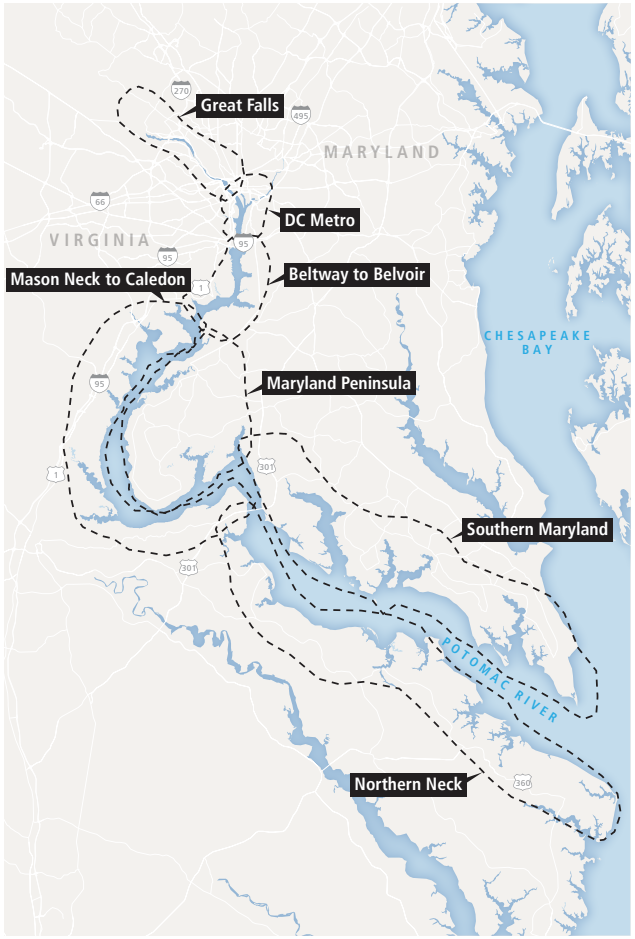
Top: Boat ramp at Point Lookout State Park (photo credit: Sarah Rogers)

