

To: Chesapeake Conservancy

**From: Steve Raabe, President
OpinionWorks LLC**

Date: August 12, 2022

Subject: New Regional Poll Findings: Chesapeake National Recreation Area

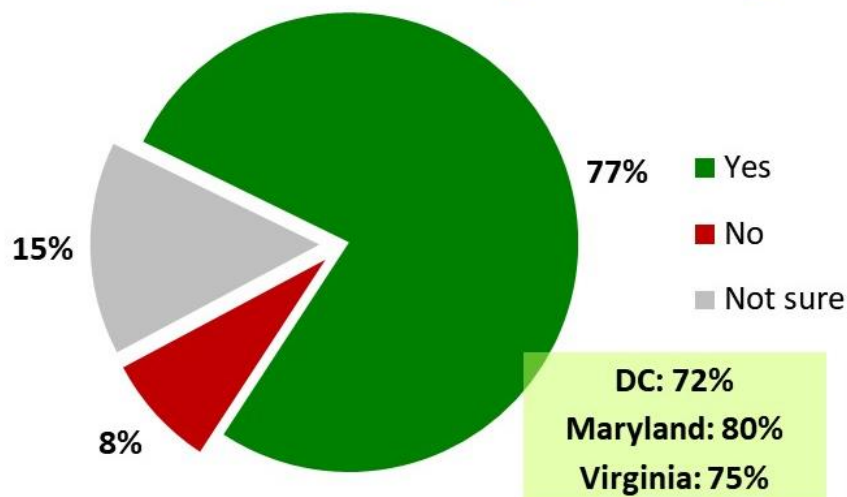
This new poll of Mid-Atlantic residents finds overwhelming support for a proposal to create the Chesapeake National Recreation Area (CNRA), a new National Park Service unit focused on the Chesapeake Bay. The support is profound, reaching 83% of all residents, and is consistent across Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. Support achieves near consensus levels, never dropping below three-quarters within any political or population subgroup in the survey sample.

These findings are based on our representative survey of 1,527 residents of Maryland, Virginia, and D.C., conducted online and by telephone July 2-11, 2022. This regional survey has a potential margin of sampling error of $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level. A detailed methodology statement is found at the end of this memo.

Overwhelming Support for Creating the Chesapeake National Recreation Area

As a starting point, this regional survey identifies broad support for creating a national park focused on the Chesapeake Bay. More than three-quarters of the region's residents (77%) think there should be such a park "that recognizes the natural, recreational, and cultural significance of the Chesapeake." Fewer than one in ten (8%) oppose that concept. The remaining 15% said they were not sure.

There Should be a National Park Focused on the Chesapeake Bay



Today, there is not a national park focused on the Chesapeake Bay. Do you think there should be a national park that recognizes the natural, recreational, and cultural significance of the Chesapeake?

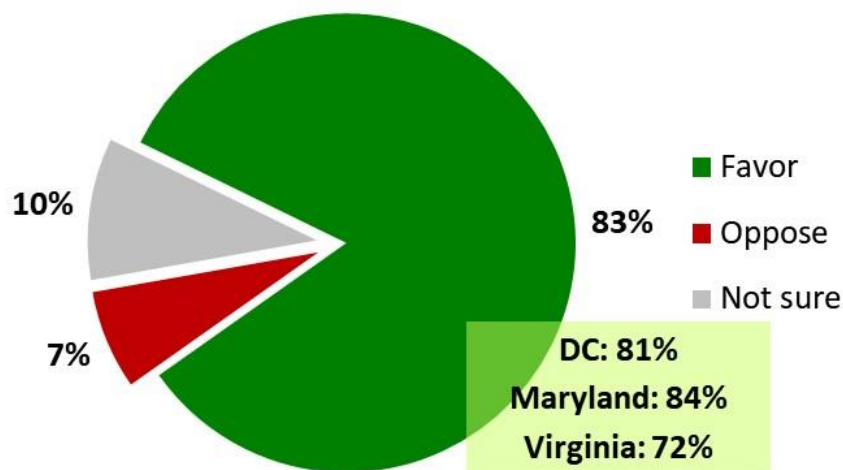
The survey went on to offer this description of the proposed Chesapeake National Recreation Area (CNRA):

There is now an effort underway to designate a collection of new and existing parks and public lands along the Bay as the new Chesapeake National Recreation Area, or CNRA. Places that highlight the Bay across Maryland and Virginia, such as state and local parks and wildlife refuges, could become part of the CNRA and benefit from the resources of the National Park Service to help improve the visitor experience, improve public access to the Bay, protect the natural environment, and tell an interesting story about our region.

