

Defining the Rappahannock Indigenous Cultural Landscape

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to identify and represent the Rappahannock Indigenous Cultural Landscape between Port Royal/Port Conway and Urbanna, Virginia. 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. The project was administered by the Chesapeake Conservancy and the fieldwork undertaken and report prepared by St. Mary's College of Maryland.

One of the goals of the Captain John Smith Trail is to interpret Native life in the Middle Atlantic in the earliest years of colonization by Europeans. The Indigenous Cultural Landscape (ICL) concept was developed as an important tool for identifying Native landscapes along the Smith Trail, both as they existed in the early 17th century and as they exist today.

The Rappahannock River watershed was identified as a priority watershed area for ICL mapping in 2015. For this project, then, the mapping effort assembled a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, including tribal and non-tribal stakeholder input, documentary research, and archaeological, environmental, and ecological evidence. All of this material was included in a Geographic Information System (GIS) database which allowed the mapping and analysis of spatial relationships between various categories of data.

Limited archaeological and documentary evidence points to the Rappahannock as serving as a borderland in the colonial period and perhaps before colonization. Before contact, limited evidence suggests that, while people were in the river valley 10,000 years ago, populations were low until ca. 200 CE. By the time Smith arrived in the Rappahannock, he found at least 43 relatively densely populated communities, indicating a rich if unknown history. After contact, the records reveal that the many groups encountered by Smith, while displaced, resisted removal from their greater homeland, eventually coalescing into two groups: the Rappahannock and the Nanzatico. The Nanzatico were ultimately deported to the Caribbean while the remaining Indians appear to have retreated into their communities.

The project more precisely defined the Rappahannock ICL, found to consist of some 552 square miles. A sensitivity model based on the evidence from the Rappahannock watershed reveals the extensive and sophisticated levels of ecological knowledge of the groups Smith encountered in the river valley in 1608. A watershed analysis suggested that ecologically-based decisions for settlements were also incorporated in indigenous systems of communication and meaning. The data analysis also forced a reconsideration of the 1608 Zúñiga map. Rappahannock tribal members noted that names of creeks crossed from one side of the river to the other, with settlement driven principally by seasonal demands and opportunities. The Zúñiga map, which shows creek names straddling the river, suggests this practice was real and stretched back at least four centuries.

One important discovery concerns the distribution of Native towns along the river's shoreline, with most towns located on the river's north bank. Traditional explanations for this observation focused on the Rappahannock groups' efforts to avoid Powhatan by placing a river between the two groups. The analysis undertaken for this project has found that ecological factors, not necessarily political ones, drove settlement to the north bank. Good agricultural soils, clay suitable for pottery manufacture, and access to marshes and transportation tributaries were found in greater numbers and more closely associated than on

the river's north bank. The north bank included most if not all of the areas first patented by the English, suggesting settlers recognized the values of the land, too.

Places of contemporary significance to the Rappahannock were also identified and include their tribal center in Indian Neck, Central Point, places east toward Tappahannock, and rural farming and trading communities. In addition to the information and data found in the report, an appendix includes all Indian place names encountered in historic documents within the Rappahannock ICL.

The report concludes with seven recommendations for future work:

1. Development of an oral history program for Rappahannock tribal members.
2. Development of a detailed culture history of the Rappahannock River groups, 10,000 BCEpresent, including archaeological collections-based analysis and regional survey.
3. Connect modern-day places to 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century landscapes.
4. Development of educational materials for Rappahannock tribal members, including the youth.
5. Development of educational materials for non-tribal members, including local residents and visitors.
6. Conduct a gap analysis of key parcels to prioritize land conservation goals.
7. Expand the ICL study to other watersheds, including the York and extended Rappahannock rivers.