

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Denver Service Center**



**Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
Maryland**

**Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy
Aqueduct**

Finding of No Significant Impact

July 2005



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, Maryland

SUMMARY

The National Park Service will implement the Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative), “Increased Development to Improve Visitor Access,” as analyzed in the “Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct Environmental Assessment” at Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

BACKGROUND

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company was established in 1825 to construct a transportation system connecting Georgetown, District of Columbia, with Cumberland, Maryland. The company followed the inspiration of George Washington, who helped establish the Patowmack Canal Company in 1785 to use the Potomac River as the basis for a navigable waterway through the Allegheny Mountains. Because the Potomac River was unnavigable at many locations, the company built a series of skirting canals. After high construction costs led to bankruptcy, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company acquired the rights to the Patowmack Company in 1824. In 1828, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company expanded the scope of the project to encompass an uninterrupted, man-made waterway from Georgetown, District of Columbia, to Cumberland, Maryland. Completed in 1850, the 184.5-mile long canal paralleled the Potomac River between the two cities on the Maryland shoreline.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was under financial ownership of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1924 when it was abandoned. In 1938, the railroad transferred ownership of the canal to the U.S. government in partial repayment of indebtedness to the Resolution Trust Corporation. The 184.5-mile long canal was soon placed under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. In 1961, portions of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal were declared a national monument, and, in 1971, President Richard M. Nixon signed the legislation that established the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

Today most of the canal remains unbroken, except for a break in the canal/towpath continuity at Big Slackwater, and without substantial modification to its original character. As the most intact example of the American canal-building era, it allows park visitors and scholars alike to study 19th-century canal-building technology and also to reflect on social and economic history, military activities, the Underground Railroad, and native peoples. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is recognized as a nationally significant historic district.

Presently, the existing boat ramp and parking area at Fifteenmile Creek is unmarked and unpaved, access can be confusing, and the area is congested. Parked vehicles often restrict access to the boat ramp, block the emergency access gate for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath, and spill over to the historic railroad trace of the Western Maryland Railroad. The boat ramp, as configured, is too steep to launch deeper-draft vessels. As a result, natural resources such as wetlands and vegetation are continually impacted by visitors who improvise alternate launch sites along the

riverbank. Safety concerns were also identified at the Fifteenmile Creek boat ramp. Vehicles left overnight in the parking lot are within the floodplain and subject to damage during high-water events, and social trailing over steep inclines between the campground and boat ramp increase the potential for visitor accidents.

The parking area at the Point of Rocks facility is unpaved and unmarked. As with Fifteenmile Creek, this leads to confusing access and congestion during periods of high use. Park visitors often park at the crowded Point of Rocks rail station lot. The station, which is very crowded, needs the parking for its patrons, and those who park at the station are required to cross the railroad tracks, which presents a safety risk.

The existing Brunswick boat ramp is located near Historic Lift Lock 30 on the canal and directly under the Maryland Highway 17 viaduct. Access at the Brunswick boat ramp is impeded by an inadequately sized, poorly designed parking area. Also, vehicle parking can restrict access to the boat ramps during periods of high visitor use.

The existing parking lot at the Monocacy Aqueduct is adequate to support visitation. However, it lies within direct view of the Monocacy Aqueduct and is considered an eyesore, diminishing enjoyment of the aqueduct. In addition, since the abandonment of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in 1924, trees have been allowed to overgrow the canal basin at the Monocacy Aqueduct. This leads to difficulty in historical interpretation of the area.

An environmental assessment was prepared to analyze the impacts of continuing current management (Alternative A, the No Action Alternative), implementing a minimal development alternative (Alternative B, Minimal Development to Improve Visitor Access), and a larger-scale facilities development program (Alternative C, Increased Development to Improve Visitor Access, the Preferred Alternative). The Preferred Alternative will provide improved access to the river, improved parking facilities, provide areas for multiple users, and, in the case of Monocacy Aqueduct, improve the viewshed. The development of designated parking areas and trails will reduce impacts on park resources from vehicular and hiking traffic in undesignated areas, and the removal of vegetation from the canal basin at Monocacy Aqueduct and the canal prism at Brunswick will aid in the interpretation of these areas.

The analysis was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), the National Park Service *Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis and Decision-making*, and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Preferred Alternative presents the NPS proposed action and defines the rationale for the action in terms of resource protection and management, visitor and operational use, costs, and other applicable factors. The Preferred Alternative will provide improved access to the river. Parking area development will increase under this alternative, and the boat ramps at Fifteenmile Creek and Point of Rocks will be relocated and expanded to improve access to the river.

