

# STRATEGIC PLAN FY24-28



*Protecting Today,  
Preserving for the Future*



# C&O CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

## Enabling Legislation

Public Law 91-664, January 8, 1971

## Establishment of Park

Sec. 3 (a) In order to preserve and interpret the historic and scenic features of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and to develop the potential of the canal for public recreation, including such restoration as may be needed, there is hereby established the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

## C&O CANAL TRUST FRIENDS AGREEMENT

*Excerpt:* The Trust's sole mission is working in partnership with the National Park Service to protect, restore, and promote the park, and to assist the National Park Service in ensuring that the park's natural, cultural, historic, and recreational qualities are enjoyed by current and future generations.

## OUR MISSION

The C&O Canal Trust, as the official nonprofit partner of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, works in partnership with the National Park Service and local communities to raise funds to preserve the park for future generations and to broaden support through programs that highlight the park's historical, natural, and cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities.

## OUR VISION

The C&O Canal Trust is the highly visible, well-respected nonprofit leader of the C&O Canal community, linking private citizens, organizations, and state and local governments with the C&O Canal National Historical Park. With the engagement of all stakeholders, we see a safe and well-preserved park, its iconic towpath running uninterrupted for 184.5 miles through diverse landscapes and populations, supported by the communities it touches, and connecting, now and into the future, all who embrace the idea of the C&O Canal as "My Canal."

PHOTO BY STAN COLLYER  
COVER PHOTO BY ROY SEWALL





Proud Partner of the C&O Canal NHP



## LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO

Philanthropic partnerships play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability and vitality of our national parks. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O Canal) National Historical Park is a nationally significant landmark that enriches the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the surrounding region. This continuous 184.5-mile park serves as a vital cultural, historical, and natural resource for millions of visitors and local residents each year.

The C&O Canal began as a dream of passage to Western wealth. Operating for nearly 100 years, the canal was a lifeline for communities along the Potomac River as coal, lumber, and agricultural products floated down the waterway to market. Today, nearly two centuries after its groundbreaking, the C&O Canal's legacy continues as a national historical park, each year ranking among our nation's most visited national parks out of over 430 units in the National Park System. While visitors traverse trails, marvel at locks and admire the beautiful scenery, they also breathe life into nearby communities, sparking economic growth and vitality. Fueled by investment through the National Park Service (NPS) and the invaluable contributions of our canal community, the C&O Canal endures as a vital economic cornerstone in our region.

For the C&O Canal, philanthropic support and partnership help to preserve its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. With over 1,300 historic structures and 20,000+ acres of ecological diversity, the park is a treasured resource for recreation, education, and connection to history and the natural world. Maintaining such a vast and complex site requires community engagement and support.

The C&O Canal Trust was founded in 2007 as the official nonprofit philanthropic partner of the C&O Canal, working in close partnership with the NPS. The Trust serves as a bridge between the NPS and a vibrant community of

individuals and partners who raise funds to preserve the C&O Canal, supporting programs that highlight the park's historical, natural, and cultural heritage and recreational opportunities. For nearly 20 years, through the generosity of individuals, foundations, corporations, and community partners, the Trust has been instrumental in supporting conservation projects, infrastructure improvements, education programs, and visitor resources throughout the park.

We are committed to providing robust support along the entire length of the towpath and adjoining trails. Our programs help to preserve and enhance the park's historic and natural resources, while also fostering a strong connection among individuals who share a passion for protecting our public lands. In addition to programs, we raise funds to help expand the park's capacity for education programs, beautification, natural resource conservation, and preservation. Since 2007, we have directly granted over \$1.5 million to the park.

As the official philanthropic partner of the C&O Canal, the Trust fills an essential role by helping to confront challenges and build capacity with resources, advocacy, and community engagement. To preserve the park's 20,000+ acres — while meeting the needs of visitors and ensuring its sustainability for future generations — we must continue to grow as an organization, expand our work, and deepen our connection with those who love the park.

We are thrilled to share our ambitious new Strategic Plan that will guide our work for the next four years, culminating with the 200th anniversary of the C&O Canal's beginning. This plan is built on four pillars that will strengthen our programs and expand our impact. Meeting our goals will be critical to helping the park continue to care for its incredible resources and provide unparalleled recreational opportunities. With our collective

commitment, we can ensure the beauty, history, and biodiversity of the C&O Canal are protected and this extraordinary place thrives.

