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The National Park Service: Filling Our Roles in the Chesapeake Bay Program

The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure and a resource of international significance. The Bay encompasses 2,500 square miles of water; its watershed includes over 40 tributary rivers, and 64,000 square miles of land in six states. The watershed is an incredibly complex ecosystem of water and land, creatures and people, cultures and economies. Effective stewardship of this complex ecosystem requires complex partnerships. It also requires a complex understanding of how this ecosystem works and how it has become degraded.

The Bay today is still beautiful and teeming with life. But the Chesapeake Bay, largest of all estuaries in the United States, has been losing its wonderful biodiversity and abundance for decades. Since the first comprehensive scientific study of the Bay in the mid-1970s, the Chesapeake Bay Program partners have learned a great deal about what we need to do to keep this ecosystem healthy.

Since its inception, the Bay Program's highest priority has been the restoration of the Bay's living resources—its finfish, shellfish, bay grasses, and other aquatic life and wildlife. A decade ago the Bay Program had primarily a water agenda focused on the mainstem of the Bay. Then initiatives expanded to include the tributaries of the entire watershed. Now the challenge includes redressing the impacts from a vast airshed. If water and air have domi-

nated the environmental restoration agenda to date, then land use increasingly will be linked to water quality across the Bay's sprawling watershed. The Bay Program has evolved in response to the ever-increasing understanding of the complexity of the ecosystem.

The National Park Service (NPS) mission is to preserve and interpret the nation's most precious natural and cultural resources and to provide for the public's enjoyment of these resources. As people have gained a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between species and their landscapes, the concept of parks as integral parts of greater ecosystems has emerged. Heightened public awareness and changing expectations has necessitated new approaches to managing parks, and new roles for the NPS in conservation leadership. As the world presses in around us, our attention as park

managers will increasingly be drawn from the more familiar realm within our park boundaries to the lands and resources beyond. More and more, the NPS is called upon to help others conserve and protect resources beyond park boundaries where most of the work to effectively manage resources as part of a whole ecosystem must be done. Such is the case in our partnership with the Bay Program.

The Bay Program is a multi-governmental, interstate partnership that includes the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia; Washington, D.C.; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the lead agency for the federal government.

The top executive from each Bay Program participant—the governors of each state, the District of Columbia mayor, the Chesapeake Bay Commission chairperson, and the EPA administrator—make up the Chesapeake Executive Council, which has been guiding the Bay's restoration since 1983. Representatives from each of the jurisdictions, along with officials from other federal agencies and local governments, as well as citizen representatives, meet regularly to carry out the policies set by the Chesapeake Executive Council.

Through a 1993 memorandum of understanding with the EPA, the NPS became a formal partner in the Bay Program. In joining, the NPS



Figure 19. Skipjack, Chesapeake Bay Appreciation Day, 1987. Photo courtesy Steve Delaney.

agreed to contribute to the restoration, interpretation, and conservation of the Chesapeake Bay's many valuable resources—both within the national parks of its watershed and in coordination with others striving for the Bay's continued recovery.

Through the 1994 Agreement of Federal Agencies on Ecosystem Management in the Chesapeake Bay, the federal partners have built a solid record of measurable accomplishments. To continue in our leadership role, the Federal Agencies Committee (FAC) drafted an update to the 1994 agreement—a vehicle for taking a fresh look at the current and future work that Federal agencies are doing in the Bay watershed.

The 1998 Federal Agencies Chesapeake Ecosystem Unified Plan (FACEUP) provides a timely response to the new watershed management initiatives identified within the president's Clean Water Action Plan and keeps the Bay Program on the cutting edge of ecosystem management nationally. The 1998 FACEUP challenges the NPS and other federal agencies to achieve specific measurable goals in areas such as watershed management, sustainable development, protection of human health, habitat restoration, stewardship of living resources, and nutrient and toxics prevention and reduction.

