Chesapeake Water Trails

A Vision
Waterways have been used for thousands of years, first as exploration routes then as navigational channels for goods and people. They were also important for subsistence and survival. Many of these same historic routes are now valued destinations for boating, camping, fishing, and other activities. As our population increases and opportunities for quality outdoor recreation decrease, the value of water trails rise dramatically.

David R. Getchell, Sr., author of Modern Water Trails defines today’s water trail as a “recreational waterway on a lake, river, or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day use and/or camping sites for the boating public.” Water trails may be open to motorized as well as non-motorized boats. An important ingredient of the modern water trail is an ethic of low-impact use and personal stewardship of the associated lands and waters. The benefits of such trails extend far beyond recreation to include environmental restoration efforts, quality of life and personal wellness. Trail guides, discovery trips, volunteerism, and educational materials nurture a citizenry that will be more aware and knowledgeable about THEIR watershed.

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National Park Service
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Chesapeake Water Trails: A Vision

The region comprised of Washington, D.C. and portions of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, form the 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed. With over 100,000 miles of streams dissecting the Chesapeake basin, water trail opportunities are virtually limitless. The Bay’s 11,684 miles of shoreline offers diverse coastal habitats to explore. The enduring legacy of people, cultural patterns and their expressions on the landscape further enhance the Chesapeake region.

The ongoing efforts with the Bay to restore and protect water quality and living resources – goals of the Chesapeake Bay Program – will benefit substantially from a system of water trails. Through the development and use of Chesapeake Bay water trails, residents and visitors alike will become more aware of the many important resources and experience the connection between land and the Bay’s health becoming better stewards. Extending far beyond traditional recreational opportunities, water trails serve the vital role of educating citizens through experiential learning.

Aerial view of freshwater marshes along Occupacia Creek near its confluence with the middle Rappahannock River, Virginia.
(Photograph by Dwight Dyke courtesy of MPRA, Inc.)
to emphasize the importance of resource conservation and restoration of degraded environments.

The North American Water Trails Conference and Chesapeake Water Trails Workshop, held October 10-13, 1998 in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, offered the initial opportunity to shape the future of water trails in the Chesapeake region. For three and a half days participants enjoyed field trips, panel discussions, inspiring speeches and the benefits of networking with colleagues. During an intensive Chesapeake visioning session, focus groups comprised of participants representing organizations around the watershed responded to key questions regarding water trails.

How do you envision water trails in the Chesapeake Region?

What are the needs of those who build water trails?

What roles are important? How should water trail activities be coordinated?

Shortly after the water trail conference, the U.S. Congress enacted the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act of 1998 directing the National Park Service to coordinate development of a network of water trails and gateways to the Chesapeake Bay. The resulting Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network recognizes the growing interest in water trails as well as the special places and stories associated with the Bay region. Water trails
are emphasized as key physical and interpretive connections from the Bay to its tributaries and upper reaches of the watershed. This developing Network will be guided by the Gateways Framework and facilitated through a technical assistance and grants program.

The vision for Chesapeake water trails – articulated by knowledgeable and experienced water trail advocates in combination with the Framework formulated by Chesapeake Bay Program Partners – will establish a blueprint for the emerging network of water trails.

The Vision

A network of water-based trails throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries that offers a variety of low-impact, paddling experiences; connects people – physical, visual, and spiritual – to the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Bay; offers invaluable experiences to the diverse people who live, work, and play in the watershed; teaches stewardship and the importance of sustaining resources for future generations; provides opportunities for habitat continuity through collaborative management; and fosters partnerships at all levels enriching environment and the quality of life.
THE MISSION

To establish interconnected water trails and important resource areas within the Chesapeake watershed through local grassroots initiatives coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries in the creation, management, and promotion of individual trail components.

THE GOALS

🔹 **Enhance access for all people**
   
   Accommodate the needs to discover, experience, and understand the Bay and its resources through Identification and development of access points, landings, and overnight areas

🔹 **Provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and education**
   
   Promote a broad range of uses, activities, and programs to accommodate the interests of the diverse population that live, work, and play within the Chesapeake watershed.

🔹 **Increase public awareness of the Chesapeake Bay and related resources**
   
   To know is to value – to value is to protect. Teach about the natural, cultural, and historic resources. Encourage lifestyles and actions that sustain resources for future generations.

