

# INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

*Join the Adventure!*

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail commemorates the explorations of Captain Smith on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries in 1607-1609, tracing approximately three thousand miles of his voyage routes. It is the first national water trail and is administered by the National Park Service (NPS) through the Northeast Region's Chesapeake Bay Office. The Trail traverses portions of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia.

#### **Legislative History**

Two bills introduced in the United States Congress (entitled the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Watertrail Study Act of 2005) authorized the Secretary of the Interior to —carry out a study of the feasibility of designating the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Watertrail as a national historic trail.¶ Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (Maryland) introduced S. 336 on February 9, 2005, and Senators George Allen (Virginia), Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (Delaware), Barbara A. Mikulski (Maryland), and John Warner (Virginia) cosponsored it. The bill was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks on April 28. On May 24, Representative Jo Ann Davis (Virginia) introduced H.R. 2588 in the House of Representatives, and 24 other representatives from the four relevant states signed on as cosponsors. The bill, which was identical to the Senate's version (S. 2568), was referred to the House Committee on Resources as H.R. 5466 on May 24, and to the Subcommittee on National Parks on May 31.

On August 2, 2005, President George W. Bush authorized the NPS to study the feasibility of establishing the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as part of the FY 2006 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 109-54). The Act also directed the Secretary of the Interior to consult with federal, state, regional, and local agencies, and representatives of the private sector, including the entities responsible for administering the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network (P.L. 105-312) and the Chesapeake Bay Program authorized by the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1267). The feasibility study was completed and published in July 2006.

H.R. 5466 passed the House on December 5, 2006. In the Senate, Senator Paul Sarbanes (Maryland) spoke in support of S. 2568. A summary of his comments can be found in **Appendix A**; excerpts include:

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Designation Act would create the Nation's first national —watertrail and honor one of America's earliest explorers, Captain John Smith, and the vital role he played in the founding of the first permanent English settlement in North America at Jamestown, Va., and in exploring the Chesapeake Bay region during the years 1607 to 1609.

Many Americans are aware of the upcoming 400th anniversary of Jamestown next year. The celebration is expected to draw record numbers of visitors to this area, including Queen Elizabeth II, as part of her recently announced state visit. What may not be as well known is that Jamestown and John Smith's voyages of exploration in present-day Virginia and Maryland were our Nation's starting points. America has its roots right here in the Chesapeake Bay region nearly 400 years ago—13 years before the founding of the Plymouth colony—when the Jamestown colonists disembarked from their three small ships on May 13, 1607. Under the leadership of Captain John Smith, the fledgling colony not only survived but helped ignite a new era of discovery in the New World....

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Act comes at a very timely juncture to educate Americans about historical events that occurred 400 years ago right here in Chesapeake Bay, which were so crucial to the formation of this great country and our democracy. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

S. 2568 passed the Senate on December 7.

On December 19, 2006, President George W. Bush signed the legislation (P.L. 109-418) establishing the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

After the president signed the bill, Senator Sarbanes said, —The signing of this legislation marks a new beginning in highlighting the historic voyages of Captain John Smith as part of the early exploration and development of our Nation. I applaud the hard work of my colleagues Senator John Warner and Congresswoman Jo Ann Davis, as well as Patrick Noonan and The Conservation Fund in working to make the Nation's first watertrail a reality. Senator John Warner (Virginia) said, —This visionary legislation brings to life the voyages of John Smith in 1608 and his encounters with Native American tribes, and traces his descriptions of the living resources in the Bay. It will also strengthen our efforts to stimulate heritage tourism for Chesapeake communities, and to restore the health of the Bay. Representative Jo Ann Davis said, “The President's signature today of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is historic

in many ways. Not only does it officially commemorate and designate the voyages of Captain John Smith in the New World, it also establishes the first national watertrail along the beautiful Chesapeake Bay. I cannot think of a more fitting way to add to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the settlement at Jamestown.”

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, administered by the NPS, provides a framework for development of the National Historic Trail. The Network, authorized by Congress in 1998 and established in 2000, links a diverse array of Bay watershed venues: federal, state, county and private non-profit parks; wildlife refuges; historic sites; museums; educational institutions; existing water trails; and other assets. The 160 plus sites and connector routes within the Network strive to help people: a) access the special places and resources of the Bay through information and facilities; b) better understand the Chesapeake through education and interpretation; and c) engage in conservation stewardship related to the Bay’s natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources. Providing programs, guided experiences and facilities/services geared toward connecting people to the Bay is a prerequisite for entry into the Network.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is to commemorate the exploratory voyages of Captain Smith on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries in 1607-1609; to share knowledge about the American Indian societies and cultures of the seventeenth century; and to interpret the natural history of the Bay (both historic and contemporary). Complementing the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, the Trail will provide new opportunities for education, recreation, eco-tourism, and heritage tourism in the Chesapeake Bay region.

The overarching goal of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is to foster citizen stewardship of the Bay. As noted in the feasibility study, —In providing a focus on and appreciation of the resources associated with Smith’s voyages, the trail would help to facilitate protection of those resources.‡ The Trail provides yet another forum for acknowledging the changes that have occurred in the Chesapeake region over the last 400 years. It can serve to stimulate a sense of urgency in people to mitigate the changes that we can, and to chart a future course that demonstrates a commitment to conserving the remaining values of the great Chesapeake.

