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Testimony before the Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 5466:  
The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Designation Act  
September 28, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 5466, the "Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Designation Act of 2006." I am Patrick F. Noonan, Chairman Emeritus and founder of The Conservation Fund – a national organization dedicated to conserving historic, natural and working lands and to promoting sustainable economic development through tourism, education and community-based initiatives. For over thirty years, I have worked to protect America's great treasures, such as Civil War battlefields, by forming partnerships with private landowners, major corporations, and state and federal agencies.

I am accompanied by my good friend and colleague, Mr. Gilbert Grosvenor, the Chairman of the Board of the National Geographic Society. Gil Grosvenor and I believe that this hearing is very timely as our nation is on the eve of the 400th anniversary of the establishment of Jamestown and Captain Smith's epic voyages of exploration. The Jamestown commemoration, organized by the Congressionally-authorized Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission, will be an American event of worldwide significance. Because of the impending anniversary, we have limited time to recognize this chapter of American history, which was crucial to the establishment of representative democracy in America.

We also wish to thank Representative Jo Ann Davis for her leadership role in introducing this bipartisan bill. Representative Davis is a patriot, a fighter and deserves recognition for her vision and leadership to complete this initiative. We also must recognize the outstanding support of Representative Thelma Drake, whose commitment to the trail has been outstanding. H.R. 5466 is co-sponsored by 23 Members of Congress from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, a testament to their recognition of the importance of commemorating the 400th anniversary of the establishment of Jamestown and Captain John Smith's voyages and thereby the need for this bill.

This legislation is both bipartisan and bicameral. Earlier this year, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved companion legislation, S.2568. The Senate bill is sponsored by Senator Paul Sarbanes, and is co-sponsored by Senator Warner, Senator Allen, Senator Mikulski, Senator Biden, Senator Carper, Senator Santorum and Senator Specter. Last week, three major publications editorialized in support of the trail, including the *Virginian Pilot*, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the *Baltimore Sun*.

We strongly support H.R. 5466, a bill to amend the National Trails System Act to designate Captain Smith's routes of travel as the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. By establishing a new National Historic Trail, the bill designates Smith's historic routes of travel as nationally significant. These routes of travel extend for approximately 2,300 miles in the Chesapeake Bay and along portions of the Bay's major tributaries in the states of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware as well as the District of Columbia.

#### Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment

On September 15, 2006, the Bush Administration transmitted the congressionally- authorized Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment to Congress. We are pleased that the study, conducted by the National Park Service (NPS), finds the trail fully meets the criteria required by the National Trails System Act for designation as a National Historic Trail and recommends federal designation. Specifically, the study determined that:

- Smith's routes of travel are nationally significant with respect to several broad themes in our nation's history including ethnic heritage (Native Americans), exploration and settlement and trade and commerce.
- Smith's map and detailed journals provide enough information to clearly define his routes of travel in 1607-1609.
- A federally designated trail would create excellent opportunities for public recreation, tourism, historical interpretation and appreciation.

The study further concluded that federal designation will afford appropriate recognition for the region's rich history and the national significance of Smith's voyages while providing a regional framework for the trail. As the proposed management agency for the trail, the NPS can build effective public-private partnerships with federal, state, local governments, businesses and non-profit organizations, substantially reducing the cost to the U.S. Treasury. Finally, the study found that the trail would have no impact upon privately owned land, including docks and piers.

The study enjoys broad public support. The Bush Administration's transmittal letter to Congress cites "exceptionally high" public interest and support for the trail, as demonstrated by over 450 letters in support of trail designation and/or expedited completion of the study from state and local governments, Indian tribes, businesses, chambers of commerce, tourism leaders, non-profit organizations, landowners, educational institutions and individual citizens. We are pleased that the proposed trail enjoys the support of the governors of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and Pennsylvania, as well as the Chesapeake Executive Council, Chesapeake Bay Commission, Virginia Council on Indians, Nanticoke Indians and member of the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission.

