

Maryland's 2006 LAST CHANCE Scenic Places



What is a LAST CHANCE Scenic Place?

A LAST CHANCE Scenic Place can be almost any place of beauty or distinctive character that is in danger of being permanently lost, such as a scenic vista, a swath of productive farmland, a river corridor, an historic urban neighborhood, or a village downtown. It should be a special setting that is locally treasured for its natural beauty or distinctive character.

A LAST CHANCE Scenic Place also faces some kind of threat: residential sprawl, a commercial strip invasion, homogenous franchises, billboard blight, a new highway, inappropriately sited cell towers, ridgeline development, or other changes that could transform the landscape and destroy its scenic beauty.

A LAST CHANCE Scenic Place must have a potential solution...if we could do X, we could save this beautiful place, now and for future generations.

COVER: Green Ridge State Forest borders the C&O Canal, offering 30 miles of horseback riding, hiking, and biking along the Canal's towpath.
Credit: edneville.com

Scenic Maryland has selected its first list of LAST CHANCE places in Maryland. The list spotlights the challenges facing our state regarding the protection of significant scenic places as well as offer potential solutions. Each of these LAST CHANCE Scenic places are featured here, reflecting on their threats and possible solutions.

Bucktown Village Store,
Dorchester County
Historically recognized
as the birthplace
of Harriet Tubman

www.scenicmaryland.org





The UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, Potomac-to-Doubs Route

THE LANDSCAPE

The Potomac-to-Doubs Route is located in a breathtakingly beautiful corridor of working farmland that has remained intact despite rapidly encroaching development. The farms along this route contain buildings dating from the 1700s and 1800s, including at least one – Cooling Springs Farm – once used as an Underground Railroad safe-house. Cooling Springs is the only identified safe-house in the nation owned by the same family that operated it during the time of slavery. As such, it is listed as a Frederick County Landmark. Two other homes along this route are listed in the Maryland Historical Trust inventory. This stretch of farmland is also listed as a Maryland Civil War Heritage Area and is embedded in the Catoctin Mountain Scenic Byway, a corridor expanding two miles on either side of US Route 15 between Frederick and Point of Rocks. The Potomac-to-Doubs Route also runs through the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park. The area along the Potomac where the route begins marks the location of earliest European exploration in western Maryland. The descendants of explorer Franz Ludwig Michel remain in the area as advocates for its preservation.



SUMMARY

Cool Springs Farm, once used as an Underground Railroad safe-house.

The safe-houses and routes of the Underground Railroad running through Frederick County constitute the best-known collection of Underground Railroad sites in Maryland today, yet few enjoy any official protection. The Potomac-to-Doubs Route, running along a three-mile stretch of gently rolling Piedmont farmland, teeters on the edge of despoilment from a variety of threats including residential, recreational and industrial development. Though portions of this route enjoy numerous historic designations – including one farm listed as a Frederick County Landmark and two homes listed in the Maryland Historical Trust inventory – efforts to develop the area through the construction of power stations and towers, subdivisions and even a golf course continue to require an active defense. Preservationists hope that the strength of aggregate designations will build a layer of protection around the area and assist in repelling the onslaught of development efforts.

The Route also runs through the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park.

THE THREAT

The Route faces threats from industrial, recreational and residential development that would blot the area's scenic landscapes and permanently break up this historically intact stretch of farmland. Last year, the state granted permission to Sempra Energy to construct and operate a 630-megawatt plant just two miles north of the route, renewing concerns that Duke Energy would rekindle its proposal to construct a massive 650-megawatt power plant directly astride the route on three pristine farms. Such a proposal was only narrowly defeated in 2002 and could now resurface. In addition, one local farm owner is considering construction of a golf course allowable through a loophole in the area's agricultural zoning ordinance. Finally, three densely spaced housing subdivisions plan construction of 200 additional homes on land directly adjacent to the Route.



View of the East Pasture at Cooling Springs Farm.

St. Pauls Church along the Potomac-to-Doubs Route.

