

## River Section 7 – Northern Neck



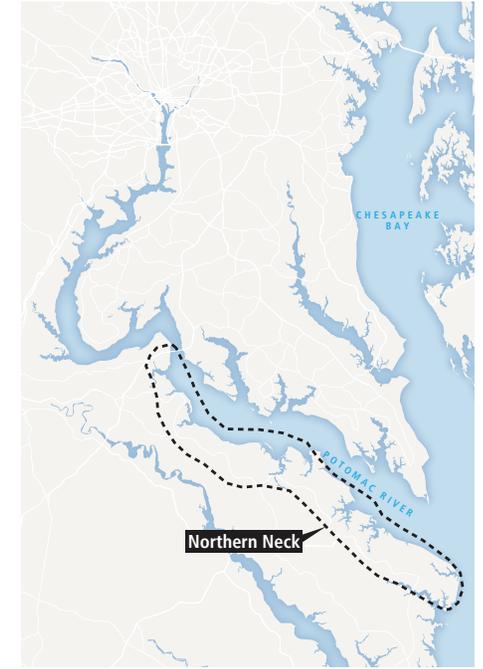
### Overview

This river section includes sites and resources along the Virginia side of the tidal Potomac from approximately the Governor Harry W. Nice (Route 301) Bridge (King George County) east to the mouth of the Little Wicomico River at Smith Point (Northumberland County). All three national trails intersect with this section of the river, with CAJO reflecting Captain John Smith's landfalls at the mouths of the Coan River and Nomini Creek. The area provides opportunities to learn about American Indian cultures, the explorations of John Smith, George Washington's legacies, the War of 1812, the Civil War, Robert E. Lee and the Lee family, river-based transportation, and the rise and decline of a major seafood industry.

The Potomac is wide in this area, approaching seven miles in some places. Numerous smaller rivers and bays feed into it including Machodoc Creek, Monroe Bay, Popes Creek, Nomini Bay, Yeocomico River, Coan River and Little Wicomico River. These places offer serene settings and some contain landscapes evocative of the 17th century. The main river corridor is well-suited for larger power or sail craft along with sea and touring kayaks, while the creeks, bays and smaller rivers depending on depth can accommodate a range of power craft and accommodate nearly any type of paddle craft.

This area is predominantly rural with agriculture as the primary industry. While commercial seafood harvesting has declined, some commercial fishing exists and the area boasts significant blue crab harvests. Recreational fishing is extremely popular and notable for the variety of fish that “run” the river during different seasons. Key features include the Horsehead, Stratford Hall and Nomini Cliffs (situated between Westmoreland State Park and Haulover Point) and the sharks' teeth and other marine fossils found within the cliffs or on the adjoining beaches.

While the Northern Neck consists primarily of large holdings of agriculture/forested lands, many of the waterfront areas have been developed into summer communities. According to 2010 Census figures, 24.3 % of homes in Colonial Beach are for seasonal, recreational and/or occasional use. (Such use in Westmoreland County is 20.2 %, far exceeding the state average of 2.4 %.) There are few parks and recreation departments or facilities in this region. Communities depend primarily on the Northern Neck Tourism Commission and local chambers of commerce to promote the area, organize and advertise community events, and support local businesses. (Note: There are efforts underway to seek National Heritage Area designation for the Northern Neck.)



