

Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement

ABSTRACT

PRODUCED BY:
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Chesapeake Bay Program Office
August 2004

Responding to a request from Congress, the National Park Service (NPS) has explored the potential for a new unit of the National Park System focused on the Chesapeake Bay. The *Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study (SRS) and Final Environmental Impact Statement* examines whether having additional Chesapeake Bay resources within the National Park System would make sense and would advance partnership efforts to conserve and celebrate the Chesapeake Bay; defines any concepts for how resources or areas of the Bay might fit within the National Park System; and makes recommendations regarding these findings. The *Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study (SRS) and Final Environmental Impact Statement* describes a series of conceptual alternatives for how the National Park System might best represent the national significance of the Chesapeake Bay.

The study compares four action alternatives against a no action alternative that calls for the continuation of existing initiatives:

Alternative A: Today's Programs – No New Initiatives—This alternative assumes the National Park Service would simply continue its existing roles related to Chesapeake Bay conservation, restoration and interpretation.

Alternative B: An Enhanced Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network – A Permanent Watershed-wide System of Special Bay Places for Experiencing the Chesapeake--This alternative would enhance and build upon the existing Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, the partnership system of 140-plus parks, refuges, maritime museums, historic sites and trails around the Bay watershed.

Alternative C: Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park – Conserving and Exploring the Bay's Waters – The Chesapeake Bay is a vast estuary – 2,500 square miles of water – known not just for its size, but also its high productivity as a natural system. This alternative would create a water-based national park that exemplifies the larger Bay's estuarine character with limited land resources for access and interpretation.

Alternative D: Chesapeake Bay National Reserve – Protecting Bay Maritime & Rural Heritage – Unlike national parks, national reserves protect and sustain the working landscape, recognizing the vital role of continued human uses in the heritage of a special place. This alternative would create a reserve representative of the Chesapeake's maritime and agricultural heritage.

Alternative E: Chesapeake Bay Watershed National Ecological & Cultural Preserve – A Living Example for the Bay and the Nation--The Bay is fed by 124,000 miles of rivers and streams from a 64,000 square mile watershed. This alternative would establish a national ecological and cultural preserve focused on one exemplary Bay tributary, from headwater stream to open Bay, representative of the larger watershed.

Preferred Alternative: Alternative B represents a remarkably efficient and effective approach to advancing public understanding and enjoyment of Chesapeake resources and stimulating resource conservation. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network should be a permanent partnership system for experiencing the Chesapeake. For this to occur, alternative B would be implemented in its entirety: the Gateways Network would be designated a permanent program of the National Park System with an on-going funding commitment; creation of two new partnership Chesapeake Bay interpretive/education centers would be stimulated through two matching grants; and the Gateways Network would enhance links to surrounding working landscapes. At some time in the future, a unit of the National Park System encompassing either one or several of alternatives C, D, and E could make a significant contribution to protection and public enjoyment of the Chesapeake Bay.

Questions regarding this document should be directed in writing to the Director, National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Program Office, 410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109, Annapolis, Maryland 21403.