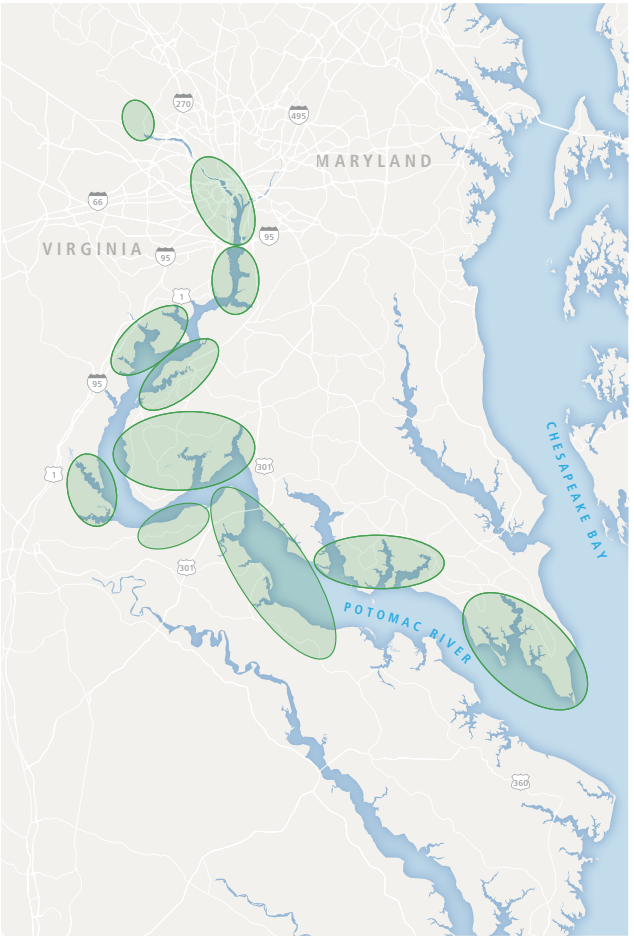
Chapter 2

Developing the Trails Along the Potomac

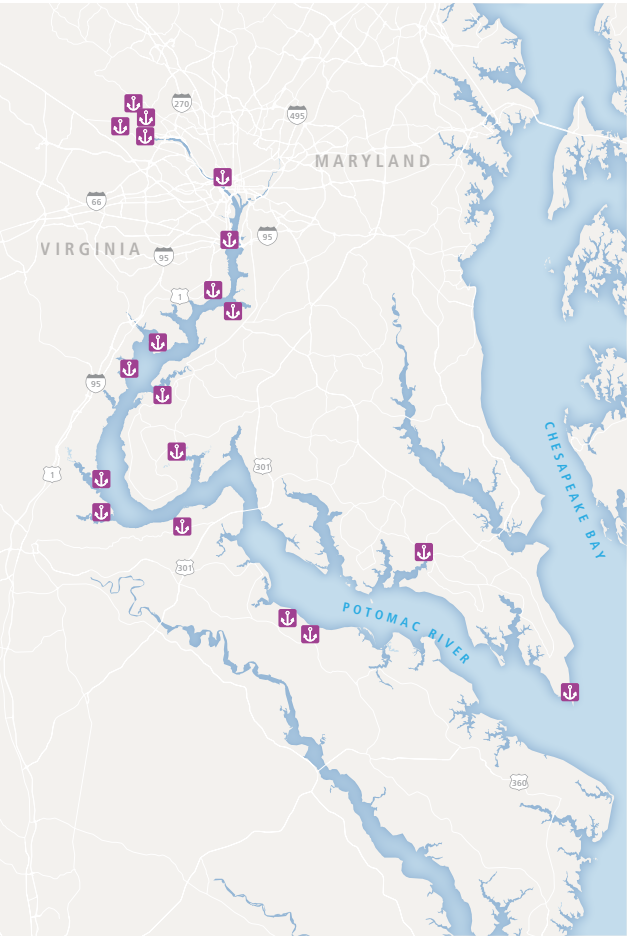
Planning Approach 15
Orientation and Interpretation 16
Trails Promotion and Support Services 18
Public Access and Connectivity 19
Resource Protection 20
Collaborative Approach 21
Existing and Potential Partnerships 22



For planning purposes, the tidal Potomac River was divided into 7 River Sections based on shared geography, population densities, clustering of public land units, visitor usage patterns jurisdictional boundaries, and transportation infrastructure.



Within each of the river sections, a resource inventory analysis identified Focus Areas that contain resources and stories associated with the national trails and currently provide a variety of immersive visitor experience opportunities.



Within the Focus Areas, Anchor Sites were identified to serve as primary locations for orienting visitors to the stories and resources associated with the national trails and for directing visitors to resources and opportunities along the river.

Chapter 2

Developing the Trails Along the Potomac

"All three national trails, Captain John Smith Chesapeake, Star-Spangled Banner, and the Potomac Heritage, are important for interpreting the history and archeology of Prince George's County, Maryland."

-Donald Creveling, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Planning Approach

The study area of this plan is the tidal Potomac, generally between Great Falls (located just north of the Potomac River Gorge and Washington, D.C.) and the mouth of the river (Point Lookout, MD and Smith Point, VA). For planning purposes, the river was divided into seven distinct "**River Sections**" (based on shared geography, population densities, clustering of public land units, visitor usage patterns, jurisdictional boundaries and existing transportation infrastructure):

1. Great Falls (VA/MD) [Riverbend Park to Francis Scott Key Memorial Bridge]
2. DC Metro [Francis Scott Key Memorial Bridge to Woodrow Wilson Bridge]
3. Beltway to Belvoir (VA/MD) [Woodrow Wilson Bridge to Fort Belvoir (VA)/Piscataway Park (MD)]
4. Mason Neck to Caledon (VA) [Mason Neck peninsula to Caledon State Park]
5. Maryland Peninsula (MD) [Pomonkey Creek to Port Tobacco River]
6. Southern Maryland (MD) [Zekiah Swamp Natural Environmental Area to Point Lookout State Park]
7. Northern Neck (VA) [Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge (Route 301) to Smith Point near Reedville, VA]

Each River Section contains one or more **Focus Areas**, targeted for near-term trail enhancements (within three to five years). Focus Areas contain resources and stories associated with the trail routes and (where resource conditions are favorable) significant, trail-evocative landscapes. Each Focus Area provides a variety of "immersive" visitor experience opportunities — occasions for people to fully engage in the environment and/or an activity.

Within the Focus Areas, **Anchor Sites** serve as primary locations for orienting visitors to the stories and resources associated with the national trails and for directing visitors to resources and opportunities along the river. These sites are staffed and provide public (water) access and key visitor amenities, receive high visitation and have the potential to offer trail-related experiences via existing and/or expanded programming and development.