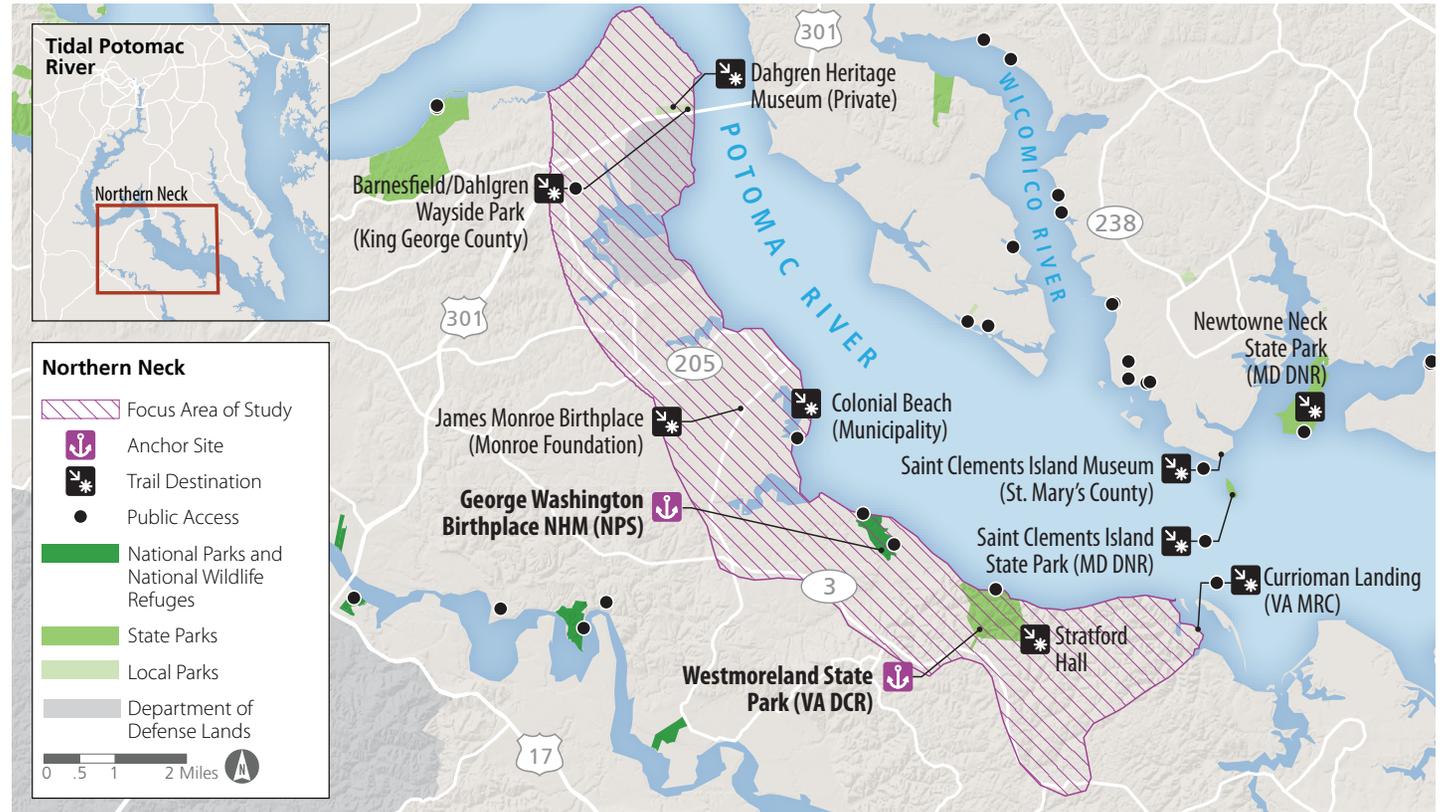
Bottom: George Washington Birthplace National Historic Monument (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Facilities within this river section include:

- Barnesfield/Wayside Park (King George County)
- George Washington's Birthplace National Monument (NPS)
- Westmoreland State Park (VA DCR)
- Stratford Hall (privately funded birthplace of Robert E. Lee)
- Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern (private)
- Hull Springs Farm (Longwood University)
- Westmoreland Co. Museum (Westmoreland Co.)
- James Monroe Birthplace (James Monroe Memorial Foundation)
- Kinsale Museum (Kinsale Foundation)
- Public beaches in the Town of Colonial Beach
- Vir-Mar Beach



Bottom: Kayak along beach near Westmoreland State Park (photo credit: NPS archive)



**Trail Components**

The following trail components have been identified to support strategic planning within this river section. The focus area described below contains two 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 Area**

The Focus Area for the Northern Neck extends from Barnesfield/Wayside Park to Nomini Creek. While there are many trail resources and partner sites southeast of this boundary, they are relatively small, isolated from each other and are identified as Trail Destinations. As enhancements occur in this area and as the Trails evolve, new anchor sites and focus areas could be identified and developed.

