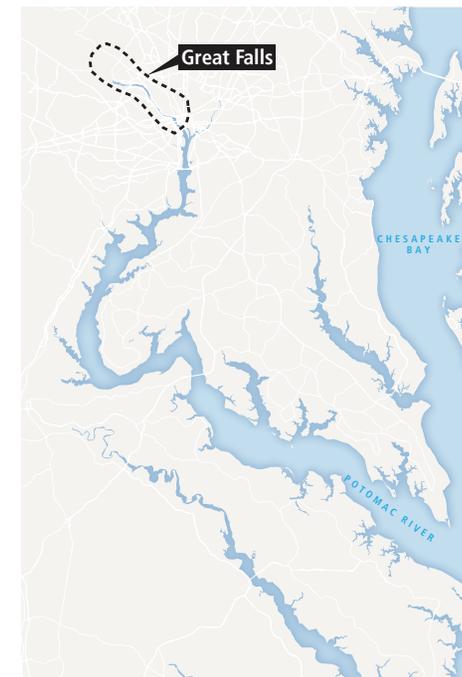


## River Section 1 – Great Falls



### Overview

This river section includes the sites and resources located between Riverbend Park (Fairfax County, VA) and the area just east of the American Legion Memorial Bridge that carries the Capital Beltway (Interstate 495) across the Potomac River between Montgomery County, Maryland and Fairfax County, Virginia. Routes for POHE and CAJO national trails, along with significant sites along the STSP trail, are located within this region. The area is rich in conserved natural landscapes and history related to American Indians, Captain John Smith, Civil War defenses of Washington, D.C., early industrialization of the United States, George Washington and Colonial settlement.

Located northwest of Washington, D.C., the Potomac Gorge is a transition zone between the Piedmont and the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Steep cliffs, rock outcrops, waterfalls, swift moving water and whitewater rapids contrast with the downstream character of the

tidal Potomac. Man-made structures such as dams, canals, intake stations and off-channel reservoirs are evident. Much of the shoreline in this area is undeveloped and protected lands border many of the tributaries extending into more developed areas.

This river section is also characterized by suburban residential development (Montgomery County, MD) and rural fields and farms (Fairfax County, VA). Access to the river is primarily available via the George Washington Memorial Parkway (VA), and the Clara Barton Parkway (MD). A network of trails — including the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, the Capital Crescent Trail, the Billy Goat Trail, Rock Creek Park trails and segments of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail — offer connections to the Potomac's shoreline and/or to inland suburban parks and the DC Metro area.

Top: Great Falls Park  
(photo credit: NPS  
Chesapeake Bay Office)

