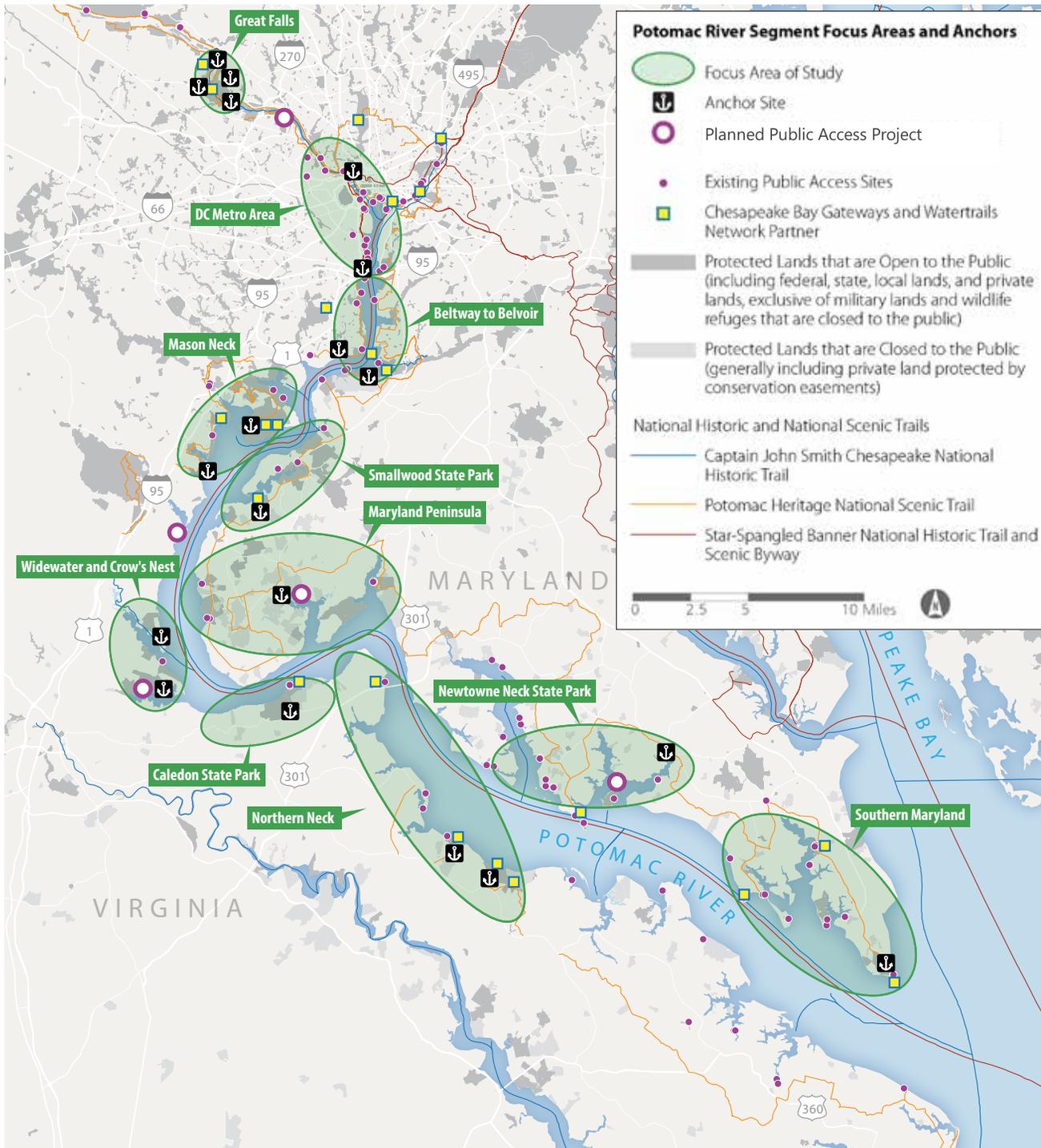




Chapter 3

River Sections and Proposed Action Items

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Chapter 3

Potomac River Segment Plan

“We have to make sure that activities on our boundaries are compatible with preservation goals.”

Glenda Booth, Friends of Dyke Marsh (from Chesapeake Bay News interview, March 14, 2012)



Introduction (How to Use Chapter 3)

This chapter provides guidance on both broad-based and area-specific actions intended to raise the visibility and usability of the three national trails along the Potomac River. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part considers the river as a whole and proposes actions that affect all seven geographic sections of the river. These cross-cutting actions can and should be applied throughout the river corridor as appropriate. The second part highlights each of the (seven) individual River Sections and prescribes specific recommendations tailored to those geographic areas.

All of the recommendations outlined herein are based on site analyses, focus group meetings and input from stakeholders. The actions are intended to be implemented within the next two to five years and are subject to all appropriate compliance regulations; which could include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). It should be noted that this is not an all-inclusive list of potential enhancements; new ideas and opportunities will develop over time. It is also

realized that while the river should be viewed as a whole, actions are often locally-based. Thus, the importance of thinking about the trails in their entirety and how each action builds on the entire trail experience.