As a model of effective collaboration, the partnership between the NPS and the Trust demonstrates the transformative impact of philanthropy on preserving our public lands and ensures they prevail in the face of modern pressures. Through this successful partnership, key parts of canal history have been preserved, rare and native plant species have been protected, and educational and outreach programs have broken down barriers and helped learners of all ages connect with the park in their own backyard. We urge all stakeholders to recognize the importance of this partnership and to continue supporting the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Together, we can ensure the C&O Canal and its resources are protected today and preserved for the future.

The importance of supporting our park has never been greater, and we have the opportunity to deepen our work together to achieve our shared mission. I invite you to join us. Your support fuels every program, every preservation and beautification project, and every effort to ensure the C&O Canal remains a vibrant place for exploration, learning, and connection.

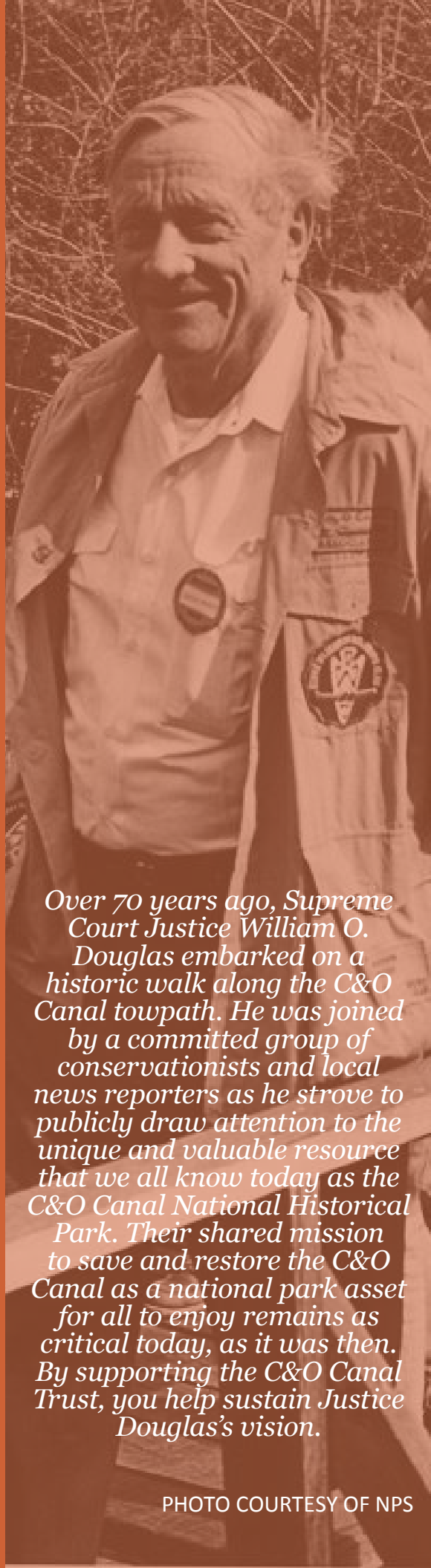
With gratitude,



Lauren Riviello  
President & CEO



**LOVE THE PARK?**  
**HELP THE TRUST!**



*Over 70 years ago, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas embarked on a historic walk along the C&O Canal towpath. He was joined by a committed group of conservationists and local news reporters as he strove to publicly draw attention to the unique and valuable resource that we all know today as the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Their shared mission to save and restore the C&O Canal as a national park asset for all to enjoy remains as critical today, as it was then. By supporting the C&O Canal Trust, you help sustain Justice Douglas's vision.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS

# *Our Strategic Plan*

For all of us who love the C&O Canal, it is more than just a park – it is a living testament to our nation’s history and a sanctuary of natural beauty that deserves our collective stewardship.

In 2024, the C&O Canal Trust’s Board and Staff, with input from the NPS, and a diverse set of stakeholders, developed this Strategic Plan to guide the Trust’s energy, resources, and talent through 2028.

***Together, we aspire to strengthen the resiliency of the C&O Canal National Historical Park by uniting a broad and vibrant canal community in service of protecting this treasured resource for today’s visitors and preserving it for future generations.***

This plan is a call to action — focused on what we can achieve together and united in our shared mission. Guided by the park’s priorities and needs, our goals reflect our collective determination to build on our strengths and continue to learn, adapt, and grow to amplify our impact. Together, we will ensure a thriving, vibrant C&O Canal that connects, inspires, and serves all who experience and cherish its legacy.







## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Trust's guiding principles represent core values that govern our strategy, actions, and impact. They shape our culture, partnerships, and decisions, and are reflected in our enduring commitment to preserving, protecting, and restoring the C&O Canal National Historical Park in strong partnership with the National Park Service.

