

# CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

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*Native Lands (York County) Park near Wrightsville, PA, is the site of a former Susquehannock Village. It is located behind the Zimmerman Center for Heritage, the first official visitor contact station on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.*

## Smith Trail has come a long way in 10 years

Visitors, new sites continue to rack up miles on first national water-based trail.

By LARA LUTZ

Along the James River, an outfitter in the Richmond area now weaves tales of the 17th-century Chesapeake Bay into paddling tours and fishing trips.

Farther north, in Virginia's Caledon State Park on the Potomac River, kayakers can stay overnight at paddle-in campsites where none existed three years ago.

Still farther north, a new kayak launch on the lower Susquehanna River offers free access to the Bay's largest tributary. A large sign identifies the stone building there as a visitor contact station on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

These are some of the many developments along the 3,000-mile water route throughout the Bay and its rivers that was created 10 years ago next month to mark the historic exploration of the region by English settlers four centuries ago.

The trail, established by an act of Congress on December 19, 2006, is arguably the most ambitious network for environmental and cultural tourism



*Sultana Education Foundation President Drew McMullen, center, with Vice President Chris Cerino, right, and Director of Paddling Projects John Mann show a projected route of some of John Smith's travels on the floor of the foundation's new center in Chestertown, MD. With a scale of 1 inch to the mile, the map is an accurate depiction of the Bay, on which various data can be projected. Photos / Dave Harp*

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## PA municipalities begin uphill paddle to reach runoff goals, one stroke at a time

Methods to curtail stormwater runoff varies by location as officials realize they have the responsibility for projects and their funding.

By RONA KOBELL

Pennsylvania is beginning to tackle its mammoth and long-neglected stormwater runoff problems, beginning the work in some unlikely places.

Blair County, a good 180 miles from the Chesapeake Bay, has begun to corral the various municipalities within its 340,000 mostly forested acres to work on cleaning the runoff from their developed areas.

Lancaster, a city so firmly rooted in the past that Amish buggies still ply its streets, has become a model nationwide for green streets and green roofs.

And Harrisburg, which declared bankruptcy and couldn't even air-condition its own city hall five years ago, has managed to restructure itself and begin to unclog its drains. Those efforts are starting to intercept at least a little of the polluted runoff bound for the Susquehanna; instead, the rain soaks into the ground, gets reused or is otherwise kept out of the degraded river.

Still, it's just a drop in the proverbial bucket. Pennsylvania has achieved only 3 percent of its total urban and suburban stormwater infiltration goal. While the state's biggest Bay impact comes from its agricultural sector, it also produces more nitrogen-laden urban runoff than any other, with 17.1 million pounds in 2015 according to federal-state Bay Program estimates. That's almost half of the total nitrogen load from stormwater for all six states and the District of Columbia, and far short of its goals of 13.1 million pounds by 2017 and 10.3 million pounds by 2025.

Complicating matters is that the Keystone State is home to more than

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launched in the Bay watershed.

Based on the travels of Englishman John Smith, who explored and mapped the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers 1607 to 1609, it was the first national water-based trail in the United States. The National Park Service launched a National Water Trails System six years later.

Managed by the Park Service, pieces of the Smith trail have been slowly coming together, forming the start of a regional network of places that invite people to experience the Bay's waterways and become more interested in protecting them. In a number of ways, sites on the trail tell Smith's story, highlight American Indian cultures past and present, and provide a window on environmental change.

The trail traverses the length of the Bay and branches up its rivers in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia. In 2012, approximately 840 miles of trails were added on sections of rivers, including the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania, where Smith did not travel but were part of the Indian landscape in the Bay region in the early 1600s.

Along the waterways, the trail encompasses approximately 180 land-based sites with interpretation and resources, such as public programs, exhibits, launch sites or settings in which the landscape is still similar to the early 1600s. Almost all of these sites are owned and managed by partner organizations such as state parks, nonprofits and Virginia Indian tribes — rather than by the Park Service itself.

"At its best, the trail has an authenticity to its landscape, an appearance associated with the early 17th century," said Jonathan Doherty, assistant superintendent for the National Park Service Chesapeake. "It's about offering sites with a sense of history that's real, not manufactured."

But the Smith trail is far from complete. During its first 10 years, the Park Service has focused mostly on planning and developing trail resources along just two rivers, the James and Potomac. The James plan was completed in 2011 and the Potomac in 2015. Plans for the Susquehanna are under way.