Thanks to the leadership of Representative Frank Wolf, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy project will complement the proposed trail. In partnership with Verizon, Dupont, the National Geographic Society and a great many others, NOAA is developing buoys that will mark Smith's routes of travel and provide historical and real-time educational information to trail users via hand-held devices and the public at large via the internet. NOAA is scheduled to deploy the first three buoys in the spring of 2007 at Jamestown, the Potomac River and in the Northern Bay. As with the trail, public response to the buoy project has been overwhelmingly positive.

The completion of a replica of Captain John Smith's 30-foot boat, known as the shallop, and its museum tour has stirred the imagination of the general public about Smith's voyages and heightened public support for the trail. We were pleased to have the opportunity to join with Representative Drake at the opening of the John Smith shallop exhibit earlier this month at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. The shallop will be on display here in Washington, D.C. at the National Geographic Society from November 3rd to December 7, 2006. We are now aware that the public demand for information on this important story will grow significantly in advance of next year's commemoration of the events that took place in the Bay nearly 400 years ago. We believe it is critical that the trail be established in time to meet this expected demand and to take advantage of the unique opportunities to leverage non-federal funding.

Mr. Chairman, the trail supporters and buoy project make up a broad public-private partnership, which includes substantial financial support from major corporations, state governments, Indian tribes and non-profits. In order to fully capitalize upon this exceptional support, we recommend Congress establish the trail before the Jamestown commemoration events begin later this fall. Because of the historic, cultural, and economic importance of Captain John Smith's explorations of the Chesapeake Bay and the public's enthusiasm and demand for information on Smith's voyages, we respectfully request that the Committee pass the bill to establish the trail this year.

### Bringing American History and Imagination to Life

As you know, 2007 marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent American settlement and of Captain John Smith's arrival in the New World. Captain John Smith - sailor, soldier, explorer, and colonial leader - played a crucial role in establishing the roots of our nation's rich maritime heritage when he explored the Chesapeake Bay in a shallop. Smith saved the hour at America's birth and served as indefatigable leader who, with the assistance and forbearance of the Native Americans, changed the course of history by ensuring the survival of Jamestown.

As the eve of the quadricentennial of Jamestown's founding approaches, it is important to commemorate the national significance of Smith's voyages, which took place 200 years before Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery and its exploration of the nation's interior. The proposed trail will recognize John Smith's leadership and inspire generations of Americans and overseas visitors to follow Smith's journeys, gain a better understanding of Native American culture, learn about the roots of American democracy, and celebrate this great land we call America.

Captain John Smith's exploration of Chesapeake Bay was a monumental and historic achievement, shaping the boundaries, character and future of America. Smith and his crew of just over a dozen men courageously traveled almost 2,300 miles along the Bay exploring a vast region from the Virginia capes to the lower Susquehanna River near Pennsylvania.

Smith saw a Chesapeake Bay with its incredible, productive ecosystem intact and with sophisticated and diverse Native American cultures thriving along the shores of what is known today as Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Smith's famous 1612 map was the first accurate depiction of the Chesapeake Bay and the native settlements present. For

nearly a century, the map served as the definitive map of the region, including areas documented entirely with information supplied by Native Americans. By providing accurate information, this map enabled the colonization of British North America and the social and economic development that led to American Independence in the late eighteenth century. Smith's voyages also opened the door of opportunity to establish our democratic form of government for all Americans

On his voyages and as President of the Jamestown Colony, Captain Smith became the point of first contact for scores of Native American leaders from around the Chesapeake. His notes describing the indigenous people he met in the Chesapeake are still widely studied by historians, anthropologists and scientists. The impact of Smith's voyages on the American Indians is a critical element of the story.

Smith commonly formed partnerships with the many different tribes by building an economic relationship based on trade. The supplies he obtained through trade with American Indians are credited with saving the Jamestown colony during its early years. The historic meeting between colonists and American Indians profoundly impacted both cultures and changed the course of history. These early interactions between the ambassadors of both peoples were in many ways a significant prelude for events to come.

As chronicled in his journals, Smith's voyages in America ignited the imagination of the Old World. He produced many books and his writing inspired hundreds, and then thousands of people to settle in the "dense woods and fertile valleys" of the Chesapeake. His adventurous spirit, descriptive writing and accurate mapping all serve to bolster his place in history. A man of humble birth, he was a captivating individual that played a crucial role in our country's history. The proposed National Historic Trail provides a practical opportunity for the outdoor enthusiast as well as the historian to experience Smith's spirit by traveling the same route he did nearly 400 years ago.

