development concept plan and assessment

may 1983

C & O CANAL
WILLIAMSPORT

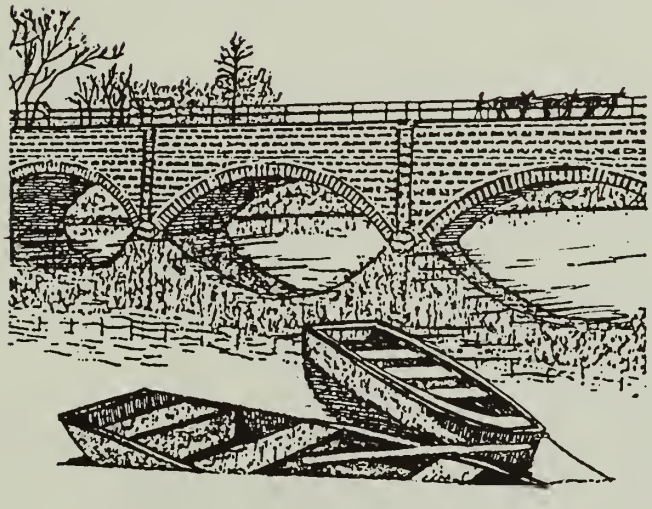
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK MARYLAND/DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Development Concept Plan

for the

Williamsport Area
Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park
Washington County, Maryland

May 1983



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Department of the Interior/National Park Service

WILLIAMSPORT, MARYLAND

JUNE 1980

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS PLANNING

This document describes a series of actions for the Williamsport area of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, and recognizes the historic significance and extensive interpretive potential of this area. The proposals are elaborations of those envisioned in the 1976 General Plan for the C&O Canal NHP. Williamsport is centrally located at mile 99.3 of the 184.5-mile canal. This strategic location made it a major center of activity during the construction and operation of the canal (1828-1924). Today the Williamsport area of the C&O Canal NHP contains many historically significant remnants of that transportation era, which are included on the National Register of Historic Places. These include the Conococheague Aqueduct, Lock and Lockhouse 44, the Cushwa warehouse, the trolley power station, a railroad lift bridge and the Bollman vehicular bridge, as well as the C&O Canal with its barge turning and loading basin and towpath. The barn and warehouse are located near the historic Town Square. Nearby is an historic cemetery and Indian burial site.

Pursuant to Public Law 91-664, which established the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park in January 1971, the National Park Service began a new management era for this 184-mile historical resource. With a boundary expanded from 5,257 to 20,781 acres, a mandate to provide for the enjoyment of the park's resources in such a manner as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations was established, and on the advice of a 19-member citizen's advisory commission, the National Park Service set out to prepare a plan for the park.

The General Plan for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park called for the stabilization and partial restoration of the historic canal and its structures, the preservation of the atmosphere of history blended into a charming natural setting, the interpretation of the rich array of historical and natural values found along the canal, and provisions for as much outdoor recreation as will not intrude upon or impair the resources which the park was establised to protect.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PARK

The purpose of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park is to provide, in perpetuity, the opportunity for mankind

> . . . to understand the canal's reason for being, its construction, its role in transportation, economic development and westward expansion, the way of life which evolved upon it, the history of the region through which it passes, and to gain an insight into the era of canal building in the country;
>
> . . . to appreciate the setting in which it lies and the natural and human history that can be studied along its way; and
>
> . . . to enjoy the recreational use of the canal, the parklands and the adjacent Potomac River.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The objectives for management of the park, which is administered in the historical category of the National Park System, are to:

> . . . Preserve the atmosphere of past times and enduring natural beauty and safeguard historic remains and natural features;
>
> . . . Impart to visitors an understanding and appreciation of an historic way of life blended into the natural setting of the Potomac Valley;
>
> . . . Develop the potential of the park's recreation resources for safe yet stimulating enjoyment by the visitors within limits compatible with the other two management objectives.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is not seen as serving the need for intensive structures, recreational playgrounds, or other manmade facilities. Rather, the canal's role is to provide the recreational user with a natural hiking, biking, and camping experience.

THE GENERAL PLAN

In analyzing the park's role in the National Park System, as well as the Potomac River Valley, it becomes apparent that there is a wide variety of visitors to the park. The national visitor or tourist, the short-term recreationist, the long-term towpath user, as well as the users of the Potomac River, all place demands on the park.

The land use plan was proposed as the method to ensure that a variety of visitor experiences could be provided along this 184-mile park. This was proposed in the form of a zoning system. The zoning system has five zones which range from complete restoration, with high density use activity, to remote natural areas with a very low visitor use density. The five zones recognize the values which various sections of the park contain.

