

How the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Changes Everything (But Most Don't Know it, Yet)

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**Destry Jarvis, President
Outdoor Recreation & Park Services, LLC**

Even before Congress authorized the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (CAJO) more than a decade ago, both Bay historians and Bay conservationists knew very well that decades of work to bring recognition and protection to the natural and cultural heritage of the Chesapeake Bay had not been as successful as all desired, and even recreational opportunities were limited due to poor public access.

Bay Conservation Requires a New Model

Virtually my first field action as a new conservationist, just after I returned from the Vietnam War in 1972, was to join the "*Environmental Sail*" on the Chesapeake Bay, an action to call public attention to its plight. 45 years later, with most of the intervening years of attention to the condition of the Bay focused on water quality and TMDL, led by the State of Maryland, USEPA, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation there is still too little land conserved, and too small of a constituency to significantly alter the political landscape.

A paradigm shift - a new model - was necessary, one that both recognized the need for land protection on the shores of the Bay and its tributary rivers, and that established a successful collaborative with multiple federal agencies, state and local governments, and hundreds of national, state and local NGOs across the Bay watershed. The key problem was, that while everyone *knew of* the Bay, very few had ever *used* the Bay for recreation, much less for its cultural heritage - the Bay had little or no constituency for conservation, and there was even less public access from the shores.

It is also worth noting that for a century, the location of a national park system unit in a particular ecoregion or physiographic province has served to call public attention to and build a public constituency for, conservation of an even larger landscape, such as the greater Everglades and Greater Yellowstone ecoregions. What has not heretofore been done, until CAJO was authorized, is to use the linear corridor of a "national historic trail" as the tool for greater landscape conservation, but that is exactly the long-term vision of advocates for CAJO - a Path, so to speak, to both a national park on the Bay, and to conservation of an even larger landscape by a multitude of constituents, most notably local land trusts.

From the first national park authorized by Congress in 1872, until the most recent large natural area national park system unit, Valles Caldera National Preserve, was

authorized by Congress in 2014, the standard has been to provide sizable acreage (via purchase, donation or transfer) to the NPS, draw a boundary around it and give NPS full authority to manage these land under applicable laws. That approach was fine for 100 years, but does not work for achieving significant land conservation gains in the 21st century, especially in the East, where collaborative conservation over large landscapes has been (recently) recognized as the most viable option. To date, however, despite numerous examples across the US, none of the large landscape collaborations have reached maturity or come to fruition.

What CAJO offers, is a “backdoor” approach to large landscape conservation, making maximum use of an underutilized “national historic trail” designation as the means to capture the public’s imagination and interest, built a new constituency from the ground up, and secure conserved lands through multiple entities, not just NPS. This approach will allow a combination of cultural heritage tourism and outdoor recreation to drive constituency buildings for conservation of the Bay.

New-Era Partners needed

The national park system evolved rapidly in composition between the 1970s and the present, and especially so in the East, with dozens of smaller new units established, often initially with little or no federal land, with multiple parcels to be acquired, or with non-federal partners expected to play a much more engaged role than had been the case earlier in the history of the NPS. Park partnership has, of necessity, evolved, but has still further to go, and CAJO can (must) be on the leading edge of this evolution.

The **first wave** of park partners were the so-called “cooperating associations,” NGOs chartered early in the 20th century by NPS to run park bookstores and donate their profits back to NPS to support primarily research and education programming. Over decades of partnership some of these cooperating associations, such as Eastern National, have been huge successes, donating hundreds of thousands to NPS annually.

The **second wave** of NGO partners arose in the 1980s during a time of severe budget cuts begun by the Reagan Administration and DOI Secretary James Watt, that came to be known variously as Friends, Funds, or Foundations, generally associated with one national park unit, which entered into cooperative agreements with NPS to raise private philanthropic funds to support specific park projects, always with NPS approval through the agency’s planning and compliance procedures. Some of these, such as Friends of Acadia, have raised millions for NPS projects, ranging from land acquisition to construction and restoration.

A **third wave** of park partners emerged in the 1990s and since, largely through the merger of a park’s cooperating association and its Friends group, which has included the Yosemite Conservancy, the Golden Gate Conservancy, and the Yellowstone Conservancy, for example. These Conservancies have expanded the scope and scale of what park partners do for NPS, to include direct construction project management,

and direct operation of some visitor programming, and have dramatically scaled up private funding support for national parks.

Now, it's time for the **fourth wave** of park partnerships to emerge, and CAJO is poised to lead. NPS Budget cuts are looming; an FTE freeze is in effect; public-private partnerships are being touted as the necessary reaction; NGO partner staffing does not count against FTE. NPS needs to embrace CAJO as THE incubator for this fourth wave of partnerships, with the first step being a cooperative management agreement with the **Chesapeake Conservancy** for direct program and site management.

This fourth wave of partnership will entail direct land management and programming operations by NGOs in cooperation with NPS. The only long extant model that can serve as the forerunner for what will come is the agreement between NPS and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. ATC, under its cooperative agreement with NPS, receives federal funds for trail management, and raises several times this amount through philanthropy. ATC directly manages the 2190 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, a unit of the national park system, under its cooperative agreement with NPS; ATC does trail maintenance and relocations; ATC does visitor interpretation and education; ATC designates "trail town" partners. NPS does "inherently federal" planning, law enforcement, and regulatory compliance.

What About CAJO?