**Anchor Sites**

Proposed anchor sites for the Focus Area include George Washington Birthplace National Monument and Westmoreland State Park. Both facilities are staffed year round, operate visitor centers and feature stories related to the three national trails. The sites receive heavy use and the combination of partners offer an array of amenities and support facilities.

- **George Washington Birthplace National Monument (NPS)** was home to generations of the Washington family from 1658 to 1815. George Washington was born at the site in 1732. The 550-acre facility includes archeological resources, a replicated 17th-century homestead, the family burial ground, a visitor center, a picnic pavilion/area, a beach with hand carry launch for paddle craft, and an interpretive trail system.

### Anchor Sites (continued)

- **Westmoreland State Park** (VA DCR) offers 1,300 acres of parkland, access to Horsehead Cliffs, opportunities for hiking (six miles of trails), fishing, boating and swimming, and year round overnight accommodations via campgrounds and cabins.

### Trail Destinations

- Barnesfield/Wayside Park, James Monroe Birthplace, Stratford Hall, Currioman Landing, Nomini Creek, Hull Springs Farm, Coles Point Marina, Bonum Creek Landing, Kinsale Museum, Lodge Landing, Lewisetta Marina, Coan Wharf Landing, Rowes Landing; Forrest Landing, Rice’s Hotel/Hughlett’s Tavern (Heathsville), Northern Neck Farm Museum, Vir-Mar Beach, Sunnybank Ferry, Smith Point Marina, Fisherman’s Museum (Reedville)

### Linking Routes

- State Routes 3 and 360 serve as the primary connector roadways. Many segments of the Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail are located on various road networks in the region. Additional biking “local loops and spurs” are identified on the Northern Neck Heritage Trail Bicycling Route Network and some provide water views. Route 202 is a key bicycling part of the POHE trail in this region
- Existing paddling trails (including the Potomac Water Trail) provide dozens of routes for canoes and kayaks. A paddling guide for Northumberland County was created by the Northumberland Association for Progressive Stewardship and is available online ([http://napsva.org/paddlers\\_guide.html](http://napsva.org/paddlers_guide.html)). Several new water trail routes for Westmoreland County have been created by the Northern Neck Planning District Commission (see the Northern Neck Tourism Commission’s website <http://www.northernneck.org/NNTC-PAGES/recreation.htm#watertrails>).

### Support Services

- The Town of Colonial Beach, which includes a variety of visitor amenities and services, is located approximately 10 miles from the George Washington/Westmoreland/Stratford complex. Lewisetta, Coles Point, Kinsale and Reedville offer support services (Reedville features an historic district and services including restaurants, lodging, retail shops and gas stations. In addition a seasonal passenger ferry offers connections to Tangier Island and Smith Point.)

## 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)

- During his explorations, Smith interacted with American Indians in this area. He visited the Onawmanient on what is now called Nomini Bay and the Cekakawon on what is now called the Coan River. He described being initially repulsed by both tribes in response to his intrusion (his detailed accounts of these interactions have subsequently been discounted by many scholars). Neither of these independent nations has an identified descendant community, although the Rappahannock tribe’s aboriginal territory included some of the southern portion of the Northern Neck.
- The Indians here would have followed a typical Chesapeake Bay indigenous lifestyle based on agriculture, fishing and shell fishing, and hunting. Oyster shell middens dating back for centuries before Smith’s explorations demonstrate evidence of the ancient habitation along this shore. Archaeologists have excavated several of these shell midden sites on Machodoc Creek, Currioman Bay, Nomini Creek and Donum Creek. The Indians traded with other groups located along the river and likely across the Bay as well. They existed well beyond the influence of Indian leader Powhatan (based to the south).