For more information: Peter H. Michael, 301.874.0235





C&O CANAL and POTOMAC RIVER Corridor

THE LANDSCAPE

The Potomac River, C&O Canal and surrounding lands provide internationally recognized scenic vistas that are unusually accessible to the public. This 185-mile corridor plays host to a distinctive combination of scenic, historic and recreational resources, including the C&O Canal National Historical Park, the Potomac Gorge, McKee Beshers Wildlife Management Area, Seneca Creek State Park, Fort Frederick State Park and the Green Ridge State Forest. Boaters, hikers, birders, anglers, hunters, joggers and others enjoy world-class recreational opportunities in and around the river and its adjacent parks. The C&O Canal Route, a Maryland Scenic Byway, follows the river corridor and the National Historical Park offers miles of meandering trails from Georgetown (D.C.) to Cumberland, Maryland. Public vantage points from the opposite bank of the river, including Ball's Bluff (VA), Algonkian Regional Park (VA), and Shepherdstown (WV) make this corridor visually accessible to the entire region. In addition, the Potomac Gorge, an 11-mile stretch of river from Great Falls to Chain Bridge known for its challenging whitewater, contains stunning geologic formations and is home to more than 200 globally rare plant species, natural communities, and diverse wildlife, including great blue herons, bald eagles, migratory birds and smallmouth bass. The C&O Canal and adjoining land contain Native American burial grounds and landmarks from the Civil War, while the river itself provides drinking water to nearly 90 percent of metropolitan area residents.

For more information: Jennifer Schill
The Potomac Conservancy, 301-608-1188

SUMMARY

The corridor encompassing the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and the Potomac River – the wildest, most natural river running through a major metropolitan area anywhere in the world – forms one of Maryland's most significant and diverse natural landscapes. Although the area enjoys local, state and federal protections, weak regulations, inconsistent enforcement and insensitive stewardship of adjacent lands threaten to pockmark its natural scenic beauty. Skyrocketing property values, frequent turnover in land ownership and efforts to maximize values by cutting down forests and constructing oversized luxury homes are slowly hacking away at these breathtaking landscapes, threatening a “death by a thousand cuts.” New and stricter buffer protection laws, increased enforcement, improved communications between government agencies, additional funding to maintain public spaces, and better public awareness and education are needed to preserve this national treasure.



Canoeists paddle along the C & O Canal near the popular Fletcher's Boathouse, minutes north of Washington, DC. Credit: edneville.com

The C&O Canal protects this remarkable vista from atop Maryland Heights, located just across the Potomac River from Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Credit: edneville.com

THE THREAT

As real estate values skyrocket in this region, and development races ever outward, residential properties adjacent to the Potomac River and the C&O Canal are rapidly changing hands. Once-modest homes built in harmony with the surrounding landscape are being replaced by luxury-sized mansions with manicured lawns and expanded river views created by wiping out large swaths of forestland. No longer is consideration being given to the natural character of the land and surrounding community. To make matters worse, the boundaries of the C&O Canal National Historical Park are not even known, as 85 percent of the park has never been surveyed. The combination of these threats is degrading the scenic character of this area lot by lot.

CHINCOTEAGUE BAY, on the Eastern Shore Worcester County

SUMMARY

Chincoteague Bay, known to the rest of the world for the famous wild ponies that roam the island at its southernmost tip, occupies a narrow ribbon of water between northeast Virginia and southeast Maryland. A wild, largely undeveloped region dotted with tiny islands, marshes, beaches and hunting and fishing camps, it offers a wealth of scenic beauty and diverse habitat. However, like many once-remote places, Chincoteague Bay is starting to gain the attention of developers. And because the area is unaccustomed to this type of activity, few protections are in place to ensure proper erosion controls, natural drainage patterns, low-impact development practices or the preservation of open spaces. Before development of these pristine shorelines becomes a done deal, it is imperative that protections be included in county and regional comprehensive plans.

For more information:

Jay Charland, Assateague Coastal Trust, Inc., (443) 235-2014



Chincoteague Bay, known to the rest of the world for the famous wild ponies that roam Assateague Island.

The mainland side of the Bay remains largely undeveloped, save for the early 20th century communities of Public Landing, Maryland and Greenbackville, Virginia (top).