The river plans deliver an outline of possible projects — "an encyclopedia of good ideas," said Matt Jagunick, an outdoor recreation planner for the Park Service.

But achieving the goals outlined in those plans can take years, depending on local partnerships and available funds. On the lower James, the trail's partner groups say they have achieved more than 70 percent of the goals set for the lower James in the 2011 work plan. Efforts to flesh out the Potomac

plan have just begun.

As a result, public visibility and the integration of trail-related themes at any given setting vary widely. The impact on a visitor's experience is unclear.

While national parks usually gauge their effectiveness using visitation figures, managers have no regional estimate of the number of people who use the Smith trail. As a network of

accident. Many people visit trail sites without realizing it. It is hoped that they learn about the trail while there. But they might also just soak in the scenery or appreciate a free, convenient place to launch a kayak or canoe.

The geographic scope of the trail, and its many independently managed sites, creates both obstacles and potential. The widespread effort has encouraged groups to combine resources in an era of limited

still be found floating in the Bay and its rivers: 10 bright yellow "smart" buoys, set out by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration at places where Smith's shallop passed.

By phone or the Internet, the buoys transmit navigational and scientific information, as well as Smith-related tales.

A recording from the buoy near Annapolis, for instance, narrates Smith's comments from 1608: "The



The Zimmerman Center for Heritage, near Wrightsville, PA, has a floating canoe/kayak launch that provides access to the Susquehanna River. Photo / Dave Harp

independent sites, there's no single entry gate — sometimes no gate at all — where visitors can be counted.

The Smith trail is not alone in this conundrum. Other trails, like the Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail and the state-based Virginia Oyster Trail, link a variety of independent sites that make a collective accounting of visitors — and expenditures — quite difficult.

### Getting the message out

To date, one of the best indicators of trail usage is the number of visits to Smith trail geocaches, a family-friendly "treasure hunt" using GPS coordinates. Since 2012, nearly 12,000 visits to 54 Smith trail geocaches have been logged in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, and each logged visit usually represents more than one person.

But this captures only a subset of people who may have traveled the Smith trail, either deliberately or by

government budgets and philanthropic donations. But it can also be a challenge to plan, develop and manage the trail in a steady, consistent way.

The trail was created — on paper — just months before a replica of Smith's boat was launched from Historic Jamestown, commemorating the 400th anniversary of his travels. Sponsored by the Sultana Education Foundation in Chestertown, MD, its crew of 12 modern adventurers followed parts of Smith's route, rowing and sailing the small, open shallop through broad water and narrow creeks for 121 days.

Drew McMullen, president of the Sultana foundation, said that his organization embraced the trail from its beginning. "As we set up the voyage around the Bay, we were talking to people everywhere and basically being ambassadors for the trail. It went really well," McMullen said.

The trail's first visible signposts were placed on the water. They can

western shore by which we sailed we found all along well watered, but very mountainous and barren, the valleys very fertile, but extreme thick of small wood so well as trees and much frequented with wolves, bears, deer, and other wild beasts."

But the trail development focus soon shifted to the shore.

"Some people will never be in a boat, so we needed land-based nodes where people could still have a trail experience," Doherty said.

Work began first on the James River. The Park Service looked for partners — nonprofits, government agencies, Indian tribes and private businesses — that could give the trail on-the-ground meaning. They identified locations of Indian communities where Smith stopped, places that evoke a sense of the early-1600s landscape, and organizations that

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could help communicate trail themes or get people on the water.

A plan was released in 2011 that identified four focus areas: the James River Oxbows, Chickahominy River and River Front Park, Jamestown and Powhatan Creek, and the Pagan River and Town of Smithfield.

As a result of these efforts, 16 public access sites, mostly for paddle craft, have been added or improved. Several outfitters and parks have added trail interpretation to their public programs. Kiosks and wayside signage mark more than a dozen trail locations on the tidal James and its tributaries.