**Features that support these stories include:** cliffs along the shores of Stratford Hall and the shell middens located near Nomini Creek.



Top: Stratford Hall  
(photo credit: NPS archive)

Bottom: Sunnybank Ferry near Smith Point, and Ophelia, VA (photo credit: Donald E Briggs)



### Star-Spangled Banner NHT

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

- The British were active along this stretch of the Potomac in 1813 and 1814. Enemy troops raided Lower Machodoc Creek (burning six schooners) and were engaged in skirmishes with American defenders near the Coan and Yeocomico Rivers, and Rosier, Mattox and Nomini Creeks. One of the fiercest engagements occurred on the Yeocomico River on July 14, 1813, involving the American schooner Asp and resulting in numerous casualties on both sides.
- There is a War of 1812 historical marker about the impressment of Americans into British service at the intersection of Hampton Hall Road (Route 202) and Munday Point Road (Route 621).
- The burning of Kinsale in Westmoreland County is one of the more well-known attacks that occurred in the Northern Neck during the War of 1812. Captain Henderson of the Northumberland militia was forced to retreat in early August 1814, when the British landed, and the enemy “pursued and burned every house in route along the way until finally reaching Henderson’s own home.” (<http://www.stratfordhall.org/educational-resources/war-of-1812-exhibit-introduction/war-of-1812-stratford-and-westmoreland-county/> )

**Features that support these stories include:** Yeocomico Church; Kinsale Museum; Stratford Hall; Nomini Church; Bushfield Manor; Nomini Hall Plantation; ferry terminal at Nomini Creek.



### Potomac Heritage NST

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

- This river section includes superb examples of tidal Potomac ecology and ecosystem conservation and restoration activities. From the marine fossils found in the shores of Stratford Hall and Westmoreland State Park to the migratory bird population at Vir-Mar Beach, the relatively undeveloped landscape within the Northern Neck generally surrounds the public access sites. Hull Springs Farm, owned by the Longwood University Foundation on Aimes Creek off the Lower Machodoc, is involved in ecosystem restoration and education from living shorelines to restoring wetlands. See <http://longwood.edu/hullspringsfarm/>
- Steamboats played an important role in the development of the Northern Neck and were the means of transportation before the 1930s. In that era, the Northern Neck was more connected to Baltimore and Norfolk (via steamboat routes) than it is to Fredericksburg or Richmond today via land-based highways. The sinking of the Wawaset just upriver from Colonial Beach on August 8, 1873 was one of the worst maritime disasters on the Chesapeake Bay during the steamboat era. Many previous steamboat landing sites remain at ports that continue to be used today in towns like Kinsale and Lewisetta.
- The region geographically and politically represents the evolution of the United States; stories here are associated with the Colonial period, George Washington’s early years and his family.
- Livelihoods here have been/are dependent on the lands and waters—tobacco farming, historically; contemporary farming and viticulture practices; forestry; along with commercial sport fishing and seafood industries related to crabs, oysters and menhaden. (Many small towns provide the backdrop for local stories related to the evolution of the seafood industry.)

**Features that support these stories include:** George Washington’s Birthplace National Monument; Westmoreland State Park, Nomini Cliffs, Stratford Cliffs, Horsehead Cliffs, Northern Neck Farm Museum; Colonial Beach; James Monroe Birthplace; Hull Springs Farm, Reedville Fishermen’s Museum; Rice’s Hotel/Hughlett’s Tavern

Top: Northern Neck beach (photo credit: NPS archive)

Bottom: Tangier Island Ferry (photo credit: NPS archive)

