



By the early 19th century, the American people sought to realize additional economic opportunities presented by the area's rivers by building a canal system. The goal was to link the headwaters of the eastward-flowing James with the westward-flowing Kanawha River. Although the canal succeeded in linking the Piedmont and Tidewater regions driving economic growth for Virginia, it was ultimately overtaken by the railroads, floods, costs, and damages that resulted from the Civil War.



**Wildlife**  
With the James River watershed encompassing lowlands and coastal plains to the southeast and mountains terrain to the northwest, a wide variety of plants and animals flourish across its diverse habitats. Bald eagle populations continue to increase in the area, making "America's Founding River" the most significant river in Virginia for our national symbol. The region is



**Challenges**  
In the next 100 years, the James River will experience many changes that will affect the collective quality of life. One of the most pressing needs continues to be reducing polluted surface water runoff that causes widespread damage to the river ecosystem. The challenge lies in managing impacts from future population growth, development, and working landscapes so both humans and the ecosystem can benefit from the river's bountiful

resources. To date, practices to control polluted runoff from agriculture and development have not met the same standards as that of wastewater treatment practices, and they deserve more immediate and concentrated attention. Fortunately, both urban and rural best management practices are becoming more prevalent and sophisticated, giving new hope for a healthier James River for future generations.



**Opportunities**  
Across the James River watershed, local governments, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, landowners, private businesses, and citizen volunteers are hard at work on projects that will enhance the river. United by the pursuit of a healthy and continually improving watershed, these projects cover a broad spectrum, including land conservation, heritage tourism, river access projects, land and water trails, and riverfront

revitalization efforts that support local development. Among these projects are the Capital Region Collaborative's Regional Plan for the James River, the creation of the Upper James Water Trail, the revitalization of downtown Lynchburg, and a county-private partnership establishing Eco Discovery Park near Jamestown. These collaborative efforts, along with many others, offer evidence of a brighter future for the James



**Envision the James**  
Launched in 2011 by Chesapeake Conservancy, the James River Association, and National Geographic Maps, Envision the James began with grassroots citizen engagement. The vision process, which engaged stakeholders throughout the watershed, revealed a desire for clean and accessible waterways; restored streamside vegetation and wildlife habitat; local economies benefiting from tourism

and recreation; the celebration of culture and heritage; and protected landscapes. Two new initiatives—Heritage and Recreation Corridor and Wildlife and Landscape Conservation—were created to respond to the public's recommendations. Both long-term implementation initiatives are under way, guided by a diverse group of partners. For more information, visit [envisionthejames.org](http://envisionthejames.org).



**The Landscape**  
The James River has become one of the nation's most treasured and historic landscapes. It serves as the heart and lifeblood of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and is home to one-third of its population. Spanning four of the commonwealth's physiographic provinces, the James River watershed connects the Allegheny Mountains with the Blue Ridge

mountains and, ultimately, with the coastal lowlands of the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed encompasses a unique spectrum of landscapes and highlights the geologic processes of plate tectonics and land erosion that contributed to the formation of this region over thousands of years.



**Native History**  
The English colonists who sailed up the "Powhatan Flu" in 1607 met many Indian nations before they settled in the territory of the Paspahegh Indians at Jamestown. Many of the tribes along the river, which the English called the James, paid tribute at that time to the political and religious leader Powhatan, but they were not under his control. Therefore, their responses to the English intrusion varied. The Paspahegh actively opposed the English presence until they and other tribes were attacked by the English under Lord Delaware in 1610, after which some tribes left their territories.

A peace treaty was signed in 1614, assigning the English to stay in Paspahegh territory; however, it was largely ignored by the English, resulting in several Indian tribes taking action against them in 1622. However, their resistance was eventually futile against the massive influx of English colonists, and the Indians of the area signed treaties in 1646 and 1677 agreeing to pay tribute to the English. Today, there are still four tribes living in the James River watershed: the Nansemond, the Chickahominy, the Eastern Chickahominy, and the Monacan.



