

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH CHESAPEAKE NATIONAL HISTORIC WATER TRAIL STATEMENT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

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1. Introduction and Findings

This report evaluates the national significance of the trail known as the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail, which incorporates those parts of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries that Smith explored primarily on two voyages in 1608. The study area includes parts of four states—Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania—and the District of Columbia.

Two bills introduced in the United States Congress (entitled the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Watertrail Study Act of 2005) authorized the Secretary of the Interior to “carry out a study of the feasibility of designating the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Watertrail as a national historic trail.” Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (Maryland) introduced S.B. 336 on February 9, 2005, and Senators George Allen (Virginia), Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (Delaware), Barbara A. Mikulski (Maryland), and John Warner (Virginia) cosponsored it. The bill was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks on April 28. On May 24, 2005, Representative Jo Ann Davis (Virginia) introduced H.R. 2588 in the House of Representatives, and 19 other Representatives from the four relevant states signed on as cosponsors. The bill, which is identical to Senate Bill 336, was referred to the House Committee on Resources on May 24, and to the Subcommittee on National Parks on May 31. On August 2, 2005, President George W. Bush authorized the National Park Service to study the feasibility of establishing the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail as part of the FY 2006 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

The study will apply the criteria of the National Trails System Act (16 U.S.C. 1241 *et seq.*) to determine the feasibility of designation. To qualify for designation as a National Historic Trail, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail must meet three criteria:

- (A) **It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use.** The route need not currently exist as a discernible trail to qualify, but its location must be sufficiently known to permit evaluation of public recreation and historical interest potential. A designated trail should generally accurately follow the historic route, but may deviate somewhat on occasion of necessity to avoid difficult routing through subsequent development, or to provide some route variations offering a more pleasurable recreational experience. Such deviations shall be so noted on site. Trail segments no longer possible to travel by trail due to subsequent development as motorized transportation routes may be designated and marked onsite as segments which link to the historic trail.

- (B) **It must be of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American history**, such as trade and commerce, exploration, migration and settlement, or military campaigns. To qualify as nationally significant, historic use of the trail must have had a far-reaching effect on broad patterns of American culture. Trails significant in the history of Native Americans may be included.
- (C) **It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.** The potential for such use is generally greater along roadless segments developed as historic trails and at historic sites associated with the trail. The presence of recreation potential not related to historic appreciation is not sufficient justification for designation under this category.

This report focuses on Criterion B, national significance. Additional documentation will be prepared to evaluate the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail against the other criteria, pending review of this draft Statement of National Significance. Later phases of the study include developing management alternatives and preparing an Environmental Impact Statement as part of the final report. The ultimate objective of the study is to determine how best to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the outdoor areas and historic resources associated with the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study team, composed of professional staff members of the National Park Service Northeast and National Capital Regions, with assistance from respected scholars and consultants, makes the following findings regarding national significance:

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Water Trail is of national significance for its association with the following themes:

(1) Ethnic Heritage (Native Americans): Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay voyages are nationally significant because they accelerated the processes that destroyed the Powhatan polity and disrupted the Native peoples' lifeways throughout the region.

The Water Trail is significant as:

- a) the route that John Smith followed in his voyages to American Indian towns and territories
- b) a symbol of the independence of the English colonists from Powhatan's control
- c) a symbol of the impact on and eventual collapse of the Powhatan polity and the Native peoples' lifeways in the Chesapeake Bay and beyond

(2) Exploration and Settlement: Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay voyages are nationally significant because of their impact on the exploration and settlement of North America.

The Water Trail is significant as:

- a) the route that John Smith followed in his program of exploration and discovery in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries
- b) a symbol of the spirit of adventure and wonder that were important components of Smith's voyages and English exploration
- c) the route by which Smith gathered information vital to the survival and growth of the English settlements in North America

(3) Commerce and Trade: Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay voyages are nationally significant because of their impact on the commerce and trade of North America.

The Water Trail is significant as:

- a) the route by which John Smith surveyed the Bay and explored for gold, silver, copper, and the Northwest Passage, for the benefit of the commerce and trade of the colony and England
- b) the route by which Smith made contact with American Indian tribes, established trade agreements with them, and increased the chances that the English colony would survive
- c) a symbol of England's trading power, soon to be increased by the production of tobacco for export from the colony
- d) a symbol of the long-term impact on and cultural contact between the Native peoples and European colonists

Subsequent chapters present the study's legislative background, a brief historical narrative of the water trail, a description of the significance themes in greater detail, a discussion of the historic use and development of the Chesapeake Bay, and a summary of the types of resources associated with the water trail. The report concludes with a bibliographical essay.