



Examples of Indigenous Cultural Landscapes in Virginia
Deanna Beacham

Examples of Indigenous Cultural Landscapes in Virginia

The concept of the Indigenous Cultural Landscape, first introduced to the public as part of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, is intended to represent large landscapes from the perspective of American Indian nations at the time of their first contact with Europeans. These landscapes comprise the cultural and natural resources that would have supported the historic lifestyles and settlement patterns of an Indian group in its totality. The concept attempts to demonstrate that American Indian places were not confined to the sites of houses, towns, or settlements, and that the American Indian view of one's homeland is holistic rather than compartmentalized into the discrete site elements typically used in our language today such as "hunting grounds", "villages", or "sacred sites". The essay on the Indigenous Cultural Landscape is attached as an appendix to this document.

Initial implementation activities of the Indigenous Cultural Landscape focused on its role as a conservation priority in the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, as indicated in the Trail's Comprehensive Management Plan. A team was formed to decide on criteria and plan additional activities such as identifying indigenous cultural landscapes in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Outreach to conservation and interpretive education practitioners was planned as well. Many of the team members believed the concept could be useful in much broader horizons, so national outreach began, primarily by word of mouth in the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Criteria for indigenous cultural landscapes in the Chesapeake Bay watershed were determined as follows:

Central indigenous community support criteria (landscape should include several of these):

- Good agricultural soil (fine sandy loam, 1-2% grade)
- Fresh water source (because river or creek water may be brackish)
- Transportation tributary adjacent
- Landing place (confluence of tributaries optimal)
- Marshes nearby (for waterfowl, shellfish, reeds, tubers, muskrat, turtles)
- Brushy areas (for small game, berries)
- Primary or mixed deciduous forest (can be restored or restorable, for larger game, nuts, bark, firewood)
- Uplands that could support hunting activities (are supporting a variety of wildlife)

Additional desirable attributes:

- Proximity to known American Indian community (documented through ethno history or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later)
- Higher terrace landform above the primary flood plain
- Protection from wind where necessary (near mouths of larger rivers)

Criteria for smaller or connective parcels:

- Areas of recurrent use for food or medicine acquisition (shell middens, plant gathering sites)
- Areas of recurrent use for tool acquisition (quarries)
- Places with high probability for ceremonial or spiritual use (even if not documented), or known by a descendent community to have been used for ceremony
 - Trails used as footpaths (usually became Colonial roads, sometimes are today's highways and local roads)
 - Parcels that can be interpreted as supporting activities of Indian community sustainability, such as trading places or meeting places
 - Places associated with ancestors, or part of a descendent community's past known through tribal history, ethno history, or archaeology

Following the initial creation of the criteria for the concept within the scope of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, nationwide outreach activities continued with the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and at conferences and consultations. In addition, to assist in implementation of this conservation and interpretation concept as the Trail is developed, this paper was written in 2011 to describe some examples of indigenous cultural landscapes along proposed segments of the Trail in Virginia. The example descriptions include lists of which criteria apply and how the sites can be interpreted as indigenous cultural landscapes. The paper was updated for the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay in 2015.

Mattaponi Wildlife Management Area



Mattaponi River Marsh - Photo by Deanna Beacham

Located in Caroline County, this Virginia wildlife management area is 2,542 acres. The property, which is held and managed by Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, borders portions of the Mattaponi River and the South River. The area is managed to conserve critical habitat for wildlife and inland fish as well as threatened and endangered species in a rapidly developing area of Virginia. The varied landscape of the WMA ranges from mature upland hardwood and mixed forests to wetlands and rivers. The upland areas occupy high ridges well above sea level. Among the wetlands areas is a "lost meander" of the Mattaponi River, a strip of water and marsh that was once part of the river, but was cut off as the riverbed changed over time.

Criteria met:

- Fresh water source
- Transportation tributary adjacent
- Landing place, with the optimal confluence of tributaries
- Marshes nearby
- Brushy areas
- Primary or mixed deciduous forest (some land has been restored or is in restoration)
- Uplands that could support hunting activities (are supporting a variety of wildlife)

