

# Contact Period Landscapes of the Lower Susquehanna River

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## **Introduction**

This project was conceived to better understand and map the resources of the contact period landscapes of the Lower Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and Maryland with two goals in mind: to assist the National Park Service (NPS) in its implementation of the segment plan for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (CAJO) and to test the application of the Indigenous Cultural Landscape (ICL) approach in the Lower Susquehanna. The Lower Susquehanna River corridor was defined as starting at about Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and traversing seventy-one miles to where the River flows into the Chesapeake Bay at Havre de Grace, Maryland (See Figure 1).

The Susquehanna River, from where it enters the Bay to about the Conowingo Dam in Maryland, was included in the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail when the CAJO was designated as part of the National Trails System. This stretch of the Susquehanna River is identified as a high potential route segment in the *CAJO Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP)*. Later the Secretary of the Interior designated the remainder of the Susquehanna River as a historic connecting component of CAJO.

The stated purposes of the *CAJO Comprehensive Management Plan* are to share knowledge of the American Indian societies and cultures of the seventeenth century, to interpret the natural history of the region and to improve recreational experiences (National Park Service). Included in the management plan was the innovative idea to consider the Chesapeake Bay region through the lens of the indigenous cultural landscape. The landscape as it was lived in by indigenous people at the time of early European contact (National Park Service Q-1).

One of the key reasons for this extension of the trail up the Susquehanna River was the contact between the American Indian tribes from the region with Captain John Smith. As this story would be an essential part of the work of NPS in developing a segment plan it was important to consider the Indigenous Cultural Landscape approach to the Lower Susquehanna. It was also an opportunity to strengthen the

conservation values by adding a cultural dimension to lands already desirable for the richness of their ecological resources and for their capacity to protect water quality. By sharing and mapping information on the cultural resources, in particular those associated with native people of the region, it was hoped it could provide future protection of significant sites and the broader cultural landscape.

To accomplish the project an expert team of archaeologists both working for state government and in private practice, historians, and land conservation professionals met and reviewed the resources in the study area. Five meetings were held to identify the scope of the project, discuss criteria for application of the indigenous cultural landscape approach, develop maps, and identify potential interpretive ideas and locations. The project outcomes include mapping the contact period landscape correlating with soil fertility, topography, and stream location and with lesser confidence contact period trails. The study also has limitations. There was a lack of opportunity to consult with descendant communities and more research needs to take place in the Maryland portion of the Study Area.

Prior to and while meetings were taking place for the Pennsylvania portion of the project, two additional efforts were underway by NPS and its partners. The *Indigenous Cultural Landscapes Study for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail* (University of Maryland, December, 2013) provides a methodology for the study of indigenous cultural landscapes. University of Maryland and NPS were also working on a study of the high probability ICL in the Nanticoke River Watershed to serve as a proto-type ICL study. (*Indigenous Cultural Landscape Study for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail: Nanticoke River Watershed*, December 2013).