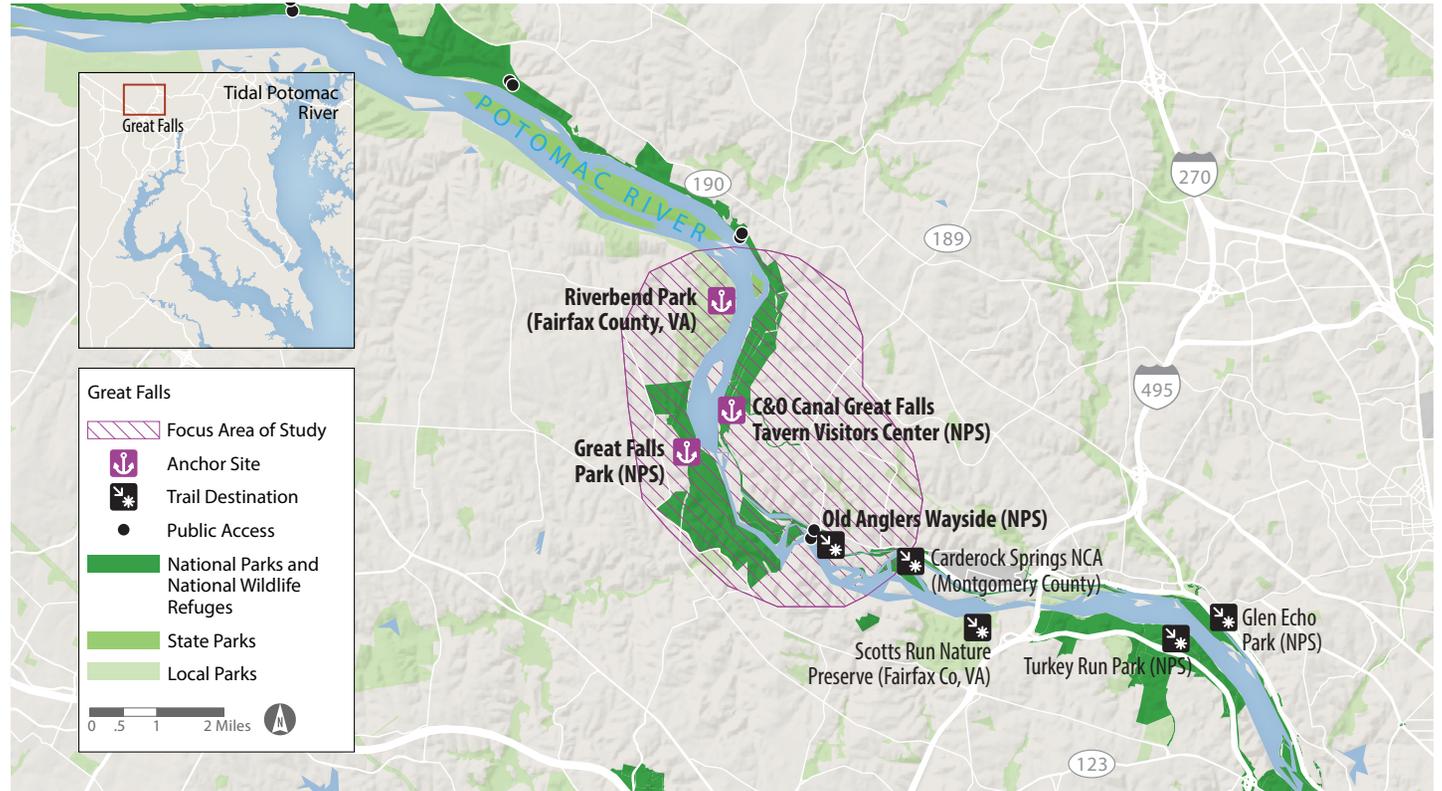
Because of long vehicular travel times between access sites across the river from each other, the facilities within this river section are separated by state and Focus Area. These facilities include:

#### Virginia

- Great Falls Park (NPS)
- Riverbend Park (Fairfax Co., VA)
- Scott's Run Nature Reserve (Fairfax Co., VA)
- Turkey Run Park (NPS, George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP))
- Claude Moore Colonial Farm (GWMP concession, privately operated)

#### Maryland

- Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center (NPS)
- Old Angler's Wayside (NPS)
- Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Canal National Historical Park, including the C & O Canal Towpath
- Carderock Springs Neighborhood Conservation Area (Montgomery Co., MD)
- Rockwood Manor Park (Montgomery Co., MD)
- Clara Barton National Historic Site (NPS)
- Glen Echo Park (NPS/Glen Echo Park partnership)



### Trail Components

The following trail components have been identified to support strategic planning within this river section of the Potomac. Each of the focus areas described below contain anchor sites, which are viewed as first-tier locations for trail development efforts as they already contain significant visitor support facilities. The next level of development would include additional trail components, such as destinations and linking routes, enhancements would occur as resources and opportunities become available.

### Focus Areas

There are two Focus Areas identified in the Great Falls map that share the same area of study. While the study area itself contains a density of resources, visitor experiences and a visual shore-to-shore connection of trail-evocative landscapes, physical access across the river is limited. Therefore, the Virginia resources are identified in Focus Area #1 and the Maryland resources are identified in Focus Area #2.

- **Focus Area #1** (Virginia): Riverbend Park- Great Falls Park
- **Focus Area #2** (Maryland): C&O Canal Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center

### Anchor Sites

Proposed anchor sites for Focus Area #1 (Virginia) include Riverbend Park and Great Falls Park. Both sites are staffed, offer interpretive exhibits and programming and are major draws for numerous visitors and residents of the communities northwest of Washington, D.C.

- **Riverbend Park** (Fairfax Co. Park Authority) offers views of the Potomac upstream of Great Falls. Hiking trails connect to Great Falls and to interior sections of the park; some equestrian trails are also available. Picnic areas, boat launch, kayak rentals, guided tours, a nature center and interpretive programs are offered.

