

Email from Linzy French, Assistant to Superintendant, C&O Canal NHP  
5 February 2019

**National Park Service (NPS) Extends Comment Period on Environmental Assessment for the Project to Reconstruct/Stabilize the Historic Stone Wall and Towpath from McMahon's Mill to Lock 42 at Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park**

The NPS released an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project to Reconstruct/Stabilize the Historic Stone Wall and Towpath from McMahon's Mill to Lock 42 at Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park (C&O Canal NHP) for public review and comment.

Due to the government shutdown, which began on December 21, 2018, the NPS's Planning, Environment and Public Comment website (PEPC) was taken offline, and all the projects that had open comment periods after Dec. 22, 8:00 am, showed up as "comment period closed." This prohibited comments on the proposal to be entered, and effectively shortened the promised 30-day comment period. PEPC is NPS's primary tool dedicated to facilitating the NEPA process and providing interested parties and affected public access to EA's and environmental impact statements (EIS's). Written comments received prior to the shutdown will be considered and included in the overall project record.

**To ensure that the public has at minimum 30 days for review and comment, the comment period for this proposal will reopen on Wednesday, February 6, 2019 and be extended through Wednesday, February 20, 2019.**

The NPS's proposal is to rehabilitate the existing historic stone retaining wall and re-establish the historic towpath along an approximately 0.9-mile stretch in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park between McMahon's Mill (Milepost 88.1) and Lock 42 (Milepost 89.0) in Washington County, Maryland. The historic stone wall supports the towpath in this area and has been badly damaged by repeated floods. The project would consist of reconstructing missing or washed out sections of the retaining wall and stabilizing or reinforcing other sections. New foundations would be established for the reconstructed wall sections. Some sections of the towpath would be moved inland, and the elevation of the towpath would be raised to reduce the frequency of inundation during flood events. The entire towpath between McMahon's Mill and Lock 42 would be resurfaced. This work would require removing select vegetation on either side of the towpath. Following construction, regular vegetation maintenance would be conducted to prevent potentially destabilizing growth into the retaining wall.

The EA evaluates two alternatives for managing the portion of the towpath in C&O Canal NHP between McMahon's Mill and Lock 42; describes the environment that would be impacted by the alternatives; and assesses the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. Under the no-action alternative, the current management of the towpath would continue with no changes. Under the proposed action, which has been identified as the preferred alternative, the historic stone wall would be stabilized or reconstructed, portions of the towpath would be moved inland, the elevation of the towpath would be raised, and the towpath would be resurfaced. Upon conclusion of this EA and decision-making process, one of the alternatives will become the long-term management option for this segment of the C&O Canal NHP.

Comments will be accepted through Wednesday, February 20, 2019. The NPS's preferred method for receiving public comments is through PEPC website for the park at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CHOH>.

You may also submit written comments to:

Kevin D. Brandt, Superintendent  
C&O Canal NHP  
c/o McMahon's Mill Towpath Improvement Project EA  
1850 Dual Highway, Suite 100  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740-6620

Only written comments will be accepted. Please be aware that your entire comment will become part of the public record. If you wish to remain anonymous, please clearly state that within your correspondence; however, the NPS cannot guarantee that personal information, such as email address, phone number, etc., will be withheld.