Features of the Preferred Alternative Common to All Project Sites

Under the Preferred Alternative, there are several elements that will be implemented at each of the four project sites. For instance, each site will receive new restroom facilities. Existing portable restrooms will be removed and replaced by self-contained, pre-cast concrete structures. These new structures will occupy approximately the same footprint as the existing portable restrooms.

Another feature common to all project sites is the installation of new guardrails along access roads and parking lots. Steel guardrails throughout the project sites will be removed and replaced by new timber guardrails.

When necessary, stormwater management, including bioretention areas, will be employed to mitigate storm water runoff water quality issues at the project sites.

Features of the Preferred Alternative unique to each of the facilities are defined below.

Point of Rocks

Under the Preferred Alternative, the existing boat ramp will be removed and a new concrete boat ramp will be constructed approximately 900 feet downstream. This will allow easier access to the river and eliminate the navigation hazard that the submerged rock ledge approximately 240 feet downstream from the existing boat ramp presents to those launching vessels at the existing location. Rip rap or other protection will be installed around the base of the new boat ramp to protect it from scouring and in the area of the existing boat ramp to stabilize banks and prevent erosion when the ramp is removed.

The area occupied by the existing boat ramp, associated parking area, and access road will be reclaimed and revegetated with native plant species.

Under this alternative, two new paved parking areas will be constructed to allow convenient access to the boat ramp and picnic area. The lower parking area, closer to the river, will cover approximately 48,000 square feet and be designed primarily to accommodate boat ramp access. The circular design will allow for directional traffic flow through the area and provide 23 parking spaces, including two handicapped spaces. The upper parking area (on either side of Canal Road) will cover 4,750 square feet and consist of 24 additional parking spaces, including four handicapped spaces, that will provide parking for a new day-use picnic area to be developed at the site and additional parking for the boat ramp. In addition, a stairway will be constructed to provide access from the upper parking area to the lower parking area.

Brunswick

The boat ramp at Brunswick will be rehabilitated and its grade lessened. Rip rap or other protection will be installed around the base of the boat ramp to protect it from scouring and to protect users from the abrupt ledges of the current boat ramp configuration. In addition, a dock structure will be constructed immediately upstream of the boat ramp.

The existing parking lot is presently paved, but under the Preferred Alternative the lot will be expanded by approximately 4,000 square feet. The area impacted by this expansion is currently maintained as lawn. The layout of the parking lot will also be changed to better accommodate visitors launching vessels from this facility. The parking area will be marked to delineate 17 parking spaces, including two handicapped spaces and nine spaces designed for vehicles towing trailers. The existing boat ramp access road will be rehabilitated and resurfaced.

Split bicycle access gates will be installed along the towpath on either side of the access road. Gates will also be installed along the towpath at Maple Avenue to prevent vehicle access to that portion of the towpath and to prevent vehicles from crossing over the historic waste weir.

As part of the Preferred Alternative, vegetation that has overgrown the canal prism from Lock 30 to Maple Avenue will be removed to assist with historical interpretation. Manual and motorized trimmers and saws will be used to cut back and clear out existing vegetation. Removing this vegetation will create a setting that is much closer to the historical landscape. After the vegetation

is removed, the area will be seeded with grass and maintained on a regular basis to prevent it from becoming overgrown again.

Fifteenmile Creek

At this site, a new boat ramp will be constructed using articulated concrete matting and will extend into the main channel of the Potomac River. The unused concrete boat ramp at this location will be removed. The boat ramp currently in use at this site will remain and serve as a canoe launch.

The previously unpaved parking area will be paved to create a boat ramp launching facility. This area will provide three handicapped vehicle spaces, but the bulk of parking will be relocated to a new parking facility that will be established near the campground.

The existing campground will be converted to a new parking area. The parking area will be constructed to accommodate 20 cars, including 14 with trailers. This lot will cover 25,533 square feet. Approximately 10 to 15 trees will have to be cleared to build the new parking lot. The proposed parking area will be contained within the footprint of the existing campground. The area across the boat ramp access road will be partially cleared to accommodate a new campground area. The exact design of the camping sites will be determined by the layout of the existing mature trees. The campground design will incorporate as many trees as possible. It is estimated that approximately 15 to 20 trees will need to be cleared for campground development. The new campground will be 11,151 square feet. Compacted gravel material will be used to construct the campground access road and designated camping sites.

The existing 139 linear feet of wood and steel guardrail will be removed and replaced with 1,274 linear feet of new timber guardrail around the perimeter of the parking lot and along the boat ramp access road. The 352 linear feet of roadway from the canal to the launching area will be engineered to provide better drainage. Road shoulders will be re-established. The road will be paved from the wooden bridge, across the canal prism, to the boat ramp area.