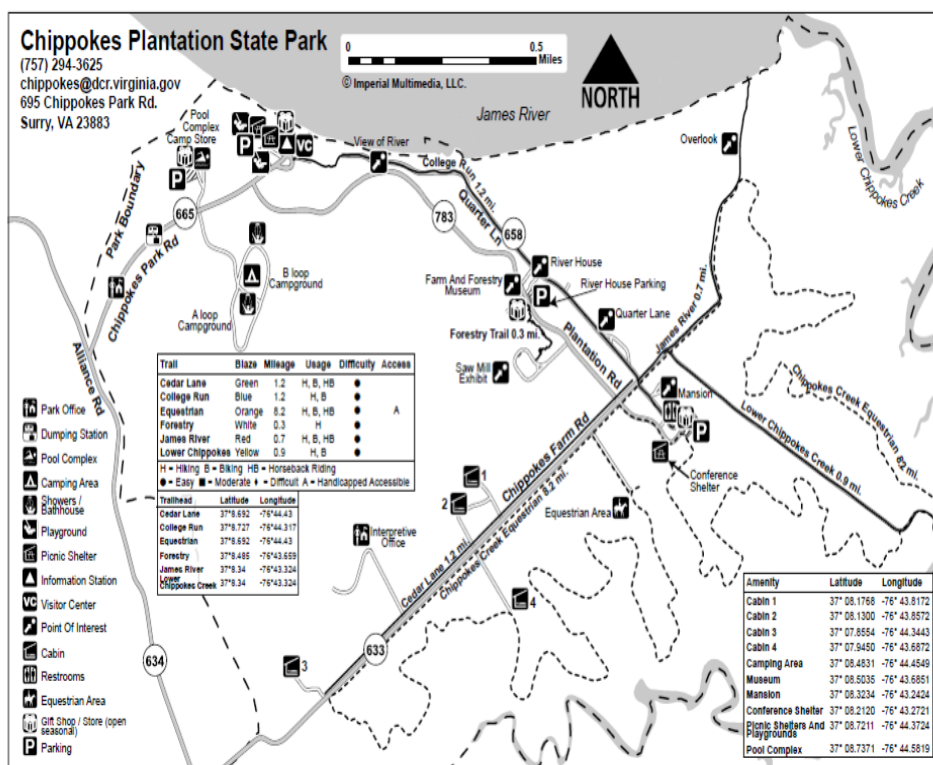
- Proximity to known American Indian community, documented through ethno history or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later
- Places associated with ancestors, or part of a descendent community's past known through tribal history, ethno history, or archaeology.



Pond in Mattaponi Wildlife Management Area – Photo by Deanna Beacham

The Mattaponi WMA is in the general vicinity of adjacent Rappahannock and Moraughtacund Colonial-era 17th century settlements that are part of the Rappahannock documented and oral history. Although interpretive education is not typically a goal for a state WMA, this is a rich, high-resource area, and examples of the wildlife critical to the Virginia Indian lifestyle are abundant. Due to the diversity of habitats, the land supports game animals including turkey, migratory waterfowl, quail, deer, bear, squirrels, and rabbits along with non-game animals used for food and clothing by the Indians, including raccoons, groundhogs, beaver and turtles.

Chippokes Plantation State Park



Map from Chippokes Plantation website - Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Located in Surry County on the south side of the James River, this 1683-acre state park was donated to the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1967 to be managed as a living museum of farming practices through the centuries. Originally this land was the territory of the Quiyoughcohannock Indians, and both the plantation and adjacent creek were named for the leader of that tribe at the time of the English arrival.

Chippokes Plantation State Park is bounded by tributaries to the James River on two sides. Landscapes evocative of the 17th century can be found along both College Creek and Lower Chippokes Creek, and there is a striking grove of bald cypress trees known as “The Cathedral” populating one section of the James River beach. The bald cypress was the tree of choice for the Indians of the area for making dugout canoes.

Although the current interpretive theme of the park is primarily the history of Euro-American farming, and the preserved farmlands and outbuildings contribute to that aspect, the lands adjacent to the waterways are intact, with considerable wooded area, including terraces along the James.



**The Cathedral
at Chippokes -
Photo by
Virginia
Department of
Conservation
and Recreation**

Criteria met:

- Good agricultural soil
- Fresh water source
- Transportation tributary adjacent
- Landing place, with the optimal confluence of tributaries
- Marshes nearby
- Brushy areas
- Primary or mixed deciduous forest
- Uplands that could support hunting activities (are supporting a variety of wildlife)
- Proximity to known American Indian community (documented through ethno history or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later)

Chippokes Plantation State Park is situated in the eastern portion of Quiyoughcohannock territory. Although the closest John Smith-mapped town of Nantapoyac is to the west (and as yet unidentified through archaeology), considerable evidence of American Indian use of the land has been shown in numerous archaeological sites in or near the park. Along with the other state park amenities and farming history interpretation, Chippokes staff have planted natural secession farm plots Indian style, which means they are allowed to go fallow after a few years of plant production. With technical help, additional interpretation of natural resources in Chippokes, such as the cypress trees and wooded areas, could be added to the educational content provided to the park's visitors.



