

Chesapeake Executive Council

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Public Access Strategy

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region III Information Resource
Center (3PM52)
841 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Chesapeake Bay Program

Agreement Commitment Report

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July 1988

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An Agreement Commitment Report from
the Chesapeake Executive Council

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region III Information Resource
Center (JPM52)
841 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Annapolis, Maryland
July 1988

ADOPTION STATEMENT

We, the undersigned, adopt the report, **Public Access to the Chesapeake Bay**, in fulfillment of Public Access Commitment Number 1 of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement:

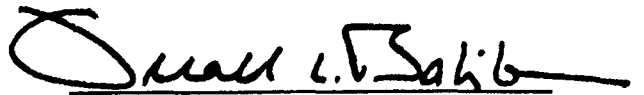
"...to intensify our efforts to improve and expand public access opportunities being made available by the federal government, the states, and local governments, by developing a strategy, which includes an inventory of current access opportunities by July 1988..."

We recognize that this report is a dynamic document and direct the Implementation Committee to periodically update the report to take into account new sites that are acquired for the purpose of providing public access opportunities for the Chesapeake Bay.

The report will be used as guidance, along with other information, to help refine and improve Chesapeake Bay Agreement programs designed to "promote increased opportunities for public appreciation and enjoyment of the Bay and its tributaries." The implementation strategies that are incorporated into this report can guide land managers at all levels to strive to acquire and make available adequate resources to improve and maintain access to the Bay including public beaches, parks, and forest lands.

The Implementation Committee will report to the Executive Council annually on the effectiveness of the strategies identified in the Bay-wide goals described in the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement.

For the Commonwealth of Virginia



For the State of Maryland



For the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



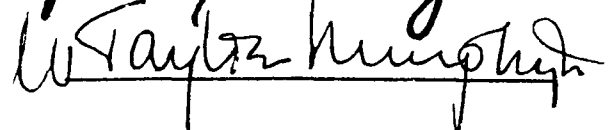
For the United States of America



For the District of Columbia



For the Chesapeake Bay Commission



PUBLIC ACCESS

In December 1987, the Governors of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Commission signed the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. One of the major initiatives of the Agreement is to improve public access to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The implementation of this initiative involves a two-stage approach. Stage one is the development of an inventory of public access sites on the Bay and its tributaries. This inventory includes all publicly owned sites, developed or undeveloped, which provide access for boating, beach use, fishing, nature study, crabbing, etc. Stage two, based on the completion of the inventory, is to consist of a series of strategies aimed at increasing appropriate opportunities for public access.

For purposes of this inventory, public access has been divided into three major types. First are those sites which provide only boating access. Second are the sites which provide boating access in concert with other types of facilities such as trails, beaches, picnic grounds, etc. This latter category would include most water-oriented park facilities. The third category includes publicly owned sites that provide any form of boating access. This category includes marshes and natural areas, as well as undeveloped public lands which could have potential for increased access opportunity.

Development of the inventory and strategy document is a joint venture of the states of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and several interested federal agencies (National Park Service, Department of Defense, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and EPA). An inventory form was developed which was used by all of the participants to ensure that the data collected would be compatible. The inventory includes all publicly owned lands in the Bay area which border on the Chesapeake Bay, its tidal tributaries and portions of the Susquehanna River. Each individual state compiled the inventory for areas under its jurisdiction. This information was then merged into one computer file for the entire Bay area.

As a result of the inventory effort, there is a much clearer understanding of the amount and type of existing public access to the Chesapeake Bay and major tributaries. In the Bay area inventoried, there are 735 publicly owned access sites encompassing approximately 123,037 acres. Of these sites, 61 are in federal ownership, 207 in state ownership and 467 in local ownership. The sites range in size from less than an acre to over 2,500 acres. While there are a few sites with fairly large amounts of frontage on the Bay or its tributaries, the total amount of publicly owned waterfront is quite small. In fact, less than 1% of the entire Chesapeake Bay and tidal tributaries shoreline is in public ownership.