A wooden stairway will be installed to connect the boat ramp area with the campground area. An improved pedestrian trail of 213 linear feet will also be constructed along the Fifteenmile Creek shoreline. This trail will also connect the campground with the boat ramp area.

An additional 1,584 square feet of visitor parking will be created along the emergency and maintenance access road. This area will serve park day users interested in hiking or biking the canal towpath. This parking area will add seven vehicle parking spaces. Two of these spaces will be designated for handicapped use.

The three steel pipe gates that restrict vehicle access to the towpath will be replaced by split bicycle access gates. The new gates will be located on either side of the access road at the towpath and across the emergency and maintenance access road. The towpath between the access road and the Fifteenmile Creek Aqueduct will be resurfaced for bicycle and hiker use.

Monocacy Aqueduct

Implementation of this alternative at Monocacy Aqueduct will involve the expansion and continued use of the temporary gravel parking lot, reclamation of the existing paved parking lot, construction of two service roads, and removal of trees from the canal basin. More specifically, the temporary gravel parking lot established to accommodate park visitors during the Monocacy Aqueduct stabilization project will be expanded to 8,350 square feet and will continue to be used after the stabilization project has ended. The existing 10,000 square-foot paved parking lot, used by park visitors prior to the stabilization project, will be demolished and removed. A portion of the

reclaimed land will be used in the construction of a gravel service road, and the rest will be planted in grass. Of the two service roads, one will run down to the river and be used once or twice a year for the clearing of debris from the upstream side of Monocacy Aqueduct. The other will run from the newly expanded gravel parking lot to the towpath and be used by park visitors and maintenance staff accessing the towpath.

In addition, National Park Service personnel will remove trees growing in the 0.82-acre canal basin. Trees will be cut by chainsaw, and the remaining stumps will be ground six to eight inches below the surface and covered.

MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures or conditions are included as part of the Preferred Alternative and have been developed to lessen the potential adverse effects of the Preferred Alternative. The following mitigation measures will be implemented for the Preferred Alternative.

Practices to Minimize Effects on Cultural Resources

If previously unknown archeological resources are discovered, work will be stopped in the area of any discovery, protective measures will be implemented, and procedures outlined in *36 Code of Federal Regulations 800* will be followed. Because of health and safety concerns, workers will be instructed to avoid contact with human remains if any are uncovered. Work will be stopped, and the park Chief of Resources will be notified. Work will resume once approved by the superintendent.

Practices to Minimize Effects on Natural Resources

Standard best management practices to limit erosion and control sediment release will be employed. Such measures include use of silt fencing, limiting the area of vegetative disturbance, and covering banked soils to protect them until they are reused.

Silt curtains or gunderbooms (silt curtains made of permeable geotextile fabrics) will allow suspended sediment at the dredging site to settle out in a controlled area, minimizing the area affected by increased suspended sediment.

Any in-stream work will be restricted from March 1 to June 15 to reduce potential effects to the aquatic community during spawning.

A bioretention area will be constructed to address storm water runoff water quality issues at each boat ramp site. Final design (not complete) will determine the appropriate location for the bioretention areas.

Another measure used to control storm water runoff will be installation of temporary silt fencing. Silt fences are made of synthetic fabric and are placed in drainage contours to trap sediments generated during construction.

Asphalt removal and concrete installation will be performed during dry periods to avoid possible contamination of storm water runoff from broken asphalt and curing concrete.

Practices to Minimize Effects on Public Health and Safety

Access to areas will be restricted during construction activity. These locations will be clearly marked with appropriate signage.

Practices to Minimize Effects on Visitor Use and Experience

Educational materials and interpretive information regarding the need for and nature of the project will be prepared and distributed to park visitors by park staff.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The No Action Alternative would continue present management and conditions. It does not imply or direct discontinuing the present action or removing existing uses, development, or facilities. The No Action Alternative provided the basis for comparing the management direction and environmental consequences of the Preferred Alternative.

Under the No Action Alternative, the facilities at each site would remain unaltered in form and function. Maintenance and repair would be performed on an as-needed basis, and law enforcement would continue to patrol these areas. Public access to these facilities would be available year round, excluding periods when high or low river levels make access unsafe or impractical. Visitors launching vessels from the boat ramp facilities would continue to encounter difficulties during periods of high use, when vehicle parking restricts access to the boat ramps, and the parking lot at Monocacy Aqueduct would remain an intrusive feature in the viewshed.