After hearing this description, an overwhelming 83% of the public favors establishing the Chesapeake National Recreation Area. Only 7% are opposed, and 10% remain unsure.

Support for the CNRA knows no geographic boundaries: 84% of Marylanders, 82% of Virginians, and 81% of DC residents support this proposal.

Support for Creating the Chesapeake National Recreation Area



There is now an effort underway to designate a collection of new and existing parks and public lands along the Bay as the new Chesapeake National Recreation Area, or CNRA. Places that highlight the Bay across Maryland and Virginia, such as state and local parks and wildlife refuges, could become part of the CNRA and benefit from the resources of the National Park Service to help improve the visitor experience, improve public access to the Bay, protect the natural environment, and tell an interesting story about our region.

Based on this description, would you favor or oppose creating the Chesapeake National Recreation Area?

Support for the CNRA proposal is cross-cutting politically, too, with 89% of Democrats, 85% of Republicans, and 80% of Independent voters all in support. Active voters are most supportive: At 86%, support is slightly more intense among people who always or usually vote, compared to the 83% measured among the broader general public.

Similarly, this very high level of support is consistent regardless of age, race or ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status – never dropping below three-quarters within any population subgroup.

Reasons for This Overwhelming Support for the CNRA

Asked in an open-ended question to say what they like about the proposal, the region’s residents are most prone to appreciate the impact the CNRA could have in helping to protect the Bay and conserve sensitive natural areas. But they also are likely to see the CNRA as a job creator, to increase awareness of the Bay, to provide better access to natural areas, and to encourage future generations to become better stewards of the natural environment. Many people simply said this is a good idea, or they like “everything about it.”

The table below summarizes these open-ended survey responses.

What People Like about the CNRA Proposal

Categorized Responses

Protects the Bay/Conserves nature	28%
Good/excellent thing to do	15%
Creates jobs	14%
Like everything about it	12%
Increases awareness/education about the Bay	10%
Better access through new sites, parks	6%
Encourages future generations	4%
Increases investment/tourism	4%
Invites exploration	2%
Showcases history/culture	2%
A common/better visitor experience	1%

What do you like about this proposal? (Open-ended)

Questions People Have about the Proposal

Asked what questions they have about the proposal, nearly half (43%) said they have no questions – indicative again of the very high level of support for the proposal. Where people did have questions, they most wanted to know the cost of the project and how long it will take, as well as the amenities it will offer and the role it will play protecting sensitive spaces and wildlife. Here are the categorized responses.

Questions People Have about the CNRA Proposal

Categorized Responses

Cost/Fees/How it is paid for/Tax impacts	18%
It’s a good idea/I like it/Want to help	5%
How long it will take/When it will start	5%
Will it protect the environment/avoid further damage	4%
Amenities, features to be offered	3%
How wildlife will be protected	3%

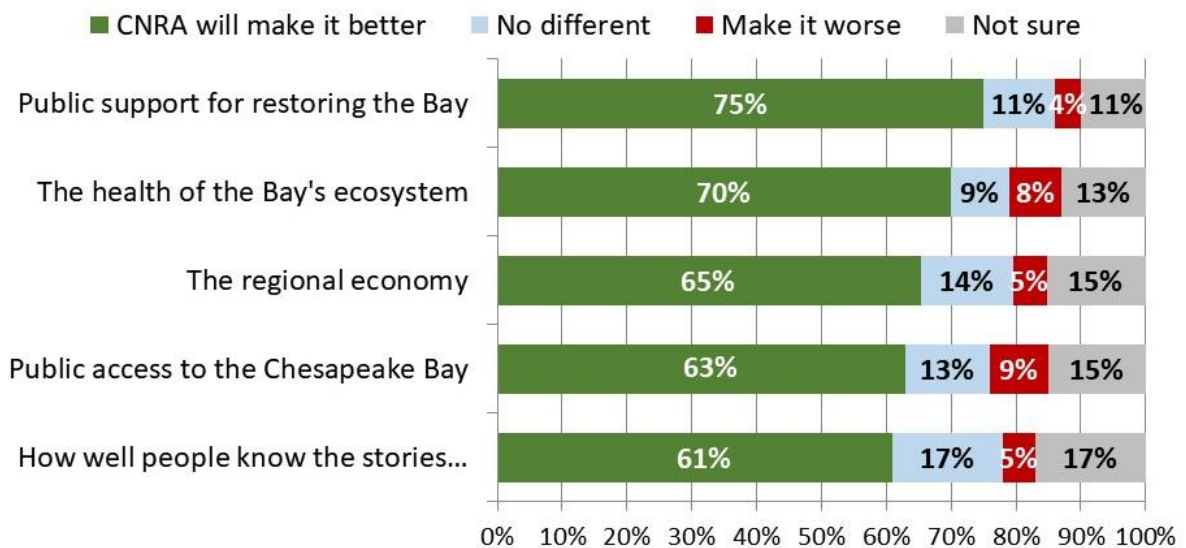
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Will it take people’s land?	2%
How this proposal will be accomplished	2%
What are the job and economic impacts	2%
Why do we need it/We don’t need it	2%
How big it will be/Exact locations/How many areas	2%
Traffic/Too much visitation	1%

