

## Draft

### Public Access Planning Action Team Monday, May 6, 2013 Meeting

#### MINUTES & ACTION ITEMS

#### **Expanding Action Team Membership**

Gaps in current membership were discussed and recommendations/suggestions for new additions to the Action Team membership were made. The following actions were identified:

- Suzanne Baird, from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, will formally be added to the Action Team membership
- Following the meeting, Lisa Gutierrez requested that Don Cosden, Assistant Director of the Maryland DNR Fisheries Service, be added to action team membership to provide additional representation for Maryland's fisheries access. Accordingly, Don was added to the membership of this action team.
- As follow-up from this meeting, Mark Hohengasser identified Ed Woltmann from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Bureau of Fisheries, Public Use and Outreach Section as an additional contact from New York. Accordingly, Ed was added to the membership of this action team.

#### **Review Application of View Access**

For this effort, all sites must meet the established definitions of public access and fall within the geographic scope that was identified in the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan](#). The application of "Viewing Access" in the public access inventory and potential site identification process was reviewed to ensure all partners are applying it in the same manner. This type of access has been defined:

- Viewing access for water, wildlife, and shoreline areas: nature trails, hiking or biking trails, waterfront trails, boardwalks, and observation decks located at or leading to the water's edge.

Through conversations about this definition, action team members agreed that sites qualifying in this category should be located at or leading to the water's edge; sites where users can only see the water from a distance will not meet this definition. Additionally to meet this definition, viewing access should be the primary use of the site.

#### **New Public Access in 2012**

As a result of the 2012 public access update process, it was determined that between October 1, 2011 and December 31, 2012, a total of 18 new access sites were opened to the public along the Chesapeake Bay and its major streams and rivers. During the subsequent discussion of this data, several additional sites in Pennsylvania that may have been opened to the public during this time period were identified. Since 2012 data has already been submitted for several reporting efforts, these revisions will be made during 2013 public access update.

It is anticipated that future agency updates to the inventory of existing public access sites will be conducted via the online public access tool. As per action team member suggestions made at this

meeting, managers of the online tool will look into the possibility of developing a username and password system that will allow all agency contacts to have continuous access to the data submission system. This would allow designated agency staff the ability to add recently opened and potential new access sites to the map viewer on an ongoing basis, as they are identified. A final call for data, including a review of any data previously submitted during the year, will be issued each year in December/January. Additional details on this process can be found in the [Public Access Plan Annual Site Update Process document](#).

It was also determined that states agency representatives will take the lead in engaging local partners in future data call efforts to improve the team's ability to identify public access sites that meet established definitions and have been opened to the public at the local level.

## **Updating the Potential New Public Access Sites Inventory**

### Partner Agencies

Upon completion of the changes that are proposed to the online public access tool, detailed above, agency and organizational partners will be asked to provide ongoing updates to the list of potential access sites that will be maintained online in association with the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan. It is anticipated that each partner will be able to go to the online mapping tool and add any potential new sites, and associated information, for their area of interest. Sites should be identified by the plan's category of 1, 2, or 3 based on their readiness to be developed. In August of each year a reminder regarding this effort would be issued to all agency and organizational partners, requesting they provide final updates to the list of potential access sites. The resulting list of potential new sites will be made available through the online public access tool. Additional details on this process can be found in the [Public Access Plan Annual Site Update Process document](#).

### Public Engagement

Action team members recognize that public engagement is a crucial part of any public access planning effort and should continue to be a part of watershed-wide strategic efforts. As such, the following changes to the online public access tool were suggested to improve the data collection process for potential new access sites identified by members of the public:

- To decrease duplication in the site suggestion and review process, the agency/partner reviewed data layer of the location of all sites that were previously suggested by the public should be posted in the online tool. When public input is sought, managers will display this data layer and request members of the public identify the location(s) of any new potential sites that were not previously identified.
- Limit the length users can input using the "suggest a stretch" tool to help them provide more targeted and meaningful data.

The current plan is to get input from the public this year using the revised guidelines and tool! To allow time for data review and management, and to provide better coordination with the existing processes now being used by the states for public access planning, the frequency of future public updates will be determined after this year's process is complete.

## **Boat-in Campsites**

Boat-in campsites are an important issue for addressing the access needs of boaters along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. During this conversation, partner groups and non-governmental organizations were identified as key providers who have an interest in expanding these facilities. It was recognized that this action team does not necessarily have the capacity to take on a large scale

inventory process and annual updates associated with this topic, but that it is an important topic with some demand from the public. In the short term, it was suggested that a trial inventory could be conducted, targeting the James River, the lower Potomac, and/or the lower Susquehanna. This process could be coordinated as a project of the Chesapeake Conservancy.

### **Universal Accessibility**

Bob Campbell, NPS Chesapeake Bay Office, gave a presentation on universal accessibility the challenges surrounding it and the need to improve existing infrastructure. Action team members shared success stories related to the implementation of water-based public access projects that were designed to maximize accessibility and expressed an interest in continuing these conversations in future meetings.

Jennifer Wampler at VA DCR would like photos and info on any accessible sites that have been developed for use in their fall workshop. Please send any photos and information to Jennifer at [jennifer.wampler@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:jennifer.wampler@dcr.virginia.gov).

### **NPS Chesapeake Bay Financial Assistance Awards Program**

Bob Campbell, NPS Chesapeake Bay Office, discussed the current status of the NPS Chesapeake Bay Financial Assistance Awards Program. Public access site development was established as a priority funding emphasis for the FY 13 awards competition and NPS CHBA has received numerous proposals for access projects eligible for immediate or future funding. Additional projects worthy for consideration for inclusion in future updates to the Public Access Plan were also identified. During this discussion it was noted that action team members would like to be more engaged in the review process for grants in their states in coming years.

### **Action Team Priorities for 2013-2014**

The Public Access Plan identifies a series of action steps for advancing public access site development. Action Team members suggested that they would like to increase the number of in-person team meetings to twice a year and identified the following as key shared priorities for 2013-2014:

1. Work with private sector funders to develop access.
2. Fill strategic gaps in access, including along water trails.
3. Explore options for resolving railroad crossing liability.
4. Fully address accessibility at public access sites and continue to share information on this topic.
5. Build opportunities for citizen stewardship.
6. Share information related to the status of state memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with transportation departments.
7. Work at doing better planning for new potential public access sites.