Sub-Alternative C-1

Two sub-alternatives for the development of a new paved parking lot were analyzed in the environmental assessment as potential elements of the Preferred Alternative. As part of the decision-making process, Alternative C-2 will be implemented as described in the “Preferred Alternative” section above because the environmental impacts will be less than those associated with Alternative C-1. Under Alternative C-1, the parking lot would be located in a currently undeveloped wooded area. This area was the location of the campground until it was relocated to its current location in the mid-1980s. The proposed location for the parking lot under this alternative has since become vegetated. The parking area would be constructed to accommodate 20 cars, including 14 with trailers. This lot would cover 25,533 square feet. Approximately 40 trees would need to be cleared for this development.

Alternative B – Minimal Development to Improve Visitor Access

This alternative would result in improvements to facilities at the four project sites. Alternative B would use previously developed areas as much as possible while still accomplishing all of the project objectives.

Features of Alternative B Common to All Project Sites

Project elements that would be implemented at all four project sites would be the same as those described under Alternative C (the Preferred Alternative) in the “Features of the Preferred Alternative Common to All Project Sites” section. These would include new restrooms, timber guardrails, and necessary storm water management.

Point of Rocks

Under Alternative B, the Point of Rocks boat ramp would remain in its current location; however, it would be rehabilitated and its grade would be lessened. Rip rap or other protection would be installed around the base of the boat ramp to protect it from scouring and to protect users from the abrupt ledges associated with the current boat ramp configuration. Visitors with deeper-draft

vessels would continue to have difficulty navigating due to the submerged rock ledge located downstream.

The existing unpaved parking area and Canal Road would be resurfaced. Canal Road would be repaired as needed and paved. Resurfacing the parking area would involve removing two mature trees and grading, compacting, stabilizing, and surfacing the area with asphalt. Five designated parking spaces, including one handicapped space, would then be marked to avoid the ambiguity and confusion of the current configuration.

In addition, a new parking lot would be constructed on either side of Canal Road, west of the boat ramp. The lot would total 7,800 square feet, providing 24 parking spaces, including four handicapped spaces. A new day-use picnic area would be created in the area surrounding the new parking lot. Picnic tables would be installed, and a small path connecting the towpath and new parking and picnic area would be added to avoid social trailing.

Brunswick

Actions taken at Brunswick under Alternative B would be the same as those described above for the Preferred Alternative.

Fifteenmile Creek

Under Alternative B, the boat ramp and parking area would be stabilized and brought back to correct elevation and grade. This process would begin with the installation of a 230-linear-foot gabion retaining wall located above the existing shoreline. The gabions would be placed directly upstream from the boat ramp, with timbers secured on top to create a dock. This structure would protect the boat ramp by deflecting ice and debris and give boaters a place to tie off. The area behind the wall would be backfilled to the appropriate elevation. The unused concrete boat ramp at this location would be removed.

The parking area would be paved and striped. The area adjacent to the boat ramp would be designed to accommodate 10 vehicle/trailer spaces and eight single vehicle spaces. Two of the 18 new spaces would be designated handicapped spaces. Paving this area would facilitate parking lot maintenance and allow efficient removal of debris and sediment following high-water events.

The parking area perimeters would be defined using timber guardrails, eliminating vehicle encroachment into sensitive areas. Alternative B would create a parking area of approximately 16,200 square feet.

To accommodate deeper-draft vessels, the deposited sediment accumulating at the confluence of Fifteenmile Creek and the Potomac River would be dredged on a biennial schedule (every other year). Dredged materials would be taken to a dry-down site and subsequently deposited at a proper disposal area. Permits from the Maryland Department of the Environment and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be obtained prior to any dredging activities.

The boat ramp access road would be engineered to provide better drainage and road shoulders would be re-established. The road would be paved from the wooden bridge, across the canal prism, to the boat ramp parking lot. A total of 352 linear feet of roadway would receive treatment. A total of 457 linear feet of new timber guardrail would be installed along the access road and parking lot perimeter to prevent unauthorized parking.

A wooden stairway would be installed to connect the boat ramp area with the campground and parking lot areas. This would eliminate the existing social trails. No changes would be made to the existing campground under this alternative.

An additional 1,584 square feet of visitor parking would be created along the emergency and maintenance access road. This area would serve park day users, who are interested in hiking or biking the canal towpath. This parking area would add seven vehicle parking spaces, two of which would be designated handicapped.

Approximately 139 linear feet of existing steel guardrail would be removed. The three steel pipe gates that restrict vehicle access to the towpath would be replaced by split bicycle access gates. The new gates would be located on either side of the access road at the towpath and across the emergency and maintenance access road. The towpath between the access road and the Fifteenmile Creek Aqueduct would be resurfaced for bicycle and hiker use.