### **Significance**

The National Historic Trail is considered to be nationally significant for the Chesapeake Bay and river voyages of Captain John Smith it commemorates. These voyages first revealed to Europeans the complexity and richness of the Chesapeake Bay region. Smith’s maps and writings spurred the development of Great Britain’s Mid-Atlantic colonies, and influenced colonial affairs for more than a century. The voyages impacted native inhabitants by accelerating the processes that destroyed the Powhatan polity and disrupting the native peoples’ lifeways throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, establishing the primacy of English culture in the region and beyond. English settlement in the region marked the beginning of significant human influence on the transformation of the Bay’s environment.

### ***Exploratory Voyages of Captain Smith on the Chesapeake Bay and its Tributaries in 1607-1609:***

Captain John Smith's explorations of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries formed the basis of his published writings and maps. Those publications, in turn, encouraged English settlement of Virginia, the Bay area, and the Eastern Seaboard. They also suggested a policy of private land ownership that the Virginia Company and the Crown eventually adopted. This policy, and the success of the English colonization, significantly altered the environment of the Bay.

Smith's publications were unique for the time because he wrote at length from his own experience (albeit sometimes exaggerated), his own observations, and his attempts to understand what he had done and seen and describe it for a distant audience. His maps were so accurate the colonists found them useful for most of the rest of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and modern archeologists have employed them to locate Indian towns. Smith's accounts have profoundly influenced our assumptions about the early colonial experience, and certain aspects – such as the story of Pocahontas – have even entered the popular culture.

### ***American Indian Societies and Cultures of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century:***

The Chesapeake Bay region of 1608 was home to thousands of native people who lived along its shores and tributaries in large and small towns. They belonged to a complex society consisting of tribes, clans, chiefdoms, and other polities. The Chesapeake Bay Indians hunted, fished, and farmed, both preserving and altering their environment. They used the natural world for their subsistence in a manner that sustained over the long term the bounty on which they depended for survival. They also maintained an elaborate trading and communication network that extended for hundreds of miles, even to the Great Lakes. The English newcomers consistently underestimated the sophistication of the native world they were invading.

John Smith's writings offer an insightful (though biased) glimpse into this world. His writings reveal that the success of his Bay journey, as well as the survival of the English colony itself, depended largely on the goodwill and assistance of the Chesapeake Bay Indians. Comparing Smith's writings to his maps, it is also apparent that he relied on the native people for information about rivers and lands he had neither the time nor the means to explore.

Our present understanding of the native world of Smith's time comes not only from Smith's writings but the subsequent work of archeologists and anthropologists. A host of publications, many of them issued in the last dozen years, have in some cases confirmed and in other cases contradicted what Smith thought he understood about the native peoples, their leaders, and their lives. More importantly, many descendants of the Chesapeake Bay Indians still live in their ancestral homeland, enriching modern Americans' experience with the Bay and its environment. Although the Bay's native inhabitants were largely displaced by the newcomers to America, their continued presence through their descendants offers an opportunity for visitors to understand their role in utilizing, altering, and preserving the Bay and its resources.

### ***Natural History of the Bay of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century:***

When Smith explored the Bay and its tributaries in the summer of 1608, he found an abundance of natural resources, including fish, birds, mammals and plant life. Smith had harvested deer, turkeys and fish while in Jamestown. He had also observed oyster beds in that area, but it wasn't until he explored the Bay that he discovered the extent of the vast domain these beds occupied.

The Bay's natural resources, as Smith reported them in his published works, helped attract English settlement. The wildlife provided a base of sustenance for European colonists, the trees were used to construct their houses and vessels, and the land was transformed into farmsteads. Until recent times, when pollution and overuse reduced the Bay's resources, the harvesting of fish and oysters constituted a major industry for Bayarea residents.

Efforts to improve the Bay's environment and restore its natural resources have been underway for years with limited success. Although the Bay will never again look like it did in Smith's time or contain the vast array of floral and faunal life he observed, portions of it still convey some sense of what he saw and experienced.

The complete Statement of National Significance for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is in **Appendix B**.

## **Trail Interpretive Plan**

### **Interpretation**

In his groundbreaking book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden defined interpretation as, "An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media...and...the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact."

Through interpretation, visitors to the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail will fully embrace the diversity and richness of the Chesapeake, will gain a sense of ownership, and will become inspired stewards of this national treasure.

Currently, any adventurer can attempt to retrace the exploratory routes Smith and his crew traveled in 1607-1609 on the Chesapeake. The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail will provide an integrated, systematic approach to public exploration of the treasures of the Chesapeake region. The Trail will offer a continuum of linked experiences and unified stories and messages related to the Chesapeake's watershed. Individual sites and stories will be interconnected like the links in a chain. Information, access, facilities and services will aid visitors in discovering and touring both water and land segments of the Trail.