Lower Chippokes Creek - Photo by Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

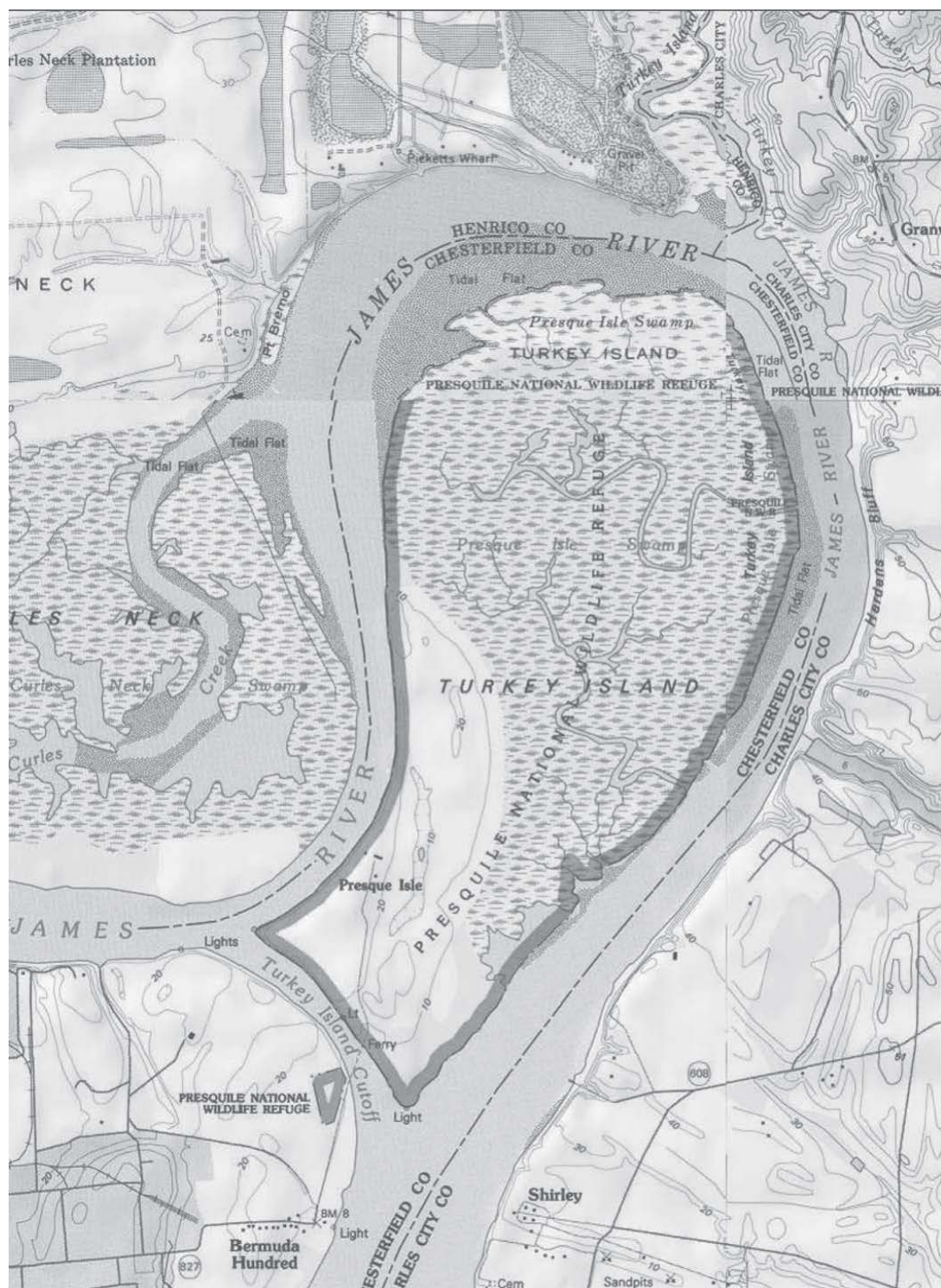
Presquile National Wildlife Refuge

Presquile National Wildlife Refuge is located on a 1329-acre island in the James River in Chesterfield County, approximately 20 miles south of Richmond, Virginia. Part of the Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge complex, it was established in 1953 to protect habitat for wintering waterfowl and other migratory birds, and at the present time is open to the public only on a very limited basis. Due to budget constraints, the refuge is presently unstaffed.