Additional trail components provide comprehensive visitor opportunities:

- **Trail Destinations** offer public access, basic visitor amenities and have the potential for significantly contributing to trail-related experiences via existing or expanded programming and development.
- **Linking routes** – on both land and water – currently or potentially connect visitors to resources and experiences along the trails.
- **Support services** include commercial services and supplies (mass transit operations, private marinas, boat ramps, restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, etc.) and may currently or potentially offer public access, immersive visitor experiences and/or information pertaining to local destinations.

The plan provides an overview of each River Section and identifies Focus Areas, Anchor Sites and other Trail Components. The plan prescribes a series of actions that will enable residents and visitors to learn about the national trails, explore the values and key stories associated with each trail and enjoy a broadened array of trail-related opportunities.

Bottom right: Jonathan Doherty, NPS Chesapeake Bay Office moderates a Focus Group Meeting in the DC Metro Region for the Potomac Segment Plan aboard the Cherry Blossom. Potomac Riverboats donated the meeting venue free of charge. (photo credit: Emily Myron)

Orientation and Interpretation

Orientation

Orienting people to trail-related opportunities is a critical first step in engagement. Interpretive services and products further involve visitors in the stories, resources and experiences associated with the trails.

Orientation information serves travelers prior to and during their trail visits. Orientation tools include everything from websites and brochures to on-site maps and directional signage. Websites (such as www.findyourchesapeake.com) and apps (such as the Chesapeake Explorer app) provide basic site information, directions, maps, visitor opportunities and pertinent regulations. Publications, printed maps, orientation kiosks and unstaffed contact stations provide overviews of visitor facilities, services, programs and safety information. Staffed visitor centers offer similar information, along with personalized assistance, and orientation programs, films and exhibits. Wayfinding devices include trail identifier signs along roadways and directional signs leading to and within the sites.

To maximize efficiency and consistency along the national trails, the NPS has developed standardized orientation panels. For STSP and CAJO, one standard panel provides an overview of the specific trail, while a second panel conveys more detail related to trail themes and/or visitor opportunities. In many locations, a third panel conveys regional or site-specific information. For POHE, standard panels introduce regional trail networks and associated themes.

This page:

Left: Interpretive signage at Point Lookout State Park (photo credit: Sarah Rogers)

Top right: Wayfinding signage at Douglas Point Special Recreation Management Area (photo credit: Donald E. Briggs)

Bottom right: 6-panel Kiosk installed at Mason Neck (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Opposite page:

Top Left: Paddling Group in front of the schooner Sultana (photo credit: Sultana Education Foundation Instagram feed)

Bottom Left: Watermen working along the Northern Neck section of the Potomac River (photo credit: NPS archive)

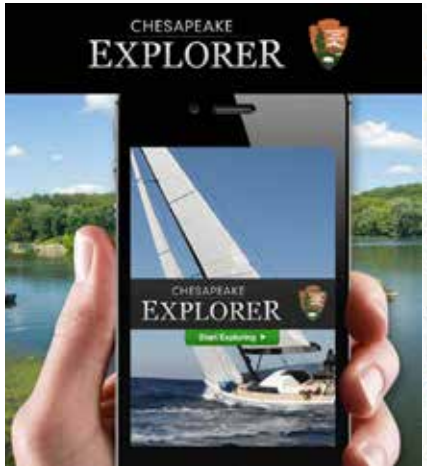
INTERPRETATION

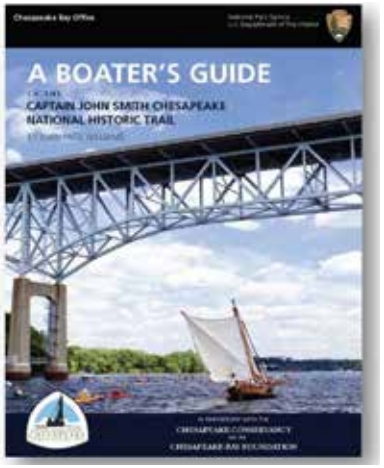
Education: Sultana Education Foundation provides a series of immersive on-water excursions along portions of the Captain John Smith Trail. The programs regularly sell out and have been touted as "life changing" adventures. [Between 2008 and 2013, approximately 3,500 students traveled portions of CAJO; many on week-long excursions.]