## Anchor Sites (continued)

- **Great Falls Park** (NPS) <http://www.nps.gov/grfa/index.htm> offers spectacular views of the Potomac. The River Trail provides dramatic views of the River and Mather Gorge below the falls. Other trails include an old carriage road, the Patowmack Canal Trail, the Ridge Trail through upland forest and several equestrian routes. A segment of the POHE is marked between Difficult Run and the boundary with Riverbend Park, and a visitor center is open daily.

For Focus Area #2 (Maryland), the proposed anchor site is the C&O Canal Great Falls Visitor Center.

- **C&O Canal Park Great Falls Visitor Center** (NPS) offers a staffed facility and access to the C&O Canal Towpath, the primary segment of the POHE, and numerous trails, including one that leads to an overlook of Great Falls. Interpretive programs are available, including a mule-drawn canal boat ride. <http://www.nps.gov/choh/index.htm>

## Trail Destinations

- Virginia: Scott's Run Nature Preserve; Turkey Run Park and Claude Moore Colonial Farm, both within George Washington Memorial Parkway lands
- Maryland: Old Angler's Wayside; Carderock Springs Park; Rockwood Manor Park; Clara Barton NHS and Glen Echo Park along the Clara Barton Parkway.

## Linking Routes

- Virginia: Several segments of the Potomac Heritage Trail include hiking and biking trails. Vehicular access to many sites is provided by the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP). The I-495 American Legion Memorial Bridge provides a high-traffic vehicular river crossing in this area but does not accommodate pedestrian or bicycle traffic.
- Maryland: The C&O Canal Towpath along the Maryland side of the Potomac provides uninterrupted, vehicular-free hiking and bicycling opportunities between Georgetown and the Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center. Multiple locks along the canal provide paddlers of all skill levels a calm-water alternative to paddling on the Potomac. The Clara Barton Parkway provides vehicular access to trailheads along the River.

Note: Public transit options are limited in areas north and west of the Arlington and Georgetown areas.

## Support Services

- Virginia: The town of Great Falls (population 15,427 as per 2010 census) is located less than 5 miles from Great Falls Park. Restaurants, grocery stores and gas stations are available. Also within the focus area, McLean, VA provides a variety of retail, restaurant and commercial services.
- Maryland: The town of Potomac (population 44,965) is located less than 5 miles from the C&O Canal Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center. The town offers a variety of restaurants, retail stores, lodging options and gas stations.



Top: Mule-drawn Canal Boat Rides at Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Bottom: Paddling at Old Angler's Wayside (photo credit: Anacostia River-keeper)



## Key Trail Stories and Associated Resources

The following key stories associated with CAJO, STSP and POHE themes are relevant to the various trail components in this river section:



### Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT

(Smith's explorations, American Indian cultures, natural history of Bay)

- Captain John Smith and his crew spent approximately one month exploring the Potomac, guiding their craft as far up the river as was navigable. He mapped the Nacotchtank tribe in this area and referred to them as one of the tribes that “did their best to content us.”
- Englishman Henry Fleet lived with the Nacotchtank for five years in the 1620s and learned the Virginia Algonquian language, which allowed him to become a trader and translator for Lord Calvert when Calvert brought settlers to Maryland. The tribe was called the Anacostan in later years, hence the name of the Anacostia River. (Reference Henry Fleet’s “A Brief Journal” from Edward Neill, The Founders of Maryland)
- The Great Falls are a prominent geologic feature in the region. Great Falls Park is located along the boundary between the Piedmont Plateau and the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the fall line. Most of the rocks here formed deep beneath the surface of the ancient Lapetus Ocean over 500 million years ago.

**Features that support these stories include:** evocative landscapes; American Indian petroglyphs carved into metamorphic rock in areas along the river; Great Falls and Mather Gorge.



### Star-Spangled Banner NHT

(military events, individual contributors, Bay region as hub, icons of war)

- Efforts against the advances of the British in Fairfax County, VA and Montgomery County, MD both contributed to the American resistance in the War of 1812.
- The area includes routes associated with the Madison’s escape from the British troops’ burning of Washington, D.C., and the removal of national documents to rural Maryland for safekeeping.