Presquile NWR updated their comprehensive conservation plan in 2012, allowing for additional public access to the refuge, and identifying the area as an indigenous cultural landscape. An environmental education center for youth, managed by the James River Association, is also sited on the island.



View of the forest from the boardwalk in Presquile NWR - Photo by Deanna Beacham



1994 map from file report - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

What is now Presquile (formerly “Presque Isle”, or almost an island) was once a peninsula inside one of the James River oxbows. It became an island when a channel was cut through the peninsula in 1933 to make navigation easier for large boats. The island includes open meadow that was formerly farmed, extensive wetlands, brushy areas and mixed forest.



View of the wetlands from the boardwalk at Presquile - Photo by Deanna Beacham

Criteria met:

- Good agricultural soil
- Fresh water source
- Transportation tributary adjacent
- Landing place
- Marshes nearby
- Brushy areas
- Primary or mixed deciduous forest
- Proximity to known American Indian community (documented through ethno history or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later)

At the time of English Contact, this peninsula was within the aboriginal territory of the Appamattuck Indians, and John Smith mapped an unnamed town near the base of the peninsula. A 2009 cultural resource survey of the refuge identified a large area considered likely to contain evidence of Late Woodland American Indian occupation. The study also reported 3 prehistoric archeological sites

that had been previously researched in a 1967 study with components ranging from Late Archaic through Late Woodland.

Some interpretation of the indigenous cultural resources present is offered in the exhibits at the Presquile visitor center, including information on which migratory wildfowl and land-based animals might have been hunted there, and plants from this part of the ecosystem that would have been especially useful to the Appamattuck Indians. The addition of a boardwalk into the wetlands area offers additional opportunity to interpret the Natives' use of indigenous plants.

Menokin

The 500 acre site in Richmond County on the Northern Neck that includes the former home of Francis Lightfoot Lee and Rebecca Tayloe is known as Menokin. Owned by the Menokin Foundation, the site is on the National Register of Historic Places, and includes the partially restored framework of the original house, which is being encased in glass for preservation. 325 acres of the Menokin property bordering Cat Point Creek, a tributary to the Rappahannock River, are held as a conservation easement acquired by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2006, to be managed by the Rappahannock National Wildlife Refuge.