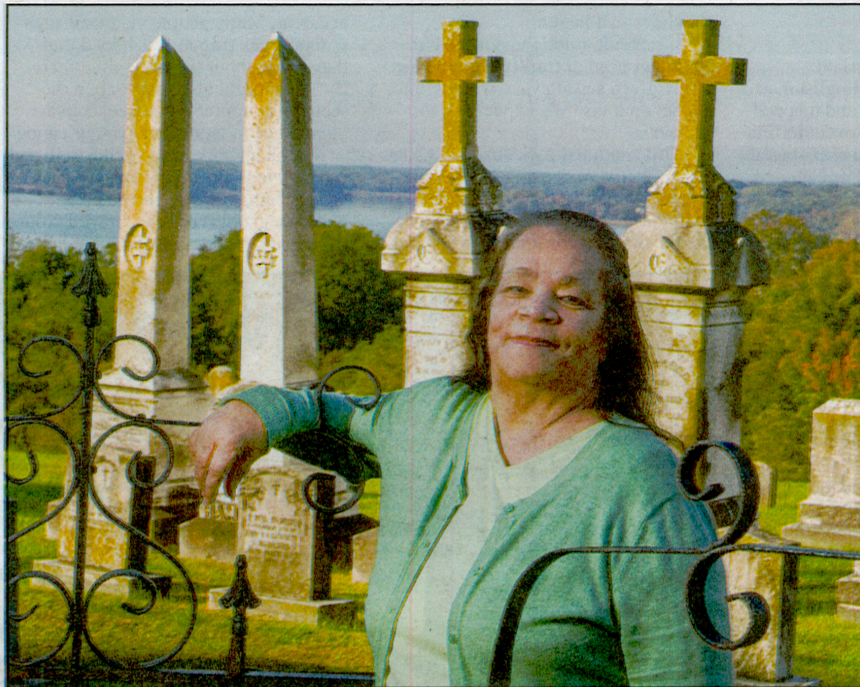
Planning for the tidal Potomac trail spur began in 2013. It posed special challenges because of the densely developed landscape along some stretches of the river and the overlapping presence of three other national trails.

"We have many layers of history here and there's no place where you are ever telling just one story," Doherty said. "That's the beauty and the complication of the Chesapeake."

Mervin Savoy, a member of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, said that she hopes the trail will help tell the Piscataway story along the Potomac.

"Smith would not have survived without native help. There would be no Smith trail without us," said Savoy, who sits on the trail's advisory board.

The trail's mission dovetails with the tribe's existing tourism effort, called Through Piscataway Eyes. "When you are on the Smith trail, you are of course



Mervin Savoy, a member of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, said that she hopes the trail will help tell the Piscataway story along the Potomac. Photo / Dave Harp

going to come across our village sites," Savoy said. "It's all one thing."

The grounds of Chapel Point State Park are an important part of the Piscataway landscape. Above the park, a village once stood on a hill, now owned by the Catholic Church, which overlooks the Port Tobacco and Potomac rivers.

Smith stopped there in 1608.

Savoy would like to realize long-discussed plans for an interpretive site and community center at the park. Even though she wishes that Piscataway interests alone were enough to spur progress, Savoy said the Smith trail might provide the impetus.

"It just won't pass muster without it," she said.

John Wilson, associate director of stewardship for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, said the state doesn't have the resources now to fund such a project.

"If NPS could bring some of those resources to the table, that would be great. We're certainly supportive," Wilson said.

#### Help from all sectors

In the meantime, the department may be adding paddle-in camp sites at state parks on the lower Potomac.

"We see the development of these sites as a great asset and something that will make the trail more real," Wilson said. "But we want to make sure we have the capacity to manage these things. We want to set it up for success."

The Park Service has some funds available to help trail partners improve shoreline access, enhance Smith trail themes and conduct related youth programs, like the Baltimore-based Kids in Kayaks.

From 2012 through 2015, Smith trail projects received approximately \$2.1

million, but partner organizations have also raised funds and committed staff and financial resources for long-term operations and maintenance.

The Zimmerman Center for Heritage, on the Susquehanna River near Wrightsville, PA, became the first official visitor contact station on the entire Smith trail in August. It not only offers programming, but serves as a trailhead where visitors can receive detailed information about other trail locations and ways to experience the river. It has a large National Park Service sign out front, despite the fact that it is not Park Service property.

Jonathan Pinkerton, vice president of the nonprofit Susquehanna Heritage, which operates the center, said that serving as a contact

station has already improved programming and visitor amenities. They've added a kayak launch and waterfront pavilion, improved the visitor reception area, added signage and developed trail programs. The Park Service provided approximately \$160,000 of a \$1.5 million budget for these improvements, which were also supported by funds from other sources.

The center also received one year of staffing help from the Chesapeake Conservation Corp.

"That happened because of our partnership with NPS," Pinkerton said.