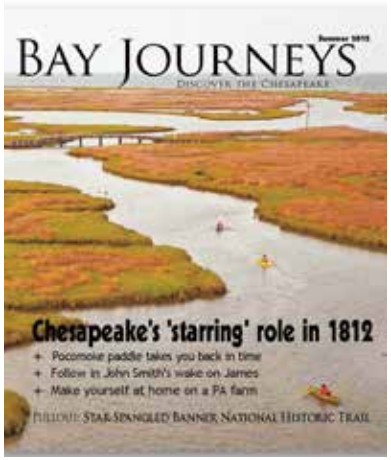
Technology: For both CAJO and STSP, geotrails have become quite popular and encourage residents and travelers to explore trail destinations previously unknown to them. Junior Ranger programs are effective in reaching younger audiences and provide online, as well as on-the-ground experiences. NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System provides water and weather data along with trail-related interpretive narratives.

Maps and Guides: *A Boater's Guide for the Captain John Smith Trail* was produced by NPS that includes itineraries for a variety of watercraft along several area tributaries, including the James, Rappahannock, Patapsco and Potomac rivers. The NPS is working with the American Canoe Association, among others, to develop a Paddler's Guide for the tidal Potomac. Similar guides/itineraries have been designed by state agencies such as Maryland DNR in cooperation with local tourism organizations such as St. Mary's County Division of Tourism.

Cultural Heritage: The Chesapeake Conservancy developed the **Watermen Heritage Tourism Training Program** in partnership with Maryland Watermen's Association, the Coastal Heritage Alliance and the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Over 80 watermen have completed the program, having received instruction related to thematic tour development, historic and cultural community asset identification, storytelling and heritage interpretation, and the Captain John Smith Trail. It has since been used as a model for a similar program in Virginia (http://watermenheritagetours.org/).







Interpretation

Major interpretive themes adopted for each of the national trails provide consistency and guidance for conveying concepts and stories along the Potomac. Further investments are needed to develop place-based trail-related concepts and stories to provide holistic interpretive experiences that reflect the richness and diversity of the region's natural and cultural heritage.

Interpretive programs and self-guided experiences help visitors learn about trail-related historical features and events, various cultures, wildlife, the environment and the principals of conservation.

Personal interpretation, including guided tours, presentations, workshops, demonstrations and living history programs actively engage visitors in learning and discovery.

Interpretive products (media) enable visitors to explore and absorb information at their own pace. Interpretive panels, multi-media exhibits, films, brochures, books, field guides, websites, audio touring devices and GPS software guide visitors through an array of self-guided and on-the-ground immersive experiences.

According to tourism officials and a membership survey conducted by the American Canoe Association (March 2014), some travelers prefer "suggested routes" (or "packaged" experiences), therefore, trail itineraries are highlighted in this plan. Itineraries suggest trail-related travel routes and describe the associated landscapes, special features, prominent sites and visitor amenities. They also provide practical information regarding access, travel distances, area conditions and visitor safety. Trail users may follow the itineraries closely or use them as general guides while creating their own excursions. The plan suggests opportunities to create new itineraries or update/expand existing itineraries associated with the national trails in coordination with trail sites and nearby communities.

Guide training and materials would serve to optimize visitor experiences within the trail corridors. Guided tours may be provided by agencies and organizations managing trail-related sites, as well as by private sector services. The plan prescribes development of shared training and materials related to trail themes, resources and stories. In addition, the NPS has initiated a two-tiered pilot training program to create tourism ambassadors and tourism guides along STSP and CAJO. The program — designed to enhance the effectiveness of trail-related outreach and interpretation — will target staff at trail sites, hospitality venues and outfitters.