The secretary of the interior and the director of the National Park Service again joined in cosigning this 1998 FACEUP agreement, which

will provide a blueprint for measuring our accomplishments in several important areas in the coming years. Many of the initiatives identified are well underway within NPS parks and program centers in response to established policy and mandates; others will challenge us to increase our commitment to partnerships, resource management, and ecosystem management within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Organizing to Support the Chesapeake Bay Program

The most fundamental work of the Bay Program can be referred to as "shaping the conservation agenda." The Bay Program at its most effective is a marriage of good science informing good policy (a perspective explored fully in Jack Greer's companion article) that requires an elaborate process of consensus-building. For all of the partners, the challenge is to bring the programmatic strengths of their agencies or organizations into the Bay Program in the way that yields the greatest combined efficacy for the partnerships as a whole. The best metaphor might be that of finding how to "hitch our horses to the common wagon," so that we are "pulling our part of the common load." Our organizations inform, and are informed by, the dialogue among all the partners in science and policy as we work together to shape the conservation agenda within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

At a minimum, this requires that all the partners have a liaison relationship within the Bay Program. "Liaison" is here defined as a means of communicating between bodies, groups or units—a close relationship, in other words. For the NPS as a partner, this necessitated the evolution of some parallel structure within our agency that allows us to bring our individual expertise to the Bay Program partnership, and take from the partnership its collective wisdom.

NPS contributions to the Bay Program are the product of the shared responsibility and coordinated efforts of the National Capital and Northeast regional offices and the collective efforts of all the parks and program centers within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The two regional offices established and co-funded the position of NPS Chesapeake Bay Program coordinator. The coordinator serves as principal liaison, representing the NPS on key committees of the Bay Program. This facilitates communication and develops working relationships between NPS and other Bay Program partners. It also allows the NPS to assist in shaping the conservation agenda within the watershed. The coordinator is assisted in this area by a number of NPS personnel whose professional expertise makes them appropriate representatives given the subject matter of the Bay Program committee.

To facilitate communication within the NPS related to the Bay

Program, each park and support office has a designated Chesapeake Bay point-of-contact (POC). The coordinator works in tandem with them and NPS's Chesapeake Bay Task Force to organize and sustain Bay-related efforts. The task force is a self-selected interdisciplinary group of park managers and program specialists, from throughout the two regions and the Washington office, who are committed to the restoration effort. The coordinator and task force members work through the POCs to communicate initiatives and identify staff to assist with them. The POCs take the lead in reporting park-based activities in support of the Chesapeake Bay, and work with the coordinator and task force to broker technical assistance to parks.

The task force has had its stalwart members, but theoretically its membership is ever-evolving, and includes any of the POCs or other NPS staff. It's less important to think of the task force as a standing committee than as a standing mechanism, serving two important purposes: 1) communication and coordination, and 2) actions and initiatives. The task force functions as the umbrella for the formation of work groups in response to Bay Program initiatives.

Finding Our Roles in the Bay Program

Prior to joining the Bay Program in 1993, the NPS conducted a study to evaluate some potential roles for our agency in the restoration effort.

We were seeking leadership roles for which our strengths are best suited. Just as the Bay Program has evolved since then, so too have our leadership roles, but they can be generally categorized as follows:

- **Stewardship of park resources.** Employing management practices within the units of the National Park System that support the restoration goals of the Chesapeake Bay, thereby leading by example.
- **Communication and education.** Helping the broader public (both residents and visitors to the Bay region) understand the function and importance of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, the environmental issues confronting it, and the efforts underway to help restore the its ecological health.
- **Local resource stewardship assistance.** Providing technical assistance to local governments and community organizations in developing plans for local stewardship of resources.

These functional areas are inherently related in ways that will become apparent as each is described in more detail.

Stewardship of Park Resources

The primary challenge for the National Park Service is to be "standard bearers" in our resource management, and to model programs and

management practices on NPS lands that complement the goals and objectives of the Bay Program. Our management of resources will be subject to conflicting demands and increasing levels of public scrutiny. As such, we will need to be paragons for multi-disciplinary and multi-objective resource management.