**Features that support these stories include:** Chain Bridge; Conn’s Ferry; Riverbend Park; nearby Brookeville, MD (a hub for War of 1812 activities).



## Potomac Heritage NST

(meeting ground of conservation ideas and practices, five physiographic regions, crossroads of opportunity, development of U.S. Republic)

- Patowmack Canal in Great Falls Park and the C&O Canal reflect the story of early American industrialization along the Potomac ([http://gfns.org/local\\_lore/gf\\_history.htm](http://gfns.org/local_lore/gf_history.htm)).
- At the end of the eighteenth century, George Washington's efforts to build the Patowmack Canal were well underway. While skirting canal construction was successfully completed and the venture operated for several years, it would take the C&O Canal and B&O Railroad until the mid 19th Century to truly open the Potomac River valley to trade. Ultimately, the Patowmack Canal had important political repercussions that helped lead to the stronger union of the American states.
- In the eighteenth century, Great Falls was primarily a collection of huge farms, many run by tenants of absentee landlords. Due to thin soil and poor accessibility to ports, farms here did not prosper.
- After the American Revolution, more farmers bought land in the Great Falls area. In the 1830s, prosperity in this region took a severe downturn. Many Virginians went west seeking richer land or greater opportunity; northerners came to Great Falls to buy cheap land.

**Features that support these stories include:** Virginia side: the ruins of the Patowmack Canal and Matildaville; Claude Moore Park (containing one of the few original sunken road segments in the country). Maryland side: the locks and towpath of the C&O Canal.

## Proposed Trail Enhancements and Implementation Strategies

In addition to the cross cutting strategies which apply to all river sections, this river section provides or has near-term potential to provide a wide variety of desired visitor experiences for different types of trail users. Providing optimal trail-related visitor experiences in a way that highlights this area’s resources, primary features and key stories could best be achieved as follows:

Site	Trail Component	Action	Description
<b>Focus Area #1 - Virginia Resources from Riverbend Park to Great Falls Park</b>			
<b>Great Falls Park</b>	 Anchor Site	Enhance Interpretive Exhibits	Kiosks that introduce CAJO & STSP— similar to the panels for POHE near the Great Falls Park and Great Falls Tavern visitor centers—could be placed at specific viewing platforms, along with a select number of designated destinations. The panels could provide site-specific information, create context of the site in relation to the overall trail routes and direct visitors to other significant trail-related destinations in the area. Consideration should be given to providing multi-lingual versions of the panels, as appropriate.
		Provide Interpretive Exhibits	Interpretive signage at Potomac Canal Overlook #3 could be added to interpret the canal and any associated trail resources, as applicable.
		Enhance Interpretive Panels	The 12 (or so) existing interpretive signs between Great Falls and Riverbend Park are badly weathered and should be replaced or updated.
		Enhance Visitor Center Exhibits	Exhibit space at the Great Falls Park Visitors Center could potentially be used to showcase the national trails along the Potomac.
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	Hiking groups and private outfitters currently offer tours along the various trails in this area. NPS staff could assist the leaders of these sites/organizations to become “Certified Trail Ambassadors” to ensure the trail-related information being shared is accurate and of high quality.
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	At trailheads, interpretive panels highlighting each of the parks in this river section could give context to how the individual sites fit into the larger stories of CAJO, STSP and POHE, as well as refer visitors to additional significant sites in the area. Touring itineraries could be expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points and other trail-related points of interest.
		River Festival Trails Promotion	A family-oriented river and culturally themed event with musical performances, guided trail walks, and a panel discussion on the park-specific issues called “Celebrating the Potomac” has been held annually at Piscataway Park in summer months. A similar event at Great Falls could be coordinated to coincide with or be held on concurrent dates to strengthen the unity between Trail sites and add continuity to Trails stories that occur along the entire length of the Potomac river. The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) is interested in helping to provide volunteers, media, and potential fundraising support for programs similar to the “Celebrate the Potomac” event.
		River Festival Trails Promotion	Each year, Potomac Paddlesports is involved in hosting the “Great Falls Race”, a whitewater championship event on the Potomac River at Great Falls/C&O Canal NHP. The event typically draws a large amount of spectators and could provide an opportunity for NPS to promote trail resources, interpretation and outreach to the recreation community.
		Interpretive Opportunity	Dean Herrin, NPS National Capital Regional Office (NCRO) Regional Historian is starting work on a Regional History Prospectus and is inventorying the Potomac River Gorge area (from Great Falls to Roosevelt Island). The findings of this research could be incorporated into trail-related interpretive opportunities. Guided tours and interpretive panels could be installed along existing trails to reference POHE.
Bicycle rentals	A seasonal outfitter or incorporation of bike rental options could be explored.		