Further analysis of the inventory data shows that approximately 25% of the sites are undeveloped or provide no facilities for use by the public. It would appear that many of these sites would be excellent candidates for development, thereby improving public access to the Bay area. Another point of interest is that 60% of the sites offer some type of boating access to the Bay and its major tributaries.

Concurrent with the collection of inventory data, a number of public meetings on the Chesapeake Bay were held throughout the study area. One of the topics discussed at these meetings was public access. As a result of the public meetings and review comments provided by the Citizens Advisory Committee, the following access-related concerns were identified:

- o Increased public access should also include increased public education on importance of Bay and proper stewardship.
- o When public access areas are provided, money should be budgeted for their care and maintenance.
- o Access inventory information should be made available to the public.
- o To help reduce public sector costs, consideration should be given to allowing the private sector to develop the facilities on public lands.
- o An environmentally sensitive Bay-wide access plan should be developed which identifies specific areas where additional access is desirable. The private sector should be given the opportunity to develop and operate the needed access sites prior to public acquisition.
- o Development of existing undeveloped areas and of new sites should be sensitive to the sites' natural character and preserve as much as possible.

As a result of these comments and a review of the inventory data, the following broad strategy areas applicable to Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia have been developed:

1) Guide for public access: One of the major problems faced by the public wishing to access the Bay or its tributaries is knowing where to go. Based on the inventory data, a guide to the access points will be developed. This guide will include all available public access areas with information on what type of access (fishing, boating, swimming, nature study, etc.) is available and how the site may be found. The document will be completed in December of 1988 and will be in a booklet or magazine style format. Interspersed with the access information will be educational material about the significance of the Chesapeake Bay and the users' responsibility in caring for it.

2) Access point signage: Another significant problem noted with the public's use of the Bay is the lack of proper signage. It is often difficult for people who are searching for a specific access area to find it. Many publicly owned sites are unmarked and known only to locals. Others are inadequately signed and difficult for someone not familiar with the area to locate. Proper road signs and site signs will greatly improve this situation and provide better utilization of existing areas.

3) Plan for needed access areas: Once the inventory data are placed on maps, it will be possible to tell where the major access needs are located. An environmentally sensitive plan can then be developed showing access needs by type, (swimming, boating, beach use, etc.) for each state. Once completed,

this plan should provide a mechanism for encouraging private development of access facilities as well as ensure the best use of limited state and local resources in providing access opportunities.

4) Cooperative agreements: It appears that there are numerous publicly owned properties which have potential for access but are not currently used for that purpose. A case-by-case analysis of these sites may lead to the development of cooperative management agreements. Such agreements could allow, for example, a locality to manage either a federal or state piece of property as an access area. Similar agreements may also be developed on private land owned by large corporations. The intent of this proposal would be to increase public opportunities on the existing public estate or on privately held lands at low cost.

5) Funding: A successful funding strategy must cover two areas of concern. First would be funding for the development of existing sites already in the public estate, many of which only lack facilities to make them usable by the public. The second area of concern is funding for the acquisition of new sites in areas of high need. Such acquisition should not only include the cost of any needed developments, but also allow for necessary maintenance and operation. To stretch public funds to the greatest extent possible, the private sector should be encouraged to develop access opportunities in harmony with the access plan. In addition, an examination will be made of the various mechanisms available for providing additional access areas. This information will be used to identify, by July 1, 1989, funding needs and tools to be used for the provision of such sites.

6) Federal Estate: Large tracts of publicly owned properties border on the Bay and its major tributaries. In total, these lands include more than 50,000 acres (with exception of not inventoried portions of military lands) the majority of which are either restricted from public use or provide only limited access opportunity. Federal land managers in concert with the respective states should carefully evaluate their holdings to determine where agreements could be established for increased opportunities.

In addition to the general strategies identified above, the following specific strategies have been developed by the states:

MARYLAND

1) Continue to provide Bay Access Funds, Waterway Improvement Funds, and Land and Water Conservation Funds from the Department of Natural Resources through Program Open Space at the state and local level. In addition, funding for land acquisition will continue through the capital budget. This would continue in an equitable manner with no impact to nontidal areas based on a distribution criteria.

