

A Development and Management Plan for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in Virginia

In 1983 Congress amended the National Trails System Act, designating a corridor for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands in western Pennsylvania. In Virginia, this corridor embraces portions of through Northumberland, Westmoreland, Lancaster, Richmond, King George, Stafford, Prince William, Fairfax, Arlington, and Loudoun counties; and the independent cities of Alexandria and Fredericksburg. The corridor is nationally significant because of its historic use as a transportation and migration corridor, and for the associated establishment of and conflicts among diverse cultures. How these cultures interact with their ecosystems is also an important part of the story.

Benefits of the Trail Corridor

The economic impacts of the trail have been studied along a segment in Pennsylvania called the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP), a 150-mile stretch built on abandoned rail lines from Cumberland, MD to Homestead, PA, just outside of Pittsburgh. The GAP hosts over 800,000 trips a year and, in 2008, generated over \$40 million in direct annual spending and another \$7.5 million in wages, and is recognized as an important economic generator in this rural region. Since 2007, a net gain of 47 new businesses has opened in the towns along the trail, and business owners attribute 25% of their revenues to proximity to the trail. Because of the region's "Trail Towns" program, which teaches local businesses how to capitalize on trail users' needs, revenues were up in 2010 even though visitation numbers were slightly down.

The trail, volunteers and staff, all contribute to communities along the corridor by drawing tourists, hosting events, sparking urban redevelopment and other improvements, increasing property values, and adding infrastructure and programs that contribute to healthy lifestyles and reduced health care costs.

Official designation of trails provides local and state agencies and others with opportunities to realize the following additional benefits:

1. Coordination among citizens groups, local jurisdictions, state agencies and federal land managers seeking to conserve landscapes, to develop non-motorized transportation options and to develop outdoor educational opportunities and heritage tourism programs in the PHNST corridor;
2. Use of the official the PHNST marker (trail logo) in marketing, wayfinding and educational programs;
3. Priority consideration for funds to support the PHNST- related projects and partners through the NPS Challenge Cost-Share Program; and
4. Technical assistance with:
 - Corridor planning
 - Project development and implementation
 - Fund-raising
 - Interpretive planning and educational program/project development
 - Marketing and promotion

- Communications and public involvement
- Heritage tourism projects.

Potential Experiences

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST) provides for three types of experiences:

1. A regional system of trails for non-motorized travel, recreation and exploration, including hiking, bicycling, horse-back riding and boating;
2. A set of physical and conceptual "gateways" to local trail corridors and related resources and activities at various locations in the PHNST corridor; and
3. A range of active and passive educational opportunities associated with the national significance of the corridor.

Management Goals and Objectives

A Development & Management Plan for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in Virginia, defined the following Management Goals and Objectives:

Management Goals

Encourage resource conservation in the Trail corridor
 Conserve the significance of the Trail segments
 Seek improvements to routes and the Trails' experience
 Encourage trail-related business services
 Coordinate with other trail partners
 Employ volunteer assistance from citizen groups

Management Objectives

Conserve heritage and scenic qualities
 Ensure financial stability
 Promote safety
 Encourage design standards
 Bicycle & on-road routes
 Ensure maintenance
 Law enforcement
 Develop volunteer coordination/building community

For a complete list of PHNST Trail partners, visit
<http://www.nps.gov/pohe/parkmgmt/partners.htm>

Related Plans

The following tables provide information on plans that are relevant to trail development.

Plan Title	Web Link	Relevance
Corridor Analysis For the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in Northern Virginia, June 2011	http://www.novaregion.org/index.aspx?nid=299	Prioritizes projects, identifies gaps in the trail through this region
A Development & Management Plan for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail in Virginia, February 2006	http://www.novaregion.org/index.aspx?nid=299	Provides goals and management objectives, general design considerations, defines roles and responsibilities
Identity Guidelines for Trail Partners	http://www.nps.gov/pohe/parkmgmt/lawsandpolicies.htm	Guidelines to develop some measure of graphic and interpretive continuity among Trail segments
2010 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the National Capital Region	http://www.mwcog.org/store/item.asp?PUBLICATION_ID=386	List of bike/ped major projects to complete by 2040
The Washington Region's Conservation Priorities: A Call to Action, 2011	www.sgalliance.org	PHNST is one of five priority projects
Conservation Corridors in Northern Virginia Assessment Report January 2012	http://www.novaregion.org/index.aspx?nid=1102	Snapshot of region's high-value natural resources, potential multi-jurisdictional applications, recommended next steps
Virginia Tourism Corporation Marketing Plan FY12	http://www.vatc.org/administration/documents/VTCMktPlan12.pdf	Organization goals. Travel forecasts, tourism revenue, growth audiences, media consumption trends
GWRC 2009 Green Infrastructure and Conservation Corridors Maps	http://www.gwgreengovt.org/greearth_regionalbluegreeninfrastructureplanning.html	Individual draft blue-green infrastructure maps for each Community
GWRC/FAMPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan	http://www.fampo.gwregion.org/transportation-planning-documents/bicycle-pedestrian-planning/	Information and guidance, as well as to encourage and facilitate the development of a safe, interconnected, regional network of on-road as well as off-road

		Bicycle and pedestrian corridors
Northern Neck Tourism Commission	2011 Northern Neck Tourism Plan http://www.northernneck.org/	Goals
Northern Neck Planning District Commission	Annual Work Program http://nnpdc.org/	FY 2011-12