Participants of the “Second Annual Rivah’ Run” paddling event enjoy Maryland’s Martinak State Park on the upper Choptank River. (Photograph courtesy of Carl W. Scheffel, Jr.)
Foster a strong commitment for resource stewardship

Inhabit and manage the watershed in a sustainable manner to safeguard the life supporting capacity of the environment while providing for economic health, resource protection, civic participation and quality of life.

**Chesapeake Water Trails**

Chesapeake Bay water trails offer access to the Bay, its tributaries, and contiguous shoreline areas. Water trails create recreational and experiential connections between land and water and provide access to important cultural, historical, and natural sites. The many stories of the Bay's rich environment may be conveyed using key “overarching” themes developed through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. Environmental awareness and stewardship is promoted through interpretation, materials, volunteer opportunities, and user education. Informational publications describe individual water trails and the relationship to the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

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**Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Overarching Themes**

- **Interconnectedness** of water, place, nature and people
- **Interdependence** of Bay’s resources sustaining people and people’s actions sustaining the Bay
- **Knowledge and mystery** surround the Bay's waters and tributaries inspiring art, literature, poetry and song

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Late-fall kayaking on the Mattaponi River near its confluence with Herring Creek, Virginia. (Photograph by Dwight Dyke courtesy of MPRA, Inc.)
Entice, Encounter, Engage!

From whitewater to tidewater, the Chesapeake watershed offers a tremendous diversity of opportunities for water trail development.

Whether an urban trail with an historical theme or a wilderness trail highlighting the natural environment, these trails share common attributes that entice people to explore waterways, encounter the resource through learning, and engage them in its stewardship.

Trail infrastructure – signage, trail guides, access points, campsites, and day use sites – are unique to each trail, but coordinated and presented to the visitor as a component of Chesapeake water trails. The information and the environmentally-sensitive design elements demonstrate stewardship of Chesapeake resources.

The trail infrastructure establishes an enduring connection between the user and the Bay’s conservation. This connection is strengthened through involvement with trail maintenance, resource monitoring, educational activities and trail associations.

Each trail is managed by a non-profit organization, public agency, or water trail association that promotes the trail,
advocates low-impact use, coordinates volunteer stewardship, encourages youth involvement, facilitates educational programs, and communicates with a variety of Chesapeake interests.

**Elements of a Chesapeake Water Trail**

A successful water trail provides access to the waterway and to intermediate points on the land. Access points are appropriately located along the length of the trail. Facilities for day and overnight use are available for a variety of users, designed to protect sensitive resources and enhance degraded areas. Quality signage, trail guides, and maps orient and educate. They identify and interpret outstanding natural and cultural features to conserve, to educate, to inspire.

**Access**

Accessible for all people
Ample parking
Multiple points
Attractive signage
Well-marked from road
Accommodate a variety of watercraft

**Facilities**

Primitive campsites
Campgrounds
Bed and breakfasts
Marinas
Tackle shops
Outfitters
Picnic sites
Beaches

**Guiding Principles of Water Trails in North America**

- **Partnerships**—cooperating and sharing
- **Stewardship**—leaving no trace
- **Volunteerism**—experiencing the joy of involvement
- **Education**—learning by experience
- **Conservation**—protecting our natural heritage
- **Community Vitality**—connecting people and places
- **Diversity**—providing opportunities for all
- **Wellness and Wellbeing**—caring for self and others
Restrooms and sanitation stations
Stores and restaurants
Museums
Parks
Connections to land-based trails

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS


Trail Guides and Maps: safety, ecology, geography, geology, history, archeology information; leave no trace outdoor skills; trail use guidelines; facilities; points of interest; resource threats context of local area to Bay watershed, trail stewardship.

