

# Defining the Indigenous Cultural Landscape for The Nanjemoy and Mattawoman Creek Watersheds

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to identify and represent the Indigenous Cultural Landscape for the Nanjemoy and Mattawoman creek watersheds on the north shore of the Potomac River in Charles and Prince George's counties, Maryland. The project was undertaken as an initiative of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay office, which supports and manages the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. One of the goals of the Captain John Smith Trail is to interpret Native life in the Middle Atlantic in the early years of colonization by Europeans. The Indigenous Cultural Landscape (ICL) concept, developed as an important tool for identifying Native landscapes, has been incorporated into the Smith Trail's Comprehensive Management Plan in an effort to identify Native communities along the trail as they existed in the early 17th century and as they exist today. Identifying ICLs along the Smith Trail serves land and cultural conservation, education, historic preservation, and economic development goals. Identifying ICLs empowers descendant indigenous communities to participate fully in achieving these goals.

The Nanjemoy and Mattawoman creek watersheds comprise approximately 223 square miles of land approximately 50 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. In addition to the Nanjemoy and Mattawoman watersheds proper, the project area included lands in the vicinity draining into the Potomac and Port Tobacco rivers. The watersheds have a human history stretching back thousands of years and were among the more populated landscapes observed by Captain John Smith in 1608 during his voyage exploring and mapping the Chesapeake Bay. Following the arrival of European settlers in the 1630s, the region remained a largely indigenous landscape until later in the century, when English encroachment created serious challenges for the Native people residing in the watersheds. Despite displacement through at the end of the 17th and 18th centuries, descendants of the Native occupants remained in the area and many still do.

This project was undertaken and this report prepared in collaboration with members of the two state-recognized Piscataway groups. A number of meetings with the Piscataway, including a driving tour and visits to selected sites and places, as well as meetings with non-tribal stakeholders were held between March and July, 2015. Local information on and knowledge about the landscape, historical records and maps, and large online data sets containing environmental, cultural, archaeological, and land use information were compiled into a GIS database in an effort to document the Nanjemoy and Mattawoman ICL. These data and information sets were collected using criteria previously established for documenting ICLs.

Analysis of these data sets revealed the nature of indigenous knowledge necessary for determining types and locations of settlements. Productive soils, access to wetland environments, and availability of good clay resources were all factors in the selection of residential settlements. Also important were relationships between settlements and sacred places, including Native cemeteries, whose landscape was incorporated into the everyday landscape. Relationships between historic and contemporary landscapes were also identified. A simple predictive model was developed for application to areas in the two watersheds that were not visited during the project. This model was found to be useful for identifying landscape viewsheds and other ICL features.

Recommendations for future work include defining the greater Piscataway Indigenous Cultural Landscape, additional research to more clearly establish connections between the historic and contemporary Piscataway landscape, development of an interpretive strategy for integration into the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail and like projects, gap analysis of key parcels for land conservation, and application of this project methodology to other watersheds along the Smith Trail.