



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam  
Governor

August 3, 2020

The Honorable Tim Kaine  
231 Russell Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner  
703 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kaine and Senator Warner:

As Virginians, we all have a profound appreciation for the Chesapeake Bay. We understand its importance as an economic driver, a biologically diverse and productive ecosystem, and one of our country's greatest outdoor recreation resources. Whether hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, boating, biking or hiking, the Chesapeake Bay watershed is an ideal location. It is for that reason I am writing to encourage you to sponsor legislation that would create a Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area with a National Park Service Welcome Center at Fort Monroe National Monument in Hampton, Virginia.

The National Park System includes 419 individual units including national parks, monuments, historic sites, battlefields, recreation areas, and other categories. National recreation areas serve a unique purpose, providing broad public access to exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities usually associated with a single geographic feature. Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in Southwest Virginia is a great example.

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States and has been formally recognized by the National Park Service as "unquestionably nationally significant<sup>1</sup>." The Bay has been called a national treasure by both Republican and Democratic Presidents. Still, there is no National Park System unit that highlights this exceptional water body and associated landscapes.

Established as an official unit of the National Park System, a Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area would elevate the Chesapeake Bay and bring additional national and international recognition. More importantly, it would bring greater National Park Service expertise and resources to the Chesapeake Bay area and restoration efforts, and establish more public access points to the Bay itself. This would increase outdoor recreation tourism in the

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<sup>1</sup> Chesapeake Bay Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement. National Park Service, 2004.

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region. Twenty-one National Park units in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania added more than \$801 million to the region's economy in 2018. National Park units in the District of Columbia added an additional \$586 million.<sup>2</sup> The creation of a Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area would likely increase those figures by establishing a major new draw for visitors.

By legislating the creation of a welcome center at Fort Monroe, we would encourage visitors to Virginia, and to the Fort Monroe National Monument, a centerpiece of the Commonwealth's efforts to promote a more just interpretation of Virginia history, and a stunning location on the Bay that is easily accessible to the large and diverse Hampton Roads and Richmond Metro populations. In addition, I encourage you to include in your legislation language to complete the transfer of the 40-acre Wherry Quarter parcel to the National Park Service. This transfer is essential for the long-term protection of the Fort Monroe National Monument and would be an ideal location for the Virginia Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area Welcome Center.

Designation by Congress of the Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area would be of great benefit to the Commonwealth, our economy, and our ongoing efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake estuary. I urge you to support this important legislative initiative, I look forward to working with you and your staff to win this important distinction for the Chesapeake region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. S. Northam', written in a cursive style.

Ralph S. Northam

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<sup>2</sup> "Visitor Spending Effects – Economic Contributions of National Park Visitor Spending." National Park Service.  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>