Leave No Trace campsite markers, an important component of the Susquehanna River Trail, promote environmentally sensitive use and enjoyment. (Photograph courtesy of Ben Nebroski)

CHESAPEAKE BAY GATEWAYS NETWORK PRINCIPAL INTERPRETING THEMES

• The Living, Natural Bay
• Peoples of the Bay
• Settlement of the Bay
• An Economic Resource: Commerce, Productivity and Transportation
• Military and Naval Presence on the Bay
• The Bay as a Source of Recreation and Renewal
• Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability of the Bay
Resource Features: Interpretation, conservation, preservation wildlife areas, archeological sites, scenic views, dramatic city skylines, whitewater, marshes and wetlands, islands, historic waterfronts, mysterious swamps, forests, bridges, boats, canals, industrial heritage, local culture, environmental needs, restoration projects

Building Water Trails

Developing a water trail requires patience and perseverance. The first key step is an objective analysis of suitability and feasibility for a water trail. If the proposed trail is appropriate for further consideration, a constituency of supporters must be cultivated. With sufficient funding, a comprehensive and inclusive planning process is initiated which involves a careful resource assessment as well as a variety of infrastructure and management decisions. As implementation commences, the need for permanent staffing and viable funding sources are paramount. Trail promotion and constituency building are important ongoing activities; beginning at the project’s conception and continuing through operations.

1. ORIGINATION…Sifting the seeds of an idea

Is the resource suitable?
Is the trail feasible?
Is there support?
Is funding available?
2. **DETERMINATION**...Roll up the sleeves, there is a trail to plan!

**Resource Assessment**
- physical features
- resource needs
- flora/fauna
- historic attributes
- cultural attributes
- existing facilities
- scenery
- educational opportunities
- hazards
- access
- ownership
- water quality/quantity
- potential day use, camping, and interpretive sites

**Mapping**

**Public Involvement**

**Partnerships**

**Infrastructure Decisions**

**User Policies and Guidelines**

**Management Structure**
- new or existing organization?
- staffing?
- funding?
- agency role?

**Promotion**

3. **CREATION**...Installing the nuts and bolts

**Landowner Agreements**

**Signs and Trail Maps**

**Volunteer Recruitment**

**Trail Guides**

**Formal Management Structure**

**Promotion**
4. OPERATION & EVALUATION…
From the opening “yea” to the day to day
Special Events and Promotion
Public Education
Maintenance and Monitoring
Coordinating/ Retaining Volunteers
Fundraising and Membership
Networking with Agencies and Other Trail Groups
Ongoing Evaluation of Management Techniques
Updating and Providing Trail Information

SUPPORTING CHESAPEAKE WATER TRAILS

As we move into the 21st century, there is growing recognition that water trails are an effective way of increasing public awareness of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and facilitating citizen stewardship. The efforts of these water trail interests are a vital component of the largest initiative of its kind in North America. With the combined energy and experience provided by the coalition of Chesapeake water trail organizations and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, we will build the trails which support the restoration of the Bay and its watershed.

A birding enthusiast at Virginia’s Kiptopeke State Park on the lower eastern shore with the Chesapeake Bay in the background.
(Photograph by Dwight Dyke courtesy of MPRA, Inc.)
1. Susquehanna River Trail
2. Northern Neck Heritage Trail
3. York River Water Trail
4. Patuxent River – Anne Arundel County
5. Choptank & Tuckahoe Rivers Water Trail*
6. Mathews County Blueways
7. Swatara Creek Water Trail
8. Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail*
9. Chemung Basin River Trail*
10. Juniata River Trail – Raystown Branch
11. Potomac River Water Trail
12. Rappahannock River Water Trail
13. Tangier Sound Water Trail
14. Back River & Newmarket Creek Water Trail
15. Shenandoah River
16. Susquehanna Water Trail – North Branch
17. Janes Island Water Trail
18. Pocomoke River*
19. Tuckahoe State Park Canoe Trail
20. Anacostia Water Trail – Bladensburg to Potomac
21. South Branch, Patapsco River
22. Antietam Creek
23. Patuxent River
24. West Branch Susquehanna River Water Trail*
25. Tidal Potomac Water Trail*
26. Nanticoke Canoe Trail
27. Virginia Beach Trail
28. Baltimore Harbor Trail
29. Monocacy Water Trailway*
30. Rivanna River Water Trail*
31. Elizabeth River Nature and Canoe Trail
32. Susquehanna River Trail (Northern Extension)

*component of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network
Solomon’s Lump Lighthouse located in Kedges Straits of Tangier Sound, Maryland.  
(Photograph courtesy of Nita Settina)

Campsite used by participants of the second annual (April 1999) Trans-Dorchester County, Maryland Kayak Crossing.  
(Photograph courtesy of Nita Settina)

View of the Chesapeake Bay from Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve, Virginia.  
(Photograph by Dwight Dyke courtesy of MPRA, Inc.)