

Creating the John Smith Trail

What would you get if you combined an interest in history, a love of the Chesapeake, and a desire to provide more opportunities for public access to the bay, for recreation, and for conservation of treasured landscapes?

The Capt. John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

At least that's what Gilbert Grosvenor, William Baker, and Patrick Noonan envisioned as they talked about how to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown and Capt. John Smith's exploration of the bay.

In their minds' eye they saw a Chesapeake Bay watershed much like the Native Americans enjoyed before the Europeans arrived - the one Capt. Smith observed during his voyages of discovery. A "goodly Bay," in his words, teeming with fish and wildlife; with healthy waters and abundant forests, wetlands, shorelines and open spaces; a place of natural wonders and discovery, rich in cultural traditions; preserved for the benefit of future generations.

So they went to work. They created a coalition and called it The Friends of the Capt. John Smith Trail. They formed partnerships throughout the Chesapeake region with local governments, businesses, interested groups, and individuals. They intrigued lawmakers and gained the interest of Congress. So began the process of creating the Capt. John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Legislative History

Senators Paul Sarbanes of Maryland and John W. Warner of Virginia, of different parties but Senate colleagues for many years, joined forces in 2005 on a bill to authorize the National Park Service to determine whether Capt. John Smith's exploration of the Chesapeake warranted National Historic Trail status. The legislation passed with strong, bipartisan support.

On August 2, 2005 President George W. Bush signed the bill, and the park service went to work to study the significance of Smith's exploration, and the feasibility of establishing the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Less than a year later, in March 2006 The National Park Service's National Landmarks Committee and the National Park System Advisory Board issued its report. They concluded that Smith's voyages are nationally significant, a crucial step in the process to establish the trail.

With that finding, Congress again took up the idea.

How the bill moved through Congress

April 6, 2006 Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) introduces Senate Bill 2568 -legislation to establish the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Senators John Warner (R-VA), George Allen (R-VA), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Joseph Biden (D-DE), Tom Carper (D-DE), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Rick Santorum (R-PA) join him as co-sponsors. The bill would designate "a series of water routes extending approximately 3000 miles along the Chesapeake Bay and the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay in the States of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and in the District of Columbia, that traces the 1607 and 1608 voyages of Captain John Smith."

May 16, 2006 The Senate's Subcommittee on National Parks holds a hearing to receive testimony on S.B. 2568.

May 24, 2006 The Senate's Subcommittee on National Parks passes S.B. 2568. The bill now moves to the Senate floor.

May 25, 2006 Rep. Jo Ann Davis (R VA-1) introduces House companion bill House Bill 5466. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Resources (Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands). Twenty-seven representatives join Rep. Davis as co-sponsors. They are:

Rep Bartlett, Roscoe G. <i>MD-6</i>	Rep Boucher, Rick <i>VA-9</i>	Rep Cantor, Eric <i>VA-7</i>	Rep Cardin, Benjamin <i>L. MD-3</i>
Rep Castle, Michael N. <i>DE</i>	Rep Cummings, Elijah E. <i>MD-7</i>	Rep Davis, Tom <i>VA-11</i>	Rep Drake, Thelma <i>D. VA-2</i>
Rep Forbes, J. Randy <i>VA-4</i>	Rep Gilchrest, Wayne T. <i>MD-1</i>	Rep Goodlatte, Bob <i>VA-6</i>	Rep Holden, Tim <i>PA-17</i>
Rep Hoyer, Steny H. <i>MD-5</i>	Rep Moran, James <i>P. VA-8</i>	Rep Pitts, Joseph R. <i>PA-16</i>	Rep Platts, Todd <i>Russell PA-19</i>
Rep Ruppertsberger, C. A. Dutch <i>MD-2</i>	Rep Scott, Robert <i>C. VA-3</i>	Rep Sherwood, Don <i>PA-10</i>	Rep Shuster, Bill <i>PA-9</i>
Rep Van Hollen, Chris <i>MD-8</i>	Rep Wolf, Frank R. <i>VA-10</i>	Rep Wynn, Albert <i>Russell MD-4</i>	

July 17, 2006 The National Park Service completes the feasibility study for the proposed Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. The study group finds the trail historically significant, desirable, and feasible and said the proposed trail "fully meets all the criteria" for a National Historic Trail. It recommends the proposed trail be authorized by Congress and notes that a federal designation would provide a structure that takes advantage of the regional nature of the trail and the many organizations interested in and associated with the history of Captain John Smith's explorations of the Chesapeake Bay.

September 15, 2006 The Department of Interior transmits the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Study Report and Environmental Assessment to Congress. In transmitting the letter, the Bush Administration endorses the John Smith

Trail and finds that it meets the criteria for National Historic Trails. The Administration found that public interest in the study has been "exceptionally high" throughout the study process.

September 28, 2006 The Subcommittee on National Parks in the House Resources Committee holds a hearing for H.R. 5466. The hearing is a major step forward in the trail establishment process. The Bush Administration, Rep. Jo Ann Davis (*VA-1*), Rep. Thelma Drake (*VA-2*), Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (*MD-1*), and Pat Noonan of The Conservation Fund testified in support of the trail.

December 6, 2006 The House passes H.R. 5466

December 8, 2006 The Senate passes H.R. 5466

Dec. 19, 2006 Marking the 400th anniversary of the departure of the Jamestown settlers from England, President George W. Bush signed a bipartisan bill to create the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the nation's first all-water National Historic Trail.