THE LANDSCAPE

Chincoteague Bay is the largest, most pristine and most beautiful of Maryland's five coastal bays. Just 27 miles long and five miles wide, it lies between Assateague Island and the mainland Delmarva Peninsula. The island's landscape of expansive salt marshes and maritime forests provides a magnificent backdrop to the Bay's blue waters. The mainland side of the Bay remains largely undeveloped, save for the traditional, early 20th century communities of Public Landing, Maryland and Greenbackville, Virginia, and the remnants of small seafood processing operations. Further south lies the resort and fishing community of Chincoteague Island. Many small islands dot the surface of the Bay, while beneath its waters lies a wondrous world of sea

THE THREAT

Insensitive residential and commercial development constitute the largest threats to Chincoteague Bay. Worcester County, Maryland, which is currently in the process of revising its Comprehensive Plan, provides little protection from development that could irrevocably harm the character and beauty of the Bay. Further south, rampant development in Accomack County, Virginia, proceeds with even fewer controls. Restrictions on bulkheading and mandatory standards for low impact development are needed to protect shorelines and fragile bay habitats.





The Charles Street corridor is a charming, turn-of-the-century commercial district in the center of Baltimore's first and largest historic district.

SUMMARY

This charming, turn-of-the-century commercial district in the center of Baltimore's first and largest historic district faces imminent threat from developers who wish to erect towering 230-foot high residential buildings that would jut far above the neighborhood's 19th century brick townhouses, historic Belvedere Hotel and even the Washington Monument. At issue is a recently proposed urban renewal ordinance granting new height allowances, despite opposition from the majority of the community's business and property owners and local and national historic preservation groups. The erection of such tall buildings in the midst of this historic corridor would permanently mar the view of nearby Mount Vernon Place and visually disrupt the character of this carefully restored and nationally recognized historic area.



Historic CHARLES STREET Corridor

THE LANDSCAPE

Mount Vernon and historic Charles Street are located in the heart of Baltimore City, directly north of downtown. The National Historic Landmark Mount Vernon Place anchors the district, which is also home to the city's premier cultural institutions, including the Walters Art Museum, the Peabody Conservatory, Center Stage, the Meyerhoff and the Lyric Opera House. Many of the area's turn-of-the-century properties have been recognized as examples of some of the country's finest architecture from this period, including a recently restored townhouse being featured in a prestigious history of American townhouses published this year. The area enjoys strong neighborhood support from residents and business owners, a group of whom banded together to restore a deteriorating corner building, rather than have it replaced by a skyscraper that would look out of place in this thriving but carefully restored neighborhood.

THE THREAT

Over powerful opposition from neighborhood community leaders, residents, business owners and local and national historic preservation organizations, the Baltimore City Department of Planning proposed an urban renewal ordinance allowing developers to construct buildings up to 230 feet high. The community supports height limits of no more than 100 feet, in order to preserve the historic integrity of the district and the views into Mount Vernon Place currently afforded by the lack of tall buildings in this neighborhood.

For more information: Jason Curtis
Mount Vernon-Belvedere Association
410-727-0066



Many of the area's historic properties have been recognized as examples of some of the country's finest architecture from this period.

The National Historic Landmark Mount Vernon Place anchors the district.

ST. MARY'S COUNTY - Various Scenic Routes

SUMMARY

Well into the 20th century, tobacco shaped the landscape of rural St. Mary's County. This once-important crop was the mainstay of the local economy until implementation of the Tobacco Buyout in 1999. The familiar site of tobacco barns lining the roadways and straddling ridges lent the area a unique character that many would like to preserve. But this county, like many others, faces the pressures of a rapidly growing population. As development encroaches, scenic landscapes give way to residential and commercial growth. Programs that seek to preserve agricultural lands fail to recognize the preservation of scenic landscaping as a priority, so the county must pursue remedies through support for agri-tourism and alternative agriculture practices, funding for the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund and a transfer of development rights program.

THE LANDSCAPE

The tobacco barns of St. Mary's County, symbols of an agricultural existence that is fast fading from southern Maryland, were added to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2004. Positioned along roadways and on ridges to take advantage of prevailing winds and to provide easy access, these aging structures punctuate local vistas. The agrarian landscapes reflect the formerly rural way of life that once was the norm in this now quickly developing region.

For more information: Teresa Wilson, 301-475-4200 X 1549

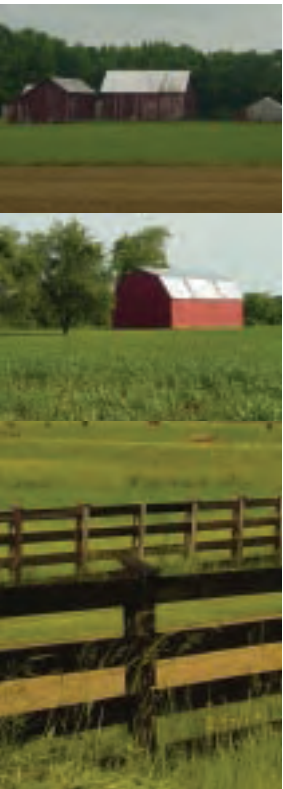
Scenic landscapes along various sections of rural routes in St. Mary's County.



