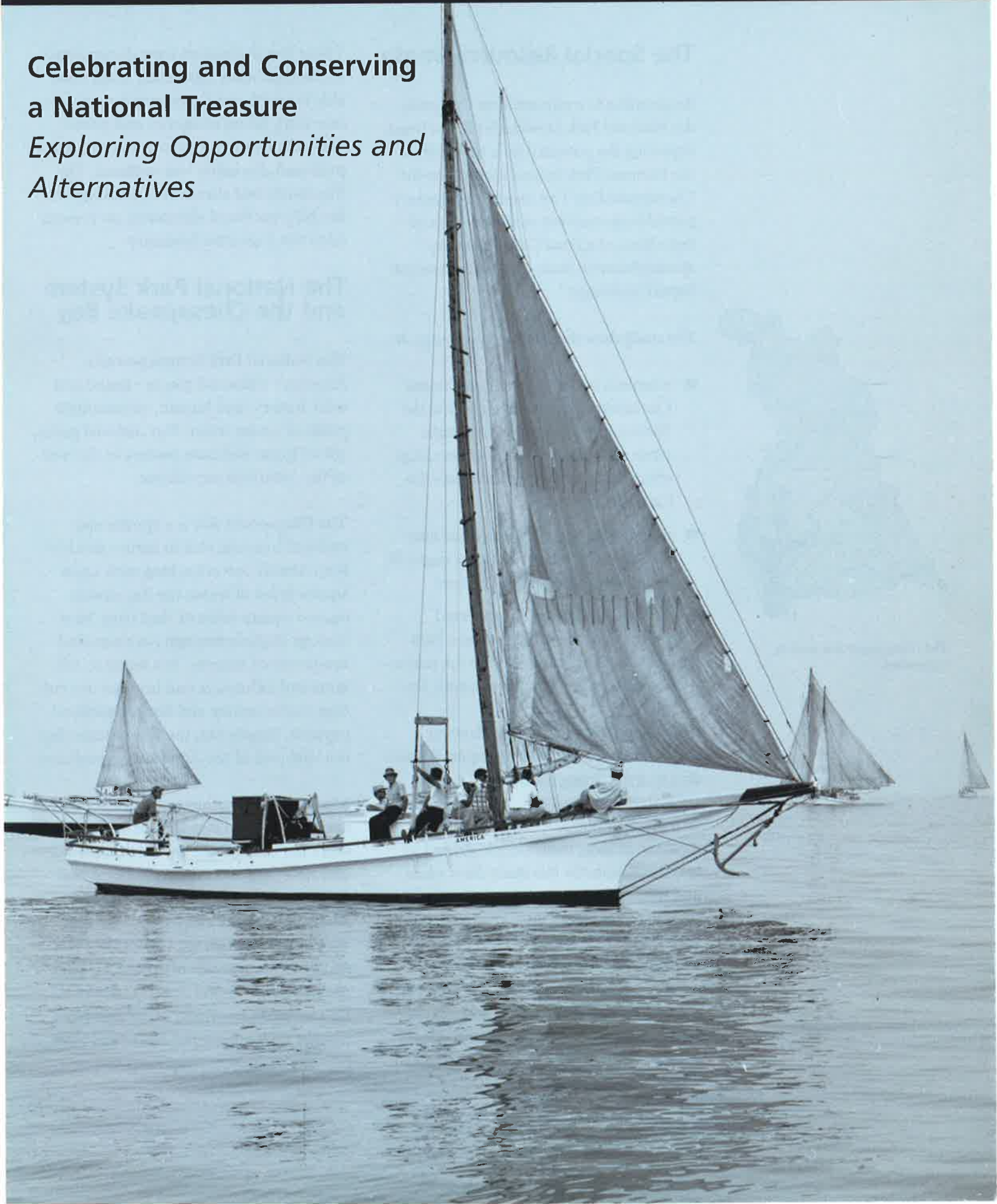


Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study Final Report Executive Summary

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Chesapeake Bay Program Office
Newsletter 5, August 2004



Celebrating and Conserving a National Treasure *Exploring Opportunities and Alternatives*



The Special Resource Study

Responding to a request from Congress, the National Park Service (NPS) has been exploring the potential for a new unit of the National Park System focused on the Chesapeake Bay. This executive summary provides an overview of the product of that effort--the *Final Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Environmental Impact Statement*.



The Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

The study does three important things. It:

- 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;
- describes a series of conceptual alternatives for how Bay resources might fit within the National Park System;
- outlines findings and a preferred approach for how the National Park System might best represent the national significance of the Chesapeake Bay.

These are described on the following pages. The entire final study report is available at www.chesapeakestudy.org.

At a series of public workshops in September 2002, many people discussed initial concepts for this study. New ideas and refinements came from those sessions and from comments submitted in writing and on the study website. Those refinements, combined with analysis by the study team and Chesapeake Bay partners, led directly to a series of five conceptual alternatives.

Those five alternatives were documented in the draft study report and made available for public and agency review in summer 2003. Based on agency and public comments, findings were developed and a preferred alternative was outlined. The five conceptual alternatives, findings, and the NPS-preferred alternative are presented in this Executive Summary.

The National Park System and the Chesapeake Bay

The National Park System protects America's treasured places – grand and wild, historic and human, on mountain peaks or under water. Our national parks, 388 of them, welcome visitors to the best of the American experience.

The Chesapeake Bay is a spectacular national treasure, rich in nature and history. Almost 200 miles long with 2,500 square miles of water, the Bay drains 64,000 square miles of land from New York to Virginia through 150 rivers and thousands of streams. It is home to millions and influences and inspires our culture, our economy and our recreational pursuits. Simply put, the Chesapeake Bay is a vital part of the American experience.

Many people, organizations and agencies are working hard to celebrate and conserve the Chesapeake and restore key natural resources and functions. Local residents and visitors, 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, we all also recognize the Chesapeake Bay faces significant pressures, which in some cases threaten

the long-term sustainability of the Chesapeake ecosystem. The Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study describes several alternative concepts for going beyond existing programs in ways that might help conserve and celebrate the Chesapeake.

However, sustaining the Bay's environment will continue to require broad conservation efforts that go much further than these alternatives and any National Park Service role.

The Alternatives

The alternatives described here and in the study are *concepts* for how the Chesapeake Bay might be represented within the National Park System. They provide different answers to the questions: If a Chesapeake Bay-focused unit of the National Park System were to be created . . .

- What would it be like?
- What focus or emphasis would it have?
- What types of resources would need to be included?
- What would be the conservation goals or priorities?
- What would a visitor experience?

Five alternative concepts are detailed on the following pages:

- Alternative A. Today's Programs — No New Initiatives
- Alternative B. An Enhanced Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network
- Alternative C. A Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park
- Alternative D. A Chesapeake Bay National Reserve
- Alternative E. A Chesapeake Bay Watershed National Ecological & Cultural Preserve

Of the five alternatives, one (alternative A) is a “no action” alternative that would simply continue current NPS roles in the Chesapeake Bay. The four “action alternatives” (B, C, D & E) vary significantly. One of these, alternative B, is quite different from the others and would not technically be labeled a unit of the National Park System.

The alternatives described on the next pages were also presented in the draft study report for public review and comment. Additional information on the alternatives, including comparison charts and an environmental analysis can be found at www.chesapeakestudy.org and in the complete *Final Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Environmental Impact Statement*. Following these descriptions are a summary of public comments and the National Park Service's “preferred alternative.”



Today's Programs – No New Initiatives

The Chesapeake Bay Program guides overall Bay conservation including...



...restoring and protecting living resources, vital habitat, and water quality...



...developing and promoting sound land use practices...



...and stimulating individual and community involvement in Bay stewardship.

This alternative assumes the National Park Service would simply continue its existing roles related to Chesapeake Bay conservation, restoration and interpretation.¹ Generally, these roles include:

- partnership in the Chesapeake Bay Program, the federal/state Bay watershed conservation and restoration effort;
- management of existing National Park System units in the Chesapeake Bay watershed;
- coordination of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network through 2008;
- providing technical assistance to communities and organizations to facilitate conservation of watersheds, natural and cultural resources.

A Vision of the Status Quo

Visitors to the Chesapeake Bay region would not find a new national park unit focused on the Bay, but they would find many places that tell a part of the Chesapeake story. They might visit the handful of existing parks in the National Park System located near the Bay — Fort McHenry, George Washington's Birthplace, Yorktown Battlefield, Jamestown Island. These places provide a small slice of the Bay's history, concentrated in colonial times and the early 19th century.

Or for a much broader taste of the Bay, visitors might sample the many parks, refuges, historic sites and water trails that have joined the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. These places show off many of the Chesapeake's themes and stories, from one end of the watershed to the other. The Gateways Network and the Park Service coordinating role would remain in place through 2008.

All those with an interest in the Chesapeake Bay would continue to benefit from the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership's efforts to conserve and restore the Bay. The Chesapeake Bay Program would remain the central mechanism for advancing Bay conservation. The NPS is just one of many partners in the Bay Program.

Description

Partnership in the Chesapeake Bay Program

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 guides efforts to restore and conserve the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Today's far-reaching conservation and restoration goals are outlined in the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement, addressing all aspects of Bay stewardship in the first decade of the 21st century. *Chesapeake 2000* seeks to engage all citizens in the effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay. Commitments to expand public access and enhance resource interpretation, education and outreach are high among priorities in order to raise public awareness and promote individual and community stewardship on behalf of the Bay and its watersheds. The NPS would continue to be directly involved in programs — such as those below — furthering these aspects of the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement.

Managing Existing Units of the National Park System in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

The NPS manages 61 park areas within the 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed. Most of these areas are parks within the District of Columbia and upper Bay watershed. The sum total acreage of these National Park System units represents less than 0.7% of the Bay watershed.

¹ Note: Alternatives B-E assume the continuation of existing initiatives for the duration of their authorized programs and funding. However, alternatives B-E add new elements, concepts or approaches as well.

There are three existing units of the National Park System in close proximity to the Chesapeake Bay² – Colonial National Historical Park (9,349 acres, including Jamestown Island, Yorktown Battlefield, a 23 mile parkway, and the Cape Henry memorial) in Virginia, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine (43 acres) in Baltimore, Maryland, and George Washington Birthplace National Monument (550 acres) along the lower Potomac River in Virginia. These small parks all have resources and stories related to and influenced by the Chesapeake Bay, but the Chesapeake is not the primary focus of conservation or resource protection. Moreover, these units also represent only a narrow slice of Bay-related themes and history.

The NPS would continue to manage existing park areas within the Bay watershed for their specifically legislated purposes, as well as to further commitments in the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement.

Coordinating the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

The existing Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is a partnership system of local, state, federal and non-governmental parks, refuges, maritime museums, historic sites and water trails around the Bay watershed. With more than 140 designated Gateways, the Network represents a broad and diverse group of sites that collectively represent the Bay and its watershed. The Gateways Network is coordinated by the NPS in cooperation with the Chesapeake Bay Program. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is currently authorized through 2008, though funding must be appropriated annually.

Under this alternative, the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network would continue to represent the broadest geographic and thematic system of Bay-related sites in the Chesapeake watershed – through 2008. Some expansion of the Gateways Network might be expected to continue in under-represented geographic regions or themes. The Gateways Network’s many independently managed partner sites would likely continue to enhance interpretation and public access and set examples for Bay stewardship, depending upon available funds and priorities. However, the availability of Gateways Network matching grants has had a substantial influence on growth of the Network and Chesapeake Bay interpretive products in recent years. If funding for Network programs is not appropriated or eventually reauthorized, Chesapeake Bay focused interpretive initiatives may become more limited.

Technical Assistance For Conserving Watersheds and Natural and Cultural Resources

The NPS would continue to provide technical assistance to communities, organizations and local and state governments to foster conservation of important resources in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This assistance, provided through the Chesapeake Bay Program Office and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, is specifically geared to helping achieve goals of the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement.

The National Park Service system includes three parks near the Bay...



...Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Baltimore, Maryland...



...George Washington Birthplace National Monument on the lower Potomac River in Virginia...



...and Colonial National Historical Park (Jamestown Island, pictured), Virginia.

² A fourth NPS unit is nearby but actually outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed - Assateague Island National Seashore along the Atlantic Coast in Maryland and Virginia.

An Enhanced Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

A Permanent Watershed-wide System of Special Places for Experiencing the Chesapeake



The Chesapeake Bay is a place of tremendous diversity. It is hard to take in the whole Bay story at one location. The existing Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network helps visitors experience the Bay and its watershed through more than 140 parks, refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and hundreds of miles of water trails. This alternative would add to the Gateways Network, enhancing it in several ways.

The existing Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is an extensive and successful partnership system of parks, refuges, maritime museums, historic sites and water trails around the Bay watershed. This alternative would build upon that strong foundation by retaining current core aspects and characteristics, while enhancing the Network to fill several identified gaps in Bay conservation and restoration. It would:

- designate the Gateways Network as a permanent program of the National Park System with an on-going funding commitment, giving a continuity limited by current legislation;
- stimulate the creation of two new partnership Chesapeake Bay interpretive/education centers; and
- create a new means of linking Gateways to their surrounding working Bay landscapes.

A Vision of the Enhanced Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

The Chesapeake Bay is a place of immense complexity and astounding diversity. The region's natural splendor extends from forest to farm field, from small town to big city, from trickling stream to wide-open shipping lane, from New York State to Norfolk and West Virginia to Delaware. So many events unfolded here over the centuries that have proved crucial to the nation's cultural, military and economic history.

In recent years, the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network has made important strides in helping people experience the Bay's incredible diversity. More than 120 different sites are already in this one-of-a-kind Network, from the shores of the Bay into the distant reaches of the Chesapeake watershed. A comprehensive web site and an annual map and guide empower visitors to find their way to all manner of Chesapeake destinations: museums, refuges, historic towns, hundreds of miles of water trails, even sailing ships.

Of course, the Network is much more than a travel-planning tool. Through visiting Gateways – paddling new water trails, seeing new exhibits, hearing living stories – people begin to understand the full picture of the Bay, how all of the individual places fit together and why the Bay is so important.

But, this alternative takes the Gateways Network to a new level. By making a permanent commitment to the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, the NPS would ensure its long-term viability and enhance the Chesapeake's status among the country's national treasures. Through two Chesapeake Bay interpretive and education centers in the northern and southern parts of the Bay visitors would finally find a holistic introduction to this complex region and its watershed. Each center would be a portal through which to view the Bay's "big picture" stories and themes, and a starting point from which to explore the scores of other Gateways. In addition, the Network would broaden its focus to help interpret and conserve important landscapes linked to existing Gateways.

Key Elements of the Enhanced Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Alternative

Continuing Core Aspects of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network would continue as an extensive watershed-wide, partnership system of sites and trails for experiencing the Chesapeake Bay. Linked through a comprehensive *Map & Guide* and website, Gateways would carry out programs and initiatives to tell the Bay stories associated with each site, provide public access to Bay resources and foster involvement in Bay conservation efforts. The NPS would continue to coordinate the Gateways Network and provide technical and financial assistance to designated Gateways, while the sites and trails would still be managed by a variety of local, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Bay Resources Represented

The Gateways Network would still represent the broadest geographic and thematic system of Bay-related sites in the Chesapeake watershed. The Network would continue a natural pattern of slow expansion, as new sites are added in under-represented geographic regions or themes. Currently, multiple sites represent each of seven principal Bay themes and the diverse Bay-related resources associated with them, including:

- The Living, Natural Bay
- Peoples of the Bay
- Settlement of the Bay

- The Bay as 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

In addition, scores of sub-themes are represented through the more than 140 Gateways.

Experiencing the Chesapeake Bay through the Gateways Network

Through the Network's many individual Gateways, travelers would continue to encounter Bay stories in many ways – while touring picturesque lighthouses, paddling winding creeks, sailing old skipjacks, strolling wooded trails, visiting historical sites and savoring local traditions. This diversity of special places conveys the breadth of the Bay's influence and the links between all of the Bay's special places.

Individual Gateways vary greatly in the focus and scope of their visitor services and programs, depending on their specific circumstances. Yet, individual sites and trails would continue to enhance interpretation of Bay stories at their sites and to expand or enhance public access, especially to the water. Scores of new exhibits, wayside panels, programs, water trail maps and guides and access points are already under development or in place. In addition, materials, media and other products for interpreting Bay-wide themes and orienting people to the entire Gateways Network would continue to be developed and distributed.

Bay sites in the Gateways Network include...



...Reedville Fisherman's Museum (Northern Neck Chantey Singers, pictured), Reedville, Virginia...



...Pickering Creek Audubon Center, Easton, Maryland...

Alternative B



...Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Havre de Grace, Maryland...



...and Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Rock Hall, Maryland.

Conserving and Restoring the Bay

As members of a Network of special Bay places, individual Chesapeake Bay Gateways would continue to strive toward setting examples for sustainable stewardship of the Bay watershed's natural, historic, cultural and recreational resources. Managers of individual Gateways would continue to explore and undertake initiatives at their sites toward that end. Due to the great variety of organizational mandates and missions of individual Chesapeake Bay Gateways, the types of activities, uses and conservation/restoration efforts at Gateways would remain highly diverse.

Enhancements to the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network would be enhanced in three key areas to address identified gaps in current interpretation and conservation of the Chesapeake Bay.

Designating the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network as a Permanent National Park System Program

The Gateways Network would be authorized as a permanent program of the National Park System. This would not change the management status of individual Gateways; they would continue in existing ownerships and management approaches. Rather, the designation would recognize the national significance of the Chesapeake Bay and the special role of the National Park Service in facilitating the telling of the Bay story through the Gateways Network. Moreover, it would recognize the unique abilities and characteristics of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network partnership to address the Bay's breadth, magnitude and diversity. Designation as a permanent program of the

National Park System would provide a long-term federal commitment to the unending importance of the Bay story, rather than the current short-term NPS role stemming from the existing Gateways Network legislation which sunsets in 2008.

Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Centers

Two new partnership interpretive centers would be created to fill a key gap in communicating the Bay story – a lack of opportunities for residents and visitors to grasp an introduction to the broadest Bay and watershed-wide themes. These centers would introduce people to those themes and orient visitors to the Network and where to experience its places and stories. Visitors would find a range of interpretive programming, activities and facilities focusing on overarching and principal Bay themes, as well as maps of the entire Network, on-line opportunities to explore other sites and plan trips and physical and interpretive links to nearby sites. In addition, the centers might provide web and television interpretive and educational programming and links as a tool for reaching off-site audiences.

The two centers would be developed through partnerships with other organizations or existing institutions, either in existing buildings or possibly expanded or new structures. They would be located where a combination of geography, transportation systems and services concentrate large numbers of people at opposite (southern and northwestern) regions of the Bay, with a direct view of Bay waters, fulfilling an earlier vision of Gateway hubs in these locations. They would be nearby authentic natural, cultural, historic or recreational Bay resources. In effect, the two centers would be high visitation start-

ing points through which people would get a first impression of the Bay and from which they would begin a longer exploration at other sites.

Working Bay Landscapes

Working farm, forest and maritime landscapes are not currently included within the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. However, they clearly provide the setting and context for many of the Network's sites, trails, resources, themes and stories. They also provide opportunities for people to explore the very fabric of the Bay region itself.

This alternative would help extend the benefits of the Gateways Network to working Bay landscapes. Existing designated Gateways would continue to be able to develop tours or programs that address the landscapes around them. In addition, state designated heritage areas and rural historic districts containing designated Gateways, and river corridors along Gateways Network water trails, would be eligible for Gateways Network technical and financial assistance (matching grants) to support conservation efforts. Financial assistance would be targeted at grants for conservation easements and conservation plan development or implementation.

Roles

The Gateways Network would continue its unique and innovative role as a partnership system of special Bay places, managed by a variety of public and private institutions.

Overall guidance and coordination of the Gateways Network would be carried out in much the same fashion as it is today by the NPS in cooperation with a multi-organizational board or coordinating body, such as

the current Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Working Group. The board or coordinating body would include representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Program, the natural resources, historic resources and tourism agencies of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia, federal agencies managing designated Gateways, representatives of other designated Gateways and key private sector organizations. The board would continue the Working Group's role in coordinating overall policy guidance for the Gateways Network, including: on-going planning for the Network, developing policy and priority recommendations, evaluating additions to the Network and project proposals, and coordinating interagency commitments and programs.

National Park Service roles would include:

- continuing to lead development of Network-wide orientation and interpretive materials, in partnership with various cooperators
- continuing to set standards for Network participation, interpretation and graphics, in consultation with the Gateways Network board and designated Gateways
- continuing to provide a range of technical assistance to designated Gateways, including new technical assistance for conservation of working landscapes
- maintaining an annual matching grants program to assist designated Gateways in improving interpretation, public access and conservation restoration
- providing new grants for conservation planning, conservation easements and public access site acquisition (willing



Under this alternative, the Gateways Network would become a permanent program of the National Park System.



Two major centers would be added to introduce visitors to Bay-wide themes and orient them to the many sites around the Bay.

Alternative B



Certain Bay landscapes, such as water trail corridors and heritage areas, would be eligible for technical and financial help for conservation initiatives.

seller only) within designated types of landscapes

- partnering with a non-governmental support organization to attract and develop financing for interpretive, education and conservation programs
- entering into a long-term partnership for each of two Bay interpretive centers. The NPS would provide a legislatively set amount of federal 1:1 matching funds (\$2.5 million each) for development of the centers. A priority would be placed on expansion of existing institutions as opposed to new development. The NPS would also enter into a partnership agreement addressing operations, programming and interpretation at the centers

Local and state government, other federal agency and non-governmental organization roles would include the following:

- continuing to manage designated Gateways to enhance interpretation of Chesapeake Bay watershed themes, improve public access to Bay resources in a sensible and sustainable manner, and foster conservation and restoration of Bay resources
- participating in the coordinating board or body guiding the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network
- providing technical assistance to designated Gateways
- partnering on development of the two Bay interpretive centers
- partnering on conservation programs within designated types of landscapes.

Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park

The Chesapeake Bay is a vast estuary – 2,500 square miles of water – internationally known not just for its size, but for its high productivity as a natural system. As the lifeblood of the Chesapeake is water, this alternative would create a primarily water-based national park that exemplifies the larger Bay’s core aquatic, estuarine character, with only limited land resources for context, public access and interpretation. In brief, the national park would:

- encompass a reasonably large, but still proportionally small water area representative of core aspects of the whole Chesapeake Bay’s estuarine environment and including limited, but related shoreline ecosystems and island environments;
- protect aquatic and other natural resources within the park area as a high quality natural system, reflecting the Bay’s importance as habitat, breeding ground and refuge for countless species at all points in their lifecycles;
- provide public access that allows visitors to explore, enjoy and learn about the estuary and its resources while preventing any degradation of the estuary’s natural systems;
- interpret the Chesapeake Bay as an outstanding natural system, upon which the region’s population depends, through a land-based visitor orientation/interpretive center and other programming in the park.

A Vision of a Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park

At a Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park, visitors might explore in depth the natural marvels of one of the world’s

largest estuaries. They might roam marshlands, stroll beaches, visit islands and paddle open waters. They could admire up close the incredible bounty of the Bay: its fish, its birds, its vegetation, and its beauty. And they would discover firsthand the dynamics of a healthy Bay.

The first stop for visitors to a such a park might be an on-shore interpretive and orientation center. Here, with a scenic vista of open Bay waters as a backdrop, the broader Chesapeake story would unfold. Compelling exhibits and innovative programs would focus on the park’s estuarine theme, while drawing the whole of the Bay and its watershed into the picture.

Most of the park would be out in the Bay’s open waters, and a key aspect of the park’s mission would be to protect a sample of the Bay’s precious aquatic environment and contribute to restoring the whole Bay’s full health. Still, the public would have numerous opportunities to get out on the water, whether during tours of a Bay island or paddling trips along shore.

The park’s land area would be limited in size, but not in appeal or significance. Here, visitors might explore such critical habitats as wetlands, marshes, and grasslands. They’d be able to see for themselves why healthy beds of submerged aquatic vegetation are so crucial to crab and oyster populations. They’d learn how diverse aspects of our collective lifestyle can affect the health of the Bay for better and for worse.



The Chesapeake Bay is all about water — over two thousand square miles of it — and the diverse aquatic life it supports. This alternative would create a water-based national park in one portion of the bay. It would reflect the Chesapeake’s rich estuarine life.

Key Elements of the Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park

Bay Resources Represented

A national park area focused on the estuary would include resources typical of the Bay's open waters, marshes, islands, beaches, and associated shoreline.

Essentially, such a park should include:

- a large contiguous water area that has some recognizable identity as a portion of the larger Bay;
- estuarine aquatic communities such as submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) beds, oyster beds, water bird feeding areas, deep and shallow open waters, islands;
- shoreline tidal ecological communities such as shorelines, beaches and tidal marshes;
- suitable areas for public access along the shoreline to provide for land and water-based interpretation, education and recreation;
- a suitable location for an interpretive center providing physical and interpretive orientation to the park and the entire Bay and serving as a launching point for interactive experiences in the park and other Chesapeake Bay sites.



A Chesapeake Bay Estuary National Park would reflect the Bay's importance as habitat, breeding ground, and refuge for numerous species and protect and restore aquatic resources.

The size of the park could vary depending on the specific characteristics of a particular area. Typically national parks are relatively large, encompassing a substantial enough area to represent and ensure protection of the core resource base.