Monocacy Aqueduct

Actions taken at Brunswick under Alternative B would be the same as those described above for the Preferred Alternative.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED

Two additional alternatives were proposed for the Brunswick boat ramp. The elements of those alternatives, which would result in resource impacts that park staff thought would be unacceptable, are described below.

Under one dismissed alternative, the existing boat ramp and the causeway through the canal would be removed. A new access road would be constructed from the towpath, at a point near the historic waste weir, to the parking area. A concrete deck would be constructed over the historic waste weir to provide additional support to protect the structure from continued vehicle access from Maple Avenue to the upstream boat ramp.

In another dismissed alternative, the existing boat ramp access road and the causeway through the canal would be removed. A new access road would be constructed from the towpath, at a point near the existing access road, to the parking area. A concrete deck would be constructed over the historic waste weir to provide additional support to protect the structure from continued vehicle access from Maple Avenue to the upstream boat ramp.

Both alternatives would have resulted in increased traffic on the historic towpath and would have created additional burden on the historic waste weir. These alternatives would also have introduced new roadways in the area that would have resulted in increased disturbance of potential sensitive species habitat. Because of the level of impact that would result to cultural and natural resources at this site, these alternatives were not retained for full analysis.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

As stated in Section 2.7.D of *Director's Order #12 and Handbook*, the environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that would promote the national environmental policy expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Sec. 101 (b)). This includes alternatives that:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
- Ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.

- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
- Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The environmentally preferred alternative for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park access improvements project was identified by applying these national environmental policy goals to the evaluation and decision-making processes.

Alternative C, the Preferred Alternative, will attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment, visitor safety and enjoyment, and cultural resource protection, without degradation of resources. Specifically, the Preferred Alternative meets the criteria for the environmentally preferred alternative because it will:

- Maintain and improve river access for recreational users and for law enforcement and emergency services personnel,
- Provide defined parking areas to protect natural resources,
- Improve visual quality of the areas,
- Facilitate better interpretation of Chesapeake and Ohio Canal,
- Reduce sediment erosion, and
- Correct and/or avoid unsafe conditions.

Therefore, Alternative C is the environmentally preferred alternative.

THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Soils

Under the Preferred Alternative, construction activities will produce local, adverse, negligible, short-term effects on soils at the Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct areas. Development of facilities such as parking areas, boat ramp and launching facilities, picnic areas, and campgrounds will result in compaction and loss of soils in the area of development. These actions will have long-term, negligible-to-minor, adverse effects on soils at each location.

Long-term, negligible-to-minor benefits will occur from reclamation of parking areas and roadways at Point of Rocks and the unused boat ramp at Fifteenmile Creek. Long-term, negligible-to-minor

benefits to soils will also result at each site as designated parking areas and established visitor-use areas are developed, reducing soil compaction and erosion from vehicle access in undesignated areas and social trailing.

Vegetation

Impacts on native vegetation under the Preferred Alternative will be minor, long-term, local, and both adverse and beneficial. Beneficial impacts will include those related to the reclamation and revegetation of the areas currently occupied by the boat ramp and access road at Point of Rocks, the existing parking lot at Monocacy Aqueduct, and the delineation of the parking area at the Fifteenmile Creek boat ramp. Adverse impacts will primarily be associated with the removal of vegetation from the canal prism between Lock 30 and Maple Avenue at Brunswick and the removal of immature and mature trees from the Fifteenmile Creek site and the canal basin at Monocacy Aqueduct.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats

Impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat under the Preferred Alternative will be negligible to moderate, short and long term, local, and adverse. Reclamation and revegetation of the area currently occupied by the boat ramp and access road at the Point of Rocks project site will have negligible-to-minor, beneficial impacts at that particular site.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety

Public health and safety was an important issue addressed during development of the Preferred Alternative. Overall, implementation of the proposed action will result in minor, beneficial, long-term effects on public health and safety, and the cumulative impact also will be beneficial, long-term, and minor. At Fifteenmile Creek, the visitor parking areas will be relocated to higher ground, lessening the risks to vehicles left overnight from high-water events. Construction of a new boat ramp at Point of Rocks will eliminate navigational hazards associated with the rock ledge that is downstream of the existing ramp.

Removal of trees from the canal basin at Monocacy Aqueduct could pose potential safety hazards to the public as trees are felled and heavy machinery and trucks are used to transport them. However, the area will be off-limits to the public during this operation and will be closely monitored by park personnel. The construction of the new parking lot and service roads and reclamation of the existing parking lot will also be closely monitored, and a temporary closing will be implemented to keep the public out of harm's way.