Site	Trail Component	Action	Description
<b>Focus Area #1 - Virginia Resources from Riverbend Park to Great Falls Park</b>			
<b>Riverbend Park</b>		Anchor Site	Enhance Interpretive Exhibits The existing two-panel exhibit at Riverbend Park could be expanded to include a CAJO panel describing the types of fish that would have been in the Potomac during John Smith's voyage to serve anglers at this popular fishing destination.
		Enhance Visitor Center Exhibits The existing exhibit space at Riverbend Park Visitors Center has excellent information on resources that are reflected in CAJO and POHE. These exhibits could potentially be updated to include trail-specific stories and used to showcase the national trails along the Potomac.	
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails Outfitters, summer camps and paddling club members currently providing paddling tours and using the launch sites could incorporate CAJO, STSP and POHE stories into their trip itineraries.	
		River Festival Trails Promotion Riverbend Park frequently hosts the Virginia Indian Festival where American Indian culture is celebrated. Tying in similar themes of CAJO to the festival could bring more attention to the trails.	
		Park Planning and Development Due to the rapids and shallow water depths, power boats have limited range to explore west of the Key Bridge. A users' map and guide could be developed to assist motor boating enthusiasts in exploring specific river stretches and destinations further downstream.	
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails At trailheads, interpretive panels highlighting each of the parks in this river section will give context to how the individual sites fit into the larger stories of CAJO, STSP and POHE, as well as refer visitors to additional significant sites in the area. Touring itineraries could be expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points, and other trail-related points of interest.	
		Develop Boat-in Primitive Campsites Riverbend Park could explore the possibility of adding water-to-land primitive, group permit-only and overnight car camping campsites and related visitor facilities where feasible.	
<b>Scott's Run Nature Preserve</b>		Trail Destination	Connecting Trails to Other Major Properties Investments by a range of agencies and organizations in trail planning, design and construction could bridge the gap between the Difficult Run Trail in Great Falls Park and Scott's Run Nature Preserve, providing a continuous route for hiking between Riverbend Park and the DC Metro river section.
		Park Planning and Development Consideration of expanding visitor services could include new accessible canoe and kayak launch, fishing pier, wayside landing access, viewing platforms or other appropriate access facilities.	
<b>Turkey Run Park</b>		Trail Destination	New Public Access Site Consideration of expanding visitor services at sites along the George Washington Memorial Parkway could include new accessible wayside landing access, viewing platforms or other appropriate access facilities.
		Develop Boat-in Primitive Campsites Turkey Run Park could explore the possibility of adding water-to-land primitive, group permit-only and overnight car camping campsites and related visitor facilities where feasible. The current headquarters for the George Washington Memorial Parkway, located at Turkey Run Park, may be relocated to a permanent location; if so, the utilities on-site could be re-purposed to support camping.	
<b>Private Bus tours</b>		Linking Route	Develop Stories Related to the Trails Private bus tour operators transporting visitors from the DC Metro area to Great Falls Park could incorporate CAJO, STSP and POHE-specific information into their interpretive narrations and printed materials.
<b>Public transportation</b>		Linking Route	Utilize Metro Stations The Silver Line (currently under construction) will extend the DC Metro service through Fairfax County to Washington-Dulles International Airport, but will not directly connect to any of the parks along the river. There could be an opportunity to extend bus service from the completed Silver Line to connect to the parks along the Potomac.
<b>Regional Promotion</b>		Support Services	Develop Policy and MOU Coordinate development and promotion of national trail-related experiences in Northern Virginia (professional and self-guided tours, events, etc.); integrate into Brand USA, Destination USA and Capital Region promotions. Utilize the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) site to promote the trails (NPS has an MOU among Virginia agencies at the Commonwealth level).