While many proposed action items may provide the benefit of new or enhanced public access along trail routes, even the best intended improvements can have negative impacts on natural, historic or cultural resources if they are not thoroughly reviewed in the project planning process. Serious consideration of site resources and characteristics should be weighed against increased public use, land conservation opportunities and other cumulative impacts. Any recordation or survey of sites, archeological, architectural, or cultural landscapes should be filed with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Office. In all cases, care should be taken to ensure the avoidance of archeologically sensitive areas; rare, threatened or endangered animal species or habitat; populations of state listed rare plant species and globally rare plant communities.

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Hiking Trail along the C&O Canal (photo credit: NPS archive)



It should also be noted that the National Park Service owns very few parcels of land in areas where proposed action items were submitted. The segment plan is meant to enhance the physical and virtual connections of many publicly accessible lands and related services along both shorelines of the Potomac, which include federal, state, county, local and municipal partners. Individual park and site manager recommendations for proposed action items informed the segment plan with projects that could benefit the national trails along the tidal Potomac River. All action items in the plan should be understood to be reflective of the individual sites' missions and objectives, which are subject to political and financial shifts that impact staffing and funding.

A common issue raised at all of the stakeholder meetings was a concern over too much signage. Some sites already have an abundance of signs and adding more could not only be a distraction but also confusing to the visitor. While this plan does contain recommendations for important interpretive and orientation signs, it is recognized that these must be considered in the context of what is currently present and how additional information might be best presented. Such decisions are at the discretion of the site manager. Options to be considered include where best to place any new interpretive signs; the potential of combining information, where appropriate, onto the same display panel or kiosk; the use of electronic or public art as signage; eliminating older, out of date signage; and/or looking at other forms of media, such as podcasts or QR codes, as a means of telling stories and providing interpretive material. It is also important that all displayed information accurately reflect the history, stories and resources of the site. This may require coordination with a number of stakeholder and interest groups.

For ease in implementation and tracking, the following recommended cross-cutting actions are presented in five major categories:

- Orientation and Interpretation;
- New/Enhanced (Physical) Connectivity;
- New/Enhanced Public Access;
- Trails Promotion and Services; and
- Resources Protection and Land Conservation

Cross-Cutting Components Orientation and Interpretation

Orientation Kiosks: Multi-paneled kiosks introducing the three trails could be installed at prominent sites within the river corridor. [Note: Many kiosks are already in place or are scheduled for installation.] Sites could include federal, state and local parks, wildlife refuges, historic sites, and private marinas, campgrounds and other facilities open for public use. Interpretive panels highlighting each of the parks in a 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.

Interpretive Signs: Single-panel interpretive signs, reflecting the natural and cultural richness of the area and keyed back to the trails, could be installed at important observation sites, smaller historical sites and parks, boat launch areas and at publicly accessible private facilities.

Wayfinding Signs: To help visitors locate trail segments, sites and other amenities and easily follow travel routes, wayfinding signs should be installed at appropriate locations. In coordination with state departments of transportation and local governing bodies, such signs may be located at key intersections to direct travelers to important sites. They could also be installed within smaller trail sites where kiosks and other interpretive signs may not be appropriate.

Maps and Guides: To help visitors become familiar with national trail segments, trail resources and sites to explore along the trail routes, maps and guides for each trail could be made available at the anchor sites and at select trail destinations, outfitter locations and local community facilities.

Exhibits: Visitor center exhibits throughout the region could potentially be enhanced with information related to the national trails. Other permanent and/or temporary exhibits could be placed at federal, state and local parks, national wildlife refuges, historic sites and regional and local information centers.

Top: 3-sided Interpretive Kiosk at Mason Neck State Park (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Bottom: Trail marker at Seaford, DE paddle craft launch site (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Audio tours/podcasts: To help visitors gain an understanding of trail-related themes along the river corridor, audio tours or podcasts could be developed or revised. Potential topics include: American Indian cultures, significant historic events, historical and contemporary fishing techniques, key bird species, etc.

Off-site Interpretation: To help visitors gain an understanding of significant cultural and historical resources and events related to non-accessible Department of Defense (DOD) lands, stories could be told from adjacent accessible public properties. For example, the story of John Wilkes Booth crossing the Potomac and landing within the confines of the Dahlgren Naval Weapons Laboratory could be told at nearby Barnesfield Park.

Paddling/Boating Itineraries: Touring itineraries for paddlers and small power boats could be developed or expanded for both guided and self-guided trips along the river. Such itineraries would allow people to take “journeys through time”, departing from federal lands, state parks, regional and local parks or other public or accessible private facilities along the river corridor. Stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) itineraries could be developed (or modified from existing itineraries) to engage the growing number of SUP enthusiasts.

Guided Boating Tours: Guided boating and paddling tours, departing from any of the public or private accessible sites along the river, could provide visitors with opportunities to explore the region’s natural and cultural keystones. Such tours could connect a number of national trail partner sites along the Potomac River and tell stories related to any of the three national trails’ themes. NPS staff could assist tour leaders in becoming “Certified Trail Ambassadors” to ensure that accurate and high quality trail-related information is being shared.