## 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 - Colonial Beach/Monroe Bay to Nomini Creek</b>			
<b>George Washington Birthplace National Monument (GEWA)</b>	 Anchor Site	Install interpretive Kiosk	Effective visitor orientation here might include a three-panel kiosk installed at an area of congregation with CAJO, STSP and POHE panels to orient users to the Trails in a larger context and identify key trail spots along the Potomac River. CAJO and STSP panels could relate site-specific information and also identify Trail sites to be seen further along the river to encourage visitors to explore beyond their immediate area and to understand where they are located in context to the entire Trail routes.
		Visitor Center Exhibit	Potential exists to develop an updated exhibit at the existing visitor center related to or interpreting resources of the three national trails. The Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon could be useful to provide images and other resources for use.
		Develop Guided Paddle Tours and itineraries	The site offers the opportunity for guided paddle trips in both Popes Creek and the Potomac River. Itineraries could also be developed connecting the park to Westmoreland State Park and the Town of Colonial Beach. Tours could potentially be conducted by seasonal park staff from either NPS or Westmoreland State Park.
		New Access	A new foot trail could be developed to connect the picnic grounds with the beach on the Potomac River. This could be a potential multi-year project using labor through the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program.
		Establish Connection with Related Sites on the River	Presently there is no formal connection between George Washington Birthplace NM and George Washington’s Mount Vernon. Communication between both organizational management staff has indicated an interest to discuss possibilities that could best interpret the connection while maintaining each site’s individual mission. National trails along the Potomac could potentially support this connection through historic/cultural interpretation and recreational opportunities.
		Bike, Canoe and/or Kayak Rentals	Consideration could be given to the provision of paddle craft or bike rentals from GEWA. This could possibly be either a park handled operation or through a concession, permit or cooperative program as appropriate. Trip itineraries for both paddle craft and bikes featuring the trails could be developed.
		Feature Trails Related Material at Park Events	The NPS recently hosted a Native American Indian heritage event at George Washington Birthplace National Monument that set an attendance record. Trail-related promotional materials and/or activities could augment these types of venues at the park.
<b>Westmoreland State Park</b>	 Anchor Site	Develop Itineraries, Update Kiosks and Add Exhibits to Visitor Center	In the recent past, two three-sided kiosks have been installed at the park highlighting CAJO and STSP trails. These panels include orientation, trail overview and site specific stories. Inclusion of POHE information on an updated orientation panel could be considered. Additionally, the existing visitor center could consider an exhibit featuring all three Trails. Touring itineraries could be developed or expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points, and other trail-related points of interest.
		Enhance Paddling Tours	Outfitters, summer camps and paddling club members could provide paddling tours utilizing the launch sites at Westmoreland and could incorporate CAJO, STSP and POHE stories into their trip itineraries. NPS staff could assist tour leader staff in becoming “Certified Trail Ambassadors” to ensure the trail-related information being shared is accurate and of high quality.
		New Itineraries for Stand Up Paddle Board Users	Stand-up paddle-boarding (SUP) activity has increased greatly in this region of the river. SUP-related paddling itineraries could be developed or current kayak/canoe itineraries could be modified to capitalize on the increasing number of SUP enthusiasts.
		Add Paddle-in Campsites	Consideration is being given to the development of water-to-land boat-in campsites in the park. These would likely be handled under a permit/reservation system.
		Power Boaters Map and Guide	A users’ map and guide could be developed to assist motor boating enthusiasts in exploring specific river stretches and destinations further up and downstream.
		Enhance Guided Walking Tours with Trail Themes	Guided walking tours could be expanded or developed to include CAJO, STSP and POHE trail themes.
		Develop Watermen Tours from the Park	Explore working with watermen who have participated in the Watermen Heritage Tourism Training Program and share NPS/approved written scripts to develop custom Watermen Heritage Tours.
Link Park via Trail with Other Key Areas	There is less than a half mile of improvements needed to connect the park to bicycle friendly roads adjacent to park land. Long term plans call for connecting the park to GEWA and other areas via a dedicated non-motorized trail, another good opportunity for interpretation once developed.		

