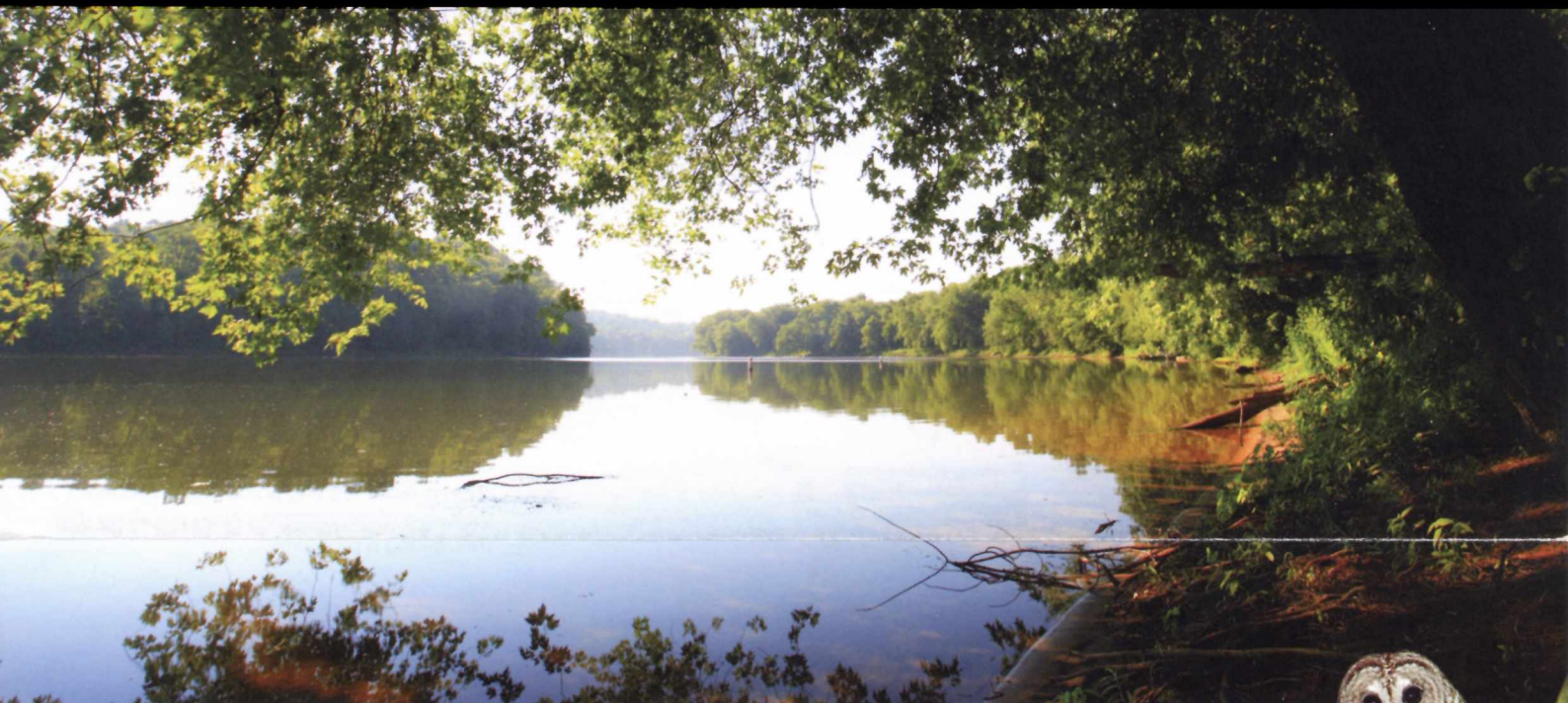


Potomac Heritage

National Scenic Trail
Washington, D.C./Maryland/
Pennsylvania/Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Linking the Potomac and upper Ohio river basins from Chesapeake Bay and Potomac tidewater to the Allegheny Highlands, this national scenic trail network lets you retrace—by foot, bicycle, horse, or boat—the corridor George Washington explored as essential to U.S. national development.

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Linking People and Places

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail both encompasses and transcends the Potomac River. By varied modern means it lets you explore the landscapes and footsteps of George Washington and his prescient vision for western expansion in the 1700s. He could see that Pittsburgh was closer to Georgetown (and the future Washington, D.C.) than to Philadelphia. Washington's dream birthed the region's booming 1800s industry and commerce.

The region brims with tales about George Washington. From his Mount Vernon estate on the river, Washington recognized the Potomac's potential as a commercial artery between the Atlantic and "the Ohio country," a site for a major federal armory, and a capital city of the fledgling United States. The city would bear his name, and the Potomac become the nation's river.

George Washington's Patowmack Canal proved short-lived, but his foresight gave rise to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal that borders the river between Washington, D.C., and Cumberland, Md. Decades after the C&O's demise, the canalway would be

preserved, thanks to Justice William O. Douglas and other visionary conservationists, to become a national historical park.

Associations with this history are many today, and the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, designated by Congress in 1983, has become an expanding network of trails in a corridor that blends the heritage of the past with the needs of future generations. The corridor encompasses the Nation's Capital and landscapes that vary from tidewater marshlands and rolling foothills of the Piedmont to mountains and valleys of the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies.

