

March 11, 2019

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor, State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Ben Cardin
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Timothy Gallaudet
Assistant Secretary of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Governor Hogan, Senator Cardin, Senator Van Hollen, Representative Hoyer and Admiral Gallaudet:

We are writing to express our strong support for designating Mallow's Bay-Potomac River as a national marine sanctuary and to urge you to take immediate action to include this national treasure within the National Marine Sanctuary System. This site would be the first-ever national marine sanctuary designated in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and it is an important part of the effort to educate and engage citizens and visitors in the Chesapeake Bay's history and maritime culture.

The shipwrecks in Mallow's Bay-Potomac River are part of our Nation's history. The 18 square miles originally proposed for sanctuary designation by the state of Maryland and Charles County boasts a diverse collection of nearly 200 known historic shipwrecks dating back to the Civil War, as well as archaeological artifacts dating back 12,000 years. More than 100 wooden steamships, known as the "Ghost Fleet," lie at rest in the area. Built from 1917-1919 for the U.S. Emergency Fleet, these ships stand as a reminder of our Nation's role in the Great War and are part of the story that made America the greatest shipbuilding nation in the world. While currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sanctuary designation will improve preservation of these shipwrecks and archaeological artifacts. By leveraging the power of the sanctuary brand, we can bring more attention to the historic site and aid in its long-term conservation by supporting economic development through sustainable tourism and building capacity for education, outreach, and research.

Sanctuary designation will provide economic benefits to the state and local communities from increased recreation and tourism to the area. The intertwining of national and natural history makes this area a popular spot for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, birdwatching and other outdoor recreation. The site lies along the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and Potomac National Historic Trail.

The designation will also bring new monitoring, education and research opportunities. For example, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, working in partnership with the State of Maryland, funded a new water quality buoy near Mallows Bay, filling a critical spatial gap along the Potomac River, to provide real-time weather and water conditions for recreational and commercial users. In another recent partnership with the State of Maryland, Chesapeake Conservancy, Charles County and numerous others created the first interpretative water trail of the ships and associated ecology as well as a laminated water trail guide and mobile audio tour that enhance user access and experiences. These assets inspired a new private-public business partnership hosted by Charles County to provide weekend kayak rentals as well as a flurry of excursions through commercial outfitters such as REI. The designation is also enhancing youth education through programs such as Ocean Guardian and a recent partnership between Charles County Board of Education and the National Association of Black Scuba Divers. This program combines in-pool SCUBA instruction and advanced technologies use with cultural heritage to meet educational standards and introduce marine-related career opportunities. Once designated, the opportunities are boundless given the existing energy of community and partners.

For our organizations to continue to invest in this site and bring in new partners who will want to invest in education programs and sustainable tourism development, we need a long-term commitment from the state and NOAA to the sanctuary. The sanctuary, once designated, should remain in place. This commitment by the state and NOAA are critical to engaging the philanthropic and business communities in the sanctuary.

The draft Environmental Impact Statement made clear that the principal purpose of the sanctuary is the *“protection, access and interpretation of the maritime cultural features of the area, including the “Ghost Fleet”, other vessels of historic significance, and related maritime infrastructure.”* And, that *“[t]he action alternatives will not include any direct management, regulation or authority by NOAA of the natural environment, including fish and wildlife, water quality, or habitat.”* Further, that *“[a]uthorities related to natural resources and their management will remain with Maryland Department of Natural Resources and other local jurisdictions”* including the Potomac River Fisheries Commission.

There are no anticipated changes or impacts to commercial or recreational fishing because of sanctuary designation and there are likely benefits from potential increases in access, partnerships, and additional resources for watermen and recreational fishermen in heritage tourism services. All other recreational uses occurring on the river or on Maryland public lands, including hunting, fossil collecting, birding, wildlife viewing, boating and paddling, would continue and not be regulated by NOAA.

The State of Maryland has been a full partner with NOAA and Charles County in the designation process since its inception five years ago. In addition, the Governor's chief counsel and staff spent over a year reviewing all the designation documents. It is time to complete this designation and make the proposed new sanctuary a reality.

The citizens and organizations supporting the designation of Mallow's Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary have been waiting for this designation. We urge you to take action immediately and prevent further delay to this site receiving the national recognition it richly deserves.

Thank you for supporting the designation of Mallow's Bay-Potomac River as a national marine sanctuary. We look forward to working with the state, Congress and the Administration.

Sincerely,



Kristen J. Sarri
President and CEO
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

On behalf of:

Accokeek Foundation
Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology
American Canoe Association
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Calvert Maritime Museum
Chesapeake Conservancy
Citizen Advisory Committee, CBP
Conservancy for Charles County
JRS Exploration, Inc.
Maryland Historical Trust
Potomac Conservancy
Preservation Maryland
Quantico Yacht Club
Southern Maryland Heritage Area
Sprintsail Enterprises
Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland