



Protecting National Park Landscapes in the Chesapeake

The Chesapeake watershed encompasses 64,000 square miles and almost 12,000 miles of shoreline in six states and the District of Columbia. More than 3,600 species of plants and animals live along the region's marshland, rivers, and streams. The largest estuary in North America, the Chesapeake Bay's land-to-water ratio – 2,800 square meters of land to every cubic meter of water – is the largest of any coastal body in the world, magnifying the impacts of land-based activities on aquatic health.

The National Park Service has a robust presence in the Chesapeake, including 54 national park sites, five national trails, seven national heritage areas, many national natural landmarks, and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network of more than 170 private and public natural and cultural sites.

Threats to the Chesapeake Landscape

One-third of the nitrogen pollution in Chesapeake waters originates as air pollution from power plants, vehicle emissions, chemical and manufacturing facilities, and other sources. The land and water impacts of this air pollution remain unregulated. Air pollutants increase the acidity of water and soil, help form ozone which damages forests and crops, and contaminate drinking water.

Sewage, stormwater runoff, excess fertilizer, and non-point source pollution from agriculture and

development add to the problem. Because air and water pollution do not respect geographic boundaries, this pollution directly impacts the region's ecological health.

Almost 17 million people make their homes in the Chesapeake landscape. Poorly-planned development increasingly fragments both natural and cultural landscapes. Farmland, forests, and wetlands are disappearing under asphalt. In recent years, Marcellus Shale gas development has emerged as a threat to the Chesapeake region's ecological health.

A New Vision for the Chesapeake Landscape

Restoring Chesapeake landscapes means protecting our lands, air and waters. The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) seeks to do the following:

- Expand national parkland protection throughout the region, and increase connectivity between protected areas
- Increase acreage in state and federal land conservation, easements, and best management practices programs, and increase connectivity among such areas
- Improve water quality
- Reduce air pollution

Protecting and Connecting Key Lands

NPCA led the successful campaign to add Fort Monroe National Monument in Hampton, Virginia to the National Park System. Anchoring the southwestern gateway to the Chesapeake Bay, this new park adds almost three miles of undeveloped shoreline to the protected landscape. NPCA is working to leverage both the Captain John Smith Chesapeake and the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trails to promote land conservation and connectivity along the James and Patapsco rivers. Neither trail currently has a lands base.

Working with local communities, NPCA seeks to establish a new Harriet Tubman National Historical Park on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The proposal includes land adjacent to and within the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Cambridge, created for migratory birds and composed of tidal marshes, freshwater ponds, and deciduous forests. The proposed park would add more than 350 acres to the protected landscape.

NPCA will work with state and regional partners to expand land protection via state programs like Maryland's Rural Legacy Program and Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit Program. NPCA also seeks to leverage land protection and promote connectivity in the reauthorization of the federal Farm and Transportation bills.

Choosing Clean Water

The ecological health of our parks in the Chesapeake depends upon the health of the waters flowing through and around them, with some parks like Shenandoah protecting critical headwater streams. NPCA is a founding member of the Choose Clean Water Coalition, established with about 200 local, state, and national organizations to protect and restore water quality throughout the Chesapeake. NPCA is a strong advocate for implementation of the Chesapeake's Total Maximum Daily Load program – our best opportunity to address water pollution problems facing the landscape in a comprehensive manner. NPCA is advocating for a new federal rule to reduce storm water runoff into streams, rivers, and the Bay, and for tighter oversight of Marcellus Shale development.



Clean Air for Parks, People, and the Chesapeake

Among the greatest threats to the region's ecological health is air pollution originating from coal-fired power plants. In addition to releasing toxic mercury and lead into the air, these power plants pollute the waterways with nitrogen oxides which feed low-oxygen "dead zones." Using the special protections for national parks in federal clean air laws, NPCA works to prevent construction of new coal-burning power plants and to force aging plants to meet modern standards – actions that provide region-wide benefits.

Protecting Chesapeake Landscapes

The national park presence in the Chesapeake provides value-added leverage in campaigns to protect the region's historic and iconic landscapes from the mountains to the sea, and to improve the air and water quality on which the health of the parks depend. Despite the challenges faced by the intense development in the watershed, national parks provide compelling opportunities for advancing landscape-scale conservation.



Sunrise viewed from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, which protects critical headwater streams of the Chesapeake Bay. ©Erin St. John/NPCA

For More Information, please contact

Pam Goddard, Chesapeake & Virginia Program Manager
202.454.3365, pgoddard@npca.org
Or visit NPCA online at: www.npcap.org

Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting our national parks. With more than 600,000 members and supporters, NPCA is the largest independent, membership organization dedicated to protecting the natural, cultural, and historic treasures of our National Park System.