Motor Vehicle/Bicycle Itineraries: A series of guides/itineraries (possibly in mobile app or other electronic form) could be developed for use by visitors touring the region via motor vehicle or bicycle. These guides, using local road networks and developed bicycle routes, could highlight access to key sites, trailheads and other area opportunities for enjoying the associated resources related to the trails.

Guided Walking Tours: Opportunities exist to develop guided walking tours of key sites within the corridor. Such tours could provide new perspectives on key sites and stories within the Potomac Segment. These could be done in partnership with DOD facilities, public park areas, historic sites, and other resource areas that support themes related to the trails.

Private Marinas and Waterfront Restaurants: The potential to provide marinas and waterfront restaurants with trail-specific information, such as menu placemats or rack cards that showcase trail-specific themes, identify the site location within the greater context of the trail route and highlight significant trail sites in the area, could be explored.

New/Enhanced (Physical) Connectivity

Trail Linkages: Opportunities should be explored to enhance the linkages between facilities along the Potomac corridor. Such linkages could create continuous routes between important resources by developing new trail segments that link together existing trails and resource areas. This could include the development of new land or water trail components.

New/Enhanced Public Access

New Public Water Access: Opportunities are needed to enhance the public’s ability to access the Potomac River and its associated tributaries. There are significant gaps in the provision of public access sites that allow boaters to be able to access the water and related trail resources. New opportunities to provide additional paddle craft and trailer boat launches should be explored whenever available and as appropriate. This includes both land-to-water and water-to-land public access.

Boat-in Camping: There is a great need for the provision of boat-in campsites along the Potomac River corridor. Such sites are important for those wishing to make multi-day trips along the water routes of the national trails. Opportunities to provide such sites should be explored on both existing public lands and on appropriate private lands in the corridor. Camping platforms and houseboat hostels could also be explored in suitable locations.



Top: Promotion for the Virginia State Parks mobile app at Caledon State Park (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

Bottom: Electronic information kiosk outside Visitor Center at Caledon State Park (photo credit: NPS Chesapeake Bay Office)

“Tourism is the world’s largest industry, and Charles County has so many amenities to offer visitors that it is natural for us to take destination marketing seriously. Whether attracting long-stay visitors or ‘day trippers’ from the D.C. metro area, we intend to showcase everything that Charles County has to offer.”

Ken Robinson, Charles County Commissioner, District 1 (from Charles County press release September 16, 2014)



Trails Promotion and Services

Event Promotion: There are a myriad of festivals and special events celebrated along the Potomac corridor. Opportunities should be explored to tie trail themes into these events as appropriate. Trail stories, displays, or other forms of marketing and interpretation should be included whenever feasible.

Rental Equipment: Work with public and private providers to expand the availability of rental equipment for people wishing to explore the trails by bike or water craft. This may be particularly feasible through concession or other partnership activities at existing public access sites or commercial marinas.

Electronic/Social Marketing: Trail partners could consider opportunities to use the internet, mobile apps and website hosting to better promote the significant sites and features in the region and to connect visitors to additional sites in the area.

Communication Strategy: The National Park Service will look at the development of a communication strategy, which will keep stakeholders throughout the Potomac Segment aware of progress made on plan implementation, as well as on opportunities to advance the plan. Stakeholders within each of the seven sections could develop a communication network to leverage and promote their work in advancing the trails within their area of interest.

Resource Protection and Land Conservation

While there are many sections of land along the tidal Potomac River corridor that are in public ownership and, thus, have a degree of protection, the bulk of the land along the river is privately held. The size of the river and the fact that much of its shoreline is still very rural can give the impression of a large protected landscape. In reality, the views and natural areas now exhibited on much of the lower river corridor could easily be erased through improper development.

Thus, there is a need for key viewsheds, sensitive lands, and lands that could link together trail resources to be identified and efforts made to conserve them through any appropriate conservation measure. One of the biggest challenges for each of the national trails is having a land base. It is a fundamental necessity for the connectivity of national scenic trails and a critically important component for the management of national historic trails. Everything else, from interpretive facilities to trailheads to docks and boat ramps, depends on it.

It should be clear that land conservation efforts can be identified as a potential action item of this plan, as it would serve the interests of enhancing trail resources along the Potomac River. Land protection and conservation could be accomplished through public acquisition or a less-than fee approach, such as a protective easement held by one of the land trusts, a public entity or another conservation organization.

The key is that all interested parties must be alert to opportunities to conserve and protect critical shoreline areas and, wherever feasible, make these available for public access. NPS may not necessarily be interested in acquiring any new lands and may elect not to have a role in conservation efforts due to federal or trail management regulations. However, NPS will do what it can, where appropriate, to support public and private entities interested in owning and managing land for conservation purposes. In many cases, visual access to undisturbed lands in lieu of public recreation access provides a connection between the user, the conservationist and the cultural resources inherent within the landscape.

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