Trails Promotion and Support Services

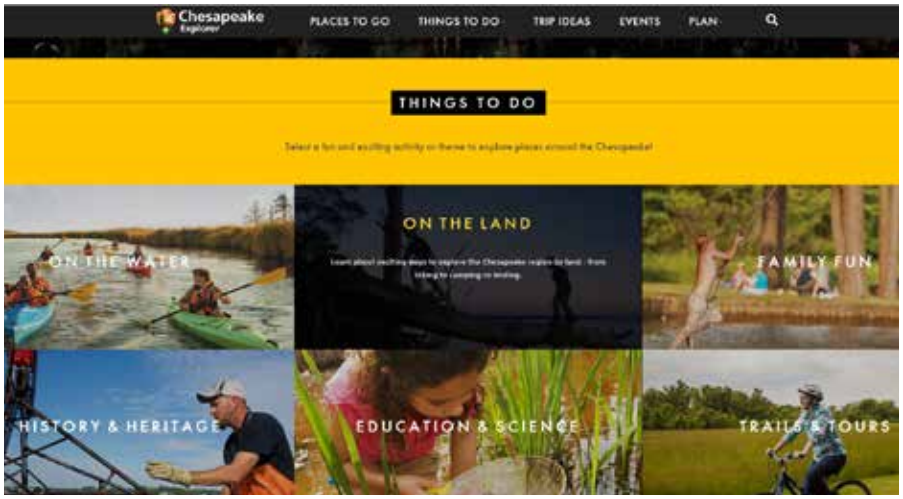
Trails Promotion

Raising awareness of the national trails with the public is an on-going effort. Effective communication with potential visitors involves:

- A visible trail presence at key sites and along travel routes, as well as on the internet and on mobile devices;
- A series of events and programs designed to draw targeted audiences to the trails; and,
- Strategic marketing and promotional activities by partner agencies, tourism organizations and the private sector.

As mentioned previously, the NPS has developed standardized signage and other products to enhance visibility of the trails. The trails' presence on the internet is established via www.smithtrail.net, www.starspangledtrail.net and their links to www.nps.gov, and through www.nps.gov/pohe. The Chesapeake Explorer app introduces visitors to trail-related sites and thematic tours and helps them create customized experiences. NPS Chesapeake Bay Office promotes trail sites, events, trip ideas and planning tools to enhance the visitor experience through http://findyourchesapeake.com/ The Chesapeake Conservancy promotes events and planning through Trips and Tips http://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/trips-and-tips. Social media and blog posts also support the digital presence of the national trails.

Trail partners and NPS have developed numerous programs and special events to draw visitors to the trails. This plan calls for further development of programs, such as guided tours, and highlights the importance of coordinated special events to raise awareness of the trails and trail themes. Festivals, river sojourns, regattas and challenge events are all promising ventures. Development of a strategic marketing and promotional effort is needed and will be most effective when organized and led by tourism officials along the Potomac, in collaboration with other trail partners.



Support Services

A variety of services are needed to augment visitor experiences along the trails. Residents and travelers often require guide services, food, lodging, equipment rentals and other amenities. A robust network of providers ensures more holistic visitor experiences and may result in repeat and/or lengthier trail visits. Efforts will be made to incorporate providers in training to ensure consistent and accurate interpretation and information.

Commercial guided tour boat cruises, paddling and cycling tours and similar activities offer opportunities for people to experience the national trails — particularly visitors who may be unable or reluctant to do so on their own. Several touring companies already provide these services on the Potomac, including the Atlantic Kayak Company which offers tours for youths and adults. A number of cruise lines, such as the Potomac Riverboat Company and Odyssey Cruises, offer sightseeing tours and private charters.

Public and private marinas provide launches, docks, boat slips, moorings, fuel, boat repairs, rentals and information that enable people to access and enjoy various sections of the national trails.

Conveniently-located **overnight accommodations** are an essential component of the national trails network. They include: hotels, motels, bed-and-breakfast establishments, hostels and campgrounds. Focus group discussions identified a particular need for additional water-accessible camping areas to serve paddlers and boaters.

Many trail users will benefit from other **commercial services**, including restaurants, grocery stores, equipment sales, rentals and repairs, and general merchandise. **Public transportation**, including busses, ferries and shuttles, are also important amenities. In particular, ferries can serve to cultivate "cross-river" experiences.

TRAILS PROMOTION

In 2013, the Accokeek Foundation initiated a "Celebrate the Potomac" event at Piscataway Park which coincided with a commemoration of the opening of a renovated and expanded water access site. It has since become an annual event at the park that is heavily attended by vendors, trail partners and general park enthusiasts. The opportunity exists to expand this annual celebration to include events at multiple partner sites along the Potomac.