THE THREAT

Since 1984, the population of southern Maryland has grown by a half a million people, making this region the fastest growing in the state. Sprawling residential and commercial development robs the area of its peaceful character, as subdivisions gobble up farmland and traffic fills the roads. Each year, thousands of new building permits are issued. In many areas, new construction has completely supplanted the former rural appearance of this area. Keeping working farms and scenic landscapes from completely disappearing from the region will present a major challenge.

The familiar site of tobacco barns and farms lining the roadways and ridges lends the area a unique character that many would like to preserve.



BUCKTOWN VILLIAGE - Dorchester County

SUMMARY

Bucktown Village, historically recognized as the birthplace of Harriet Tubman, retains much of the same 19th century village character it possessed during Tubman's childhood. The village center, nearby churches and lands of the Brodess Plantation were then and remain now important components of the local African-American community. But today rapid development threatens the integrity of this area, as Dorchester County and nearby Cambridge, like much of the Eastern shore, witness a growing population and proposals for building thousands of new homes. The county faces many challenges as it tries to protect the scenic beauty and historic nature of this village in the midst of inescapable growth.

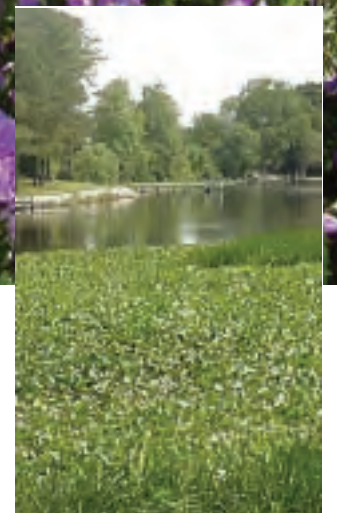
THE LANDSCAPE

Just nine miles south of Cambridge, Bucktown Village occupies 10 square miles in the heart of Dorchester County. A rural village set amid expansive agricultural fields and woodlands, the Bucktown area was home to Harriet Tubman, one of the Underground Railroad's most well-known champions. Here, along the banks of the nearby Transquaking River, Tubman spent her childhood and later returned to the region to lead numerous slaves to freedom. At the center of the village is the Bucktown Store where, as a teenager, Harriet received a blow to the head while attempting to assist a fellow slave – her first public act of defiance. Currently, this store is being developed as an interpretive venue and gift shop. At the nearby Brodess Plantation, an archeological investigation is underway to reveal connections between the plantation and Tubman's time there.

THE THREAT

Residential development is a foregone conclusion on Maryland's Eastern Shore, and Dorchester County is no exception. The region's population, which has already grown by 50 percent over the past three decades, is projected to grow an additional 23 percent by 2020. In Cambridge alone, more than 6,000 homes have been proposed, which, if built, would double the number of existing homes. Bucktown Village must plan now for the inevitable approach of residential and commercial growth by working with local landowners to arrange conservation easements; by encouraging the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy to purchase sites facing the most imminent danger of development; by expanding the boundaries of the nearby Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge; by siting campgrounds in the area with accompanying hiking/biking paths to encourage low-impact land use and tourism; and by seeking Village Zoning and other appropriate uses as the county reviews its Comprehensive Plan.

For more information: Jennifer Pollard, 410-827-9756 X155, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and



This rural village set amid expansive agricultural fields and woodlands, and along the banks of the Transquaking River was home to Harriet Tubman, one of the Underground Railroad's most well-known champions.



SCENIC ROUTE 40 - Allegany County from Belle Grove to Fifteen-Mile creek.

SUMMARY

This seven-mile segment of Scenic Route 40 and its surrounding viewshed in eastern Allegany County make up one of the most visually enjoyable and well-preserved portions of the Maryland Historic National Road Scenic Byway. Originally part of a privately funded turnpike that connected Baltimore with the beginning of the National Road in Cumberland, Maryland, this stretch of scenic roadway follows one of the most historically and culturally significant transportation routes in the United States. While it enjoys historic recognition, however, the designation does not carry any protections. In fact, development plans projected over the next two decades threaten to clear woodlands adjoining the Green Ridge State Forest to make way for thousands of housing units and a shopping center. This, in turn, will place traffic pressure on the Byway and require alterations that would erode the Scenic Route's historic value and visual integrity.