These five zones of the park are shown below:

Zone A - National Interpretive Center Zone - This zone defines areas containing major historic restoration opportunities where the park visitor will be able to see a functioning canal in an historic setting. The areas were also selected for accessibility, availability of parklands for development of visitor facilities, and the compatibility of the environment adjoining the park. These interpretive centers are seen as supporting the largest density of visitor use. Most of that use is considered to be short-term (one to two hours). The concept of development of these areas is that of an outdoor living history museum. Historical accuracy is imperative in these re-creations of historic scenes.

Zone B - Cultural Interpretive Zone - This zone identifies sections of the park where historic resources occur, but the high density of Zone A is deemed to be incompatible with the desirable mood of the area. In

most cases, the historic resources do not provide the accessibility, the available land, or the attractive qualities of those in Zone A. The historic resources are often spread along the canal, producing a longer-term visitor use (two to four hours) than found in Zone A.

These areas will not necessarily be completely restored, as the objective here is to introduce the visitor to towpath use with a lesser degree of historic interpretation. Rewatering of portions of these sections is proposed. The extent of rewatering will be the subject of future engineering feasibility studies.

Zone C - Short-Term Recreation Zone - These sections are designated to serve the general towpath user who desires a leisurely stroll of two to six hours in a natural setting. These areas are limited in historic resources and available land for visitor facilities. The sections are short and often are links between two zones of higher density where cross traffic is considered to be a desirable activity. The objective here is to ensure a leisurely recreational experience in a natural setting where uncontrolled access or development could produce a higher user density.

Zone D - Short-Term Remote Zone - Due to limited access, these sections can retain a remoteness which produces low density use. Through proper management, the park visitor can be assured of finding solitude in a natural setting. The objective here is to provide short-term experiences for those who wish to spend an undisturbed day in a natural setting.

Zone E - Long-Term Remote Zone - These sections provide the user with the opportunity for a long-term primitive hiking, biking or horseback experience. With limited access, high quality natural surroundings, and little development, these sections are seen as providing for those who seek a near wilderness involvement with the environment. The objective here is to ensure that these sections retain their wild character and continue to provide this type of experience.

Parking for towpath users will not be provided in Zone E; adjacent sections will be designed to provide access. For planning and development purposes, the park was divided into 32 sections and zoned.

The general plan suggested the following for the Williamsport section, which is one of six classed as Zone A.

Section 19-Zone A-General Plan-Williamsport

THE PROPOSAL

The Resources

Historic canal operations in and near Williamsport produced a wide variety of historic resources which could be restored to form a handsome outdoor museum. The Cushwa structure, located by historic Town Square, could become the center for interpretive facilities. The barge turning and loading basin, the aqueduct, the railroad lift bridge, the Bollman vehicular bridge over the canal, and Lock 44 and Lockhouse are among the resources available to help interpret canal history.

Rewatering of the canal and turning basin will be considered in conjunction with a study of the existing drainage from the city streets into the canal. The possibility of locating parking and other facilities along historic Town Square will be explored in a cooperative planning effort with the town.

Access and Existing Facilities

Major access to the town of Williamsport is provided by interstate highways 70 and 81. The recreational attractions offered by the town along the river and its easy accessibility will combine to make Williamsport an important activity area along the canal.

Parkland and Adjacent Land Use

The opportunity to combine canal restoration and the historic character of Williamsport into a reconstructed period town has great potential. The Park Service will continue to coordinate this effort with the citizens and elected officials of the town.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

GOAL: Provide an interpretive focal point for visitors to the C&O Canal NHP at Williamsport, which highlights the peak period of the canal era.

ISSUE: Uses of existing buildings and structures have not been specifically defined, nor has the extent of historic restoration been determined.