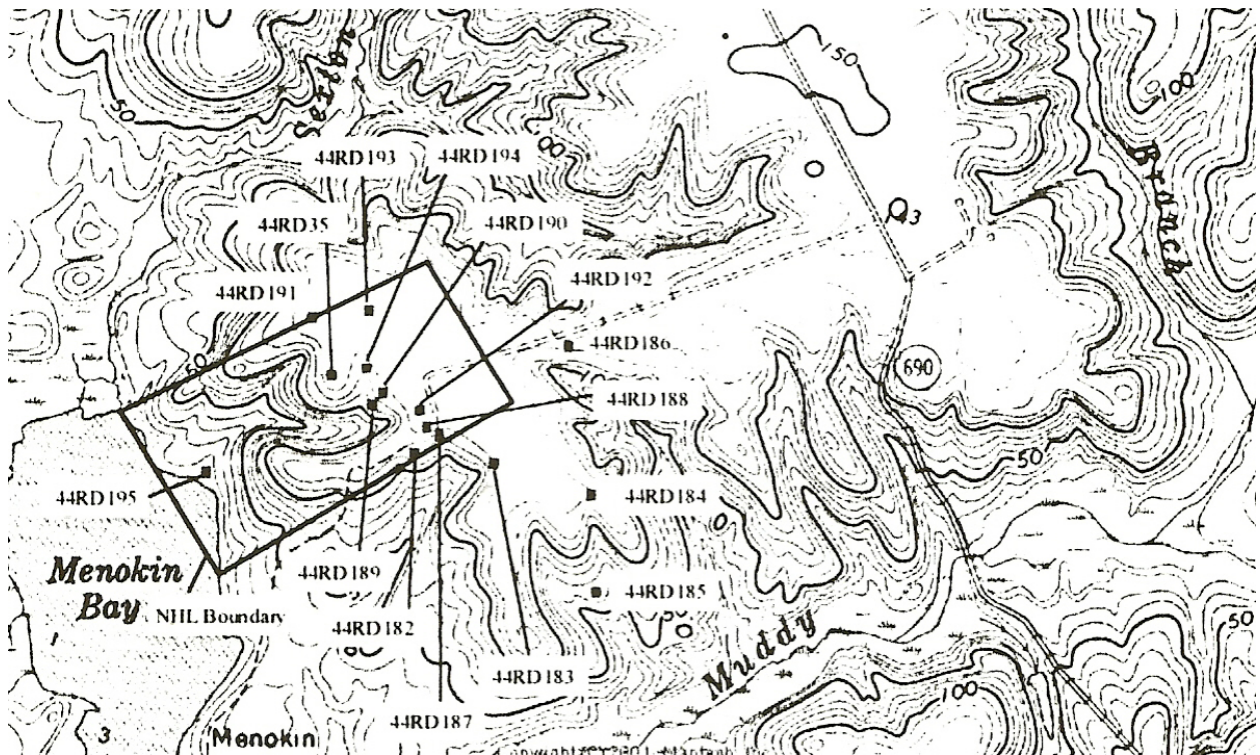


Menokin Bay - Photo by Sarah Pope

At English Contact, this region was the aboriginal territory of the very large Rappahannock tribe. When John Smith visited the area, he mapped Rappahannock towns at Cat Point Creek as well as in many places along the Rappahannock River. The Lee family tradition holds that the Rappahannock called the area Menokin, and Lee retained that name for his plantation and home.

Criteria met:

- Good agricultural soil
- Fresh water source
- Transportation tributary adjacent
- Landing place
- Marshes nearby
- Brushy areas
- Primary or mixed deciduous forest
- Proximity to known American Indian community (documented through ethno history or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later)



Graphic from Menokin file report on identified archaeology

Archaeological surveys and excavations at Menokin have shown several sites with pre-Colonial Woodland components, including one on a terrace near Menokin Bay that is considered to be Late Woodland or Contact era.



Cat Point Creek at Menokin - Photo by Deanna Beacham

Menokin staff have previously created interpretive education material on the natural resources of the site, including a guide to wildlife and a guide to trees. A Master Naturalist volunteer has compiled a listing of plants along with their uses by English colonists as well as by the Rappahannock tribe. As the Menokin staff and volunteers have expertise in native plants, further interpretation on the use of plants by Native peoples of Virginia would be of particular interest there.

Lifelong learning classes, organized by the Rappahannock Institute of Lifelong Learning, have been taught at Menokin on topics including the Virginia Indians of the region, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and the pottery of the Pamunkey tribe.

Menokin is a Chesapeake Bay Gateways site, and is open to additional interpretation on Virginia Indian lifeways. Their visitor center has space that can be used as a small classroom. They also enjoy a good relationship with the Rappahannock Tribe, whose members have given dance performances there.

The Indigenous Cultural Landscape of the Eastern Woodlands
A Model for Conservation, Interpretation, and Tourism
Deanna Beacham (Weapemeoc)
Spring 2011

It is universally recognized by those concerned with the preservation and restoration of treasured landscapes such as the Chesapeake Bay or other major waterways that widespread public buy-in can be best achieved by appealing to the citizens' appreciation of those areas in their relatively natural state. The immediate corollary is that to appreciate such waterways, one needs to have access to them, or to the lands adjacent. Those lands will be best appreciated if they are already preserved and protected from some of the encroachments of modern life, and especially if those lands and access points have scenic, historical, or cultural significance.

The concept of the indigenous cultural landscape as useful in land conservation programs and interpretation arose from considering what an indigenous person's perspective of the Chesapeake Bay region might have been when John Smith first explored the Bay and its tributaries. It has more recently been recognized as applicable to other indigenous peoples' lands, if their pre-Contact lifestyles were similar. This construct recognizes and respects that Indian cultures lived within the context of their environment, although not in the stereotypical sense of "living in harmony with the environment". American Indian peoples lived around major waterways within large varied landscapes, with which they were intimately familiar. They used different parts of those landscapes in different ways: for food, medicine, and clothing procurement, for making tools and objects related to transportation and the household, for agriculture, and for settlements.

A brief glimpse into the lifestyles of the American Indian peoples of the Chesapeake Bay region at the time of early European contact might be helpful here as an example. Although those many nations had somewhat different cultures and sociopolitical structures, their life-ways were similar throughout the Bay area, and indeed were shared by nations in most of the Eastern Woodlands. They practiced agriculture, and lived for some parts of the year in permanent towns and communities. The communities were often fairly widely dispersed. Houses were not stationary, but moved as agricultural lands became fallow, so that communities drifted in location over the years. Men and women had differing duties, and the duties of both connected them with their broader surroundings and took them away from their permanent communities during some periods of the year. Men were primarily responsible for hunting, and procuring food from fish and shellfish. They were also the principal tool makers for tools made of stone. The women were primarily responsible for agriculture, for gathering plant materials used for food, housing, medicine, and clothing, and for processing animals for food and clothing.