THE LANDSCAPE

This segment of Scenic Route 40 extends between the High Germany Road and Fifteen Mile Creek exits of Interstate 68, crossing over Town Hill and Green Ridge. It has been little altered since the 1930s. The panoramic view west from Sideling Hill offers one of the most unspoiled vistas of western Maryland's gently rolling wooded countryside. The view from the top of Town Hill, peering down from the historic Town Hill Hotel B&B, has been identified as one of the highest priorities for preservation in the Allegany County section of this Historic National Road. The Byway provides access to Green Ridge State Forest, the largest contiguous block of forest in Maryland, and serves as a recreational gateway into Allegany County. In June 2002, the entire length of this road, from Baltimore to Missouri, earned recognition as an "All American Road" through the Federal Highway Administration's Scenic Byways program, the first-ever multi-state designation in the program's history. A series of interpretive markers will soon be placed along the entire 200-mile stretch of road in Maryland, including the scenic overlook at Town Hill, and a guide to market the Historic National Road is currently in production.

THE THREAT

Within the year, construction is slated to begin on approximately 315 single-family homes on 1/3-acre lots, followed shortly thereafter by a shopping center. The project is part of a 4,300 housing unit development that will ultimately include townhouses and condominiums and could clear as much as 1,000 wooded acres adjoining the Green Ridge State Forest on two sides. Not only will such a project disrupt the scenic landscape of this Route, it threatens to damage the integrity of the Historic Road itself by creating heavy traffic pressure requiring road widening, traffic signals and turn lanes. While the county has approved the developer's plans, an appeal has been filed and a vote is pending. Potential solutions being sought include protections for the wooded tract of land adjoining the State Forest or a reduction in the housing development density to levels that would maintain the character of the Scenic 40 corridor and prevent major alterations to the roadway. Long-term solutions include undertaking a planning effort focused on economic development in eastern Allegany County that enhances the area's special historic and natural qualities.

For more information: Susan Trail, 301-478-2259

Originally part of a privately funded turnpike that connected Baltimore with the beginning of the National Road in Cumberland, Maryland, this stretch of scenic roadway follows one of the most historically and culturally significant transportation routes in the United States.





Scenic Maryland, Inc.

Scenic Maryland is dedicated to protecting, enhancing, and celebrating the beauty of Maryland. We seek to reclaim the visual environment of Maryland's established neighborhoods, provide critical assistance to communities seeking to protect their sense of place, preserve the scenic countryside and historic landscapes of the state, and promote transportation planning and design that preserves scenic resources. We are an affiliate organization of Scenic America and work closely with them at the national level on many of their goals. Listed below are our objectives.

- Educate and advocate for scenic resources, serving as a voice for the scenic beauty of Maryland.
- Reclaim the visual environment of Maryland's established neighborhoods.
- Preserve the scenic countryside and historic landscapes of Maryland.
- Promote transportation planning and design that preserves scenic resources.

We have undertaken to work on these specific issues:

- BILLBOARDS & SIGN CONTROL
- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- OPENSOURCE
- SCENIC BYWAYS & RIVERS
- TELECOMMUNICATIONS TOWERS
- TRANSPORTATION



Other site-specific special projects include:

- SCENIC ARNOLD
- ASSESSMENT OF ORDINANCES FOR OUTDOOR SIGNAGE
- EASTERN SHORE SCENIC ASSESSMENT PROJECT— which tests methodologies for scenic policy evaluation and scenic resource identification.

www.scenicmaryland.org



Brochure design: Marti Betz Design / Illustration

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Scenic Maryland is a 501c(3) charitable organization.
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Thank you for supporting Scenic Maryland, Inc.



The mission of Scenic Maryland, Inc. is to protect, enhance, and celebrate the beauty of Maryland.

Founded in 2001 by a group of concerned citizens, Scenic Maryland is a non-profit organization that relies solely on financial contributions to achieve its mission.

For more information about making a donation to Scenic Maryland, please contact

Scenic Maryland, Inc.,
PO Box 39095
Baltimore MD 21212;
call 410-377-0644;
visit www.scenicmaryland.org;
or email lizbuxton@earthlink.net.

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