

Indigenous Cultural Landscapes

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
National Park Service | Chesapeake Bay Office



An Introduction to the Indigenous Cultural Landscape Concept

Overview

The concept of the Indigenous Cultural Landscape (ICL), first introduced in 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 their 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 organized into "natural" and "cultural" features, or divided into discrete site elements such as "hunting grounds," "villages," or "sacred sites."

Indigenous Cultural Landscapes are one of seven trail-related resource types along the John Smith Trail. Visitor experiences of the trail's major themes – John Smith's voyages, American Indian cultures of the 17th century and today, and the Chesapeake environment of then and now – depend on the continued presence of key resources along the trail, including landscapes evocative of the early 17th century.

To further define, study, and test the concept of Indigenous Cultural Landscapes, American Indian tribal members, state historic preservation and natural resource officials, archaeologists, and NPS staff have convened since 2010 to articulate criteria, identify landscapes, and conduct regional and national outreach. An ICL resource group comprised of NPS staff, tribal members and researchers has informed and helped refine the concept, and is fostering applications beyond the Chesapeake region.

Major Milestones

Major events in the timeline of the development of the Indigenous Cultural Landscape have included the following:

- 2010** Introduction of the concept in the Comprehensive Management Plan of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and formation of the ICL resource group.
- 2012-14** The University of Maryland created an annotated bibliography, refined the criteria and developed a prototype methodology for identifying ICLs. The methodology was applied through an initial study of the Nanticoke River in Maryland and Delaware. The bibliography and prototype are posted online at <http://www.nps.gov/chba/parknews/indigenous-cultural-landscapes.htm>.
- 2013-15** ICL identification and mapping, and a bibliography and narrative completed for the Lower Susquehanna River watershed, with extensive expert and scholarly input, including the assistance of Bucknell University.



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- 2015** St. Mary's College of Maryland is conducting an ICL study for the Nanjemoy peninsula along the Potomac. Environmental, historical, and cultural resource information about the Nanjemoy and Mattawoman watersheds are being described and mapped in collaboration with members of state-recognized Piscataway groups and other stakeholders. The report will reflect an evolution of the initial prototype methodology.
- 2015-16** St. Mary's College of Maryland and the Chesapeake Conservancy, working with the NPS are modeling potential predictive areas for identifying ICLS along the John Smith Trail using current archaeological and topological data to identify known and potential hot-spots for conducting further consultation, surveying, and research.
- 2015-17** With guidance from the ICL resource team, the SHPOs, American Indian tribes and other stakeholders, a definition or variance of the ICL concept will be considered relative to the National Register of Historic Places. This is occurring in conjunction with NPS-led efforts to engage the State Historic Preservation offices and interested parties in development of a multiple property nomination for the John Smith Trail. The ICL concept has broad conservation and interpretation applications beyond its characterization as a trail-related cultural resource.

Suggested Criteria

To conceptualize ICLs in the Chesapeake, it is helpful to understand the historical and landscape features which must or may be present, as follows:

Core landscape criteria include:

- 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, tubes, muskrat, turtles)
- Brush 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)
- Proximity to known American Indian community (documented through ethnohistory or archaeology; may be Contact-era or later)
- Trails used as footpaths (usually became Colonial roads; sometimes are today's highways and local roads).

Additional desirable attributes either coincide with the above criteria or enhance an initial ICL assessment:

- Protection from wind (when applicable)
- High terrace landform (when applicable)
- Areas of recurrent use for food or medicine acquisition (shell middens, plant gathering sites)
- Areas of recurrent 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
- 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, oral history, or archaeology.

Further Applications

Additional watersheds will be documented as funding allows, and informed by preliminary modelling of the Chesapeake, where archaeological evidence or information combines with natural features suggestive of a pre-Contact American Indian presence. As awareness of the concept spreads, and mapping provides a finer-grained definition of the criteria, more public agencies and academic partners may adopt the approach as a means to engage American Indians in identifying special places; for conservation purposes; and to enable development of public interpretation (brochures, programs, and exhibits) to help the general public to see the landscape through indigenous eyes.