Similar to the actions to be taken at Point of Rocks, the Brunswick boat ramp will also be rehabilitated and its grade will be lessened. Rip rap or other scour protection will be used to stabilize the area around the base of the boat ramp to increase safety for those launching boats. Effects on public health and safety at this site will be long-term, beneficial, and minor.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

Historic and Cultural Resources

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The listed site includes the entire length of the canal and towpath and all associated canal-related structures, including bridges, culverts, aqueducts, waste weirs, turning basins, locks, and lock houses. There are no known archeological sites within the footprints of any actions from

the Preferred Alternative; however, there are three known archeological sites within the immediate vicinity of the proposed parking lot at Monocacy Aqueduct. There are no historic structures within the footprints or near vicinity of the area of potential effect of the Preferred Alternative. Within one mile of the project sites, there are 15 historic structures near Point of Rocks, 16 historic structures near the Brunswick project site, six historic structures near Fifteenmile Creek, and 26 within a mile of the Monocacy Aqueduct, 20 of which are within the bounds of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

Wetlands

The National Wetland Inventory identifies several areas downstream of the Point of Rocks boat ramp, between the boat ramp access road and the Potomac River, as small, freshwater forested/shrub wetlands. Several small, freshwater forested/shrub wetlands are identified by the National Wetlands Inventory within and surrounding the Brunswick project site.

Based on a review of the National Wetlands Inventory dataset, no wetlands have been identified within the Fifteenmile Creek project site. However, the lowland area surrounding the boat ramp is perennially flooded and pock-marked with wet depressions, some of which support hydrophytic vegetation. The area is underlain by alluvial land with hydric properties. Taking these factors into consideration, many of the wet depressions meet wetland criteria and will continue to be protected by the National Park Service.

Review of the National Wetland Inventory dataset revealed no mapped wetlands within the Monocacy Aqueduct project site. However, based on soil type, vegetation, and hydrology, the canal basin meets standard wetland criteria and functions as a palustrine forested wetland.

There are no prime and unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas within the project area.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

There were no highly controversial issues or effects identified during the preparation of the environmental assessment or during the public review period.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified during the preparation of the environmental assessment or during the public review period.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Preferred Alternative neither establishes a National Park Service precedent for future actions with significant effects nor will it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

Projects that were considered in conjunction with the Preferred Alternative for their cumulative effects include rail station improvements, a community park, pivot bridge deck replacement, state of Maryland and CSX barrier trench, the town of Brunswick utility line upgrade, and the Monocacy

Aqueduct stabilization project. The effects to natural resources anticipated from these actions are adverse and of negligible-to-minor intensity. The effects to cultural resources anticipated from these actions are adverse and of minor-to-moderate intensity. Park operations, public health and safety, and visitor use and experience would receive minor-to-moderate beneficial effects from these actions. In combination with the Preferred Alternative, which will produce both minor adverse and minor beneficial long-term effects, significant (major) effects are not anticipated.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources

Impacts on the historic landscape are judged to have no adverse effect on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Register of Historic Places property as a whole, given that changes will occur within a small portion of the 184-mile corridor that is listed in the National Register.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was contacted regarding this project, and the Service agreed with the park's finding of no effect on threatened and endangered species.

However, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources indicated that the Wildlife and Heritage Service had a recent record for the state-listed endangered clasping-leaved dogbane occurring on park property at the mouth of Fifteenmile Creek near the river. They also stated that the Wildlife and Heritage Service's Natural Heritage database identifies five species of concern within the vicinity of the project site. Any of the finfish species that may occur in or near the project site will be adequately protected by the "Use IV-P in-stream work" restriction period, appropriate sediment and erosion control methods, and other best management practices typically used for the protection of stream resources. Thus, there will be no effect to threatened and endangered species as a result of implementing the Preferred Alternative.

Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection laws

The Preferred Alternative will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Impairment

In addition to reviewing the list of significant criteria, the Superintendent of Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park has determined that implementation of the Preferred Alternative will not constitute an impairment to Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the project's environmental assessment, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in National Park Service *Management Policies 2001*. As described in the environmental assessment, implementation of the Preferred Alternative will not result in major, adverse impacts to a resource or value whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant National Park Service planning document.

Although implementation of the project will cause short- and long-term, localized adverse effects, in all cases these result from actions taken to preserve vital park resources. Overall, implementation

of the Preferred Alternative will result in benefits to natural, historic, and cultural resources, public health and safety, and visitor use and experience.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Internal National Park Service discussions led to identification of the main issues and impact topics that were addressed in the environmental assessment.

The environmental assessment process under NEPA requires agencies to seek outside suggestions and other input about what should be considered in the environmental assessment. This process, called “scoping,” involves contacting other federal, state, and local agencies that might have an interest in the proposed action.

