



April 20, 2015

Mr. Nicholas DiPasquale  
Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program Management Board  
410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109  
Annapolis, MD 21403

Dear Mr. DiPasquale and Management Board Members,

On behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft management strategy for Public Access Site Development, created as a result of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* signed on June 16, 2014. With more than 50 national parks in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and two national water trails—the Star-Spangled Banner and Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trails, public access is a priority for park visitors to explore the Chesapeake’s land and waters.

The nonpartisan NPCA, with its more than 1 million members and supporters across the country, is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing America’s national parks for current and future generations. NPCA is also the leader of the “Freedom to Float” coalition, which includes more than 300 businesses, organizations, and individuals dedicated to promoting public access for recreation and community stewardship while preserving treasured waters and natural landscapes in the Chesapeake watershed.

We applaud the work of the National Park Service, state agencies, and numerous regional and local partners that opened 69 new public access sites between 2011 and 2013. The active promotion of available and newly established access, as well as the promotion of the more than 3,200 miles of water trails in the watershed has complemented a growing constituency of stewardship and an upward trend of participation in water-based recreational activities.

We also applaud the work of the National Park Service in convening an inclusive river segment planning process—which has identified additional access opportunities and created new partnerships to implement Public Access Site Development strategies along the James, Potomac, and Lower Susquehanna Rivers.

NPCA understands the obstacles faced by agencies pursuing additional water access and their limited funding capacity. In a growing region with rapid-scale waterfront development projects—it is imperative that agencies seek innovative

solutions and partnerships and highlight models of success that create new public water access.

### **Provide Robust Local Technical Assistance**

We recommend that federal and state agencies provide technical assistance and resources to localities and better approach local businesses when pursuing public water access projects. Local governments are key decision makers in access site development and they are motivated by projects that can demonstrate a strong economic impact. Local business involvement is essential, and agencies should share models of success within the Chesapeake watershed that can be replicated and build momentum in emerging communities.

Federal and state agencies should also provide local communities resources on managing conflicts among users—which too often prevent access sites from being built or opened to the public. Local governments and partners should be provided a toolkit and resources on public access development, including a guide for working with neighbors and landowners that addresses issues including liability, maintenance, and stewardship. A model of success that can be replicated throughout the region is the Anne Arundel Public Water Access Committee in Maryland, which is comprised of recreationists and business owners. This committee advises the Anne Arundel County Department of Parks and Recreation on access site development while building broader community support.

### **Highlight Best Practices and Opportunities for Urban Waters**

To fill strategic gaps in access along water trails, especially in urban centers, we recommend exploring the potential for access on existing public lands and seeking opportunities for public access to additional federal lands. Many local governments control decision making authority over waterfront real estate, including urban areas such as the District of Columbia and the City of Baltimore. The National Park Service and state agencies should approach public land managers along urban waterfronts, as well as private sector partners and funders to propose public access site development.

Large-scale urban waterfront development projects, such as the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in the District of Columbia, and the Waterfront Partnership “Inner Harbor 2.0” proposed plan should be assessed for access opportunities. Innovative public-private partnerships, such as the proposed “11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park,” across the Anacostia River in the District of Columbia offers new water access and a dynamic public park space. Agencies should promote these partnership models for motivating innovative access site development in the region.

### **Create Public Access on Existing Federal and Public Lands**

Federal and state agencies should seek opportunities on federal lands owned by the Department of Defense for public access site development. Lands should be identified along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries where a memorandum of understanding (MOU) may be possible between a local or state agency to provide public water access.

We support the management approach that ensures that public access is considered in the planning of all appropriate transportation projects. Many road projects across or adjacent to rivers and streams could provide new public access opportunities. In Maryland, HB 797 was signed into law in 2013, which where feasible creates a collaboration between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Department of Transportation (DOT) to establish public

access along state road and bridge projects. We recommend that similar guidelines be established among Bay watershed state agencies where they do not exist. Funding from the Transportation Alternatives program of the Federal Map-21 Act should be allocated to the states for this purpose—and create new access for fishing, paddling, and wildlife viewing along the region’s water trails.

**Make Funding for Public Water Access a Priority**

We recommend that federal and state partners make funding for public water access a priority—and urge local entities to develop sources of funding as well. Although the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways & Water Trails Network provides over \$1 million in financial awards for public access each year—local governments and businesses should prioritize funding for public access to meet necessary federal matching requirements where access gaps exist. Agencies should pilot a system that spreads the cost of public access development and maintenance over an entire spectrum of users—not just power boaters.

We appreciate the efforts of the participating partners that have developed these proposed management approaches to effectively implement public access site development. Agencies and partners should continue to highlight successes and share best practices so that momentum will continue to build and the Chesapeake Bay watershed will confidently reach its goal of 300 new access sites by 2025.

NPCA believes that lands and waters that are more accessible to the public will enhance the national park and water trail experience and inspire new stewards to ensure a cleaner, healthier Chesapeake.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback, and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Edward Stierli  
Field Representative, Chesapeake & Virginia Program