This page:

Bottom Left: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office website Find Your Chesapeake http://findyourchesapeake.com/

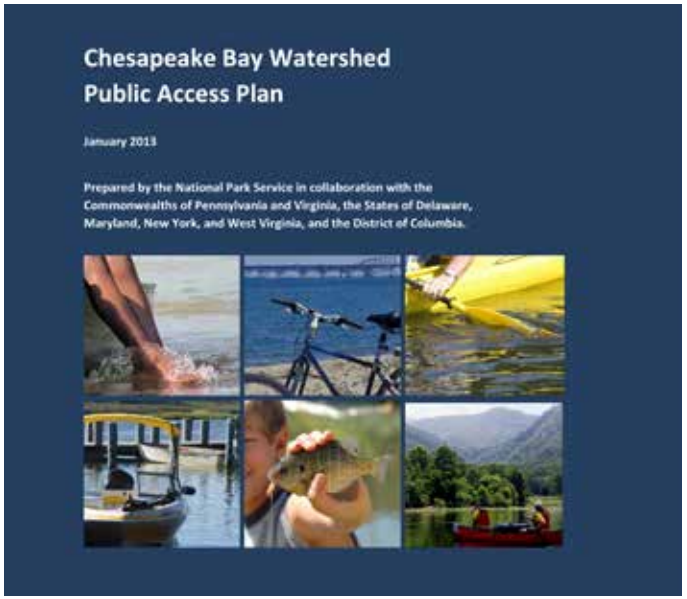
Opposite page:

Top: Tent camping in Virginia (photo credit: NPS archive)

Bottom: Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan (2013, NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

PUBLIC ACCESS

The long-standing public demand for increased access to the water in the region is addressed in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan, developed in 2011 by the NPS in collaboration with watershed states (as a response to Executive Order 13508). The plan outlines ways to increase public access to the Bay and its tributaries, with a target of creating 300 new access sites by 2025. Feedback related to the draft plan indicated people want more places along the water to walk, sit, play, picnic, camp, swim, fish, watch wildlife and launch canoes, kayaks, paddleboards, sailboats and powerboats.



Public Access and Connectivity

Expanded Land/Water Access

Along the Potomac, expanded or enhanced public access will broaden the array of opportunities for trail users and will likely increase overall use and attract new audiences. Increased land access can be achieved through the development of new or expanded hiking, biking and/or equestrian trails, site-specific (vehicle) touring routes and associated trailheads, parking areas and other amenities.

Although water access is adequate along many stretches of the Potomac, there are areas, particularly along lower portions of the river, where access is limited. For instance, in Virginia, between Leesylvania State Park and Smith Point – about 75 river miles – there are only seven public boat access sites. The 30-mile stretch between Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve and Colonial Beach is devoid of public boat access sites.

Also, many areas lack water-accessible camping facilities, hindering extended paddling excursions. The development of new or expanded soft and hard launches and landings, dock slips, floating docks, boat-in camping areas and associated amenities will facilitate increased paddling, boating and overnight use. New or expanded piers and shoreline fishing areas will increase access for anglers, while designated beaches and shorelines will expand swimming opportunities. Additional observation platforms and overlooks are necessary to extend visual access to the water.

Increased Connectivity

Increased connectivity will enhance the national trail network along the Potomac. Seamless visitor experiences — with numerous physical linkages between various destinations and services — will provide optimal opportunities for trail users. Strategies for improving connectivity may include:

- Improving sections of existing hiking and biking trails (through rerouting, widening or resurfacing) to allow for more varied use as appropriate;
- Developing new access to close gaps in existing land routes;
- Establishing new water trail segments to connect national trail components and/or link them with local water trails;
- Acquiring properties or easements to connect key sites; and
- Supporting development of expanded or improved connector roads and mass transit options.

Resource Conservation

Resource conservation encompasses a broad set of actions intended to protect or restore historic, cultural and natural sites, landscapes and other features contributing to the quality of visitor experiences associated with the national trails. Any proposed enhancement or development along the trails should avoid archeologically sensitive areas when looking to establish new trail connections or amenities to enhance existing trails. Additionally, increased threats posed to historic resources from increased visitor use should be considered when studying the cumulative impacts of any proposed development. Probable locations of cultural resources should be considered in any new development project, from signage to group tours, and effort made to minimize potential impacts from increased visitation, site use and related development that might ensue. In all cases, care should be taken to avoid revealing locations of sensitive archeology sites.

In addition to historic and cultural resources, special care should be given to the identification of state or federally listed populations of rare and endangered plant species and globally rare plant communities in all areas of proposed development. In some cases, new development could negatively impact these species and promote the spread of non-native invasive species. All proposed developments should be reviewed by NPS and the respective state Natural Heritage Programs to ensure avoidance, minimization or mitigation of potential impacts.

