seven principal types of trail-related resources¹ [see endnotes at end of Introduction].

1. *John Smith voyage stops*: Locations where Smith and his crew stopped during the 1607-1609 voyages.
2. *Evocative landscapes*: Visible shoreline generally evocative of the seventeenth century encompassing stretches where the shoreline is relatively free from intrusion by modern development and offers visitors an opportunity to vicariously share the experience of Smith and his crew. Such shorelines are primarily composed of wetland and forest vegetation.
3. *Indigenous cultural landscapes*: Landscapes generally encompassing cultural and natural resources that would have likely been associated with, and supported, the historic lifestyle and settlement patterns of American Indians and that exhibited their cultural or esthetic values at the time of early European contact.
4. *Historic American Indian town sites*: Historic American Indian town sites including, but not limited to, those mapped in *John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages 1607 – 1609* (Rountree et al. 2007), *John Smith in the Chesapeake* (Haile 2008), and others.
5. *Significant seventeenth-century American Indian archeological sites*: Sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or determined to be eligible for listing, which offer an opportunity to tell important stories of the native peoples who lived in the Chesapeake when John Smith arrived.

6. *Landscape features and cultural sites of significance to modern American Indian tribes*: Sites which consultation or scholarly research has documented as culturally significant to modern Chesapeake Bay tribes, having an historical connection to a 17th century tribe and in proximity to the Smith voyage route.
7. *Cross sites*: Twenty-five general locations in proximity to the trail where Smith's maps indicate that he or others placed a brass cross, marking the limits of their exploration. These sites are generally known on the basis of interpretation of Smith's maps, his journal writings, and scholarly research.
8. *Public access sites*: Places where the public can view Smith's voyage routes from the land or gain physical access to the water along voyage routes for boating, fishing, swimming, or other recreational use.

These resources form the basis for the visitor experience along the trail, and thus the basis for conservation.

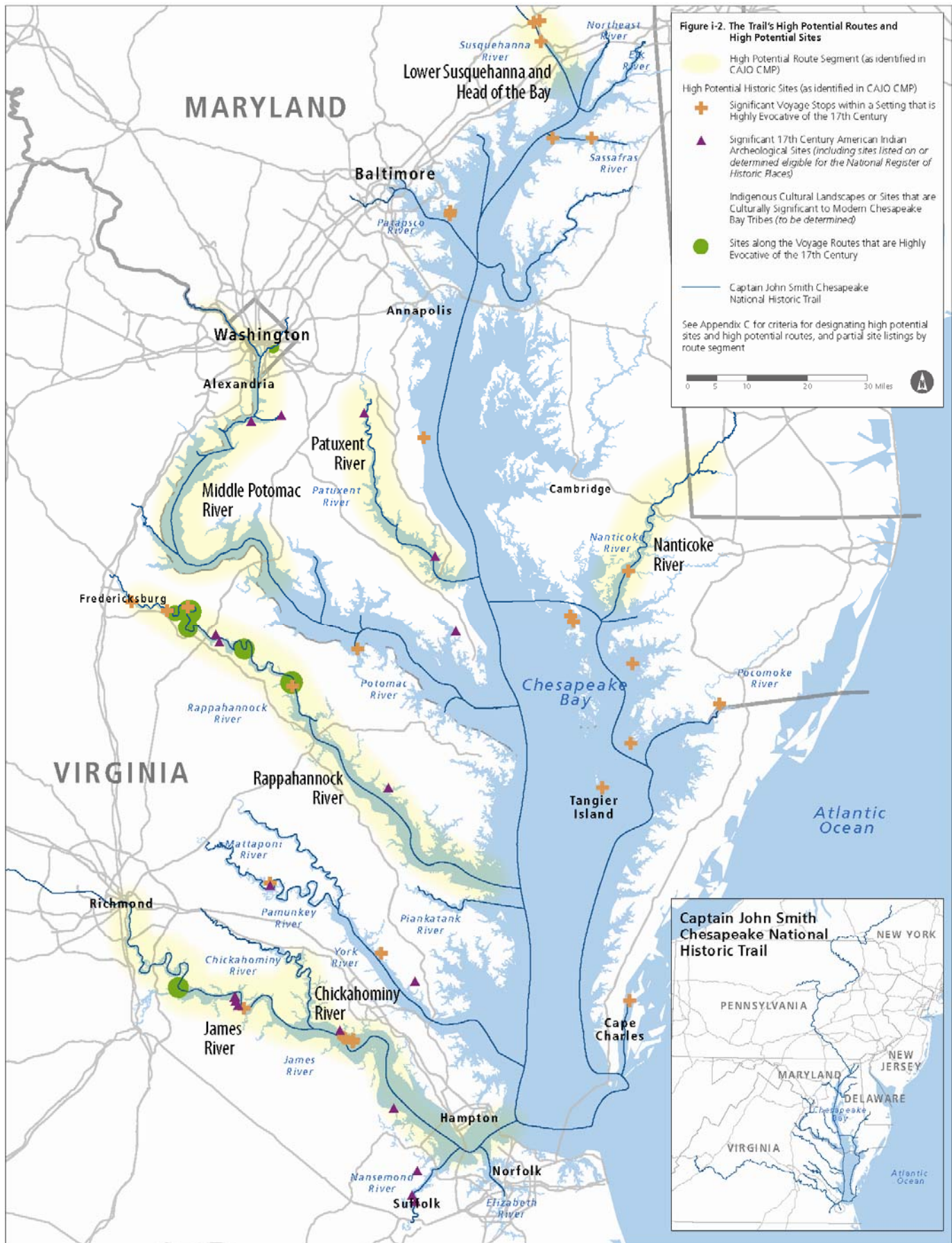
High-Potential Route Segments and High-Potential Historic Sites