What questions do you have about this proposal? (Open-ended)

The public feels a range of things will be better with the creation of the CNRA, from the region’s economy to public access to the Bay to how well the stories of the region’s peoples are told. Each of these factors will be improved in the eyes of the public. But the greatest benefit will come in public support for restoring the Bay, which 75% believe would be improved by the CNRA. This chart summarizes all five impacts we tested.

Impact of the CNRA



If the Chesapeake Natural Recreation Area was created, would it make each of these things better, worse, or no different?

*"How well people know the stories of Native American peoples, free and enslaved Blacks, watermen, and others"

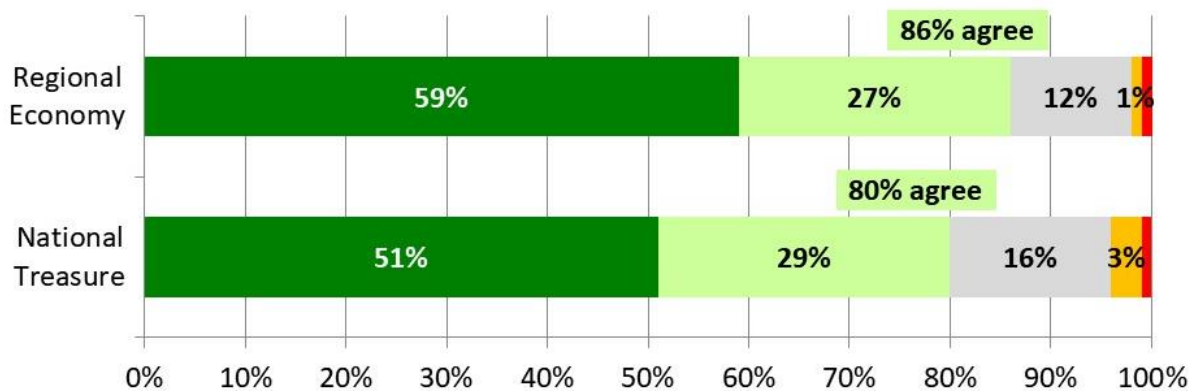
The Importance of the Chesapeake Bay

Residents of the Mid-Atlantic are familiar with the Chesapeake Bay and its importance to the region. But the magnitude of that importance in the public’s mind is simply impressive and helps explain why such strong support exists for the CNRA proposal.

- A resounding 86% of residents agree with the statement, “The Chesapeake Bay is important to our regional economy.” Nearly six in ten (59%) agree *strongly*.
- Perhaps more significant to this proposal, 80% of residents agree that “The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure just like Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, or Yosemite.” More than half of residents (51%) *strongly* agree with this statement. That puts the Bay in rare company and certainly helps explain why residents believe it is deserving of national park status.

Near Consensus on Bay’s Importance

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral or not sure ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, are neutral, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements about the Chesapeake Bay?

The Chesapeake Bay is important to our regional economy.

The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure just like Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, or Yosemite.