In many ways, Captain John Smith personified the chance for a better life that would become the American dream for the millions of immigrants who would later benefit from his daring. The son of a farmer in Lincolnshire, England, Smith left his home to seek adventure and fortune in the wider world. Although he was not part of England's upper class, he became President of the Jamestown Colony, which was funded by the London based Virginia Company, one of North America's first "venture capital" enterprises. Smith demonstrated that America was a different place, where success was achieved through hard work, not necessarily noble birth. He helped set the foundation for America's philosophy of equality through his famous "don't work, don't eat" policy. Smith focused on skills and talents, not titles, setting an egalitarian outlook that has echoes in America to this date.

Smith was a bold leader who defied the odds and helped ensure the survival of Jamestown. His contemporaries gave him the credit for having supplied the firm hand and common sense that saved the Jamestown colony during its early struggles with starvation and disease. If not for his leadership, the colony would most likely have failed like the earlier lost colony of Roanoke. England would have lost its claim on the New World and our history would have been vastly different. Instead, he planted the seeds of our American democracy right here in the waters of the Chesapeake and set the stage for the flowering of political leadership in 18th century Virginia and the founding of our nation as an independent country.

In 1804, in his book on *The Life of George Washington*, Chief Justice John Marshall, who laid the foundation for our federalist system, wrote of Captain Smith "[w]hen we consider that he sailed above three thousand miles in an open boat; when we contemplate the dangers, and the hardships he encountered, and the fortitude, courage and patience with which he met them; when we reflect on the useful and important additions which he made to the stock of knowledge respecting America, then possessed by his countrymen; we shall not hesitate to say that few voyages of discovery, undertaken at any time, reflect more honor on those engaged in them, than this does on Captain Smith."

## Maritime Heritage, Tourism and Recreation

In addition to commemorating Smith's voyages, the proposed trail offers tremendous economic opportunities through heritage tourism, such as trail outfitting and guide services, food, lodging and maritime commerce. By establishing the trail, H. R. 5466 will provide an excellent opportunity for the public to learn about Native American history, early English settlement, as well as the Chesapeake Bay's natural resources. The trail will promote public education through: trail maps and guide books, classroom and field experiences, museum and website exhibits and interpretive buoys.

Smith is a proud part of the region's rich maritime and cultural heritage, which includes the fleets of working boats tied up to the docks at watermen's villages, restored 19th century skipjacks and buyboats, Native American villages and displays in local maritime museums. John Smith's waterways of history will link these features with other recreational, cultural and historic destinations providing a highly desirable tourism opportunity for the region. For example, last month the Maryland Watermen's Association, along with Chesapeake College, submitted a grant to the Department of Labor to develop a Maritime Heritage Tourism Tour Guide Training Program, specifically designed to train watermen to give tours on

the Chesapeake Bay. If approved, this will supplement the watermen's income and allow them to maintain their traditional way of life.

The Chesapeake Bay Commission, the Chesapeake Executive Council, members of the Jamestown 400 th Commemoration Commission, economic development officers, chambers of commerce, businesses and local governments have recognized the potential historic tourism opportunities of the trail. Involving volunteer communities, non-governmental organizations, public agencies, business and private landowners in the planning and operation of the trail will make the trail a new model for public-private partnerships so crucial to protecting understating the regions working waterways and experiencing 400 years of maritime history.

## Conclusion

The Chesapeake is an American treasure. It is the cradle of our nation and ties us to our history as a nation from Yorktown to the nation's capital. The Chesapeake is also a working landscape providing billions of dollars annually to the economy of the region and is cherished by the millions of people that live near its shores. Through the bipartisan leadership of the Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania Congressional delegations and the support of this Committee, the establishment of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail will create exceptional opportunities for recreation and historical tourism experiences, education and stewardship and leave a lasting legacy for all Americans.

H.R. 5466 recognizes the riches of the Chesapeake, just as John Smith did when, he said, "[h]eaven and earth never agreed better to form a more perfect place for man's habitation." We urge your favorable consideration of this bill and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.