Conserving and Sustaining the Park

A core goal of this alternative would be to conserve, protect, and restore the estuar-

ine environment and natural resources represented within the park area as a high quality natural system.

This goal recognizes the significant ecological function of the Bay as a natural system and the importance of protecting certain core areas as close-to-pristine environments. Such an area would provide habitat, breeding ground and refuge for countless species at all points in their lifecycles. Moreover, it would benefit the broader estuary and the millions of people who depend on it. An estuarine park would protect these natural resources through three key principles:

- **Protect and preserve estuarine resources:** The estuarine park's preservation goals would aim towards the level of protection necessary for sustaining the area as a high quality natural system with healthy populations of native species. Public ownership or management of core estuarine resources would be most compatible with this goal, whereas consumptive, commercial uses may be incompatible. Some limited acquisition of existing lands or rights might be needed to provide a base for interpretation and administration on a small area of the shore. With multiple state and federal agencies involved in managing aquatic systems and resources, a cooperative joint management plan would be developed to ensure consistent, integrated science-based approaches to resource protection, management, public access and other aspects of the park. Research and monitoring of natural systems and resources would be encouraged.
- **Restore key fragile natural resources:** Given centuries of human use in the Bay, most areas have seen some impacts to key natural resources.

The most prominent examples include submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and oyster beds. The park would be a focus site for restoration of such key resources through public and voluntary efforts. Restored areas would expand the park's ability to serve as a protected base supporting the overall Bay system. In addition, scientists would use the park as a place for learning how best to restore water habitats, making it a living laboratory for restoration.

- ***Provide public access in a manner that encourages learning and enjoyment and does not degrade natural systems:*** Public access to Bay resources is critically important to fostering support for and involvement in Bay conservation and stewardship. Within the park, public access would be developed and managed to achieve this fundamental purpose, but also managed to avoid impairment of natural systems. Local, state and federal government and the private sector would be involved in the cooperative joint management planning process to design approaches to meeting this principle. The specific characteristics of public access would be dependent on the resources of a potential park area, but generally, uses such as boating, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, hiking, and recreational fishing would be expected to be compatible.

Experiencing the Park

A visitor would come to enjoy and understand the Chesapeake Bay as a remarkable natural system through experiencing the waters and estuarine resources of the park. That experience might include:

- ***Primary orientation at a land-based interpretive center:*** This facility would introduce visitors to the park, as well as to the overarching themes of the broader Chesapeake Bay. The center should be accessible by multiple forms of transportation (water-based, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians). It should also be within view of the water and nearby natural or recreational sites.
- ***Group tours, planned itineraries and established programs providing visitors with a variety of experiences:*** Opportunities would exist for visitors to participate in planned programs or to design their own visit with experiences on the open water, at islands, marshes or along the shore. This might include canoe, kayak and sailing tours and experiences in the underwater environment, where appropriate, through glass boat tours or scheduled dives. Interactive experiences with researchers and scientists might also be available as appropriate.
- ***Access for a variety of populations:*** The park would provide access to visitors with varying degrees of physical abilities, available time, and desired outcomes. It would accommodate multiple forms of transportation to the park and provide a range of experiences tailored to visitors. The park would also provide a virtual interpretive experience for those who are unable to visit the park first hand, those who wish to pre-plan activities, or those who visit the reserve but do not venture out onto the resource.



The park would be a living laboratory for restoration where scientists would learn how best to restore water habitats.



A visitor center and programs would introduce visitors to the Chesapeake's value as a sensitive natural system upon which we all depend.

Alternative C



The park would allow for greater public access to the water so visitors can explore the Bay's environment and special qualities first-hand, on and in the water.

Through the resource-based experiences, tours, interpretive center and various sites, visitors would be introduced to and come to recognize:

- the Chesapeake Bay as a vast, diverse, productive and sensitive natural system – the natural, living Bay;
- the lasting dependence of people on the Bay's natural functions, coupled with the Bay's dependence on human decisions and actions for its future well-being;
- a range of related themes and sites beyond the park where they can continue their exploration of the Chesapeake Bay.

Roles

As for any park, partnerships with different levels of government, neighboring communities and the private sector would be important to this alternative. Particularly important would be collaborative efforts among the varying agencies involved in management of aquatic systems and resources. Depending on the characteristics of any potential park area, this might involve cooperative management agreements and a joint management plan, involving the NPS, local and state government, other federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. National Park Service roles might include:

- entering into cooperative management agreements with other public land management agencies within the park
- coordinating and leading park management planning, including any cooperative joint management plans, such as for aquatic resources; a final park management plan(s) would be approved by the Secretary of the Interior

- carrying out resource management activities in cooperation with other park partners
- developing and carrying out a comprehensive interpretive plan, in cooperation with other park partners
- developing and operating the park's interpretive center
- acquiring lands, waters, or development rights necessary to protect resources within the park or provide for public access

Local and state government, other federal agency and non-governmental organization roles might include the following, depending on the characteristics of any potential park area:

- participating in management planning for the park
- managing existing public lands and waters to meet park management plan objectives
- partnering on resource inventories, conservation and restoration programs, and research and monitoring programs
- carrying out conservation initiatives and land use planning to mitigate impacts on estuarine resources from waters or lands outside the park
- acquiring sensitive resource lands or public access points
- developing or providing tours and other services

A Chesapeake Bay National Reserve

National reserves protect and sustain the working landscape, recognizing the vital role of continued human uses in the heritage and character of a special place. This alternative would create such a national reserve representative of the Chesapeake Bay's internationally recognized maritime and rural agricultural heritage. Briefly, the reserve would:

- encompass a reasonably large area of publicly and privately owned lands and waters reflective of the Bay region's maritime and rural, agricultural heritage;
- retain the living, working character and pattern of human use of the lands and waters;
- conserve the reserve landscape, protecting it from sprawl development and the conversion of resource lands to developed uses;
- protect traditional resource dependent activities (commercial and recreational fishing, crabbing, oystering, agriculture, forestry) and manage the resources for permanently sustainable use;
- protect high priority, sensitive natural and cultural resources;
- interpret the Chesapeake Bay's heritage through media and programming at a central interpretive center and multiple partner sites within and beyond the reserve;
- be fully dependent on a partnership approach to management, involving local, state and federal government and the private sector.

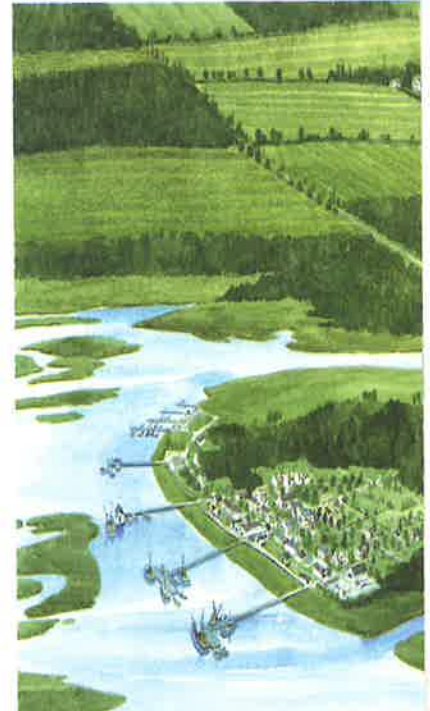
A Vision of a Chesapeake Bay National Reserve

A Chesapeake Bay National Reserve would provide visitors and residents with a generous serving of the true Bay landscape and culture. A reserve would not only include memorable scenery and natural abundance in forests, on shores, and along streams. But here, the human dimension of life on the Bay would come to the forefront as well. In addition to natural areas, a reserve would encompass small fishing towns, rural communities, working farmlands, and perhaps even historic factories.

Land in the reserve would be mostly privately owned, just as it is all around the Bay. But the reserve and its resources would be managed through a strategy recognizing the special national significance of this region. Maritime communities inside the reserve would strive to remain living, breathing places. Along shorelines in the reserve would sit boatyards where Chesapeake watermen still ply their centuries-old trades. Existing and new visitor sites, tours and events might focus on such aspects of Bay life as the seafood industry, plantation life, small-town life and key historic settlements.

Managed by a partnership between private citizens and local, state and federal governments through a coordinating board, this reserve would also embrace conservation efforts that focus not just on natural environments, but on cultural and economic ones as well: How can farms thrive in ways consistent with protecting the long-term health of the Bay? What strategies and tools can give the commercial fishing industry the best chance to thrive in the decades ahead? An array of significant natural areas would

Protecting the Bay's Maritime and Rural Heritage



The Chesapeake's abundance created a working landscape tied to the Bay. Watermen, farmers and residents of maritime communities all depend on the Bay in one way or another. Today, this is part of what makes the Chesapeake a very special place. This alternative focuses on protecting and sustaining that working, living landscape and the traditions it reflects.

