

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park Project Scoping

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



January 8-February 10, 2007

Environmental Assessment for Eelways – Historic Dams # 4&5 on the Potomac River, Washington County, MD.

The National Park Service (NPS), in partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and in cooperation with Allegheny Energy, is in process of reviewing a proposed request to establish passages for the American Eel at Dams # 4 & 5 on the Potomac River. The proposal is to establish one eelway passage per dam location.

Dams # 4 & 5 were built by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company to supply water for their canal operations. Both dams were originally completed in 1834 but eventually replaced by solid masonry structures that exist today. Dam # 4 was replaced in 1860 and is located at mile 84 of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Dam # 5 was replaced in 1857. Dam # 5 is located at park mile 106. Both structures are owned and maintained by the NPS.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Park Service is initiating work on an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate potential impacts of the proposed project to the natural, cultural, and human environment.

Purpose and Need

The American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) population is in decline partly due to obstacles they encounter on their lifecycle migration between freshwater river habitat and saltwater spawning areas. Dams are an impediment to this lifecycle. Ways and means to enable the American eel to have safe passage over historic Dams # 4 & 5 of the Potomac River is the focus of this project, which would open over 120 miles river as habitat for the eels and help with their restoration.



Dam #4, photo taken from Maryland looking toward West Virginia
(NPS Photo 2006)



Dam #5, photo taken from Maryland looking toward West Virginia
(NPS Photo 2006)



Project locations

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Resources and Impact Topics

Initial internal project scoping identified the following resources and impact topics for consideration in the EA:

- Geology
- Soil
- Water Resources
- Floodplains
- Vegetation
- Wetlands
- Wildlife and Aquatic Life
- Archaeological Resources
- Cultural Landscape/Resources
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Park Operations
- Public Safety
- Socioeconomic Environment
- Endangered and Threatened Species

Alternatives

(The project is proposing to establish one eelway passage per dam location.)

Initial internal project scoping has identified the following alternatives for consideration in the EA:

- No Action** – the status quo, American Eels would continue to encounter impediments to their upstream migration at Dams # 4 & 5. Existing voids in the structures would yield limited passage.
- Construction of passageways near the West Virginia shoreline.** At both dams, this would involve an exposed structure that would originate in a calm pool of water at the base of the dam and rise to the top of the dam. A water diversion wall would be installed at the top of the dam at the passage way location to prevent debris from damaging the eelway structure.
- Construction of the passageway on the Maryland shoreline area.** At Dam # 4, the passageway would utilize the semi-watered canal with a few modifications at the guard lock above the dam. At Dam # 5 a complete underground passageway would be constructed to connect the river area below the dam to the area of the guard lock above the dam.
- Combination of Alternatives B and C.** This alternative would combine one structure at a Maryland location and one structure at a West Virginia location.



US Fish and Wildlife Service

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include:

- Public scoping period (January 8- February 10, 2007).
- Public Scoping Meeting – January 17, 2007.
- Preparation of EA.
- Public review of EA.
- Analysis of public comment.
- Preparation of decision document.
- Announcement of decision on proposal.

Public Scoping Period

At this time, the Superintendent is announcing a 34-day public scoping period to solicit public comments on this proposal. During this scoping period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed project so that the National Park Service can appropriately consider them in the EA. You may submit comments electronically at the National Park Service's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>) or submit written comments to:

Superintendent
C&O Canal National Historical Park
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Please submit your scoping comments by February 10, 2007.

Once the EA is developed, it will be made available for public review for a 30-day period. If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list for this or other announcements, please be sure to indicate that in your response.