

Potomac Heritage

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

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



© PAT AND CHUCK BLACKLEY



Barred owl

© MILLARD H. SHARP
PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

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.

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 many 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 approaches like conservation easements, watershed organizing, reuse of brownfields (former industrial properties), and community-based heritage tourism promotion, they are imagining and building a new kind of conservation.



NPS / TERRY ADAMS

View of the Washington Monument from the Mount Vernon Trail.



© CAROL HIGSMITH

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.



© PAT AND CHUCK BLACKLEY

Bicycling on the C&O Canal towpath, Maryland.



© GRAPHITTI DESIGN, INC.

On the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail in Pennsylvania.

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

Opportunities abound to explore natural areas, historic sites, museums, battlefields, and fortifications. Frederick Gutheim, 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 multiple recreation and natural areas. Watch for pileated woodpeckers and other birds, deer, beavers and other mammals, and wildflowers including Virginia bluebells. Or just relax and enjoy serene moments while basking in the solitude beneath a majestic oak, maple, or sycamore.



© STEVE AND DAVE MASLOWSKI
PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

Chickadee



© STEVE MASLOWSKI
PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

Pileated woodpecker



© SAMUEL R. MAGNONE
PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

Virginia bluebells



© ALAN AND SANDY CAREY
PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

Beaver

Building Partnerships for Conservation and Recreation

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is part vision and part reality. Under the National Trails System Act, the Secretary of the Interior may recognize, through formal agreements with land managers, trails between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands as Trail segments (except in West Virginia). As of early 2010, over 830 miles of existing and planning trails are part of the network.

In addition to improving the health of waterways, many communities in the Trail corridor are pursuing conservation and economic development goals to preserve historic landscapes and open space, to restore riverscapes, and to maintain local sources of food. At the same time, they create opportunities for hiking,

bicycling, horseback riding, boating, and cross-country skiing. The braided Trail network connects communities and special places—and it will link present and future generations to the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Potomac and upper Ohio river basins.

Accessibility Service animals are welcome on many Trail segments. For details check the websites of Trail partners.

Safety First Remember, your safety is your responsibility. • Watch children near stream banks, cliffs, and automobile traffic. • Beware of poisonous snakes and spiders. • Avoid poison ivy and poison oak. • Observe posted regulations and always wear life vests (PFDs) when on the water.

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, partners, and related information see www.nps.gov/pohe. For travel ideas please visit www.potomacheritage.net.

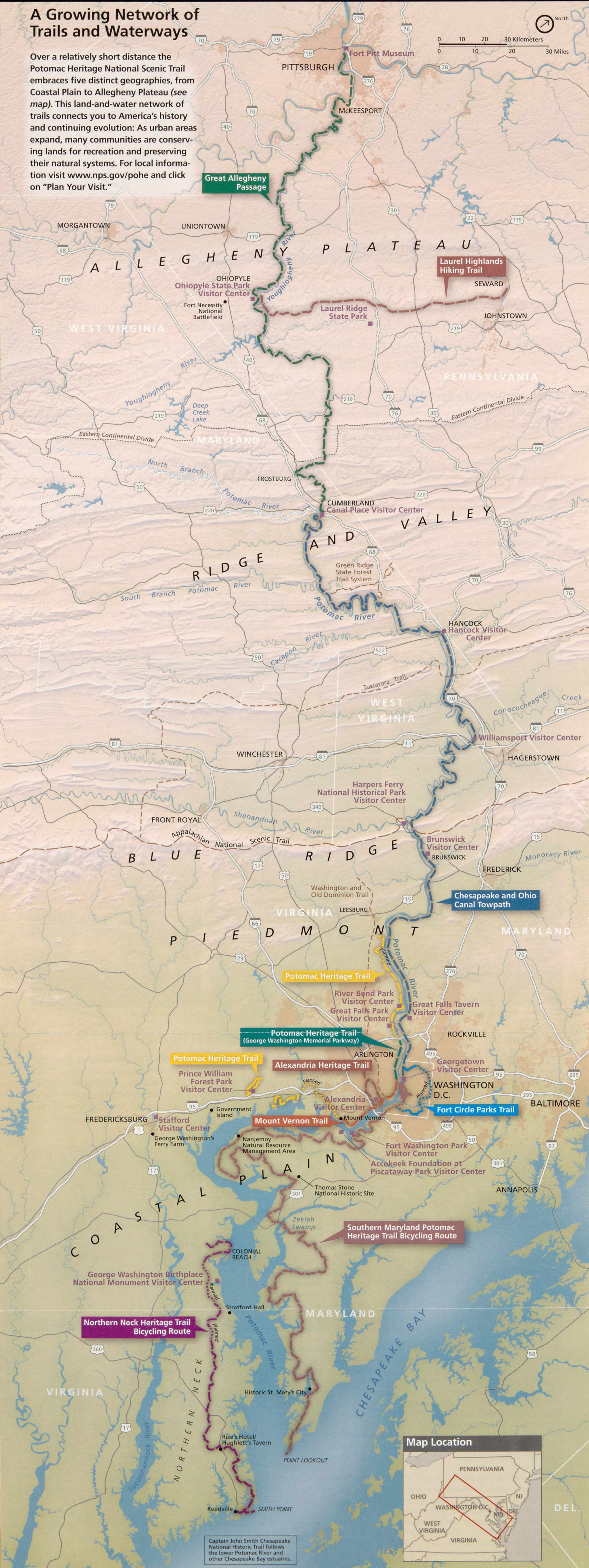
This national scenic trail is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

♻️GPO:2012—372-849/8059 Reprint 2011
Printed on recycled paper.

Experience the Corridor of Commerce First Imagined by George Washington

A Growing Network of Trails and Waterways

Over a relatively short distance the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail embraces five distinct geographies, from Coastal Plain to Allegheny Plateau (see map). This land-and-water network of trails connects you to America's history and continuing evolution: As urban areas expand, many communities are conserving lands for recreation and preserving their natural systems. For local information visit www.nps.gov/pohe and click on "Plan Your Visit."



Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail follows the lower Potomac River and other Chesapeake Bay estuaries.