Alternative D



The reserve would include and conserve part of the working Bay landscape and waters, including maritime communities and fisheries.



The reserve would support fishing, farming and forestry by helping to keep these traditional Chesapeake uses sustainable well into the future.

also be included in this reserve – state parks, refuges and perhaps newly protected sensitive natural sites. Thus, the reserve would also encompass samples of the broad shores, winding riverbanks, deep forests and wetlands that help shape the Bay.

Key Elements of the Chesapeake Bay National Reserve Concept

Bay Resources Represented

A representative reserve area would include resources typical of the Bay region's aquatic, rural, maritime and agricultural heritage within one contiguous area. This means it should include:

- one or more waterfront maritime communities and the maritime resources associated with them (e.g. traditional waterfront industries, historic and modern commercial structures, boat-yards, fishing piers/wharves, seafood processing operations)
- agricultural and forest lands
- historic and cultural resources representing the Bay's long maritime and agricultural heritage (e.g. historic settlement sites, plantations, wharves, etc.)
- Bay and Bay tributary shoreline
- shoreline tidewater ecological communities (beaches, tidal marshes, and grasslands)
- estuarine aquatic communities (open Bay waters, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), oyster beds, crabbing areas, possibly islands)
- public access points at Bay and river shorelines

- existing protected lands, such as state parks, refuges and natural areas.

The size of the reserve could vary depending on the characteristics of any specific area. Reserves are typically 15,000 acres or much larger in size, encompassing a broad enough area to effectively represent and conserve the characteristic resources.

Conserving and Sustaining the Reserve

A core goal of this alternative would be to conserve and sustain the traditional working landscape, waters and natural and cultural resources within the reserve that reflect the Bay's heritage.

This goal recognizes that the interaction and interconnectedness of the Bay's natural environment and human use and settlement over time is what gives the Chesapeake its nationally significant character. Historical and modern patterns on the working landscape reflect this – from early American Indian settlements to colonial plantations to maritime communities to today's watermen and crabbing industry. A reserve would conserve and sustain the basis of these patterns and the viability of the landscape through three key principles:

- ***Retain the living, working pattern of privately owned lands and human uses of land and water, complemented by protection of key sensitive resource areas:*** A reserve would be predominantly privately owned with a mix of traditional uses. Yet it would also include certain protected lands (both public and non-governmental) for which private ownership and use is impractical, such as certain high priority sensitive natural

areas, recreational or public access sites and certain historic sites.

- ***Conserve the reserve landscape, allowing change to occur, but protecting against sprawl development and the conversion of resource lands to developed uses:*** A reserve would employ a locally adopted and implemented comprehensive management plan for guiding land use and resource protection on all lands within the reserve. The plan would set guidelines limiting sprawl development and conversion of farm and forest lands to non-resource uses and protecting important natural and cultural landscape features, such as stream corridors and maritime community historic districts.
- ***Protect traditional resource dependent activities (commercial fishing, crabbing, oystering, agriculture, forestry) from development pressures and managing resources for sustainable use:*** Resource dependent uses are particularly sensitive to development pressures. A reserve would include a purchase of development rights program aimed at protecting resource dependent uses. Purchasing development rights on sensitive farmlands, forests, and fisheries infrastructure sites (picking houses, workboat docks) helps keep these areas in production by removing development pressures and providing the owners with funds to reinvest in their businesses.

Experiencing the Reserve

In the mind's eye, the Chesapeake is a broad expanse of water surrounded by lands farmed and forested for centuries. A multitude of rivers, streams, creeks and wetlands flow through these lands, on which watermen have crabbed and fished for an equal length of time. This is the Bay's working landscape, something that anyone must experience to truly know the Bay. That experience would be guided in several ways:

- ***A primary interpretive/education center*** would introduce visitors to Chesapeake Bay themes and orient them to a series of experiences and sites throughout the reserve. It would be a true portal to other public and private sites in the reserve that collectively help illustrate the working landscape. The center would accommodate multiple modes of transportation (water-based, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians) and be located near a complex of natural, cultural and recreational sites, such as on existing public lands or in a maritime community.
- ***Self-guided tours, group tours, planned itineraries and established programs*** would provide visitors with a variety of experiences on the open water, in the community, at sites and in the broader reserve landscape.
- ***Individual sites throughout the reserve*** would be primary places for visitors to learn and experience more of the Chesapeake. Parks, refuges, historic sites, trails and water trails within the reserve would provide site-specific Bay stories and programs, events, festivals, exhibits and tours.



The reserve would protect the landscape from sprawl development, but allow natural changes to occur over time.

Alternative D

Through the landscape, center, tours and sites, visitors would come to recognize:

- the dynamic interconnectedness of water, place, nature and people in the Chesapeake region over time;
- how the Bay region's resources have shaped human use and settlement of the region and conversely, how human use has changed the Bay and the surrounding landscape; and
- the lasting dependence of people on the Bay and its resources, coupled with the Bay's dependence on human decisions and actions for its future well-being.



An interpretive center would introduce the Bay's heritage and link people with a variety of existing visitor sites and programs that represent the authentic Bay.

Roles

This alternative depends on a vital and engaged partnership among local, state, and federal government and the private sector. The details of such a partnership would vary depending on the size, location and constituents of a reserve. Typically, overall guidance and coordination would be carried out through an appointed multi-partner board or commission. This entity would represent core reserve partners, such as local, state and federal government and the private sector. It would provide the primary forum for addressing reserve-wide planning and implementation, such as a comprehensive management plan. All reserve partners would cooperate to carry out the plan, with roles tied to the partners' organizational missions.

National Park Service roles might include:

- providing technical and financial assistance for comprehensive management planning

- transmitting the final comprehensive management plan to the Secretary of the Interior for approval
- in cooperation with state government, providing administrative and logistical support for the coordinating board or commission
- developing a comprehensive interpretive plan, in cooperation with other reserve partners
- providing 1:1 federal matching funds for development of the reserve's interpretive center
- providing interpretive staffing for the interpretive center
- giving technical assistance and small matching grants for enhancing interpretation at sites within the reserve
- providing technical assistance for conservation of cultural resources within the reserve
- providing matching grants to the state(s) for purchase of development rights on important resource lands, or, carrying out a purchase of development rights program for willing sellers when matched by equal funding from another non-federal partner

Local and state government, other federal agency and non-governmental organization roles might include the following:

- participating in the board, commission or coordinating body for the reserve and in comprehensive management planning and interpretive planning



- coordinating and targeting relevant existing technical and financial assistance programs to assist in development and implementation of the reserve
- adopting and implementing the comprehensive management plan and ensuring consistency with the plan
- continuing to manage existing public lands
- partnering on development of the interpretive center and other interpretive projects
- partnering on implementing a purchase of development rights program for the reserve.

National Ecological & Cultural Preserve

A Living Example for the Bay & the Nation



Water flows into the Chesapeake from hundreds of rivers and streams, altogether draining a vast area of land. How we use and care for that land directly influences the Bay's future. This alternative focuses on caring for one Bay tributary and its surrounding watershed as a national model for sustainable use and stewardship.

The Chesapeake Bay is fed by more than 124,000 miles of rivers and streams from a 64,000 square mile watershed. It is a complex ecological and cultural system where tributaries greatly influence the Bay. This alternative would establish a national ecological and cultural preserve focused on one exemplary Bay tributary – from headwater stream to open Bay and islands – as a representative cross-section of the larger Bay watershed. The preserve would:

- conserve and restore the tributary ecosystem such that human uses are in optimal balance with natural processes, ensuring a vital, sustainable and clean future;
- protect key natural resources and river shorelines along a core riparian area of the primary tributary river and some or all of its feeder streams;
- demonstrate and apply the best in evolving land and resource stewardship practices on public and private lands throughout a resource conservation area encompassing the entire tributary watershed;
- provide a series of opportunities for visitors to experience and learn about the transition of natural areas from headwaters to Bay and how human actions influence the health of the Bay system;
- engage the private sector, local, state and federal government as partners in creating a sustained, focused national model of watershed stewardship.

A Vision of a Chesapeake Bay Watershed National Ecological & Cultural Preserve

In a National Ecological & Cultural Preserve, visitors would experience the Chesapeake Bay along the natural flow of a single tributary as it runs from upland headwaters down to the open Bay. Whether taken by car or foot or bicycle or kayak, the journeys available along this corridor would put travelers in direct touch with the diverse places and activities that create, feed and influence a new future for the Chesapeake Bay – the watercourses of the Bay watershed.