An array of diverse interpretive opportunities will enable visitors to explore the nooks and crannies of the Chesapeake region, and step back in time and envision the people and events that shaped the Bay. Through storytelling and guided exploration, visitors and area residents will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Bay's incomparable resources. Visitors will also be able to understand the urgent need for conservation and restoration of Bay resources; feel inspired to help protect this national treasure; and seek opportunities to engage in stewardship activities.

### **Basis of the Plan**

In late 2007 and early 2008, the NPS hosted eleven interpretive scoping meetings throughout the Chesapeake Bay region, from Jamestown, Virginia to Havre de Grace, Maryland and including Seaford, Delaware. (A complete meeting series schedule and a report of the key findings are included in **Appendix C**.) Existing and potential partners participated in the meetings, including Gateways managers; local, state and federal government officials; historians; American Indian tribal representatives; journalists; outfitters; tourism officials; and business owners. The National Park Service (NPS) asked participants to share their views regarding special places associated with the Bay; important stories and conservation messages; potential methods for interpretation along the Trail; early implementation strategies for Trail development and interpretation; and potential Trail partners. More than 200 stakeholders provided valuable ideas and information related to promotion, development and interpretation of the Trail.

### **Purpose of the Plan**

An Interpretive Plan is an important component within the planning hierarchy of the NPS. It is coordinated with the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) for a site, a unit or a trail. The CMP for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail establishes the administrative objectives, policies, processes, and management actions needed to fulfill the preservation and public use goals established under the authorities of the National Trails System Act, as amended (16 USC 1241-1251). The CMP provides a framework for a wide range of partnership activities that are possible and desirable to provide for public use and understanding of Trail history and for public appreciation of Trail resources.

This Interpretive Plan will help guide the NPS and federal, state, and local partners over the next five years in efforts to:

- Orient visitors to the Trail's recreational opportunities;
- Interpret the Trail's natural features and human history with an emphasis on contrasting the Bay of 1600 with the Bay of today; and
- Instill an appreciation of Bay resources and a sense of stewardship in all who experience components of the Trail.

The plan identifies key interpretive themes, describes target audiences, and outlines visitor experience goals. It recommends ways to effectively convey stories and messages, and methods to achieve visitor experience goals through educational programs (e.g.,

guided tours and environmental education), interpretive media (e.g., publications, exhibits, waysides, and websites), facilities (e.g., access areas and overlooks), and visitor services.

The plan serves as the keystone of the interpretive planning process. To achieve and be accountable for the long-term goals of the plan, annual implementation plans with specific benchmarks will be developed by the NPS, and individual partners. The NPS will compile and maintain an Interpretive Database to archive the various planning efforts. Successful implementation of the recommendations described in this plan is dependent on the ongoing commitment and actions of all of the partners.

### **Common Threads**

Although the entities associated with the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail are varied, the partners and audiences share many common beliefs, desires and expectations regarding the Trail. During the series of interpretive scoping meetings and through additional consultations, some overarching ideas emerged, including the following:

#### ***The Trail***

- is not a static entity; it will evolve to provide new opportunities
- will include land and water segments
- will provide an opportunity to reach/educate the next generation

#### ***Audiences and Users will include***

- a broad array of users with specialized and often multiple interests
- people representing a wide spectrum of ages (multi-generational) and demographics
- local residents (noted as a key audience)
- virtual users (noted as perhaps just as important an audience as on-site visitors)

#### ***Trail Experiences and Opportunities may include***

- opportunities for people to be refreshed, renewed, educated, and inspired
- opportunities for people to experience quiet and serenity
- opportunities for people to experience all four seasons in the Bay region
- enticing people out of their cars and onto the water and/or land
- an emphasis on appropriate and compatible low impact experiences
- the chance to embrace a truly unique —American experience

#### ***Concepts and Objectives***

- “Imagine, if you can, a world without roads”
- accurately interpret the cultures of American Indians as they existed prior to European contact
- depict the impacts of Smith’s voyages and European settlement on the native peoples and the Bay environment

- portray the richness and bounty of the Bay in 1600 (“a veritable Garden of Eden”)
- convey the beauty of the Bay today (there’s ... “a lot out there that can stop the heart”)
- share public pride in farming, water-related work and travel, small town charm, literature and human history in the region
- expose people to the continuity of the human experience on the Chesapeake
- interpret the ecological and historical connections between communities and waterways throughout the watershed
- compare the Bay of 1600 to the Bay of today to help promote a sense of urgency for protecting what we have and restoring what we can
- make the connection between human history and environmental changes (people have always responded to their environment and impacted it, as well)
- inspire people to feel hope for the future of the Bay
- build public awareness of and support for conservation and restoration efforts
- motivate visitors to stay (in the region) longer to support local communities

### ***Early Implementation***

- reach out to people (where they are) and share the Trail’s message
- produce, publicize and make connections
- create a “Coming Soon” sign to create a sense of anticipation
- collect stories (from residents, particularly the elders)
- create a baseline and a process for measuring success
- create websites
- integrate Trail information with school curriculums
- institute a Bay passport or passbook
- develop pre-packaged experiences
- provide opportunities for people to create their own itineraries