The former "*Friends of the Captain John Smith Trail*" (now the **Chesapeake Conservancy**) was established as the NGO partner to provide full-time visible education and advocacy for CAJO, and to supplement and complement the work of the NPS. All around the national park system, it is readily apparent that NGO partners are a *necessity* in the 21st century, not just a *nicety* as they were perceived to be in the late 20th century.

CAJO presents unique opportunities for adaptive partnership management in several respects:

- * CAJO is the first national water trail, so there are not fixed limits or rules - creativity and initiative will set the model henceforth.
- * CAJO is a "national historic trail" - a component of the National Trail System authorized by the National Trail System Act of 1968 that has not had the intense focus that national scenic trails have had, and thus can evolve based on direct experience, and which unlike the scenic trails, does not expect a continuous protected corridor, but rather focuses on nodes, or a string of pearls of conserved landscape.
- * CAJO is the only national historic trail that begins with a complete linear corridor - albeit all water - already in place, well documented, and "protected" - the routes of Captain John Smith's explorations. Protected landscapes will follow.
- * CAJO allows combining the authorities and constituencies of both the National Trail System Act, and the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act - laws that were enacted on the same day - October 2, 1968 (50th anniversary in 2018 will present an opportunity for constituency building and actions).

CAJO's NPS and NGO partners recognized early on that the key focus needs to be on building a constituency through greater awareness, education and improved access, AND that iconic landscapes that still exist much as they did when Captain John Smith sailed or rowed past can still and should be protected, by any of the engaged partners - federal, state, local or NGO - and managed collaboratively to assure that these shoreline views and historic landscapes are conserved in perpetuity.

Much has been accomplished in the nearly 11 years since CAJO was authorized, but not enough. The NGO conservation-community-wide shift in emphasis to focusing on large landscapes has produced innovative thought, serious academic study, important analysis, and a growing awareness of their importance., but thus-far, government actions to support this approach have been few and far between.

Cooperative Conservation vs Large Landscape Conservation

The GW Bush Administration (2001-2008) sought to make progress on "*cooperative conservation*" as a way to de-emphasize exclusive federal land management and decision making, but also acknowledged that landscape scale land use requires multi-party collaboration (think sage grouse conservation versus grazing and mining on public lands). This approach was more about allowing state, local and private interest to engage in federal land use decisions. What that Administration did not acknowledge was the *necessity* of this approach to large landscapes in the East.

The succeeding Obama Administration (2009-2016) modified the rhetoric to "*large landscape conservation*" and "*America's Outdoors*" while still recognizing that the federal land agencies cannot possibly (nor should they) make large scale land use decisions over non-federal landscapes. This Administration's scope was BOTH about engaging states and locals in land uses on federal land in the West, AND about establishing a means for federal land agencies to engage state and local governments in the East where too little federal land exist on which to make large landscape decisions unilaterally.

What's To Be Done

Apparently, the Trump Administration will not look favorably upon federal land management agencies leading the way on large landscape conservation, given their stated intent to reduce rather than expand the federal role. Approaching the new Administration with a large landscape agenda for the Chesapeake Bay, especially in light of the FY 2018 "skinny budget" stated intent to eliminate the Chesapeake Bay funding altogether would appear to be a fruitless gesture at present.

Instead, it seems that initiatives that concern both military history and Native American heritage will be more likely to resonate with the new DOI leadership. CAJO fits that perfectly, so, let's lead with CAJO to get to a large landscape, rather than leading with a Bay-wide large landscape initiative to support the Trail's objectives.

* **Funding** - the NPS/FWS budgets will be very tight for at least the next several years, so progress will come from the NGO community, not appropriations.

- * **Staffing** - The federal FTE freeze will not be removed soon, and term and temp positions are highly vulnerable, so shift to interns (SCA) who do not count against FTE will be a necessity.
- * **Acquisitions** - Federal LWCF funds will be greatly reduced for a time, so pursue state and local government, or land trust purchases, donations, or transfers of key iconic CAJO sites that are prioritized and coordinated Trail/Bay-wide. Target the 71,000 acres identified in the Comprehensive Management Plan for CJSCNHT as retaining visible, trail-related, evocative 17th century landscapes. But get started with Garrett Island, and Susquehanna River lands below the Conowingo Dam.
- * **Park Partners** - state parks along the Bay and its major rivers should all be designated as official CAJO park partners. Agreement among NPS and each State are in place - use them to forge these designations and operationalize them with site-based interns.
- * **Trail Towns** - official CAJO local towns should be designated along the Bay shore and rivers in all six Bay watershed states ASAP. The sites are well known, the towns are ready, get it done.

THEN, WHEN THESE THINGS ARE DONE, SEEK RECOGNITION AS A UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM FOR CAJO.

ALL OF THESE CRITICAL ELEMENTS CAN AND SHOULD BE LED BY THE **CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY** AND ITS COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

The Chesapeake Conservation Partnership, managed by Chesapeake Conservancy, has formed and is moving forward on many initiatives to further the large landscape cause.

The Chesapeake Conservancy has led the way on the “Rivers of the Chesapeake” initiative which has, prior to Fy 2018, produced increased LWCF funding to protect critical parcels, like Werowocomoco.

Effective partnerships at the local, state and non-profit levels are greatly aided by the GIS-data driven “land-scope” initiative of the **Chesapeake Conservancy** which has greatly expanded usable knowledge on the land status throughout the watershed.

MORE IS NEEDED, BUT A LOT HAS BEEN DONE, AND WILL CONTINUE.