The task force is assisting park staff to adopt or adapt management practices within the parks that support the overall restoration effort. To better broker technical assistance, the task force, through the park POCs, surveyed park staff to gather information on issues related to the Bay Program. Twenty-six of twenty-seven parks in the watershed responded to the survey, giving the task force a good snapshot of their technical assistance needs. The following issues were identified as either high- or medium-profile (meaning parks deal with them on at least an annual basis) by more than half of the parks:

- Exotic and invasive species management
- Cultural and historic scene management
- Integrated pest management implementation
- Adjacent watershed development
- Erosion and sedimentation (from inside or outside of the park)
- Right-of-way management
- Ornamental plant and landscape management

- Turf, lawn, and field management
- Stream bank and shoreline management
- Stormwater management problems
- Estuary and wetland habitat impacts, preservation and restoration

These survey results will help the task force establish priorities for assistance activities, and are already helping to direct technical materials and training opportunities to park staff.

At more than 60 NPS sites within the watershed—encompassing over 286,000 acres—resource managers are already working to adopt management practices supportive of Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. Well over 15 million people visit these sites per year, affording the NPS an important opportunity to help the public better understand how we work to protect their resources. Where we are using best management practices that support the Bay restoration effort, we can help the public understand what we are doing and, by association, what they need to do in their communities and homes to be better resource stewards.

Communication and Education

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is both a biological and cultural system. We find geology, biology, and

ecology overlaid with history, lifeways, and economies in a collage that gives this area its identity. To a historian, the Chesapeake Bay conjures up visions of tall ships and different cultures encountering each other in the distant past, and a land holding a bounty of natural resources that most European colonists found hard to believe. To ecologists, it is a complex system of soils and fresh and salt water mixing to create a broad diversity of life, from mountaintop forests to seagrass meadows near the mouth of the Bay. To many, it is simply where they live. By telling the stories of the Bay, we can help people find their place in a complex world and within an ecosystem where land, water, plants, animals, and people's cultures, both past and present, are linked.

In the NPS, we have come to appreciate the maxim that people value what they understand, and they protect what they value. That is a big reason why we have interpretation in national parks: to give people a place-based education, and help them understand and value resources. The corollary within the Bay Program is the emphasis on improving public access to the Bay, both physical and educational. The story of the Chesapeake Bay is multifaceted and must be encountered in places both historic and natural, and through both cultural and recreational experiences.

Noting the existence of outstanding resources, as well as the

need to study and interpret the connection between the unique cultural heritage of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the natural resources on which the settlements depend, the U.S. Congress in 1998 passed the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Act. The purposes of the act are to identify opportunities for increased public access to and education about the Chesapeake Bay, and to provide financial and technical assistance to communities for conserving important natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources within the watershed. NPS has been given the responsibility for identifying a network of gateways and watertrails and administering the assistance program.

With the visitation that we enjoy at our sites, the NPS has an important opportunity to educate visitors about resource stewardship and to interpret the relationship between individual sites and their biocultural context. We can tell these untold stories in some of our parks and help others do a better job of telling the stories of their communities as well. For the NPS and the other Bay Program partners engaged in communication and education initiatives, the challenge is to shape the conservation agenda through giving the public access to the resources of the Bay and educating them about its stories, advocating for a healthy ecosystem, conserving resources, and engaging

communities in sustainable resource stewardship.

Local Resource Stewardship Assistance

In addition to stewardship of national park sites, the NPS also provides assistance to other Bay Program partners in conserving and interpreting important cultural, historical, and natural resources. This is provided through NPS programs for rivers, trails, and conservation assistance; resource planning and grants management; public education; interpretation; and cooperative heritage planning.