Human uses would be visible throughout the preserve, but they would lie lightly on the land. Always, the rivers and their riparian corridors would seem a revered element of the landscape – with forested streambanks and healthy wetlands filled with the sounds of birds and wildlife. Conservation and restoration programs adopted here – in an environment that supports a full range of modern human activity, from farms to residences to towns to businesses – would be an inspiring model for the stewardship of vital natural habitats and the restoration of water quality all across Bay country.

Through a central interpretation/orientation center and out in the preserve, visitors would find a range of exhibits, sites and programs revealing how the elements of the preserve watershed fit into the complex mosaic of the Chesapeake as a whole. Through these experiences visitors might learn both how we have influenced the Bay in the past and how we can sustain its vital functions tomorrow.

Key Elements of the Concept

Bay Resources Represented

The ecological and cultural preserve would track one significant mid-sized (15 to 50 mile) Chesapeake Bay tributary river ending in the main body of the Chesapeake Bay and encompass important components of its surrounding landscape. Within a core riparian area, resources particularly important to be represented include:

- headwater ecological communities (freshwater marshes, swamps, headwater streams, and upland/headwater forests)
- riparian ecological communities (shorelines, river beaches and islands, wetlands and tidal marshes)
- estuarine aquatic communities (submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster beds, deep and shallow open water, islands)

Beyond the core riparian area and extending to the boundary of the watershed, the preserve should encompass an array of land uses. In essence, the sum of the preserve landscape, wildlife, human settlements, and watercourses should offer enough diversity of natural and cultural resources to illustrate watershed ecological processes, historic interaction of humans with the landscape, contemporary land use issues and emerging, progressive resource stewardship practices. The overall size of the preserve would vary depending on the characteristics of the specific tributary river, but this preserve would be expected to encompass many square miles.

Conserving and Sustaining the Resource

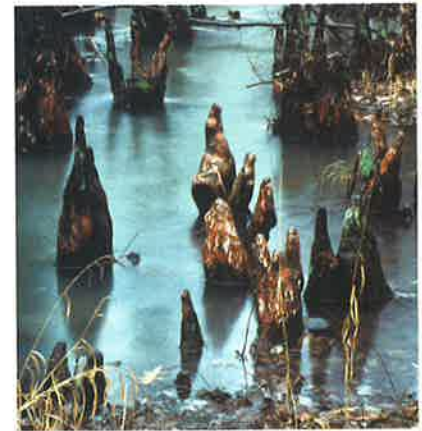
A core goal of the reserve would be to conserve and restore the tributary ecosystem so that human uses are in optimal balance

with natural processes, ensuring a vital and sustainable future. This would be achieved through the following principles, as applied in a core riparian area (encompassing the water and riparian zone of the primary tributary river and some or all of its feeder streams) and a resource protection area (including the remainder of the tributary watershed).

- ***Protect and restore vital natural resources within the core riparian area:*** Within the core riparian area, vital natural habitats retaining a high degree of integrity would be protected in as near a pristine state as possible. Other important natural habitat types could be conserved even if the integrity is partially compromised; these areas would be the focus of restoration efforts to enhance their habitat value for living resources. Collectively, these natural resource areas would represent a series of habitat types from headwaters to open Bay.

Ideally, these natural resource areas would form a core publicly owned series of nodes of the preserve along the tributary. This might be through existing local, state or federal landholdings. Some fee simple acquisition from willing sellers or land donations may be appropriate. Public lands would also provide public access for experiencing and learning about the preserve (see below).

- ***Conserve riparian shorelines within the core riparian area:*** Conservation easements and incentives for applying best management practices would be used to conserve riparian shorelines. The objective of these initiatives would be to establish as near possible a contiguous forested or vegetated



The preserve would follow on Bay tributary from headwater trickle to the open Bay, including land within the tributary's watershed.

riparian buffer along rivers and streams in the core area.

■ ***Protect and restore water quality throughout the preserve:***

Encompassing an entire Bay tributary river's watershed, the preserve would appropriately include a mixed pattern of public/private ownership and land uses. How these lands are managed directly influences water quality and the viability of the tributary ecosystem

Working landscapes within the preserve would continue in economic production, but best management practices would be developed and applied to protect tributary water quality from all point and non-point sources of polluted runoff. This would be coordinated through a watershed management plan developed by state and local government and other preserve partners in consultation with the NPS.

- ***Illustrate how sustainable management practices can help restore the Chesapeake Bay:*** In total, the preserve would be managed to illustrate how sustainable land use management practices can protect water quality and living resources, thus contributing to the environmental and economic viability of our communities. Partnerships would be developed to facilitate public access to and interpret managed resource lands of high demonstration value, including techniques such as low impact development, conservation landscaping, nutrient trading, and riparian buffering.

Experiencing the Preserve

The Chesapeake Bay is linked with our national identity. It is big, bold, and has

influenced many of the major story-lines of the Nation's history. It illustrates the interdependent relationship we have with an outstanding natural ecosystem. Yet, the Bay is feeling the cumulative effects of hundreds of years of human use and the more than 15 million people living within the watershed. The future of the Chesapeake hangs in the balance – its loss of biodiversity and abundance, symbolic of a national and global pattern. This alternative responds directly to this challenge, by setting an example for conserving and illustrating stewardship of an entire tributary system.

The national ecological and cultural preserve would allow visitors to experience the beauty, influence and function of the Bay environment through an entire tributary system. Moreover, visitors would experience a place dedicated to sustainable stewardship and human use of that environment. Unique within the National Park System, this would allow visitors to understand the place and how to ensure its future. The preserve would present a broad array of resource stories and experiences to build this understanding. The experiences would be guided in a number of ways:

- ***A primary interpretive/education center*** would introduce visitors to Chesapeake Bay watershed themes and resources and orient them to a series of experiences and sites throughout the preserve. The center would accommodate multiple modes of transportation (water-based, vehicular, bike, pedestrian) and be located near a complex of natural resource sites, such as on publicly protected lands with the preserve's core area. The center would be a "portal" to visit key resource sites throughout the preserve and other resource



The preserve would protect lands along the river corridor and other streams feeding it to help sustain habitat and water quality.

sites around the Bay. The center would also partner with a wide range of organizations and individuals to present programming on current and evolving stewardship practices.

- ***Self-guided and group tours, planned itineraries and established programs*** would provide visitors with a variety of experiences along the riparian corridor from headwaters to open Bay and at sites within the preserve's working landscape.
- ***Demonstration sites throughout the preserve*** would be primary places for visitors to learn about innovative and sustainable management practices in agriculture, forestry and commercial and residential development. Visitors would have opportunities to personally participate in traditional practices and conservation and restoration activities.

Through the programming for these experiences, visitors would come to recognize:

- what the Bay was like as a natural system at the time of first European contact and how it has changed since;
- the nature and characteristics of a Bay tributary watershed from headwaters to open Bay waters;
- the interconnected and interdependent relationship and influences between people and the Chesapeake's natural systems;
- how stewardship of land and water resources is taking place to ensure a sustainable balance between human uses and ecological functions and how those principles and actions can be applied elsewhere.

Roles

Similar to other alternatives, this alternative depends on a vital and engaged partnership among local, state, and federal government and the private sector. Like alternative D, overall guidance and coordination would typically be carried out through an appointed multi-partner board or commission representing core preserve partners – local, state and federal government and the private sector. It would provide the primary forum for addressing preserve-wide planning and implementation, typically through the preserve's comprehensive watershed management plan. Development and implementation of the plan would require the firm commitment of local, state and federal government and the private sector to create and apply incentives, assistance and programs to support best management practices watershed-wide.

National Park Service roles might include:

- providing technical and financial assistance for comprehensive watershed management planning;
- transmitting the final comprehensive management plan to the Secretary of the Interior for approval;
- in cooperation with state government, providing administrative and logistical support for the coordinating board or commission;
- in cooperation with other preserve partners, developing a comprehensive resource protection plan for key resources within the preserve's core area;
- acquiring, owning and managing select resources, as appropriate within the preserve's core area
- partnering to develop conservation



Throughout the preserve, stewardship efforts would help restore natural systems, continue human uses in sustainable ways, and demonstrate the best in evolving management practices as a model for international stewardship.