Site	Trail Component	Action	Description	
<b>Focus Area #2 - Maryland Resources from C&amp;O Canal Great Falls Visitor Center to Old Angler's Wayside</b>				
<b>C&amp;O Canal Great Falls Tavern Visitors Center</b>		Anchor Site	Provide Interpretive Panels	The existing single paneled POHE exhibit at the visitor center could be expanded to reference STSP and CAJO trails as appropriate.
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	Existing guided tours of the historic structure could expand to include information that connects the canal's development with the Industrial Revolution and reference POHE.	
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	At trailheads, interpretive panels highlighting each of the parks in this river section could give context to how the individual sites fit into the larger stories of CAJO, STSP and POHE, as well as refer visitors to additional significant sites in the area. Touring itineraries could be expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points and other trail-related points of interest.	
		River Festival Trails Promotion	Canal Pride Days are held throughout the year along the C&O Canal to encourage volunteers and neighbors to maintain the trails along the canal. Opportunities exist to engage the volunteers with CAJO, STSP and POHE stories during these events.	
		Develop Boat-in Primitive Campsites	While there are existing camping areas along the C&O Canal Towpath, the majority are located north of Great Falls Park and cater primarily to hikers/bikers rather than paddlers. The existing paddle-in accessible Marsden Tract Campsite is currently the only paddle-accessible camping south of Great Falls. Additional sites in the region, such as C&O Canal Great Falls Tavern Visitors Center, could explore the possibility of adding additional water-to-land primitive, group permit-only and overnight car camping campsites and related visitor facilities where feasible.	
<b>Old Angler's Wayside</b>		Trail Destination	Develop Stories Related to the Trails	Outfitters, summer camps and paddling club members currently providing paddling tours and using the launch sites could incorporate CAJO, STSP and POHE stories into their trip itineraries.
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	River recreation in the Potomac Gorge has expanded to include new users and new equipment. As safety is a primary concern, re-examination of what constitutes a "vessel" and the safety requirements associated with use may need to be implemented at access sites such as Great Falls, Carderock Springs, Old Angler's Wayside and Riverbend Park.	
		Paddle Craft Rentals	Opportunities to expand boat rentals could be considered.	
<b>Carderock Springs</b>		Trail Destination	New Public Access Site	Consideration of expanding visitor services at sites along the Clara Barton Parkway could include new accessible canoe and kayak launch, wayside landing access, viewing platforms or other appropriate access facilities.
		Develop Boat-in Primitive Campsites	Carderock could explore the possibility of adding water-to-land primitive, group permit-only and/or overnight car camping campsites and related visitor facilities where feasible.	
<b>Glen Echo Park</b>		Trail Destination	Connecting Trails to Other Major Properties	Trails leading from Glen Echo Park, Clara Barton Parkway and sites beyond could be developed and connected to the C&O Canal Towpath.
<b>Potomac Heritage Trail</b>		Linking Route	Funding opportunity for Public Access	The Federal Lands Access Program (MAP-21, §1119; 23 UCS 201, 204) supports capital and planning expenses for new or existing alternative transportation, including transportation by bike, bus, rail or any other publicly available means of transportation (including sightseeing services). This region is well-suited for the development of a transit in parks program that includes interpretation of the national trails along the Potomac. Funding sources for a trail connection formerly procured through the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program <a href="http://www.fta.dot.gov/grants/13094_6106.html">http://www.fta.dot.gov/grants/13094_6106.html</a> can now be accessed through the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) <a href="http://www.fh.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/fltp/">http://www.fh.fhwa.dot.gov/programs/fltp/</a>
<b>Capital Bikeshare</b>		Linking Route	Bicycle rentals	National Capital Bikeshare locations could be added in parks along George Washington Memorial Parkway and Clara Barton Parkway, such as Carderock Springs and Turkey Run, and advertised at other kiosks in the area to enhance visitation to the parks.
<b>Regional Promotion</b>		Support Services	Technology	The Chesapeake Bay Explorer mobile app could be updated to include additional partner sites in the area and the water- and land-based trail routes that connect to the national trails.
<b>Private Marinas</b>		Support Services	Gateway Site	Installing signage and providing rack cards and other trail-related materials at areas where the public currently access the Potomac via boat ramps and marine-related services, like restaurants and other businesses, could be an effective way to reach a larger portion of existing river users.