Jurisdiction	Plan Title	Plan/Study Year
Arlington County	Pedestrian Trans. Plan, Bicycle Trans. Plan, Bike Lane Plan, Arlington Master Plan, Pedestrian Element	1997 1994 2001 2008
City of Alexandria	Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan	2008
Fairfax County	Countywide Trails Plan, County Bicycle Map	2002 2009
Loudoun County Loudoun County Bicycle and	Pedestrian Master Plan	2003
National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board	Priorities 2000: Metropolitan Washington Greenways & Circulation Systems Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the National Capital Region	2001 2006 2010
National Park Service	Paved Recreation Trails Plan	1990
Prince William County	Thoroughfares Plan (part of Comprehensive Plan) Greenways and Trails Plan	1998 1993
Virginia Department of Transportation	Virginia Department of Transportation State Bicycle Policy Plan	2010
Virginia Department of Transportation, Northern Virginia Office	Northern Virginia Regional Bikeway and Trail Network Study	2003
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority	WMATA Metrorail Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Planning Study	2010
Stafford County	Stafford County Bicycle / Pedestrian Facilities Plan	1996
King George County	King George County	2006

	Comprehensive Plan, 2006-2026	
Westmoreland County	Westmoreland County's Comprehensive Plan Vision 2030	2010
Northumberland County	Northumberland County Comp Plan, Chapter 4- Bicycle Facilities Plan	2006

Compliance

All PHNSST activities that are funded by the federal government should be in compliance with applicable federal regulations and executive orders.

Marking, Branding and Promotion



Through a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, Northern Neck Tourism Commission staff coordinated installation, with Virginia DOT and others, of PHT route signs along the through-bicycling route between Colonial Beach and Reedville. VDOT approved AASHTO's M1-8a signs for placement along this designated PHNST route. This model can be replicated in other regions of the state.

For other branding and interpretation, the National Park Service has developed *Identity Guidelines for Trail Partners*, which can be accessed online at <http://www.nps.gov/pohe/parkmgmt/lawsandpolicies.htm>.

NPS encourages cross marketing and promotion and will continue to seek partnerships with governments and private partners. Language to promote the trail online should follow this format: **Explore the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail—a network of trails between the Chesapeake Bay and the Ohio River. Find itineraries for hiking, bicycling, paddling and more at www.potomacheritage.net and visit the National Park Service trail site at www.nps.gov/pohe.**

Planning for Future Trail Development

Land managers along the trail meet several times each year to coordinate trail development and plan for the future network. In spite of fiscal challenges and dwindling staff resources, the trail has made significant progress over the past five years. The PHNST in Virginia has over 242 miles of footpaths, multiuse trails, and bicycling routes, 191 miles of which are used for non-motorized transportation. Over 45 organizations and agencies are involved in various aspects of trail planning, construction, maintenance, interpretation, and marketing. The National Park Service has led the work on trail segment recognition, coordination, and project assistance.

Constraints

Unlike trail segments in other states that utilize abandoned rail lines, most of the trail in Virginia will have to be created and connected using a mixture of stream valleys, public lands, utility right of ways and roadways. Other than the river and existing roadways, there are no established corridors to follow. The proximity of gray infrastructure barriers like Interstate 95 and active rail lines to the Potomac River limit the potential area for trail corridor development. While there are public lands to connect, some of these public lands are military bases reluctant to allow public egress through federal property.

Opportunities

In spite of these constraints, there are opportunities for partnerships to seize upon the “gateway” experience. The proximity of three other National Historic Trails offers opportunities for joint displays and targeted land conservation for gateway sites. These trails, the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail, the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, and the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail, are targeted to a specific period of time, while the PHNST interprets a span of 10,000 years. There are also state and federal land holdings along the river that could be utilized as gateways for many of these trail experiences.

Over time and with an overlay plan in place, existing roadways could be used to connect PHNST segments. An overlay plan should be adopted by the local governments using roads for the trail so that the experience is consistent and rewarding for trail users.

Consistency could also be augmented by historic towns along the corridor if they serve as gateways for the trail. These towns include Leesburg, Occoquan, Dumfries, Colonial Beach, Montross, Warsaw, Kilmarnock, Irvington and White Stone. A standard kiosk and landscape elements should be installed in gateway towns to inform trail users and promote local businesses.

Also in close proximity to the PHNST, the East Coast Greenway and U.S. Bicycle Route 1 can be used to connect gateways where off-road trails are not feasible.

Summary Recommendations for state, regional and local governments:

- Acquire lands as needed to establish Gateway sites at strategic points along the Potomac River Corridor. Identify where Gateway sites need to include restrooms and other visitor amenities to provide for service area gaps.
- Work closely with VDOT to improve a north-south corridor for non-motorized travel, and include design elements that provide shade, traffic buffering, and rest areas.
- Work with land trusts to protect additional lands that offer scenic views or wildlife habitat along the corridor.
- Seek funding to create and install kiosks, landscaping and visitor services at gateway sites serving multiple historic trails.
- Work closely with DRPT to integrate transit stops with the PHNST trail network.
- Work closely with Tourism to promote PHNST itineraries, towns and businesses.

- Work with Tourism to provide businesses with workshops on how to capitalize on trail user needs.
- Define and fill existing gaps in the trail network.
- Seek additional public access sites to the Potomac River and tributaries, and work with businesses to increase bicycle passenger opportunities on cruises and ferries.
- Work with local convention and visitor bureaus to establish PHNST displays at nearby rest areas and visitor centers.
- Work with Arlington County to create a major Gateway site to entice tourists in the Capital region to explore the trail in Virginia.