



The Proposed Trail System

Early in its development, this braided trail system will encompass the river and its banks from the headwaters in the Allegheny Mountains at Iron Gate to where the river empties into the Chesapeake. Land trails utilize river roads and off-road trails that weave back and forth along and across the river. This diversified trail will pass through rural countryside, quaint towns and major urban areas. Paddlers can choose from a mix of flatwater to class 1-4 rapids in environments from pristine wilderness to major cities. With 48 miles of designated Scenic River, the corridor encompasses the ruins of old canals and mills, remnants of Native American fishing camps, historic plantations, forts and battlefields, and wildlife areas and parks.

A logical next step for public and private partners will be to develop landings for paddlers at appropriate intervals connected by river roads with improved shoulders. Entrepreneurs should consider the development of associated support services like campgrounds, restaurants, B&Bs, and outdoor adventure supplies and trips.

These improvements will not only open up access to the river and encourage outdoor exercise and adventure, they will offer opportunities to interpret the historical context and encourage visitors to nurture the natural resource. The heritage trail is unique because of the anticipated outreach to school groups and the emphasis on interpretation. Stories that strengthen our understanding of the river's role in human development will also emphasize how future life depends on protection of the resource.

JAMES RIVER HERITAGE TRAIL

America's River



The trail along the river at Robious Landing could become a designated section of the James River Heritage Trail.

GOALS

The James River Heritage Trail, already in use by paddlers from the Allegheny Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay, is also used by bicyclists and hikers in urbanized areas. Ultimately, paddlers, bicyclists, equestrians, hikers, fishermen, schoolchildren and tourists will visit this braided trail system to enjoy the river and become enchanted with its stories. Both banks of the river as well as the riverbed could contribute to part of a managed corridor that will enhance the natural resource, delight the eye, and provide a host of outdoor activities for all ages.

BENEFITS

This trail will benefit communities along the James River by providing recreational and educational opportunities for children and their families. A season full of special events already takes place along the river from April through October, as highlighted in the James River Days brochure published by the James River Advisory Council. Improvements along the river will provide more venues for community fairs and fundraisers, historical tours, outdoor adventure games, skill training, and river monitoring and clean-up.

Families as well as tourists who visit the river will generate business for campgrounds and lodging places, restaurants, grocery stores, paddling outfitters and bike shops. Over four million people are located within 30 miles of the proposed trail, representing more than half of the state's population. These travelers are increasingly attracted to educationally-oriented experiences provided by cultural and historic sites close to home.

AUTHORITY LEGISLATION

Legislation passed in 1972 authorized DCR to establish and administer a state-wide system of non-motorized, scenic, recreational and connecting side trails.
§ 10.1-204

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

In addition to outdoor enthusiasts, outfitters, the hospitality industry, corporate partners, land conservancies, river groups and adjacent jurisdictions, the following stakeholders may be interested in forming a coalition to develop and promote the James River Heritage Trail.

American Canoe Association
 Audubon Society
 BikeWalk Virginia/Virginia Trails
 Blue Ridge Parkway National Park
 Captain John Smith National Historic Trail
 Chesapeake Bay Foundation
 Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network
 Coastal Canoeists
 Colonial National Historical Park
 East Coast Greenway Alliance
 George Washington and Jefferson National Forest
 Float Fishermen of Virginia
 James River Advisory Council
 James River Association
 James River/Presquile National Wildlife Refuges
 Mariners Museum
 Plantations
 Scenic Virginia
 Scouts
 The Conservation Fund
 The Nature Conservancy
 VCU Rice Center
 Virginia Bicycling Federation
 Virginia Canal and Navigation Society
 Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club
 Virginia Conservation Network
 Virginia Cooperative Extension
 Virginia Council on Indians
 Virginia Department of Education
 Virginia Department of Forestry
 Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
 Virginia Department of Historic Resources
 Virginia Division of the Isaak Walton League of America
 Virginia Horse Council
 Virginia Outdoors Foundation
 Virginia Professional Paddlesports Association
 Virginia Tourism Corporation

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation will help build support for a continuous trail and work with groups to develop a conceptual plan to be implemented at the local level while encouraging protection of the river as a primary resource through the development of a corridor plan.

In addition to local tourists, many more will come from outside the state. The number of people who enjoy watching wildlife continues to expand, and they will find plenty to watch along the middle reaches of the James, where towering sycamores, rolling pastures and untouched natural beauty frame the historic river.

Sport adventure tourism is the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry. In 2008, total attendance for the James River Adventure Games reached 10,000, with an economic impact of \$416,000. Over 1000 riders registered for the Capital to Capital Bike Ride in 2008, raising \$40,000 for improvements along the Virginia Capital Trail.

Within the state, paddlesports operators generated in excess of \$7 million in both direct and "multiplier" revenues primarily in struggling rural economies. Within the nation as a whole, mountain biking pumps \$26 billion into the American economy and the horse industry is estimated to contribute nearly \$40 billion annually to the nation's gross domestic product.

Beyond the economic impact from tourism, trails provide affordable exercise that serves the whole community. A recent analysis showed that every \$1 investment in trails led to almost \$3 in direct medical benefits, and the Center for Disease Control estimates that increasing physical activity among inactive Americans could reduce medical costs by \$76.6 billion.

Project Status – Accomplishments and Milestones

Route Status:	<p>Water trail – 70% mapped, 8% under development Current paddling route: 240 miles 26 miles of paddling route in Botetourt Co. under development</p> <p>Land trail – 9% on ground, 7% under development 12 miles paved road 62 miles soft or natural surface trail</p>
Staffing and support	Trail development is currently a local initiative.
Defined in local plans	About a quarter of the local jurisdictions along the trail have defined a greenway along the river in their local comprehensive plans
Regional Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower James water trail and Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail from Route 17 bridge to Richmond • 11.5 miles of trail at Chippokes State Park in Surry County • Twenty-eight contiguous miles of the off-road, paved Virginia Capital Trail will be completed in 2009 in Charles City and James City counties. The entire 55-mile trail is slated for completion in 2013 • James River Park System offers approximately 20 miles of natural surface trails on both sides of the river • Three miles of natural surface trail at Robious Landing Park in Chesterfield County • James River State Park in Buckingham County has 13.3 miles of multi-use trails • Over 7 miles of multi-use bikeway and 14 miles of earthen-packed treadway follow the course of Blackwater Creek where it spills into the James River in Lynchburg. • Middle James River water trail map • One mile loop USFS Locher tract in Rockbridge County • Water trail under development in Botetourt County
Kiosk Locations	Pending

While it is still under development, the James River Heritage Trail is one of five long distance trail networks that serve as the foundation in developing a statewide Virginia Trail Plan. Long range, Virginia's plan will strive for a commonwealth traversed by a system of multi-purpose trails linking Virginia's communities, open spaces and natural landscapes.

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