

Potomac Heritage

National Scenic Trail
District of Columbia / 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, the national scenic trail network lets you retrace—by foot, bicycle, horse, or boat—the corridor that George Washington considered essential to the nation's development.



George Washington
NPS / INDEPENDENCE NHP

A Rich Blend of Outdoor Recreation and Heritage

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail lets you retrace George Washington's travels via landscapes and waterways that fueled his vision for westward expansion in the mid-1700s. He recognized that Pittsburgh, at the Ohio River, was closer to Georgetown (and a future Washington, DC) than to Philadelphia. Washington's dream—to link the Ohio and Potomac rivers—would tap Midwest agricultural wealth for global trade via Alexandria, VA, and the Chesapeake Bay. In fact, it birthed the region's industry and commerce of the 1800s.

George Washington is everywhere here. From his riverside Mount Vernon estate, Washington foresaw the Potomac's commercial potential as well as sites for a national armory at Harpers Ferry (then in Virginia) and the Nation's Capital. His Patowmack Canal proved short-lived, but his foresight energized the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal that linked Washington, DC, and Cumberland, MD, by the mid-1800s. Steam-powered railroads, unknown in Washington's day, would reach the Ohio River valley by the 1850s. They traveled the upper Potomac val-

ley but delivered payloads for global shipping from Baltimore, MD, not Alexandria, VA, as Washington had wanted. The C&O canalway was preserved, thanks to Justice William O. Douglas and other visionaries, and became a national historical park in 1971.

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, authorized by Congress in 1983, is an expanding network. It encompasses urban parklands of the Nation's Capital and landscapes from tidewater marshlands to the Piedmont's rolling foothills to mountains and valleys of the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Highlands. We all benefit as communities and organizations—in their practice, planning, and partnerships—rediscover rivers and trails as windows on history, culture, and the natural world. Employing conservation easements, organized watershed advocacy, re-claimed brownfields (former industrial sites), open-space preservation, and community-based heritage tourism, citizens imagine and build an open-space experience that will endure for generations.



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 were then western lands.

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Bicycling on the C&O Canal towpath in Maryland.

© PAT AND CHUCK BLACKLEY



On the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail in Pennsylvania.

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Enjoying a Treasure Trove of Nature and History

Opportunities abound to explore wild nature, historic sites, museums, battlefields, and fortifications. Frederick Gutheim, biographer of the river, wrote that you can discover and enjoy the Potomac's lineage as "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 corridor offers outdoor recreation and avenues for discovery. Watch and listen for pileated woodpeckers, deer, beavers, and foxes. Enjoy wildflowers and fall colors. Or simply relax and enjoy serene moments basking in the solitude beneath a majestic oak, maple, or spreading sycamore.



Chickadee

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Pileated woodpecker

© STEVE MASLOWSKI
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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 continues to develop into a seamless corridor. Under the National Trails System Act and through formal agreements with land managers, existing and planned routes in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia are recognized as sections of the Trail.

The Trail's network connects modern communities to the the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Potomac and Ohio river basins. Besides restoring waterways to health, many Trail corridor communities pursue conservation and economic development projects that preserve historic landscapes and open space, restore riverscapes, protect bald

eagle habitat, and help maintain local food sources. Their work also creates recreation opportunities—hiking, bicycling, boating, crosscountry skiing, and horseback riding.

Accessibility We encourage partners to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all.

Safety First Remember, your safety is your responsibility. • Watch children near stream banks, cliffs, and busy roads. • 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 National Scenic Trail Office
National Park Service
PO Box B
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
www.nps.gov/pohe



The national scenic trail is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov. The Trail is also part of the National Trails System; for information visit www.nps.gov/nts.

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Potomac Heritage Trail Network

From the mouth of the Potomac River at the Chesapeake Bay to the Allegheny Highlands of Pennsylvania, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail lets us experience a rich variety of historic and natural landscapes.

The national scenic trail incorporates 710 miles of existing and planned trails managed by federal, state, local, and nonprofit entities. This map shows individual trail segments differentiated by color. Detailed information is found at www.nps.gov/pohe.