Site	Trail Component	Action	Description
<b>Focus Area - Colonial Beach/Monroe Bay to Nomini Creek</b>			
<b>Stratford Hall</b>	 Trail Destination	Guided Trails Tour	Guided walking tours could be expanded or developed to include CAJO, STSP and POHE trail themes.
		Feature Trails-related Material at Events	Stratford Hall hosts an annual Wine and Oyster Festival, typically in mid- to late September. Trail-related promotional materials and/or activities could augment these existing events.
		Participate in the Itinerary for "Inn to Inn" Tour	Drafting an itinerary for an "inn-to-inn" tour along the Tidewater Potomac Heritage Bicycling Route with associated paddling excursions could support guided and self-guided tours by bicycle. Activities, including kayaking and wine tasting, could provide an intimate and exceptional experience of the resources associated with the significance of the corridor. Stratford could be an important stop along this trail.
<b>James Monroe Birthplace</b>	 Trail Destination	Development of New Kayak Launch, Parking and New Trails	Plans call for the development of a new canoe/kayak launch with parking at the site on Monroe Bay. The potential exists for trails to be added to connect this site to Colonial Beach in the future. Interpretive/orientation signage on the trails could be added to this site. Touring itineraries could be developed which feature the trails and guide visitors to other points of interest.
<b>Village of Kinsale</b>	 Trail Destination	Add Interpretive Signage and Develop Itineraries	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 developed or expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points, and other trail-related points of interest.
		Develop Guided Walking Tours	Guided walking tours could be expanded or developed to include CAJO, STSP and POHE trail themes. It may be possible to tie them in with the existing tours of Historic Kinsale.
		Expand Boat Rentals	Opportunities to offer or expand boat, canoe and kayak rentals could be considered.
		Develop Working Waterfront Interpretation	Work with VA Coastal Zone Management Program to develop historical narratives emphasizing the value of working waterfronts on the Potomac and describe the era when fishing and shellfishing were major industries in the Northern Neck and what is being done to restore that industry.
<b>Town of Colonial Beach</b>	 Trail Destination	Expand Trails-related Information on Charter Boat Tours	Work with those providing charter boat tours from the town to incorporate trails-related information. Could include such things as the "oyster wars", Smith's voyages, use of resources by American Indians, river commerce, fishing, watermen's heritage, and wildlife. On-water watermen's heritage tours could be associated with the Colonial Beach Museum.
		Interpretive Signage/ Kiosks	There are excellent locations along the Town's waterfront for the installation of interpretive signage to orient people to the trails and trail opportunities. Good locations to consider include the Town Pier and areas along the public beach.
		Interpretive Opportunity	The visitor center, museum and town pier complex offer an excellent opportunity for trail-related information, exhibits, and interpretation.
		Paddle Craft Rentals	The Colonial Beach Yacht Center currently offers paddle craft rentals and tours. Rentals could be packaged with guided tours or printed itineraries with information related to the trails. There may be additional opportunities for other rental locations within the Town.
		Interpretive Information	Work with Northern Neck Planning District Commission, the VA Coastal Zone Management Program and the Town of Colonial Beach to develop historical narratives emphasizing the value of working waterfronts on the Potomac and describe the era when steamboats were the main transportation link to the outside world from the Northern Neck.
		Feature Trails-related Material at Town Events	The Town of Colonial Beach holds a major Potomac River Festival each June and other events during the course of each summer. Trail-related promotional materials and/or activities could augment these existing events.
		Provide Information on Trails at Restaurants.	Explore providing waterfront restaurants with trail-specific information such as menu placemats or rack cards that showcase trail-specific themes, identify the site location within the great context of the trail route and highlight significant trail sites in the area.
<b>Barnesfield/Wayside Park</b>	 Trail Destination	Park Enhancements	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. The informal hand carry site at Wayside Park could be converted to a formal paddle craft access.

