

# Section 1:

## Purpose and Need for Action

### **PURPOSE OF THE SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY**

The Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study (SRS) was requested by Congress to evaluate the potential for a new unit of the National Park System focused on the Chesapeake Bay.

The purpose of the study is to explore whether it would be appropriate to represent additional Chesapeake Bay resources within the National Park System and whether that would help advance the national and regional partnership efforts to conserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay; to determine what type of resource(s) and concept(s) might be appropriate, if any; and to make recommendations regarding these findings. The 1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act provides that studies of potential new park units include a determination by the Director of the National Park Service on what alternative is most efficient and effective. Recommendations on what, if any action should be taken are made by the Secretary of the Interior when the study is transmitted to Congress. For this study, such recommendations focus on overall concepts, resource types and criteria and not site-specific resources.

As part of this mission, the study team, led by the National Park Service (NPS), has sought direct input from political, environmental, business and community leaders, as well as local citizens and resource managers, so that alternative concepts fully representing the national significance of the Chesapeake Bay and the requirements for new NPS units could be identified. Through evaluating the concept descriptions, stakeholders in potential sites and/or areas can begin to explore for themselves whether they fit one of the concepts and wish to suggest how their place might play a role if a concept were to be implemented in the future.

Ultimately, any realistic vision or concept can only be achieved in partnership with others and in a way that sustains the vital economic, cultural, natural and recreational role the Bay plays in its surrounding communities and the nation at large.

### **NEED FOR THE SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY**

The SRS provides a unique opportunity to look beyond existing programs and assess certain aspects of desired future conditions for the resources along the Chesapeake Bay. Local residents and visitors, action groups, stakeholders, and regional, state and federal agencies have long cherished the Chesapeake Bay and its important role in the natural environment and cultural development of the United States. However, these concerned parties also recognize that Chesapeake Bay resources face substantial pressures, in some cases threatening the long-term sustainability of the Chesapeake ecosystem.

Many people, organizations and agencies are now working hard to celebrate and conserve the Chesapeake Bay, and restore its key natural resources and

functions. Coordinating overall conservation and restoration efforts is the Chesapeake Bay Program, a partnership between the federal government, the states of Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and the Chesapeake Bay Commission. The National Park Service is a partner in this work.

Currently, the National Park Service works to enhance interpretation and conservation of, and access to, the Chesapeake Bay through a variety of programs and initiatives. These initiatives include: a) the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, a vibrant partnership system of natural, cultural, historical and recreational sites; b) management of existing NPS units, such as Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine and Colonial National Historical Park; and c) the provision of technical assistance to various preservation and conservation efforts in the Bay watershed. These initiatives help support the overall Bay conservation and restoration effort coordinated by the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Despite these efforts, existing programs may not completely encompass the important resources, stories, and themes of the Chesapeake Bay. Congress has described the units of the national park system as a cumulative expression of our national heritage. This system does not include a representative example focused on the Chesapeake Bay. The current study is intended to determine if establishing a new NPS unit would fill a gap in the National Park System. Equally important is the evaluation of a new NPS unit's potential to help support current partnership efforts to protect and interpret the Bay. Without effective recognition, protection, and interpretation, the natural resources, cultural resources and the lifestyles of the Bay may be threatened by loss, over-development, and degradation through neglect over time.