To be effective in such a society, both men and women had to be familiar with very large areas of land and water, and be able to remember and travel to the appropriate places for gathering particular plants, acquiring stone for tools, or hunting particular species of animals. This was the indigenous person's world of the time; in area it far outstripped what is generally understood today as an "Indian community" according to the dots on the early explorers' maps. This view of the world one inhabited and lived with was the indigenous cultural landscape.

The construct of the indigenous cultural landscape is particularly pertinent to land conservation and interpretation in the East today for two major reasons. It embraces an aspect of America's cultural heritage that has widespread appeal for the geotourist. People of all ages and backgrounds are intrigued

by Native history and culture and eager to learn more about what life was like for Indians, especially during that time before the advent of Europeans into the Chesapeake region changed the Indian world. This fact is acknowledged by one of the major themes of the National Park Service's Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, which embraces respect for, inclusion of, and education about the Indian communities of the Chesapeake.

In addition, the use of such a construct does more than capitalize on the public's great interest about American Indians and their cultures, and the emotional ties such interest brings to the conservation of natural resources. It also recognizes that these indigenous communities still exist, and that respecting them and their cultures is a valid and central goal of any land/water conservation effort. Furthermore the construct re-emphasizes the values that American Indians have toward natural resources, including an attachment to place, and thereby encourages that attachment to place which will further efforts to help save and protect Eastern waterways and their watersheds.

In the past, opportunity related to American Indian cultural conservation and curiosity has focused primarily on archeological sites, not on the full landscapes in which these cultures existed prior, and for some decades after, European contact. Conservation and preservation of Native archaeological sites is indeed critical, but our efforts should not be limited to such sites. Instead, they should be expanded whenever possible to embrace known archaeological sites - or areas of high potential for pre-Colonial archaeology - and their surrounds, preferably in units of land large and natural enough to accurately reflect the cultural life-ways of the communities that lived within them. Such an approach strengthens the arguments for preserving and conserving and/or restoring larger cohesive landscape units, which may include uplands, forests, natural openings and meadows, as well as riverine, estuarine, and marine waters, in connected blocks and corridors.

This approach also brings both equality and visibility to the descendents of the indigenous cultures who inhabited these lands historically. If we conserve for both indigenous cultural and ecological reasons, along with scenic and aesthetic reasons, we build a greater meaning for these landscapes, and for the people who were...and still are...attached to them culturally. We build opportunities for the public to interact with and learn about these communities which furthers their attachment to those lands and waterways. In addition we include these indigenous peoples, who are today largely absent from the greater "conservation communities" of the Eastern United States, as equal partners, consultants, educators, and interpreters.

The descendent indigenous groups of the East should participate in the process of selecting and prioritizing culturally significant indigenous landscapes, which are currently underrepresented in our federal, state, and regional databases. These groups will be those who have descended from the original indigenous peoples and who have maintained their American Indian identity through the centuries. Such participation would not be linked to their recognition by the Federal government or the states as tribes. Federal recognition by these groups is usually problematic, because their treaties with European nations preceded the formation of the United States government and were not subsumed by the U.S. at its formation. Nevertheless, these American Indian groups still use, protect, respect, and enjoy the rivers and tributaries that often share their names, and they will want to help in efforts to conserve the related lands of those watershed.

Additionally, it will be useful for conservation and interpretation purposes to define indigenous cultural landscapes even where there is no extant descendent Native community that acknowledges a historic connection to the area. These landscapes can be readily identified by knowledgeable American

Indian scholars working in consultation with trusted archaeologists and anthropologists experienced in recognizing areas of high probability for pre-Colonial use and habitation.

Finally, the use of the indigenous cultural landscape can be applied to protected lands no matter who manages them. The added value of the indigenous cultural landscape lies in its particular suitability for educational and engaging interpretation wherever public access, whether private or public, limited or unlimited, is permitted on preserved lands. To know the people's history, one must know the landscape and how it was used. Presenting information about the historical use of the landscape offers further opportunity for underserved American Indian communities to enrich the field of heritage tourism by sharing their stories and their perspectives on the lands being conserved.

#

Published in George Wright Society 2011 Conference Papers – Spring 2011
Deanna Beacham