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John Maounis
Superintendent,
National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office
Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail
Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network
410 Severn Ave., Suite 314
Annapolis, MD 21403

Dear Mr. Maounis:

The Citizens Advisory Committee to the Chesapeake Executive Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on the *Draft Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan* released in July 2012 in response to Chesapeake Executive Order 13508.

At the very outset, we want to commend the National Park Service, the six Chesapeake watershed states and the District of Columbia for highlighting the great need for expanded and improved public recreational access to the shorelines of the Chesapeake and the thousands of miles of rivers and streams which flow into the Bay. We also commend you for undertaking the difficult task of attempting to inventory existing public access points throughout the watershed and identify new ones.

Despite improvements since the 1987 and 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreements, reports indicate that even today less than two percent of the watershed's 11,600 miles of tidal shoreline is publicly accessible and that access is often limited to those who own boats. The consequence is a public that is largely disconnected from the Bay and its tributaries. Better access to the waterways of the Chesapeake watershed for swimming, all types of boating, fishing, and camping are not only in great demand by citizens and visitors to the watershed but, as the 1987 Bay Agreement underscored, "...essential if public awareness and support [of the restoration effort] are to be maintained and increased." In this regard, we believe the Draft Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Plan and its policy and planning recommendations represent a step forward in advancing public access to the Bay and its great rivers and submit the following recommendations for improving the Draft Plan:

1. We believe that improvements are necessary not only in the *quantity* of access "points", but in the *quality* and *variety* of shoreline, water-based recreational opportunities offered. Perhaps a better measure of progress in achieving Chesapeake watershed public access goals should be the increase in the percentage of Bay watershed shoreline in each state that is publicly accessible for multiple uses such as swimming, boating, camping, and fishing.

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2. We have deep concerns about the inclusion of “viewing” sites on this list of existing and potential public access sites. Viewing may be a desirable and appropriate activity in certain locations but, in our judgment, it is not access to and from the water and consequently should not be part of this plan. The inclusion of “viewing” sites toward the Executive Order’s target of 300 new access sites by 2025 would have the unfortunate effect of reducing the number of new sites for genuine access—swimming, fishing, boating and camping—to the Bay and its tributaries as public agencies strive to meet that numerical target. In reviewing the list of existing and potential sites, it appears that what is regarded as “viewing access” is inconsistently applied by the jurisdictions in the watershed and artificially inflates the number of existing and potential access sites. Every boat ramp, fishing pier, park, wildlife area, etc. could be counted as a “viewing access” site. Moreover we are concerned that the inclusion of “viewing” sites could have the unintended consequences of encouraging potential environmentally destructive practices such as clear-cutting to maintain or enhance “views.”
3. Recognizing that it is necessary to accurately define the problem in order to identifying the best solutions, we strongly encourage NPS to present the data on access points, both existing and proposed, in a clear and disaggregated manner, that differentiates between the categories of access in each state and in the report’s maps. For example, one should be able to easily see on a table how many swimming sites presently exist in each state and see on maps where they are and where new ones are proposed. Distinct maps for the different categories of access or a single map with color-codes would be far more useful than the single map with public access points with undifferentiated uses. First though, the accuracy of the data on existing sites needs to be improved as there seem to be many inaccuracies.
4. We are disappointed that the plan essentially punted on identifying potential new areas for camping along Bay shorelines, particularly in view of the fact that the public has repeatedly called for improved camping opportunities along the shorelines and watertrails as a high priority need. We urge you to move swiftly to identify potential new, environmentally sustainable, waterfront camping opportunities.
5. We believe that the Federal government should set an example in providing the public with enhanced opportunities for enjoying the natural, cultural and recreational wonders of the Chesapeake. There are numerous national parks, wildlife refuges, lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and Department of Defense lands, among others, where public water access can be improved without adversely impacting on the mission of these agencies. Yet, of the 316 potential new access sites identified in the plan, only 26 were proposed on Federal lands and these included several “observation towers.” With the Federal government having such a huge presence along the shorelines of the Chesapeake, we believe much more can and should be done in this area. For example, the Secretary of Interior could direct the agencies under his jurisdiction with land holdings along the shorelines of the Chesapeake watershed to submit a plan, schedule and process for enhancing public water- based access at their facilities. The Department of Defense could be directed to clean up contaminated sites such as Poole’s Island and/or identify excess property sites in the Chesapeake which can be transferred to public management entities for improved public access to the Bay’s waterways. The Army Corps of Engineers could

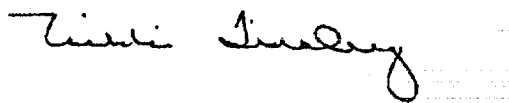
be encouraged by the Congress or the Secretary of Defense to enhance public water-based recreation in the Chesapeake Bay associated with its navigation and public works projects.

6. We are deeply concerned by the report's recommendation that states and localities should "...consider expedited procedures or exemptions [from water quality protections] for reviewing some types of access site development." We believe that all access projects must be developed in an environmentally sustainable way that is compatible with other Bay program goals.
7. Finally, we support the 12 planning and policy recommendations contained in the report and in particular the need to focus on urban public access issues, making funding for public access a priority, and building opportunities for citizen stewardship.

However, we believe more can be done to advance public access along roads and bridges than simply establishing agreements with transportation departments. We encourage the states to create an inventory of all the bridges crossing navigable and fishable rivers and streams to identify bridges and approach roadways where waterway access for fishing, swimming, canoeing and kayaking can be provided reasonably and safely. We believe that all bridge construction and reconstruction projects currently in the planning and design process should be reviewed to ensure that waterway access is incorporated into planned construction or reconstruction, where possible, that such access be given due consideration in the comprehensive transportation plans developed by each metropolitan planning organization and State and funding under the Transportation Alternatives program of new Federal MAP-21 Act be allocated by the States for this purpose. We also believe more can be done to enhance accessibility for citizens and visitors with disabilities, including more wheelchair accessible canoe and kayak launches, fishing and swimming areas and recommend that the on-line inventory of access sites the National Park Service is developing also include information about accessibility accommodations available at each of these sites.

Your attention to these comments and recommendations is appreciated and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Nikki Tinsley
Chair, Citizens Advisory Committee

CC: Chesapeake Executive Council
Hon. Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior
Chesapeake Bay Program Principals Staff Committee
Nick DiPasquale, Director Chesapeake Bay Program