Alternative E



Visitors could experience the transition from headwaters to Bay, and learn how people influence the Bay system.

easements for resource protection and cooperative agreements for interpretation, as appropriate within the preserve's resource protection area;

- providing 1:1 matching funds for developing the interpretive/education center and partnering with other institutions to ensure on-going operations;
- assisting with interpreting key themes and resources, including providing financial and technical assistance, and in some cases providing interpretive personnel at key sites;
- providing financial and technical assistance for resource conservation, restoration and management in a focused geographic area, emphasizing demonstration of innovative and sustainable management practices

Roles of state and local government, other federal agencies and non-governmental organization partners might include the following:

- participating in the board, commission or coordinating body for the preserve and in the comprehensive watershed management planning and interpretive planning;
- partnering with the NPS to identify and inventory key resources for protection within the preserve's core area;
- continuing to manage existing public lands and acquiring and managing select resources, as appropriate within the preserve's core area;
- adopting and implementing the comprehensive watershed management plan and ensure consistency with the plan; partnering on implementation of the range of stewardship incentives,

assistance and programs for the preserve;

- partnering on funding, development and management of the interpretive/education center;
- interpret key themes and resources at key sites;
- demonstrating innovative and sustainable management practices throughout the preserve.

Public Comments

The *Draft Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Environmental Impact Statement* stimulated comments from the public by mail, fax, email and the internet, as well as at the public open houses. In total, there were more than 3,000 comments submitted - 52 from agencies and organizations, 935 from public open house comment cards, and 2,107 from individuals via the website, email, mail, and fax.

Public comments focused on the five alternatives outlined in the draft report, each of which describe a different way the National Park Service might contribute to the partnership effort to conserve and celebrate the Chesapeake Bay.

The draft study and the five alternatives generated comments with several overarching messages and consistent themes. People:

- view the Chesapeake Bay as an overwhelmingly significant place where natural and cultural resources and themes are both paramount;
- are concerned about how the Bay is doing and want to see it restored;
- support the National Park Service having a long-term role in the Chesapeake - over 92% of comments supported doing more than just the status quo (alternative A);
- have a strong preference for combining elements of the initial concepts, rather than picking any single concept by itself; no single concept can adequately represent the size and diversity of the Bay.

Public comments expressed strong support for an enhanced National Park Service role in the Bay, though there was no clear consensus on picking one of the single park concepts (alternatives C, D, E) as the sole alternative to pursue and no formal proposals of specific places where a concept might be applied. Many people expressed support for each of these alternatives individually, but the majority of comments advocated some combination of approaches, merging two or more action alternatives (alternatives B-E) into a final National Park Service recommendation.

Generally, the most numerous comments support:

- making the National Park Service commitment to the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network permanent (as in alternative B); almost all respondents at open houses said they would visit one or more Gateways (see www.baygateways.net) and supported the addition of two interpretive centers; and
- establishing a "park unit/NPS role" that encompasses at least one of alternatives C, D or E, but preferably elements of all three.

A number of comments also advocated combining these elements with a Chesapeake Bay National Water Trail linking sites around the Bay. A few comments suggested other new concepts. See the fully study report at www.chesapeakestudy.org for details.

Overall, comments strongly rejected the status quo, with many people saying more efforts were needed to improve public access to the Bay and to educate the public so that they have a greater appreciation of the entire Bay watershed.



Key Findings

In formulating a preferred alternative, the National Park Service makes findings relative to four key criteria for new units of the National Park System. The final study's findings are described below.

National Significance:

The Chesapeake Bay is an outstanding example of a unique set of ecological and cultural elements with long-standing and expansive influence on the history and development of the United States. The Chesapeake Bay is unquestionably nationally significant and a major part of the nation's heritage which the National Park System strives to represent and interpret.



While the Chesapeake Bay can be independently viewed as a significant natural resource, a significant historic and cultural resource, and an area of outstanding recreational opportunities, it can only truly be understood as an interconnected and interdependent mosaic. The Bay's natural resources are the basis of a rich cultural history and multitude of recreational opportunities. The region's cultural history in turn affects the natural environment. The Bay proper is dramatically influenced by its watershed. Many cultural patterns of the upper watershed developed because of connections with the Bay.

Real understanding of the Chesapeake Bay comes by viewing all elements through their context and interrelationships. The Chesapeake is truly a system where each part's individual importance contributes to the overwhelming significance of the whole.

As President Ronald Reagan wrote in 1984, "the Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure that is worth preserving for its own sake." The Congress reiterated this statement in Public Law 106-457 (November 2000), finding that "the Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure and a resource of worldwide significance."

Suitability:

Areas being considered for potential inclusion within the National Park System must meet a suitability criterion - they must represent a natural or cultural theme or type of recreational resource that is not already adequately represented in the National Park System, or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land-managing entity.

In spite of many organized efforts to protect and enhance the Bay, the study finds there are certain clear gaps - not filled by any other entity - that could be filled through National Park Service roles consistent with the agency's mission. The "action" alternative concepts (alternatives B, C, D & E) presented in the study focus directly on these gaps. These concepts, and the Chesapeake Bay resources they address, were also identified in the study as not already represented within the National Park System. Public and agency comments on the draft study support these findings. Accordingly, alternatives B, C, D & E meet the suitability criterion.

Feasibility:

Areas being considered for potential inclusion within the National Park System must also meet a feasibility criterion. An area's natural systems and/or historic settings must be of sufficient size and configuration to ensure long-term protection of

resources and to accommodate public use. It must have potential for efficient administration at a reasonable cost.

Among other feasibility factors, this study places a premium on partnerships and support as a key ingredient for each of the alternative concepts.

One concept - alternative B (Enhanced Gateways Network) - already has that support fully in place. Specifically, through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, the National Park Service has assembled a partnership system of 140 parks, refuges, historic sites, museums and trails around the Bay watershed where people can have Chesapeake experiences. This system pulls together federal, state, local and private resources in a coordinated approach to interpreting the Chesapeake. This allows NPS to play a unique role in the overall Bay restoration strategy - coordinating efforts to connect the public with the vast and diverse Chesapeake story. Public understanding and involvement is a key Bay restoration goal. Alternative B - which builds on and enhances the existing Network - is clearly feasible.

The three other action alternatives (alternatives C, D & E) exist at this time only as concepts. Comments submitted during public review of the draft study indicate support at the conceptual level for some combination of these concepts' elements. However, a specific finding of feasibility depends upon evaluating a range of factors associated with particular site-specific proposals. No detailed, broadly supported site-specific proposals for these concepts yet exist. Thus, these alternatives are not feasible unless and until a viable proposal comes forward.

Management Alternatives:

Areas being considered for potential inclusion within the National Park System must be evaluated for whether there are effective alternatives to direct National Park Service management. Such alternatives might include continued management by other entities, assistance from established programs or cooperative management between the National Park Service and other entities.

This study's suitability findings indicate that each of the action alternatives responds to an identified gap in conservation and interpretation of the Chesapeake Bay. While this alone does not indicate a National Park Service role is necessary, it does have a strong bearing on management alternatives.

More importantly however, this study incorporates an exploration of management alternatives into the fundamentals of the alternative concepts it describes. None of the action alternatives contemplate sole management by the National Park Service. Each of the action alternatives inherently integrates cooperative management among other entities and the National Park Service. These management roles are described in the key elements section of each alternative. The varying roles are woven into the alternative concepts to maximize the efficiencies and effectiveness of each partner and role. Ultimately, this is intended to make each whole concept greater than the sum of its parts. The National Park Service role in each alternative is carefully crafted to fill the gaps not addressed by other entities, and consistent with the National Park Service mission.



“With millions of visitors coming to enjoy the Bay watershed each year. . . , a permanent commitment by the nation and NPS to the Gateways Network is instrumental to sound tourism, conservation and stewardship efforts. NPS’s direct involvement in partnership with the states and regional and local conservation partners is critical. . . . The Bay is a vast resource representing several states, many diverse interests, multiple geographic locations, and a wide range of related sites and site types. The Gateways Network seems to be the most flexible option for providing for full recognition, assistance and interpretation of the vast array of sites that are related to the Bay. Furthermore, it seems the most efficient to implement, and the most fiscally responsible.”

--Virginia Department of Historic Resources

NPS-Preferred Alternative

A final special resource study is required to "identify what alternative or combination of alternatives would in the professional judgment of the Director of the National Park Service be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing for public enjoyment." This standard guides the identification of a "preferred alternative."

Several factors combine to make the Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study different from typical "new area studies" - and ultimately shape the most effective and efficient approach for a National Park Service role in the Chesapeake:

1. As a natural and cultural resource and source of recreational opportunities, the Chesapeake's scope is immense in significance, size and diversity.
2. The region has a wide range and variety of established institutions involved in various aspects of resource conservation, interpretation and recreation, including the Chesapeake Bay Program's guidance of a multi-faceted regional strategy for restoring water quality.
3. Through an extensive partnership system of multiple sites - the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network - the National Park Service has a unique existing role in interpreting the Chesapeake, enhancing public access, and stimulating involvement in Bay restoration.
4. While there appears to be strong interest in the role a unit of the National Park System could play in contributing to Bay conservation and interpretation, there is not yet a site-specific park proposal within the study area.