**Recreation and Adventure**  
Whether you're interested in paddling, hiking, biking, scenic vistas, or wildlife watching, the James River watershed contains hundreds of places for residents and visitors to explore. Both water- and land-based trails weave throughout the watershed, creating opportunities for the public to choose their adventure. Some options range from kayaking through the remains of canal

locks on the Upper James River Water Trail to biking along the Virginia Capital Trail, visiting historic cities and plantations in the Lower James River, or whitewater rafting at the fall line in the city of Richmond. Soon, one will also be able to visit Virginia's newest state park—Natural Bridge, a landmark northwest of Lynchburg that was once owned by Thomas Jefferson.



**Captain John Smith Trail**  
Captain John Smith was an explorer from England who was an integral figure in the exploration and settlement of the Chesapeake area during the early 17th century. To honor Capt. Smith and to protect his legacy, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail was established by Congress in 2006 as the nation's first all-water national historic trail. Administered by the National Park Service, with the Chesapeake Conservancy serving as the primary partner in implementing the trail, this

trail follows the routes Smith took on his many explorations and invites visitors to explore the natural and cultural wonders of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. From 1607 to 1609, John Smith made 15 excursions on the James and its two major tributaries the Appomattox and the Chickahominy Rivers. The Capt. John Smith Trail extends more than 200 miles beyond Richmond to where the James River joins the Blue Ridge mountains near Iron Gate and the confluence of the Cowpasture and Jackson Rivers.



**Envision the James**  
THE JAMES RIVER RUNS 340 MILES through the heart of Virginia where its waters and shores were witness to the beginning of American history. Its historical significance, scenic beauty, and abundant wildlife all provide irreplaceable value to the quality of life of residents and visitors. Two and a half million people live within the James River watershed, which stretches from the Allegheny Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay and includes more than 15,000 miles of tributaries. Today the James helps us celebrate our heritage and connect with the natural world, but it does not come without its list of challenges.

Both before and after the establishment of the English colony of Jamestown on its banks, the James River has played a central and defining role in the development of Virginia. No other natural feature of Virginia had more influence on the early colony, and no other natural feature has provided more for Virginia through time. For thousands of years, Virginia's first inhabitants enjoyed and gave thanks for its bounty, but 400 years after the arrival of the English, "America's Founding River" needs nurturing itself. The Envision the James initiative was set in motion with the goal of achieving a shared vision and on-going commitments from communities and partners throughout the James River Basin to value, sustain, and enhance the region's natural and cultural heritage, local economies, wildlife abundance, and outdoor recreation assets for present and future generations. This vision respects the river as a community asset by identifying and promoting opportunities to create and enhance a common agenda for the James River to benefit humans and the ecosystem alike, for many years to come.



**MAP KEY**  
Federally protected area  
State protected area  
Protected area  
Other point of interest  
Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

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Funded by THE CONSERVATION FUND

Additional support from Virginia Environmental Endowment, MeadWestvaco Foundation, NewMarket Corporation, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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The Chickahominy River is an ideal destination for the sportsman and wildlife watcher alike. Much of the river is graced with wetlands and forested shorelines reminiscent of landscapes from hundreds of years ago. Near the mouth of the river is the only Virginia Wildlife Management Area in the coastal plain that consists mainly of woodlands and is managed primarily for upland wildlife.

In June 1606 King James I granted a charter to a group of London entrepreneurs, the Virginia Company, to establish a satellite English settlement in the Chesapeake region of North America. On May 14, 1607, the Virginia Company explorers landed on Jamestown Island to establish the Virginia English colony on the banks of the James River, 60 miles from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Not long after its settlement, Jamestown became a melting pot for the interaction of Native, European, and African cultures, setting the tone for America's cultural history that continues today. Historic Jamestown offers recreational opportunities as well as interpretation of the region's early history.

With its strategic location at the Falls of the James, Richmond has been an important political, military, and economic hub since the arrival of Europeans. First capital of the Virginia Colony, Richmond has since served as the capital of the state of Virginia and the Confederacy. Today it remains a robust city with the third largest metropolitan area in Virginia. Parks, museums, and monuments celebrating Richmond's rich history abound.

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