PHASE I:

Actions	Consequences
o Stabilize the Conococheague Aqueduct.	Repair of the collapsed portions of the upstream and wing walls will help to restore the historic appearance of the aqueduct. The masonry will be protected from deterioration resulting from the intrusion of water. The potential for future collapse will be minimized. This will constitute necessary interim preservation of the structure and supports the long term goal of the GMP to restore the Conococheague Aqueduct. Recovery of fallen stones from the creek will release silt into the Potomac River with resultant short term, minor effects on aquatic life.
o Restore the trolley power station for use as a combination visitor contact facility and management facility.	Adaptive restoration of this structure will provide the park with presently non-existent visitor facilities. It will simultaneously enhance the character of the canal environment by re-creating the original exterior appearance of the building, as well as stabilizing it and preserving its historic fabric.
o Restore exterior of Cushwa warehouse to period appearance and use interior for storage.	This restoration will protect the historic features of this canal-related structure and provide a useful interpretive and storage facility.

o Landscape the core area encompassing the power station warehouse and Town Square.	Removal of visual intrusions, such as the parking area, will create an integrated and esthetic park environment.
o Outline the turning basin in stone for interpretive purposes.	Delineation of the historic dimensions of the basin will provide a cost-effective interpretive device.
o Restore the canal prism and towpath west of the aqueduct to mile 100.9.	A clearly defined canal prism and towpath for the entire Williamsport National Interpretive Center Zone will improve interpretive potential and the zone's historic authenticity.
o Restore Lock 44 and Lockhouse.	Restoration of these structures will improve the historic scene and provide additional sites for interpretive programs.
o Develop a Williamsport self-guiding interpretive walk with wayside exhibits at the Conococheague Aqueduct, the turning and loading basin, the trolley power station, Cushwa warehouse, the railroad lift bridge, the Bollman bridge and Lock 44 and Lockhouse.	Visitors will be able to orient themselves to the park and its historic themes.
o Conduct an engineering feasibility study of canal rewatering.	This analysis will determine the cost-effectiveness and environmental impacts of rewatering.
o Rewater canal to its historic level from Lock 44 to the Conococheague Aqueduct.	This is a prerequisite for an interpretive barge program, and will improve historic authenticity, interpretive value and esthetics. Initial maintenance costs will be higher. Pumping requirements will increase energy consumption.

PHASE II:

Actions	Consequences
o If cost-effective, rewater the canal east of Lock 44 to permit locking through a canal barge. o Should the canal be rewatered, a canal barge could be used for interpretive demonstrations. o If feasible from an engineering standpoint, restore and rewater the turning basin to its historic depth.	Improvements of both interpretive potential and the authenticity of the historic scene. Barge trips could be included as part of the interpretive program, resulting in a more complete interpretive picture of historic canal activities.

RATIONALE: These actions will support the goals of the General Plan by creating a national interpretive center in the Williamsport area of the C&O Canal NHP, with a visitor contact facility and stabilized and restored structures of interpretive interest.

It is not anticipated that the proposed restoration and stabilization of historic resources along the line of the Canal at Williamsport, as planned herein, will increase visitation significantly.

GOAL: Preservation of the historic scene.

ISSUES: Existing modern housing near the C&O Canal NHP, the existing uses of the park, the Allegheny Power Company plant, and the NPS maintenance facility are visual intrusions upon the historic scene.

PHASE I:

Actions	Consequences
o Plant material will be used to screen the houses and power plant from the view of towpath users.	Minimize visual intrusions within the historic scene and improve esthetics.

PHASE II:

o Riverfront park will be integrated with the canal restoration projects and appropriately landscaped.	Improve historic authenticity and esthetics.
o The NPS maintenance structure will be removed and the existing structure formerly used by the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) will be converted to maintenance use.	A non-historic building will be relocated to an area in which it can be used and out of the main interpretive area. The maintenance function will be screened from major interpretive sites.

RATIONALE: These actions will provide a landscape which emulates the historic scene.

GOAL: Provide safer access to the park and better circulation within it for both vehicles and pedestrians.

ISSUES: The C&O Canal NHP is presently linked to the town by Potomac Street and the historic Bollman bridge. No adequate or well-defined parking area exists within park boundaries. Coal trucks must travel across a canal dike to reach the Allegheny Power Company plant. Visitors are limited primarily to the aqueduct and towpath.

PHASE I

Actions	Consequences
o The Potomac Street vehicle access will be limited to use by the handicapped.	An easy access to the park will still be available to individuals with physical limitations.

PHASE II

o Visitor vehicles will be directed to a new parking area behind the Trolley Barn.	The heavy visual and environmental impact of cars within the main interpretive areas of the park will be eliminated.
o Pedestrian access to the interpretive center will be across the Conococheague Aqueduct.	Visitors will be able to enter the park safely, leading them directly to the remaining points of interest within the park.
o All power plant traffic will cross the canal at the existing coal truck access, but alternatives will be sought by the town and power company.	This will continue to adversely affect users of the towpath, as well as the historic resource, and will prevent both rewatering of the canal and use of a barge.