As summarized in Chapter 1, the National Trails System Act and supporting planning documents provide guidance for protection and conservation of trail-related resources. The Act also recognizes the importance of state and metropolitan trails and the relevance of protection strategies in both national and regional contexts. Policy guidance for resource protection is also provided in other federal legislation, such as the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

More specifically, land conservation strategies endorsed by many of the partners engaged throughout this planning process should be considered as part of any development project in an effort to identify solutions that support efforts to protect the scenic and historic qualities of the Chesapeake's special places.

Existing Strategies

Management operations associated with CAJO, STSP and POHE embrace historic, cultural and natural resources, and consider resource conservation intrinsic to providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities. Trail planning documents identify and define trail resources — including evocative landscapes, high potential route segments and historic sites — and recommend protection strategies that support quality visitor experiences.

Nationally significant resources associated with one or more of the national trails include: the route, stops and places sited by Captain John Smith's voyages; sites of American Indian towns of the 17th century; original routes of travel, battlefields and historic structures associated with the events of the War of 1812 in the Chesapeake; cultural landscapes connected to George Washington, Robert E. Lee and the evolution of the nation; and relevant archeological sites.

Trail-related protection strategies include: conserving local and regional natural resources and open space in rapidly developing areas; providing connections between ecological islands or hubs; preserving cultural landscapes; protecting archeological resources and historic sites; and high potential historic sites and (land and water) segments; providing public access to evocative places; and offering recreational opportunities.

Supporting Visitor Experiences

Identifying and protecting places that contribute to diverse and enriched visitor experiences will be a primary element in establishing an overall conservation strategy for the Potomac. Desired visitor experiences may differ among the national trails because of their varying purposes and significance, requiring reconciliation among conflicting landscape values. Kayakers on the Captain John Smith Trail might seek an immersive experience along a protected creek with evocative landscapes, whereas a bus tour group may be interested in historic sites associated with the Star-Spangled Banner Trail.

Visitors on the Potomac will encounter vast tracts of relatively undeveloped shoreline that contributes to their trail experiences. However, the presence of these shoreline forests, wetlands and farm fields can be deceiving as much of the land is privately owned and subject to land use change or development. Opportunities for landscape conservation within the Potomac corridor could assist to safeguard the visitor experience.

RESOURCE PROTECTION

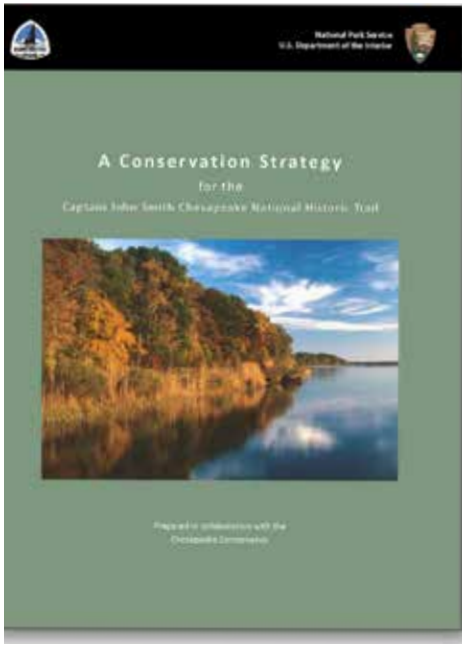
High Potential Route Segments can provide high quality recreation experiences in areas with exemplary scenic values or can offer opportunities to vicariously share the experience of the original users of a historic route. High Potential Historic Sites provide the opportunity to interpret the historic significance of a trail during the period of its major use.

The CAJO Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) identifies the "Middle Potomac" as a high-potential route segment, and highlights a significant (Smith) voyage stop and two significant 17th century American Indian archeological sites. The STSP CMP recognizes more than 20 high potential historic sites on or near the tidal Potomac and lists five high potential routes (including the middle Potomac River from Anacostia River to Leesylvania State Park, VA/Smallwood State Park, MD).

The POHE Foundation Document identifies the trail network as important for preservation of historic routes and sites connected with the evolution of the nation; conservation of open space, rare species and functioning ecosystems; and for public access to historic features and

"Given that these national trails consist of very little public land along the entirety of their routes, the Section 106 review process is an important tool for protecting trail resources along the Potomac."