These factors and the findings above point to a most effective and efficient approach combining elements of several alternatives in two principal outcomes:

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network should be enhanced and made permanent:

The existing partnership system of Chesapeake Bay Gateways represents the most comprehensive approach for visitors to experience the diversity of the Chesapeake Bay. The Gateways Network links Chesapeake sites throughout the watershed, enhancing their interpretation, improving public access to Bay resources, and stimulating citizen involvement in conservation. In addition to scores of sites are twenty designated water trails, extending well over 1100 linear miles - with outstanding potential for an integrated and nationally recognized Chesapeake Bay water trail system.

Though the Gateways Network exists today, under current law the National Park Service - the coordinating agency for the entire Network - would cease its involvement in 2008. This sunset date should be eliminated if the Gateways Network is to continue to function.

The National Park Service plays the core, integrating role in the Gateways Network: drawing together 140 independent sites in five states and the District of Columbia; coordinating overall planning for the Network with the states and other partners; providing technical and financial assistance to partner sites; and carrying out a range of Network-wide initiatives. The National Park Service role in the Gateways Network is unique - not duplicated by any other organization. However, it is fully consistent with legislation and

precedent for key federal roles in the federal-state Chesapeake Bay watershed partnership.

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 partnership Chesapeake Bay interpretive/education facilities would be stimulated through two 1:1 matching grants (NPS grant share capped at \$2.5 million each); and the Gateways Network would enhance links to surrounding working landscapes.

Alternative B represents a remarkably efficient and effective approach to advancing public understanding and enjoyment of Chesapeake resources and stimulating resource conservation.

The park/reserve/preserve concepts (or combination of alternatives C, D & E) meet NPS criteria and fill a key gap in protection and public enjoyment of Bay resources:

While the Bay is large and diverse, with many ongoing protection and interpretation efforts (including the Gateways Network), some key gaps in those efforts remain. Those gaps relate to certain types of resources and themes - representative of the Bay - that are encompassed within the scopes of alternatives C, D and/or E.

At some time in the future, a unit of the National Park System encompassing either one or several of these alternative concepts could make a significant contribution to

protection and public enjoyment of the Chesapeake Bay. While the alternatives are described in this study as individual concepts, many who commented on the draft study correctly observed that several concepts could be linked together. There are models for this at other locations within the National Park System, where several different sub-units are managed by the National Park Service, or a partner in association with the Park Service, as part of a larger unit. The sub-units typically protect and interpret key under-represented natural and cultural themes of the region. Existing park units neighboring the Bay (Fort McHenry National Monument, Colonial National Historical Park, and George Washington Birthplace, which each represent a narrow spectrum of Bay cultural themes) could be viewed as initial elements of such an approach.

However, there are no detailed, broadly supported site-specific proposals for any of alternatives C, D or E, or a combination thereof, at this time. As noted in the findings above, a finding on the feasibility of a potential future unit is wholly dependent upon site-specific analysis.

No further consideration and evaluation of these concepts as a potential Chesapeake Bay focused unit of the National Park System is necessary unless and until a specific proposal enjoying demonstrated state and local government, Chesapeake Executive Council and public support is advanced. Proposals suitable for future consideration would focus on those concepts (Alternatives C, D & E) and their core resources, or a combination of those concepts, determined through this study to preliminarily meet National Park Service criteria. Such proposals would clearly





articulate how the key elements of the relevant concepts described in this study are met. The National Park Service would ultimately consider and offer a finding on any such proposal relative to new unit criteria - with a particular emphasis on feasibility and management alternatives - and this study's findings and relevant concept descriptions.

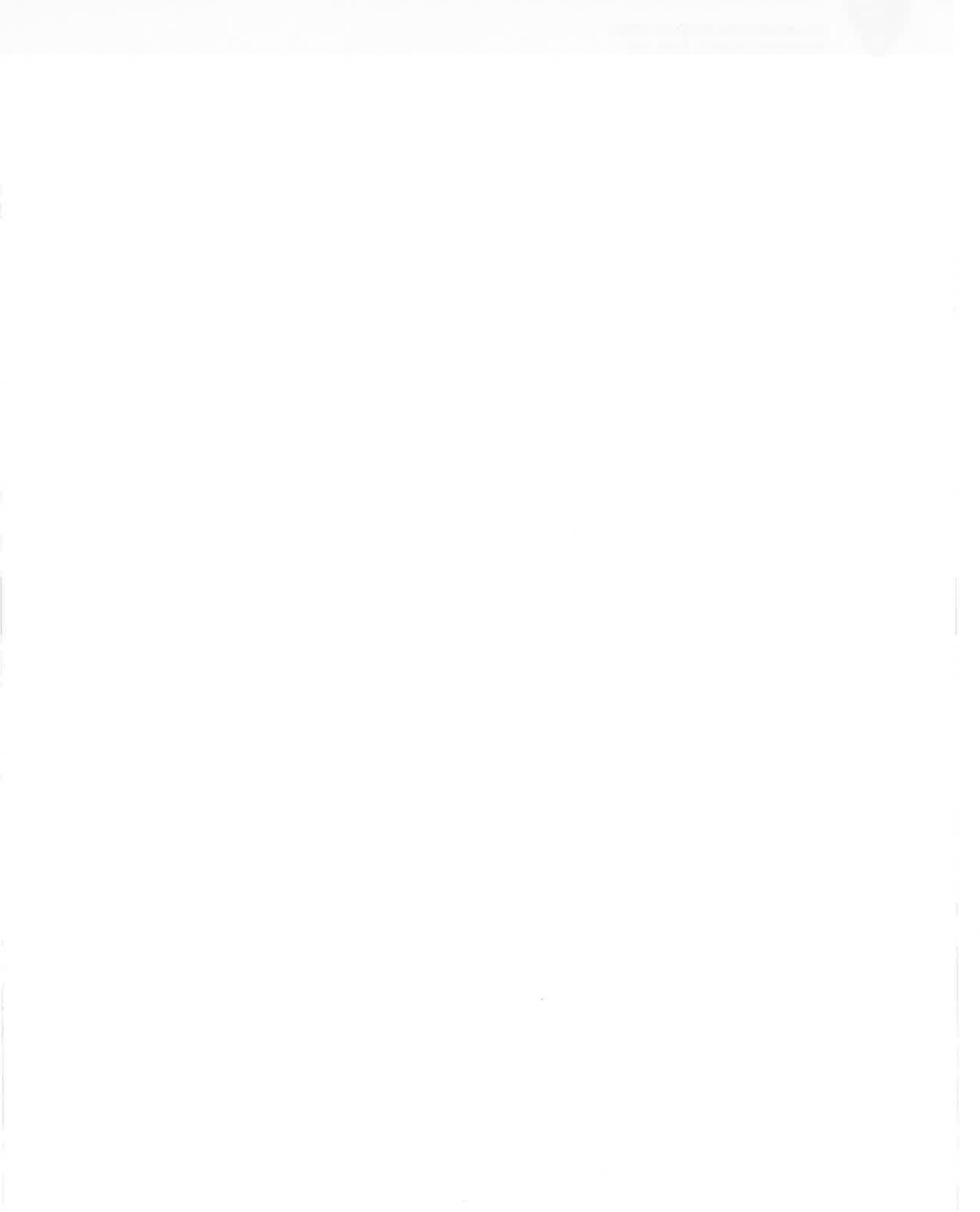
Next Steps

The preferred alternative described on the preceding pages and in the *Final Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Environmental Impact Statement* presents the National Park Service's professional judgment on how to represent the Chesapeake Bay within the National Park System. Based on the National Environmental Policy Act, a "Record of Decision" formally finalizing the study process will be issued thirty days after notice of the study's availability is published in the *Federal Register*.

The National Park Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Accordingly, it is the Secretary of the Interior who transmits and makes formal recommendations to Congress on National Park Service special resource studies. Such recommendations may factor in budget constraints and program priorities of the Department. It is anticipated that this study, along with a recommendation, will be transmitted to Congress by the Secretary shortly after the Record of Decision is finalized.

Implementation of the study's preferred alternative would require legislation to be passed by the Congress and signed by the President of the United States.

As "next steps" proceed, visit www.chesapeakestudy.org to check on progress.





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Chesapeake Bay Program Office
410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109
Annapolis, MD 21403

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