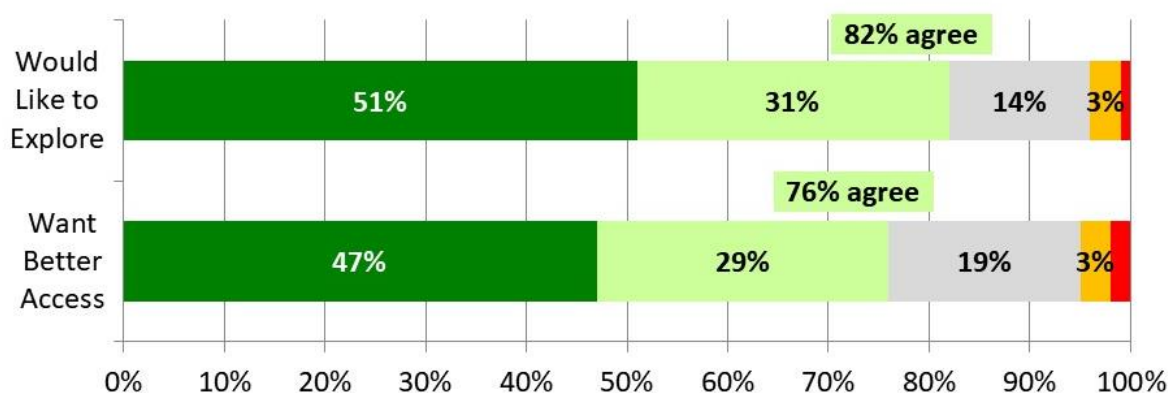
A Desire for Greater Access to the Bay

Residents not only value the Bay as a resource and a national treasure, but they want to explore it. And most believe there should be better access to the Bay. The interest is widespread.

- More than eight in ten (82%) agree with the statement, “I would like to explore the parks and cultural sites along the Chesapeake Bay.” Half (51%) strongly feel with this impulse to explore.
- More than three-quarters (76%) think that “There should be better access to the Chesapeake Bay for boating, fishing, or just picnicking and relaxing for everyone.” Almost half (47%) strongly agree.

Desire for Greater Access to the Bay

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral or not sure ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, are neutral, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements about the Chesapeake Bay?

I would like to explore the parks and cultural sites along the Chesapeake Bay.

There should be better access to the Chesapeake Bay for boating, fishing, or just picnicking and relaxing for everyone.

In keeping with this desire to explore, survey respondents strongly endorsed two other activities that the CNRA would help make possible.

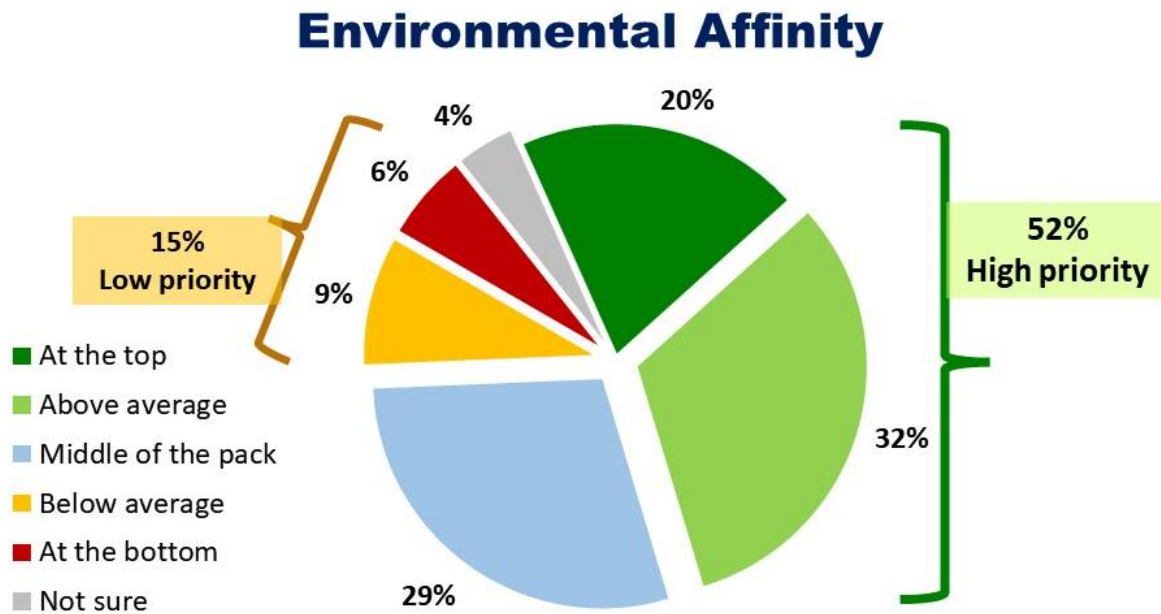
- Seventy percent (70%) said they would like to explore park sites along the Bay by boat.
- Three-quarters (75%) would like to “experience the cultural diversity and history of our region at park sites along the Bay.”