As required by the National Trail System Act (NTSA), the trail's *Comprehensive Management Plan* defines "high-potential route segments" and "high-potential historic sites."² Their relevance is summarized as follows:

All segments of the trail have the potential to provide important opportunities for visitors to experience the world encountered by John Smith and his crew as they explored the Chesapeake Bay. Those trail segments or sites along the trail that meet criteria for designation as high-potential



Figure i-2. The Trail's High-Potential Routes and High-Potential Sites



historic sites and high-potential route segments, offer exceptional opportunities for visitors to vicariously share the experience of John Smith and his crew. Because these sites and segments are exceptional, trail management actions would place priority on protecting their associated resources and values that are fundamental to the trail and on enhancing the opportunities which visitors have to experience those resources and values.

Pursuant to Section 7(g) of the NTSA, as amended, future potential direct federal acquisition (i.e., purchase by the United States) for trail purposes would be limited to those areas designated as high-potential historic sites and high-potential route segments. High-potential historic sites and high-potential route segments would be higher priorities for trail development, including:

- * Management unit planning*
- * Public access development*
- * Interpretive media and programming*
- * Resource protection (emphasis added)³*

The CMP designated seven high-potential route segments and sixty-eight high-potential historic sites (see figure i-2). These are the starting points on which this strategy is based. Importantly, the CMP notes the potential for designating additional high-potential route segments and/or high-potential historic sites.^{4, 5}

Relationship to Segment Plans and Trail Development

The CMP recognizes the vast scale of the John Smith Trail and lays out an approach to trail planning and management based on trail segments. It calls for segment plans to address trail development, protection, and management issues at a finer level of detail.⁶ To date, one segment plan has been completed—for the tidal James River segment of the trail—and additional segment plans are scheduled. It is important to note that while this *Conservation Strategy* will influence future segment plans, they, in turn, will provide opportunities for refining conservation priorities specified in either the CMP or this strategy.

Land Conservation Strategy Guidance

In accordance with the national scenic and national historic trails provisions of the NTSA (Section 5), this document provides further strategy guidance in developing a protection plan for high potential-historic sites or high-potential route segments. The trail's *Comprehensive Management Plan* specifically calls for the following conservation strategy.

The strategy would identify lands of conservation interest and would include specific techniques to be used to protect them (see appendix K). Priority would be placed on protecting evocative landscapes, voyage stops, and

sites that provide public access to evocative landscapes and voyage stops, particularly those that are along high potential route segments and that are designated as high potential historic sites. Priority would also be placed on protecting sites that provide access to the trail for recreation, including: 1) pull-offs that provide visual access to the trail, 2) trailheads from which trails provide access to the trail, 3) day-use facilities, 4) boat launches, and 5) primitive campsites.⁷

The CMP calls for a broad, comprehensive approach to protection. It is intended to be collaborative, engage many partners, and encompass a range of strategies that include: promoting public awareness, recognizing the trail in public policy, strategic conservation planning, landowner assistance, and land protection through conservation easements and fee-interest acquisitions.⁸ The CMP also states that federal acquisition would only occur for sites with a willing seller and with special importance to the CMP's implementation.⁹ Environmental and other compliance considerations for this plan are addressed in the environmental assessment accompanying the CMP.

Overview of the Strategy

This strategy is organized in the following five chapters:

Chapter 1: *The Visitor Experience as the Driver for Land Conservation* describes the centrality of the visitor experience to land conservation along the trail and how to understand the trail's varying landscape settings.

Chapter 2: *Trail Resources and Their Protection Status* broadly summarizes the "state-of-the-trail" in terms of its permanent protection. It presents a framework for understanding resource protection issues, considering: 1) the extent to which lands are already permanently protected by conservation easements or public and non-profit ownership, 2) regulatory mechanisms in place to guide development along the trail, and 3) the relevance of landowner circumstances in terms of their potential willingness to protect the trail corridor.

Chapter 3: *Identifying Conservation Focus Areas* describes an approach to identifying potential conservation focus areas as determined by resource conditions and protection needs associated with "visitor itineraries." It depicts the trail's initial focus areas, based upon that approach.

Chapter 4: *A Partnership Model for Conserving Trail Resources* presents an approach to conserving trail resources within the context of conservation focus areas. It describes seven types of collaboration among partners with complementary goals and capabilities.

Chapter 5: *Implementation* describes a series of initial actions the National Park Service intends to work on with partners to begin carrying out this strategy in the near term.

These chapters provide the trail's conservation partners with a guide for focusing on specific conservation priorities within manageable segments of the larger John Smith Trail.

Introduction Endnotes

1. CMP, pages 2-29 to 2-30
2. CMP, section 2.4.2
3. CMP, pages 2-28 to 2-29
4. CMP, page 2-34: "Future research and field study, changing environmental conditions, addition of public access sites, additional land protection, and/or development of new water trails and partnerships could support designation of additional high-potential route segments . . . [or] high-potential historic sites."
5. In May 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar designated four connecting trails as new components of the John Smith Trail, including the Susquehanna River from near Conowingo Dam to Cooperstown, New York; the Upper James River from Richmond to Irongate, Virginia; the Chester River in Maryland; and the Upper Nanticoke River in Delaware. Those new segments have not yet been evaluated for the presence of high-potential route segments or high-potential historic sites.
6. CMP, page 2-12
7. CMP, section 2.5.1.
8. CMP, Appendix K-3
9. CMP, page 3-30