The story today is one of people and organizations—in practice, planning, and partnerships—who seek to rediscover rivers and trails as windows onto the region's history, culture, and ecology. With modern tools like land trusts, community-based river corridor conservation, the Clean Water Act, and redevelopment of formerly polluted brownfields, they are imagining and building a new kind of conservation.



View of the Washington Monument from the Mount Vernon Trail.

NPS/TERRY ADAMS



George Washington's Patowmack Canal went around the Great Falls of the Potomac River (above) to make the river navigable farther inland toward what was then the western lands.

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Bicycling on the C&O Canal towpath, Maryland.

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On the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail in Pennsylvania.

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Enjoying the Trail Corridor's Mix of Natural and Cultural History

Opportunities abound to explore historic sites and museums and Civil War fortifications and battlefields. Frederick Gutheim, the biographer of the Potomac River, has written that you can discover the Potomac's lineage as a "fishery, granary, harbor, route, homesite, plantation, hunting ground, mine, power source, factory, swamp, and pleasure ground."

From hiking, biking, or horseback riding to canoeing, kayaking, or fishing, the Trail embraces manifold recreation opportunities and natural areas. See pileated woodpeckers, beavers, Virginia bluebells, and other birds, small mammals, and wildflowers. Or just relax and enjoy serene moments basking in the solitude beneath a majestic oak, maple, or sycamore.



Chickadee

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Pileated woodpecker

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Virginia bluebells

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Beaver

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Building Partnerships for Conservation and Recreation

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is part vision and part reality. Under the National Trails System Act, the Secretary of the Interior may designate trails between the Potomac River mouth and the Allegheny Highlands (except in West Virginia) as Trail segments, based on applications by local or state agencies. As of 2007, 17 trails of varied character and length are part of the Trail network.

Along with efforts to improve the health of the Potomac and other rivers in the Trail corridor, many communities are pursuing conservation and economic development goals to preserve historic landscapes and open space, restore riverscapes, and maintain local sources of

food. At the same time, they are creating opportunities for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, boating, and cross-country skiing. The braided Trail network, besides connecting communities and special places, will link present and future generations with the rich heritage of the Potomac and upper Ohio river basins.

Safety Watch children near stream banks, cliffs, and areas with automobile traffic. Beware poisonous snakes and spiders and know how to identify and avoid poison ivy and poison oak. Observe posted regulations and always wear life vests (PFDs) when on the water. Your safety is your responsibility.

More Information

Potomac Heritage NST Office
National Park Service
Post Office Box B
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
www.nps.gov/pohe



For a list of Trail segments and partners visit www.nps.gov/pohe. To view a hiking guide visit www.potomactrace.org.

This Trail is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so all may experience our heritage. To learn about parks and National Park Service programs, visit www.nps.gov.

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Experience the Corridor of Commerce First Imagined by George Washington

A Growing Network of Trails and Waterways

Great Allegheny Passage

Between Cumberland, Md., and the Forks of the Ohio in Pittsburgh, Pa., 150 miles of the Great Allegheny Passage bridge the Eastern Continental Divide, with opportunities for travel by foot, bicycle, or in some places by horse or on cross-country skis. The trail system—about 130 contiguous miles are open—features scenic views, small towns, state and local parks, many outdoor recreation opportunities, access to rivers and streams, and interpretive exhibits.

Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail

This 70-mile trail climbs up out of the Youghiogheny River valley at Ohiopyle, Pa., to follow Laurel Ridge through state park and other public lands from the Youghiogheny River to the Conemaugh River near Johnstown. Six parking areas provide starting points. Eight overnight shelters and tent-camping areas are along the trail. Biking is prohibited.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park extends 184.5 miles along the Potomac River between Georgetown in Washington, D.C., and Cumberland, Md. Historical highlights along the canal towpath include locks, lockkeepers' houses, aqueducts, and other remains of this canal that operated from 1828 to 1924. Recreation opportunities abound for hikers, bikers, boaters, anglers, campers, birders, and wildflower enthusiasts.

Potomac Heritage Trail

Between Theodore Roosevelt Island and the American Legion Bridge, this 10-mile hiking path within George Washington Memorial Parkway passes steep, rocky hillsides and crosses forested streams and many periods of history.

Mount Vernon Trail

This 18.5-mile walking-biking trail parallels the Potomac River and George Washington Memorial Parkway between Theodore Roosevelt Island and Mount Vernon. It affords views of the Washington, D.C., skyline and access to national memorials on the Virginia waterfront, historic Alexandria, wetlands, and the home of the nation's first president.

Alexandria Heritage Trail

Connecting with the Mount Vernon Trail, this 23-mile loop invites you to discover artifacts, buildings, gravestones, waterways, and landscapes shaped by diverse peoples over 9,000 years. A companion guidebook is available.

Prince George's County Potomac Heritage Trail

This 20-mile route features a broad range of historic places, Potomac River views, and connections to local and national parks and other recreation facilities.

Map Location