Involvement with the Smith trail has led to greater emphasis on the environment, alongside the center's focus on history and heritage.

"It has solidified the notion of environmental stewardship in our programming," Pinkerton said. "It's not just about Smith and his voyages, or native American sites. It's also about the landscape and how we protect this resource for future generations."

The Park Service sign at the front of the building is attracting local attention and drawing visitors seeking a national park passport stamp, Pinkerton said. The center is also able to offer the popular Park Service Junior Ranger program, which brought in more than 300 students during its first year.

At the Sultana Education Foundation, in Chestertown, MD, staff has



A hill above Chapel Point State Park in Port Tobacco, MD, was once a Piscataway village visited by Capt. John Smith in 1608. The site, which overlooks the Port Tobacco and Potomac rivers, is now owned by the Catholic Church. Photo / Dave Harp

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been highlighting Smith trail themes since their recreated shallop took to the water in 2007.

"It's a baseline for what the Bay was, before we messed it up," McMullen said. "You can't teach environmental science without teaching history. It's a fundamental part of our methodology to combine the two."

In the spring of 2017, the foundation's new headquarters — where a large map of the Bay is built into the floor and animated with lights to show Smith's route — will become the second visitor contact station on the trail.

The Park Service did not provide financial assistance for the building or floor map, but has helped with program development and teacher training. In 2008, it provided the Sultana Foundation with approximately \$85,000 to support Smith trail expeditions for the public and to develop the Chester and Sassafras rivers water trails as components of the Smith trail.

### Preserving Werowocomoco

A major site in Virginia is slated for attention in the coming year: a 264-acre tract of rural, riverside land. It was once the location of Werowocomoco, a spiritually and politically important Indian community on what

*"I want to make the trail a national park. There's no reason it shouldn't be. When people think of great landscapes in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay should be among them."*

— Joel Dunn, President of the Chesapeake Conservancy

is now the York River. John Smith was brought to Werowocomoco as a captive to meet the Indian leader Powhatan. It is also where Smith later claimed to have met Pocahontas.

The Park Service recently purchased Werowocomoco for \$7.1 million, but it is not yet open to the public. A planning process, including public input, is expected to begin in early 2017 to determine how to protect the site while hosting a potentially large number of future visitors.

Werowocomoco is the only property that has been acquired specifically for the Smith trail. Joel Dunn, president of the Chesapeake Conservancy, said that the trail has put landscape conservation efforts in a larger context.

"The trail has given us a framework for the interpretation of the Chesapeake, its rivers and history that we

didn't have before," Dunn said. "It's engineering a collective impact."

A conservation strategy for the Smith trail released by the Park Service in 2013 analyzes the landscape for places that are especially important for maintaining or enhancing visitor experiences. Relatively large, natural landscapes are critical and are often not fully protected by conservation agreements.

The initial list of conservation focus areas includes places like the upper Rappahannock River in Virginia and the upper Nanticoke River on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Coordinating conservation efforts in large areas, where many organizations are at work, can be challenging, much like the development of the trail itself. Many partners are needed for success because of limited government

funding, but can an undertaking with so many owners and locations ever achieve a solid regional identity with broad public recognition?

Dunn suggested that one way to overcome that hurdle would be to boost the trail's status.

"I want to make the trail a national park. There's no reason it shouldn't be," Dunn said. "When people think of great landscapes in the United States, the Chesapeake Bay should be among them."

Dunn said that national parks get dedicated line items in the federal budget. National trails do not.

"Right now, the trail is nested in among [the budget for] some 20 other national trails, so it's difficult to get more money," Dunn said.

Gaining national park status, he added, could lead to greater, more reliable funding, and step up the pace of trail development.

Doherty counsels patience, saying it takes time to develop such a sprawling, complex project. The Appalachian Trail, he pointed out, took approximately 75 years to become the trail as we know it today.

"For a whole host of reasons, things take time, from the Smith trail to conservation efforts in the Chesapeake as a whole," Doherty said. "It also takes commitment and people with a vision. We still have a ways to go."



Jonathan Pinkerton, vice president of the nonprofit Susquehanna Heritage, which operates the Zimmerman Center for Heritage, and Betsy Buckingham, the organization's development and outreach director greet visitors at the center, left. Pinkerton said that serving as a contact station has already improved programming and visitor amenities. They've added a kayak launch and waterfront pavilion, improved the visitor reception area, added signage and developed trail programs. Photos / Dave Harp