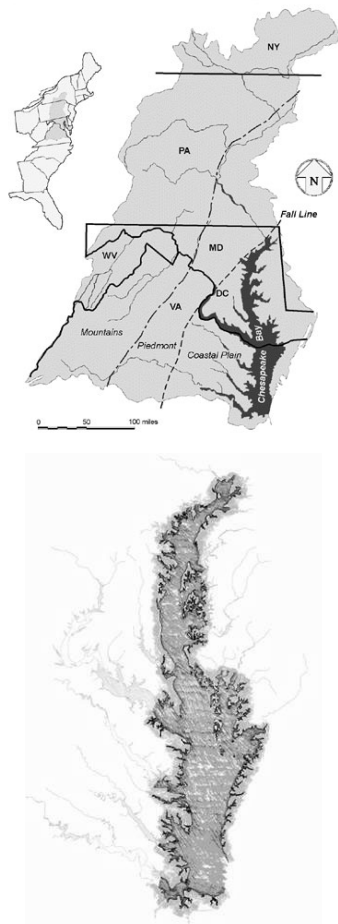
This SRS explores whether and how the NPS might extend and expand its support, using its resources and expertise to help ensure that the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the Chesapeake Bay will be enjoyed by future generations. Specifically, the study explores whether and how a National Park System area designation would help advance conservation and interpretation of the Chesapeake Bay. The SRS is a formal means of assessing existing programs, resources, and interpretive opportunities around the Bay, where gaps in conservation and interpretation might exist, and what the NPS role in filling those gaps might be.

## **STUDY PROCESS**

### **Geographic Scope of the Study**

The Chesapeake Bay as a region and a system is generally recognized as going beyond the strictest definition of the Bay itself. There are multiple layers, ranging from the Bay proper to the Bay and the tidal portions of its tributaries to the entire watershed. Sites within these broader areas contribute significantly to telling the Bay story.

However, the Chesapeake Bay watershed is enormous, encompassing 64,000 square miles (Figure 1-1). Even the Bay and its tidal tributaries have a



**Figure 1-1: The Chesapeake Bay watershed, above, and the SRS area of focus, the mainstem of the Bay and the surrounding shoreline, below.**

combined shoreline of over 11,684 miles. Since congressional interest in exploring the potential for a new National Park System unit(s) focused on the Chesapeake Bay, any potential unit should be directly recognizable as a Chesapeake Bay place.

Accordingly, the SRS focuses on the Bay proper and its surrounding shoreline. Any concepts or places considered in this study should have a substantial foothold or anchor along the Bay, but may extend beyond this core as well. The shaded portion of this drawing shows the area of focus for the study.

## Study Process Overview

National Park Service management policies outline the criteria for designating a new unit and the process for conducting a special resource study. To be eligible for favorable consideration as a unit of the National Park System, an area must:

- Possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources;
- Be a suitable and feasible addition to the system; and
- Require direct NPS management instead of protection by some other government agency or by the private sector.

Generally these criteria are straightforwardly applied to specific resources and lands, usually more discrete than the Chesapeake Bay study area described above. A combination of factors – the geographic scope of the Chesapeake Bay, its diversity in resources and themes, and the lack of any initial specific proposed areas for park unit designation – requires a somewhat modified study process that still ensures NPS criteria are applied.

First and foremost, the Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study starts with a different focus than many other special resource studies prepared by the National Park Service. This study focuses not on place, but on seeking consensus on what kind of unit of the National Park System – if any – might best represent the Chesapeake Bay. The concepts presented in this study as alternatives provide the basis for that discussion. Eventual implementation of any concept resulting from this study – a step requiring Congressional legislation – would be preceded extensive consultations and possibly even further study.

In developing concepts for a Chesapeake Bay unit of the National Park System, this study has encompassed the following steps:

- Defining the national significance of the Chesapeake Bay;
- Identifying the resource types and interpretive themes that typify the Bay
- Assessing the degree to which existing programs and initiatives conserve and interpret those resources and themes, or, conversely, identifying gaps in current Bay conservation and interpretation; Developing initial concepts as starting points for public discussion in workshops, briefings and consultations creating conceptual alternatives based on public feedback, gaps, Bay resources and themes and NPS criteria;
- Preparing a draft study with alternative concepts for public review;
- Evaluating public comments on draft alternatives;
- Establishing findings for a preferred NPS-alternative.

An interdisciplinary study team, led by the National Park Service, has overseen completion of these steps. Central to this process is the direct involvement of the public and Bay stakeholders in exploring and informing what kinds of concepts might best reflect the Chesapeake Bay. The study team has consulted with county, city, state, and federal officials; politicians; natural and cultural resource managers; technical experts; tourism officials; citizen's groups; trade organizations; and the general public.