Park personnel conducted site visits with personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at the Brunswick and Fifteenmile Creek boat ramp sites. Discussions at the Brunswick site centered on the potential increases to storm water run-off and the need for a bioretention area.

At Fifteenmile Creek, discussions focused on the temporary benefits of dredging, the use of fill at and/or paving the parking area in its current location within the floodplain, and the removal of vegetation at the former campground site to accommodate a new parking area. During the site visit discussions, Maryland Department of the Environment personnel indicated that they were not in favor of elevating the existing parking area or repeated dredging.

In 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources provided letter responses to National Park Service inquiries regarding the proposed improvements at Fifteenmile Creek. The Chesapeake Bay Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated that “except for transient individuals, no federally proposed or listed endangered or threatened species are known to exist within the project impact area. Therefore, no Biological Assessment or further Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required.” A similar response was received in a November 8, 2004 letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the presence of proposed or listed species at the Brunswick and Point of Rocks sites.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources indicated that the Wildlife and Heritage Service had a recent record for the state-listed endangered clasping-leaved dogbane occurring on park property at the mouth of Fifteenmile Creek near the river. They also stated that the Wildlife and Heritage Service’s Natural Heritage database identifies five species of concern within the vicinity of the project site. Regarding the presence of finfish species, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources indicated that the Fifteenmile Creek (Upper Potomac River Drainage Area) is classified as a Use IV-P stream (recreational trout waters and public water supply) and that in-stream work is generally not permitted from March 1 through June 15 during any year. Any of the finfish species that may occur in or near the project site will be adequately protected by the “Use IV-P in-stream work” restriction period, appropriate sediment and erosion control methods, and other best management practices typically used for the protection of stream resources.

Consultation regarding the Monocacy Aqueduct site was initiated with the transmittal of letters to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requesting information about the presence of proposed or listed species at that site. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources response, dated November 8, 2004, indicated that drainages in the Monocacy Aqueduct area are classified as Use I-P (Water Contact Recreation, Protection of Aquatic Life, and Public Water Supply). In-stream work restrictions for Use I-P waters will be from March 1 to June 15, inclusive.

Prior to project implementation at any of the four project sites, coordination will be required with the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The park and cultural resource specialists at the National Capital Park Regional Office determined that no American Indian tribes are associated with Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Therefore, no tribal or government-to-government consultation was initiated prior to this project.

Public Involvement

The environmental assessment was made available for public review and comment for 30 days from March 17 through April 15, 2005. An electronic copy of the environmental assessment was available for downloading and review on the park's website during the same period. The National Park Service also sent copies of the environmental assessment to various local organizations, interested parties, and government agencies for their review and comment. Agencies and organizations to which the environmental assessment was sent included, but were not limited to, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and the Maryland Historical Trust. The environmental assessment was available for review at Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park visitor centers in Hagerstown, Brunswick, Hancock, and Cumberland, Maryland. Review copies of the environmental assessment also were available in the U.S. Post Offices in Point of Rocks, Dickerson, Brunswick, Hancock, Little Orleans, and Flintstone, Maryland. The public libraries in Brunswick and Hancock, Maryland also had copies of the environmental assessment available for review. A public information meeting was held at park headquarters in Hagerstown, Maryland on March 30, 2005.

Five letters commenting on the environmental assessment were received by the National Park Service. Four of the comments and NPS responses are included in the following paragraphs. The fifth comment, the NPS response, and a change in the Preferred Alternative is summarized on the attached errata sheet.

Comment 1: The Maryland Department of Natural Resources suggested that the planned parking capacities for trailers and cars at the Brunswick site may not be adequate to meet future needs.

Response 1: The National Park Service has evaluated the need for development, including future parking need projections, and determined that the balance between development and resource protection as presented in the Preferred Alternative will provide sufficient parking.

Comment 2: The Maryland Department of the Environment; Sediment, Stormwater, and Dam Safety Program; Plan Review Division noted that a complete accounting of impervious surfaces (including removal of existing surfaces and creation of new areas) will be necessary when final design plans are completed. Additional comments from this agency addressed other permitting requirements, including disposal of soils, stormwater management, and vegetative stabilization, that need to be considered during the final design process.

Response 2: The National Park Service thanks the Maryland Department of the Environment for their comments and suggestions regarding additional permitting requirements. All appropriate permits and actions will be incorporated into the final design for the project.

Comment 3: The Maryland Historical Trust reviewed the environmental assessment and determined that the access improvements “will have no adverse effect on historic properties, conditioned upon completion of archeology considerations.”

Response 3: The National Park Service thanks the Maryland Historical Trust for their consideration and agrees to implement archeological considerations where necessary to protect cultural resources.