-Destry Jarvis, President, Outdoor Recreation & Park Services, LLC



Opposite page: The Ghost Fleet at Mallows Bay (photo credit: Don Shomette)

This page: A Conservation Strategy for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT

An Overall Strategy

A resource protection and conservation strategy for the Potomac River corridor must reflect a coordinated effort to treat the protection needs of the three national trails, as well as associated local trails and partner sites. Additionally, it must include protection efforts that clearly enhance visitor experience opportunities.

The overall strategy will rely on partnerships among NPS and other federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations and others. Numerous examples of successful conservation projects attest to the value of such partnerships. Developing a common framework for resource protection will allow partner organizations with varying interests and strengths to assume appropriate roles in developing and implementing comprehensive strategies related to particular conservation opportunities.

The Conservation Strategy developed for the Captain John Smith Trail in 2013 presents a methodology that assesses resources contributing to the trail experience and a "scorecard" technique to identify focus areas for resource protection. It also describes a "partnership action model" as a guiding framework for resource protection initiatives, consisting of the following elements:

1. Assessing Resources Contributing to Trail Experiences
2. Promoting the Trail's Recognition
3. Developing Strategic Conservation Plans
4. Encouraging Private Land Stewardship
5. Permanently Protecting Lands to Ensure the Trails' Integrity
6. Guiding Compatible Development
7. Monitoring Progress and Adjusting Strategies to Reflect Changing Situations

This Conservation Strategy related to the Captain John Smith Trail will serve as the foundation for developing a specific resource protection strategy for the Potomac River. That strategy, rather than this plan, will address protection goals of high priority trail resources and specific initiatives in detail. The Chesapeake Conservation Partnership will also help identify conservation and resource protection opportunities.

Collaborative Approach

Further development and success of the national trails in the Chesapeake region depends on collaborative partnerships among federal, state and local government agencies; non-profit organizations; commercial interests; volunteers; and various private interests.

Along the Potomac River, the shared capacity of numerous agencies and organizations will be required to enhance and manage visitor services and resource protection efforts. The actions outlined within this plan depend upon successful coordination among a range of partners. What may be impossible for a single entity to achieve may well be feasible through effective collaboration.

This plan represents a shared vision for elevating the significance of the stories associated with the national trails along the Potomac and for using the trail designations to support local and regional efforts to expand public access, visitor experiences and land conservation. The partnerships may involve activities ranging from marketing, fundraising and program design to resource protection, technical assistance and facility development. It will take innovative and efficient collaborative efforts to realize the full potential of the national trail designations as tools to develop, conserve and promote premier educational, recreational, tourism and conservation assets in the region.

CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The Chesapeake Conservation Partnership is a coalition of diverse organizations and agencies working to advance land conservation and public access in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Partnership was convened in July 2009 by the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office and the Chesapeake Conservancy to develop a strategy in response to President Obama's Executive Order 13508. Through a series of working groups and an annual meeting, the group makes progress on large landscape efforts in a collaborative and strategic way. In 2015 the Partnership provided primary input into the development of the Protected Lands Management Strategy, one of 23 developments under the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement which seeks to protect an additional two million acres of lands by 2025.

Existing and Potential Partnerships

Numerous effective partnerships are active along the Potomac River corridor, boasting an array of impressive public services and conservation initiatives. The following entities may play a role in implementing the specific actions called for in this segment plan:

Public Site Managers

- Natural area preserves
- Historic sites
- Wildlife refuges and management areas
- Federal and state parks
- County and municipal parks
- Recreational trails and ferry services
- Water access sites

Commercial Facilities and Services

- Marinas
- Campgrounds, motels and other overnight accommodations
- Guide services
- Equipment sales and rentals

Non-Profit Organizations

- State, County and Local Tourism Organizations
- Watershed and river-based organizations
- Organizations associated with particular sites
- American Indian tribes, descendant communities and other organizations
- Land conservation and historic preservation organizations
- Trail clubs
- User groups

Educational and Research Institutions

- Area universities and associated sites
- Community colleges

This page:

Left: Boat show at the National Harbor waterfront (photo credit: NPS archive)

Top right: Colonial Beach Yacht Center at Monroe Bay along the Potomac River (photo credit: MLS listing)

Bottom right: Kayak rentals and dock at Westmoreland State park (photo credit: Sarah Rogers)

Opposite page:

Beach and piers along Westmoreland State Park (photo credit: Sarah Rogers)