2) Continue to provide corridors for limited recreation uses, such as bicycling, hiking, etc., which relate to tidal streams, shorelines and unique resource areas maintaining naturalness of the sites.

3) Where needs have been expressed by the public and/or local government, encourage the placement of boat ramps and related facilities in less urbanized areas. Placement of these facilities is to be based on careful consideration of disturbance to the effected eco-system.

4) Control shoreline development along the Bay through the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Local Programs.

5) Encourage the development of a comprehensive Bay oriented program which would publicize access areas as a "string of rural and urban parks, inns, and boat landings" through an integrated system of common signage. This program would represent both public and private areas as part of a total Maryland system and would attempt to relate one area to another for the purpose of providing unique cultural and educational experiences.

6) Consider incentives to private landowners to increase access.

7) Analyze surplus state and federal properties to determine whether they can be used as access areas to the Chesapeake Bay. Also analyze the use of potential surplus corporate land holdings for additional passive or active access areas.

8) Enter into cooperative agreements with quasi-public and private enterprises, such as power companies and public utilities for joint projects for access and recreational opportunities.

VIRGINIA

1) Special emphasis will be placed on providing Virginia Outdoors Funds, both grants and loans, to local outdoor recreation projects which provide access to the Bay and its tributaries.

2) In addition to development of its own sites, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will provide matching funds to localities for the acquisition and development of boating access areas.

3) Through the Public Beach Board, grants will be made to localities for the development of public beach access and beach improvements.

4) The Virginia Natural Heritage Program will identify key natural resources in the Chesapeake Bay area and work to protect the most significant sites.

5) Encourage the use of public access criteria as a part of shoreline development.

6) Apply Coastal Zone Management (CZM) funds to the development and improvement of public areas.

7) Enter into cooperative agreements with public and private entities for access and recreational opportunity.

8) Develop a program to improve signage to Bay area public access and recreation sites.

9) Continue the process of inventorying and analyzing potential access sites and direct acquisition and development efforts towards the vest identified sites.

PENNSYLVANIA

1) Establish a long-term access area acquisition program which targets potential development sites based upon public demand, undeveloped potential and an attractiveness factor.

2) Continue to conduct inventory of the current total boating demand on the Susquehanna River.

3) Continue efforts to secure funding to satisfy the projected access development needs of the fishing and boating public.

4) Provide assistance to local municipalities and sportsmen groups for the acquisition, development and management of access sites.

5) Encourage private landowners to disperse properties suitable for fishing and boating access to the Susquehanna River.

6) Continue to promote the access area development program through distribution of printed literature and recreational maps, educational seminars and signage.

7) Seek the support of other state resource agencies to develop and promote the resource.

8) Promote public awareness of the importance of protection and care of the natural resource.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The water quality improvements in the Potomac River and the planned improvements in the Anacostia River have increased the need for public access. They also provide for a unique opportunity to develop an access system for urban residents while increasing the appreciation and understanding of the aquatic environment.

1) The District of Columbia, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is constructing a boat launching ramp on the Anacostia to alleviate the acute shortage of facilities in the Washington area.

2) An aquatic education center is being established on the tidal Anacostia to provide information and education for Washington metropolitan residents with special emphasis on the District's youth.

3) Artificial reef habitat enhancement projects are being initiated to provide more productive experience for bank anglers.

4) Handicapped access is being explored and encouraged through a variety of nonprofit and industrial groups.

CONCLUSION

Implementation of the strategies outlined above will provide increased public access to the Chesapeake Bay and its major tributaries. The two key aspects of this process are: (1) necessary funding to carry out the acquisition and/or development of identified areas, and (2) sensitivity in the selection and development of sites which will assure that proper access is provided while conserving the natural integrity of the Bay. Another important factor is the continued cooperation of those involved in the provision of access, including the private sector. It is only through a continuation of the efforts begun in this process that current and future needs relating to the Bay will be met.