

C H R I S
VAN HOLLLEN
U . S . SENATOR  FOR MARYLAND

Chesapeake National Recreation Area Act Summary of Committee Changes

Senator Van Hollen and Congressman Sarbanes released the CNRA discussion draft and map for public feedback in November 2022. The legislators hosted a nearly six-month public comment period, which included several listening sessions with groups such as neighborhood community organizations, environmental and historical preservation groups, racial justice advocates, seafood and outdoor recreation businesses, and local elected officials. Senator Van Hollen and Congressman Sarbanes worked with the CNRA Working Group to review the feedback received from all sources to determine what changes to the draft legislative text were necessary to address the input they received. The Chesapeake National Recreation Area was introduced in July 2023 and included authority for NPS to partner with local stakeholders and acquire by voluntary sale or donation Burtis House, Whitehall, Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, and the North Beach of Fort Monroe to serve as the first sites within the CNRA. Following introduction of the legislation, further modifications were made based on feedback from the National Park Service (NPS) and bipartisan Committee staff to align the CNRA with established precedent in order to ensure the amended legislation was favorably reported out of the Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources (ENR), which occurred by voice vote on November 19, 2024. Technical changes include:

- **A modified mechanism to expand the CNRA through future voluntary land acquisitions.**
 - **Self-executing studies.** In the amended text, new sites are acquired through a unique, self-executing authority that provides NPS the ability to study sites for future acquisition once they have been identified by the Advisory Commission. This modification will require Congress to authorize new acquisitions; however, the self-executing study authority will expedite acquisition compared to the standard NPS expansion process by eliminating the need for Congress to separately authorize studies for potential new sites.
 - **Geographic scope.** Under the amended text, the self-executing study authority for future sites applies to sites in Maryland and Virginia that are near or adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay and tidal tributaries. Congress can also direct NPS to study sites throughout the watershed via legislation. If NPS determines that the site is appropriate for inclusion in the CNRA, it can be added to the unit by an act of Congress.
- **Simplified partnership agreements.** The amended text also clarifies NPS's authorities to enter into partnership agreements. The new language allows NPS to enter into cooperative agreements with local governments, NGOs, and individuals to interpret and restore nationally significant historic, cultural, or recreational resources relating to the Bay. It no longer includes a formal designation for partner sites.

- **Providing NPS more authority in CNRA administration.** Several provisions relating to how NPS organizes management of the CNRA were amended to maximize efficiency in NPS's administration of the unit.
 - **Superintendent.** The specific requirement that the CNRA be overseen through the Superintendent of the Chesapeake Bay Office of NPS was removed, but the text retains direction for NPS to administer the CNRA in coordination with the Chesapeake Gateways Program.
 - **Headquarters & Visitor Centers.** The specific requirements for the location of the park headquarters and visitor service centers were removed to allow NPS to determine the most appropriate and cost-effective locations. The amended text also gives NPS the authority to acquire up to 10 acres of additional land from willing sellers for visitor service purposes, while still prioritizing selection of sites in Annapolis and Fort Monroe.
 - **Traffic Planning.** The specific requirement for transportation planning to minimize traffic impacts was retained with some modifications: the language was streamlined to align with existing NPS authorities and a requirement to coordinate with state and local government partners was included.

- **Gateways Partnership Program.** The permanent authorization is maintained but the annual amount is modified from the original \$6 million to “such sums as necessary” to allow for more long-term flexibility as funding needs for the program continue to increase over time.