Wendell Berry, in his essay "The Futility of Global Thinking," cautions against "the 'will-o'-the-wisp,' the large scale solution to the large scale problem, which serves mostly to distract people from the small, private problems that they may, in fact, have the power to solve" (Berry 1991). To adapt his thinking, then, the question that must be addressed is not only how to care for the Chesapeake Bay, but how to care for each of the Bay's human and natural communities, each of its small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others.

To accomplish this we must engage people in the stewardship of resources within their own communities. Obviously, venturing into community-based planning assistance is an important new effort for the Bay Program. This will

necessitate effectively engaging 1,650 local governments in the Bay's restoration, and poses the daunting challenge of staying ahead of the population curve. Nearly 15 million people already live in the Bay's watershed, and 3 million more are expected to join them by the year 2020. "The problem is not just the environmental impact of more people, but also the impact of more people consuming and wasting more per capita. For example, we have improved landfill technology but increased our garbage per capita by 50% in the last 30 years. We have built cleaner cars but drive so much more that auto emissions rose five times faster than population. We pride ourselves on better planning and zoning but use nearly four times more residential open space per capita than we did in 1950. Now the task is to define convincing alternatives that offer a high quality of life" (Horton 1992).

In 1996, the Chesapeake Executive Council adopted the "Priorities for Action for Land, Growth, and Stewardship in the Chesapeake Bay Region," acknowledging that the expected population growth "will continue to test our abilities to meet restoration goals while accommodating growth and development." "New residents and citizens who are already in the region will want to attain economic prosperity, will expect to live in communities where the quality of life is high, and will insist on an environment that is clean and

available for their enjoyment. Integrating economic health, resource protection, management and enhancement, and community participation will be a challenge for us all" (Chesapeake Executive Council 1996). The council requested that the "Priorities" be addressed through broad public outreach, and in 1996 also adopted the Local Government Participation Action Plan. The goal of the "Priorities" is "to encourage sustainable development patterns, which integrate resource protection, community participation and economic health." The first objective is to "foster a sense of community and place to protect heritage," acknowledging that "the Chesapeake Bay Region's heritage is a composite of its landscape, people, institutions, and history. The special character, communities, and sense of place are important qualities to residents and a motivation for local protection and restoration efforts" (Chesapeake Executive Council 1996).

Community-based planning promotes local decision-making. The community must be engaged in self-determination of choices; otherwise external forces will make the choices. A shared community vision provides the blueprint for their desired future. It allows a community to control its own destiny, to conserve the region's heritage, to tell its stories, to retain the places that are special to people, and to maintain its economic base for present and future generations. It is

an opportunity for residents, governments, civic organizations, and businesses to work together to establish a plan for stewardship and management of such valued resources as open space, beautiful views, and historic places that give the region its distinctive character.

The challenge at the community level is to find the appropriate scale of stewardship. Is it a neighborhood? A town? A county? A subwatershed, which might encompass several municipalities? For citizens, the questions are: What do we value enough to protect? Where do our common interests intersect? What size region do we have the commitment and the capacity to steward?

The objectives for the NPS and other Bay Program partners in community-based planning are two-fold. First is to be advocates for conservation, including various forms of interpretation, as a way to build understanding of and appreciation for the important resources of the area. Second, and more important in terms of public process, is to be impartial facilitators of consensus-building. We can only be accepted in this role if we

are first up-front about our advocacy. And as committed conservation advocates, our facilitation role requires a certain leap of faith and belief in the process of consensus-building. We must trust that true consensus and public buy-in will serve to protect many, if not all, of the resources we value. Certainly, sustained protection is only possible with broad public support.

Now, the goal for the Bay Program should be citizen-based and community-grounded management of the Chesapeake Bay watershed that balances environmental, economic, and cultural values. For the NPS and other Bay Program partners, our objectives should be to lead by example, share what we know, and help build community capacity for local resource stewardship. By expanding our ability to educate and provide technical and planning assistance, we can help local stewardship efforts. And only through effective stewardship in all communities can we hope to be successful in our efforts to restore and conserve the Chesapeake Bay.

References

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