Actions	Consequences
o A new road to the proposed parking area will be constructed within the park boundaries.	Better control of visitor traffic by avoiding use of a public road as the main entrance to the park. Environmental disruption of that part of the Conococheague shoreline and old railroad line required for roadbed.
o Existing power plant traffic patterns will be changed when access is needed for a canal barge. Potential alternative routes could include a bridge to be built at the present canal dike crossing, a new access road originating at the proposed I-81 interchange, or a new bridge, which would cross the canal east of Lock 44. The final decision will be deferred until the feasibility and relative cost-effectiveness of each of these routes can be established. This matter will be fully coordinated with town officials, the public, and the power company.	Elimination of coal truck traffic will alleviate damage to the canal and the town streets, provide a safer crossing for towpath users and permit the rewatering of the canal and possible use of a barge. It will reduce canal maintenance costs. A part of the riverside area of the park may be disrupted if a new road segment is constructed. Negotiations with both private landowners and the highway department will be required if a new road, rather than a bridge, is constructed. Impacts on the street system of Williamsport from coal truck traffic will be reduced.

RATIONALE: Implementing these actions will eliminate vehicular traffic from the core of the interpretive zone, except for vehicles used by the handicapped and power plant vehicles. Existing conditions require that the present power plant access be retained. Visitors will have an adequate, easily accessible area in which to park their cars or buses. Access to the visitor contact facility and waysides will be safer and more direct.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS CONSIDERED: In the course of formulating the Preferred Planning Proposal, certain actions suggested by the planning committee and described in the General Plan or in the Interpretive Prospectus for the Williamsport section of the C&O Canal NHP were considered but not incorporated into the proposal. These actions and the reaons for their omission are described below:

Actions Considered	Rationale
o Location of a visitor contact facility in the Cushwa warehouse.	The power station was chosen to serve as the visitor contact facility because: 1. The Cushwa warehouse was historically a point at which passengers could board the canal barges. Should the canal and turning basin be rewatered, it could again be used for this purpose with only exterior restoration. 2. The warehouse is more flood-prone than the power station. 3. Structurally, the power station is superior to the warehouse. 4. Interior use of the power station will preserve the structure.
o Restoration of the Conococheague aqueduct.	A cost-effectiveness comparison of stabilization versus restoration of the aqueduct indicated complete restoration to be economically unfeasible.
o Location of park headquarters at Williamsport.	No adequate structure exists for this function. The entire park area at Williamsport is on the floodplain.
o Implementing a shuttle system from existing town parking lots.	Current and projected visitation levels do not make such a system cost-effective.
o Closing the dike road across the C&O Canal to the power plant during Phase I.	No suitable alternative access could be decided upon.

o Relocating the power plant access road, using a potential exit from I-81 and crossing the presently undeveloped quarry property during Phase II.	Would require the acquisition of land and easements. An exit from I-81 is now feasible.

COMPLIANCE

FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT: Since much of the Williamsport area lies within the 50-year floodplain, existing structures will be adequately flood-proofed and no new development, apart from roads and a parking lot, is proposed. An evacuation plan will be formulated. These measures will result in compliance with existing federal, state, county and local floodplain requirements.

HISTORIC RESTORATION: Any stabilization or restoration of historic structures will be carried out according to the standards of the secretary of the interior for historic preservation projects. The Maryland state historic preservation officer will be given the opportunity to review this plan as it relates to the relocation or demolition of any structure, including those which may be deemed nonhistoric, before final decisions are made by the National Park Service. The state historic preservation officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation commented positively on the General Plan, which contains actions proposed in the preferred alternative.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT: Before any development of the Williamsport area is undertaken, the Fish and Wildlife Service will be contacted to ascertain whether any threatened or endangered species, or critical habitat for such species, exist within this section of the park.

COORDINATION/CONSULTATION:

Planning team meetings were held on June 22, July 13, September 14, and October 5 and 19, 1981. A public meeting was held in the Williamsport Public Library on September 15, 1981. An additional meeting was requested by the mayor and town council and held on November 15, 1982.

Valuable assistance was received from Mr. Jack French, mayor of Williamsport, and his town manager, Mr. Lee Draper, as well as the Williamsport Town Council and Planning Commission.

The alternative was presented to the C&O Canal Advisory Commission in December of 1981 for comment and to a newly appointed advisory commission on September 18, 1982 and December 4, 1982. The C&O Canal Advisory Commission unanimously favored this alternative at its September 18, 1982 and December 4, 1982 meetings.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN • WILLIAMSPORT

CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

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As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The Department has also major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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