Comment 4: A letter from Catoctin Power, LLC, requests that the National Park Service consider retaining and maintaining an existing access road to access the underside of the US Route 15 bridge at Point of Rocks. This road would serve as an access road to a pumphouse that Catoctin Power, the National Park Service, and the Maryland State Highway Administration are considering for construction. Use of the existing road would eliminate use of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal tow path to access the planned pumphouse.

Response 4: The National Park Service will continue to allow access to the underside of the US Route 15 bridge either via the tow path or the existing county road. Future responsibility for maintenance of the existing county road is uncertain at this time, but if the road is retained, an agreement to assume maintenance responsibilities will be reached in coordination with the parties having a need to access the underside of the Route 15 bridge.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), attached to the public review environmental assessment, represents the National Park Service decision. The entire public review environmental assessment will not be reprinted.

Errata and Response to Comment

Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct Environmental Assessment

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, Maryland

Comment: The Tourism Council of Frederick County Maryland, Inc. requested that the new parking lot at the Monocacy Aqueduct be configured to allow a motor coach or school bus to turn around. An alternate suggestion was to provide signage directing large vehicles to the boat ramp parking lot.

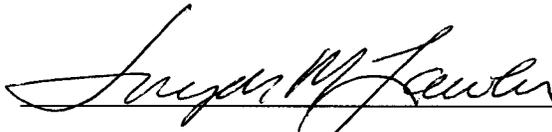
Response: The National Park Service has provided an area to accommodate parking and a turnaround for large vehicles, including buses and motor coaches. The area will be signed to only allow buses and oversize vehicles. The revised parking area is shown within the hatched area marked "Bus Parking Only" in the figure on the following page. This revision does not result in any changes to the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

CONCLUSION

The Preferred Alternative will not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The Preferred Alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Adverse environmental impacts that could occur are short- or long-term and of negligible to moderate intensity. There will be no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, or other unique characteristics of the region. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. No uncertain or controversial impacts, unique risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law nor result in the impairment of park resources or values.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended: 
Kevin D. Brandt, Superintendent Date 7/27/05
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

Approved: 
Joseph M. Lawler, Director Date 8/1/05
National Capital Region, National Park Service



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
C&O Canal National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

F
NPS

ESJ/CAL

IN REPLY REFER TO:

200500790

D2215(CHOH)

March 16, 2005

MAR 22 2005

RA Bus
JEB Brandy
- Anne
KB

Rodney J. Little, Director
Division of Historical-Cultural Programs
100 Community Place
Crownsville, Maryland 21032-2023

Dear Mr. Little:

FR G.

In accordance with the Council of Environmental Quality and the National Environmental Policy Act, we are forwarding a copy of *Environmental Assessment, DRAFT, Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct, National Park Service, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, March 2005*. This draft document will be on 30-day review beginning March 17, 2005, through April 16, 2005.

Thank you for the time to review this project. Please forward any comments to Lynne Wigfield, Compliance Officer, at lynne_wigfield@nps.gov, (301) 745-5802 or the above address. Please forward any comments by April 16, 2005.

Sincerely,

Kevin D. Brandt

Kevin D. Brandt
Superintendent

Enclosure

The Maryland Historical Trust has determined that this undertaking will have no adverse effect on historic properties conditioned upon completion of archeology considerations.
Ejmy Cole Date 5/26/05

Archeo: #2CNA BC
5/26/05 conditioned on completion of archeo work.

HSE: #2NA CAL
5/26/05



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
C&O Canal National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

IN REPLY REFER TO

L7617 (CHOH)

September 1, 2005

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, National Capital Region *9/2*

From: *ACTING* Superintendent, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park *↪*

Subject: Boat Ramp Access Environmental Assessment

Enclosed is a signature page that was omitted from the boat ramp Access Environmental Assessment. You may recall that you noted this in your review of the document. The document has been signed by my acting and by the Acting Chief of the WASO Water Resources Division. Your signature will complete this process. When complete, please return the original to the park. We will provide a copy to the regional office as part of the final document.

**STATEMENT OF FINDINGS
FOR**

EXECUTIVE ORDER 11988 (FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT)

Access Improvements to Point of Rocks, Brunswick, Fifteenmile Creek, and Monocacy Aqueduct

Environmental Assessment

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

Recommended

for Robert D. DeLaney

Superintendent,
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
National Historical Park

08/11/05

Date

**Certification of
Technical Adequacy and
Servicewide Consistency:**

William J. Jackson
Acting Chief, _____ *8/16/05*
Water Resources Division Date

Approved:

Joseph M. Jaster

Regional Director
National Capital Region Date *9/2/05*