Some Context: High Environmental Affinity and Respect for the National park Service

Two other factors may help explain the very high level of support for the concept of the Chesapeake National Recreation Area.

First, residents throughout the Mid-Atlantic region place great importance on protecting the natural environment. Asked where they rank this priority against “all the issues and challenges facing the region today,” a 52% majority place it at the top of their list or as an above-average priority. By contrast, only 15% place the natural environment below average or at the bottom of their priority list.

Among those for whom the natural environment is an above-average or top priority, support for the CNRA skyrockets to 92%.

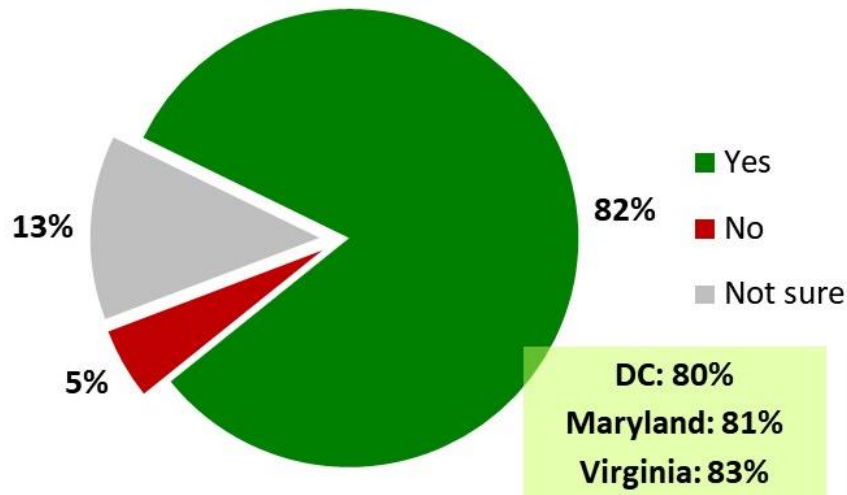


When you consider all the issues and challenges facing this region today, where does protecting the natural environment rank on that priority list for you?

Second, the National Park Service is very well regarded as a steward of America’s natural and cultural treasures. Fully 82% believe that the National Park Service does a good job caring for the nation’s natural and cultural treasures – a number that holds consistent across the region’s three major jurisdictions.

Trust the National Park Service

Caring for America's Natural and Cultural Treasures



Overall, do you trust the National Park Service to do a good job caring for America's natural and cultural treasures?

Conclusion

This poll demonstrates enormous support for the proposal to create a Chesapeake National Recreation Area. An overwhelming 83% of residents from Western Maryland and Southwest Virginia all the way through the region's tidewater areas support this proposal. The central place of the Chesapeake Bay in this region, its stature as a national treasure, and the desire of people to better understand and explore its many historic, cultural, and recreational sites help explain such strong support.

How This Poll was Conducted

A total of 1,527 interviews were conducted among adult residents of D.C., Maryland, and Virginia July 2-11, 2022. Residents were surveyed online, and by live telephone interviewers who reached residents on both wireless and landline telephones. This blended sampling approach helps ensure the poll best represents all segments of the public. Sampling targets were adhered to throughout the interviewing process to ensure that the sample represented the public geographically, politically, and for key demographic indicators such as gender, age, and race or ethnicity. Following interviewing, statistical weights were applied to ensure the sample most closely mirrored the characteristics of the population of each state, D.C., and the region as a whole. This regional poll produces a margin of sampling error no greater than $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level, meaning that at least 19 times out of 20 the actual results would differ by no more than that margin if every resident of the region had been interviewed.

Brief Background on OpinionWorks

Based in Maryland, OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies at the state and local level across the country. Since 2007 we have been the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun* newspaper and have polled for numerous other media, institutions of higher education, and public interest advocates throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. We are engaged by state and local government agencies from Delaware to Oregon to assess public needs and preferences. We measure health attitudes and behaviors for public health departments and foundations, assess alumni engagement and prospective student expectations for colleges and universities, evaluate donor and volunteer relationships for non-profit organizations, and study human decision-making to inform behavior change efforts to help restore the Chesapeake Bay and encourage habits like recycling.