

Other Important Resources and Values

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values. Program offer visitors the opportunity to experience different eras of the canal's existence.

- **Canal Towns** - Fueled by the trade and commerce made possible by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, towns sprang up throughout the region as the nation expanded westward. Canal towns such as Hancock, Williamsport, Cumberland, Sharpsburg, Shepherdstown, Harpers Ferry, Point of Rocks, and Brunswick continue to play an important role for the canal, its history, and its future.
- **Solitude** - Comprising about 20,000 acres of land, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park winds through urban and rural communities and provides visitors with opportunities to appreciate the history and natural surroundings of the canal.
- **Opportunity for Scholarship and Scientific Research** - The park continues to increase its exposure in several high profile research disciplines. Archeological, paleontological, and geologic discoveries (i.e., cave and karst formations), for example, have greatly enhanced the knowledge base of these resources and the park continues to expand its natural resources collections.
- **Hydrologic Resources including Riparian Areas** - Water is one of the park's most distinguishing features. There are 261 perennial streams documented within park boundaries, 3 water bodies (Little Pool, Big Pool, and Widewater), an estimated 54 miles of watered canal, 27 documented springs and seeps, and numerous other wetlands that exhibit exceptional biodiversity.



Foundation Document Overview

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

District of Columbia, Maryland, and West Virginia



Contact Information

For more information about the *Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: CHOH_information@nps.gov or 301-739-4200 or write to: C&O Canal NHP Headquarters, 1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100, Hagerstown, MD 21740-6620

Purpose



The purpose of the CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve and interpret the 19th century transportation canal from Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Maryland, and its associated scenic, natural, and cultural resources; and to provide opportunities for education and appropriate outdoor recreation.

Significance

Significance statements express why Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park preserves and interprets 19th century canal transportation, civil engineering technology, and the evolution of a flat water transportation system in support of the industrial growth of the nation.
- The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park contains more than 1,300 historic structures, including one of the largest collections of 19th century canal features and buildings in the national park system.
- The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park preserves archeological evidence of 13,000 years of human habitation along the Potomac River.
- Through preservation efforts that began in the 1950s, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park towpath was transformed into one of the most heavily used recreational trails in the nation and serves as the backbone for national and regional trail systems.
- The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park provides diverse recreational opportunities for millions of visitors annually, including numerous access points to the Potomac River, ranging from urban to rural settings.
- The 15-mile-long Potomac Gorge, managed in part by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, is one of the most biologically diverse natural areas in the national park system.
- Paralleling the Potomac River for 184.5 miles and travelling through four physiographic provinces, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park provides a natural buffer of forest, woodlands, prairies, and barrens and a wildlife corridor along the second-largest tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

- Interpretive and educational opportunities engage a diverse cross section of urban and rural communities along the length of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park and were envisioned in the park's enabling legislation. Living history events, school programming, canal operations demonstrations, and a nationally renowned Canal Quarters program offer visitors the opportunity to experience different eras of the canal's existence.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Districts – Historic Structures – Archeology** - Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district, resources that contribute to the significance of the district include cultural landscapes, the canal prism, locks, lockhouses, section houses, aqueducts, culverts, dams, turning basin, masonry walls, weirs, and the Paw Paw tunnel. The historic district includes other cultural landscapes associated with the canal such as the Cushwa Warehouse and adjacent sites such as the Ferry Hill Plantation, Fort Duncan, and the Great Falls Tavern. Prehistoric American Indian rock art has also been documented at several locations within the park.
- **Towpath** - The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal parallels the Potomac River and its towpath for 184.5 miles. Once used by mule teams to pull boats along the canal, the towpath provides uninterrupted, nonmotorized access to the entire length of the park, connecting visitors to historic structures, the natural environment, and many other experiences along the canal. The towpath also serves as a backbone for numerous national and regional trail systems, such as the Capital Crescent Trail, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, Western Maryland Rail Trail, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and the Great Allegheny Passage.
- **Museum / Archival Collections** - An extensive collection of oral histories, lockhouse log books, and shipping records from the canal operators and families who lived and worked along the canal serves as a valuable resource for the interpretation and preservation of the canal.
- **Scenic Views Including Great Falls and the Potomac Gorge** - Located 15 miles from Washington, D.C., scenic views of the Great Falls section of the Potomac River offer visitors a stunning display of speed and force as the river rushes over a series of steep, jagged cliffs and flows onward through the narrow Mather Gorge and into the Potomac Gorge.
- **Recreational Opportunities** - Numerous Potomac River access points and a variety of towpath activities provide recreational opportunities for millions of park visitors annually.
- **Biodiversity within the Potomac Gorge** - The Potomac Gorge, which is partially managed by the park, is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the national park system. There are more than 113 rare, threatened, and endangered species documented in this area.
- **Natural Communities** - The park's forested canopy, unique geology, and proximity to agricultural and natural areas comprise a wide range of habitat conditions that are fundamental to supporting diverse vegetation and wildlife communities. These include riparian areas like floodplain forests and wetlands that traverse the canal's path through the Upper Coastal Plain westward through portions of the Piedmont, Blue Ridge, and Ridge and Valley physiographic provinces.
- **Interpretation and Education** - Interpretive and educational efforts highlight the park's diverse landscapes and offer visitors the opportunity to experience different eras of the canal's operation. With several million visitors annually, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park provides programs ranging from the living history canal boat and canal launch programs to lock demonstrations, guided hikes along the towpath, and Junior Ranger camps.