Site	Trail Component	Action	Description
<b>Focus Area - Colonial Beach/Monroe Bay to Nomini Creek</b>			
<b>Village of Reedville</b>	 Trail Destination	Walking and Paddle Tours	Opportunities exist to provide walking tours with trails-related information in the Town as well as develop paddling tours and itineraries.
		Enhance Interpretive Information for Charter Boat Tours	Charter boat tours that currently operate from Reedville could offer new and expanded narratives related to American Indian uses of resources, Captain John Smith's explorations, the War of 1812, river commerce and fishing, watermen's heritage, the "oyster wars," and the river's natural features and wildlife.
<b>Bonum Creek Landing</b>	 Trail Destination	Provide Interpretive Information	This landing near the Oyster Company could be interpreted as part of the POHE trail and feature information on watermen's heritage.
<b>Sunnybank Ferry</b>	 Trail Destination	Provide Interpretive Information	The existing Sunnybank ferry service could be interpreted as part of POHE trail. Trailblazer signage could be located at the ferry route to convey the history of the ferry and to provide information regarding other nearby trail sites. Could co-locate a CAJO trail blazer sign with POHE sign.
<b>Hull Spring Farm</b>	 Trail Destination	Develop Paddle Craft Access and Signage	Hull Springs Farm owned by Longwood University is considering providing an accessible paddle craft access. This would make an excellent access site for paddle craft to the Trails on the Potomac River from lower Machodoc Creek. Would also be a good site for an orientation panel to the Trails.
		Provide Primitive Paddle-in Campsites	Consideration is being given to the development of paddle in primitive campsites off Glebe Creek on Southern side of property. These could potentially be developed by Longwood University's Outing Club, offering an excellent opportunity for a paddle itinerary featuring the trails.
<b>Private Bus tours</b>	 Linking Route	Offer Shuttle Service	Consideration to develop a shuttle service in Northern Neck and have local B&Bs and/or wineries - as well as significant sites in the area - serve as stops along the shuttle route could be explored. The Town of Colonial Beach currently offers a seasonal bus service.
<b>Water Trails</b>	 Linking Route	Develop Trails-related Tours/Itineraries for Existing Water Trails	Work with the Northern Neck PDC and VA Coastal Zone Management Program to incorporate trail-related tour itineraries on existing designated water trails and on those under development in Westmoreland County. This could include the Monroe Bay Water Trail, Currioman Bay Water Trail, Lower Machodoc Creek Water Trail and the Bonum Creek Water Trail.
<b>Potomac Heritage Trail</b>	 Linking Route	Improve Wayfinding Signage	Work with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) to improve wayfinding signage to existing boat ramps and cartop launch sites.
		Develop Additional Water Access Opportunities	Work with VDOT to evaluate potential water access sites at bridges. The potential exists to provide a soft landing site at the Route 205 crossing of Maddox Creek now under construction.
		Develop "Inn-to-Inn" Touring Itineraries	Drafting an itinerary for an "Inn-to-Inn" tour along the Tidewater Potomac Heritage Bicycling Route, with associated paddling excursions, could support guided and self-guided tours by bicycle. Activities including kayaking and wine tasting could provide an intimate and exceptional experience of the resources associated with the significance of the corridor.
<b>Private Marinas</b>	 Support Services	Provide Interpretive Panels at Marina Locations	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 developed or expanded to help visitors reach key park sites, river access points, and other trail-related points of interest.
		Develop Stories Related to the Trails	Explore providing waterfront restaurants with trail-specific information such as menu placemats or rack cards that showcase trail-specific themes, identify the site location within the great context of the trail route and highlight significant trail sites in the area.
		Consider Boat-in Primitive Camping	Consider incorporating or expanding water-to-land primitive campsites where feasible. Marinas which may be willing to consider such use would be Coles Point Marina, Coan River Marina and Smith Point Marina.
<b>Private Campgrounds</b>	 Support Services	Provide Paddle-in Campsites	Monroe Bay campground near Colonial Beach could consider expanding paddle-in campsites.