### ***Robust Partnership***

We provide the highest standard of support to our park partner as we work with the National Park Service towards a shared vision for the preservation and enhancement of the natural and historic character of the C&O Canal.

### ***Focused Stewardship***

We thoughtfully steward our philanthropic, volunteer, and other resources to engage in projects and programs that will have the greatest positive impact on the park both today and into the future.

### ***Community Engagement***

We welcome the broad range of geographic, demographic, and economic backgrounds of our canal community, seeking as far as possible to meet and engage stakeholders "where they are."

### ***Operational Excellence***

We maintain an organization that is efficient, innovative, transparent, and trustworthy.



# STRENGTHEN THE TRUST FOR CONTINUED GROWTH AND EXPANDED IMPACT



We strive to be a leading national parks Friends group, using best practices across all aspects of our mission and strengthening our capacity to support the park's current and future needs.

***Foster a desirable and high-performing workplace built upon a positive culture and resourced for success.***

- Position and resource the Board and Staff to achieve maximum potential, enhance capabilities, and align representation with strategic goals to sustain future growth.
- Build organizational capacity by optimizing resources, processes, and infrastructure to support growth, high performance, and impact.
- Ensure the Trust has the resources needed to accomplish its goals with sustainable funding and strong partnerships, including alignment with the NPS.





***Enhance the Trust's reach, impact, and reputation through strategic and efficient marketing and communications initiatives.***

- Expand communications impact by strengthening branding and creating engaging, targeted content for a variety of audiences.
- Inspire a sense of individual responsibility for the park through volunteerism, philanthropy, and advocacy, while adapting materials and website content to align with branding strategies.



PHOTO BY TRUST STAFF



PHOTO BY TRUST STAFF



PHOTO BY FRANCIS GRANT-SUTTIE

**Operational Excellence**



LEFT PHOTO BY INDRANEEL SAMANTA  
RIGHT PHOTO BY FRANCIS GRANT-SUTTIE



# PROTECT, PRESERVE, AND RESTORE THE CULTURAL RESOURCES AND HISTORIC INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE C&O CANAL

We will align advocacy, funding, and volunteer support behind shared preservation objectives with the NPS, enhancing the visitor experience and expanding public engagement with the canal's history. Together, we will ensure long-term preservation and deepen public connection to the park's legacy.



PHOTO BY FRANCIS GRANT-SUTTIE



PHOTO BY PA



## ***Expand the Canal Quarters Interpretive Program.***

- Open an eighth Canal Quarters structure and build the groundwork for the addition of more structures to the program by 2028.
- Increase occupancy and program revenue by 30% by 2028 to ensure sustainability and ongoing maintenance of structures.

## ***Improve the resiliency and surface of the towpath for a safe, accessible, and continuous trail.***

- Raise \$100,000 to support towpath maintenance and rehabilitation.
- Advocate for government funding for continued towpath improvements prioritized by the NPS in most need of rehabilitation and to ensure continuity from Georgetown to Cumberland.
- Raise \$150,000 for maintenance and repairs of historic culverts, which are critical to managing the flow of water in our flood-prone park. There are over 150 culverts along the C&O Canal.



UL GRAUNKE



PHOTO BY JEFF ORNER

## **Building Resiliency**

### ***Did You Know?***

*Seven historic lockhouses in the park have been rehabilitated to date through the Trust's award-winning Canal Quarters Interpretive Program, welcoming an average of 3,000 visitors each year from across the country and international travelers.*

*Each lockhouse has been rehabilitated and furnished to interpret a different time period, and each tells a unique story about the development of the C&O Canal. Annual program revenue funds the ongoing maintenance and preservation of these historic structures.*



LEFT PHOTO BY TURNER PHOTOGRAPHY  
RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS





## ADVANCE THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE C&O CANAL

We will help protect our region's incredible mosaic of natural habitats. Through focused stewardship, we can ensure the natural beauty of the C&O Canal, one of the nation's most biologically diverse national parks, endures for generations to come.

***Safeguard the park's beauty and biodiversity by supporting the conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered plants.***

- Raise \$100,000 to support the extension of the park's work to collect seeds, propagate, and outplant rare, threatened, and endangered plants.
- Engage skilled volunteers in monitoring and planting to boost rare plant populations in the park, with a goal of 40-45 species outplanted by 2027.
- Expand education and public awareness of responsible recreation and inspire stewardship of natural resources.



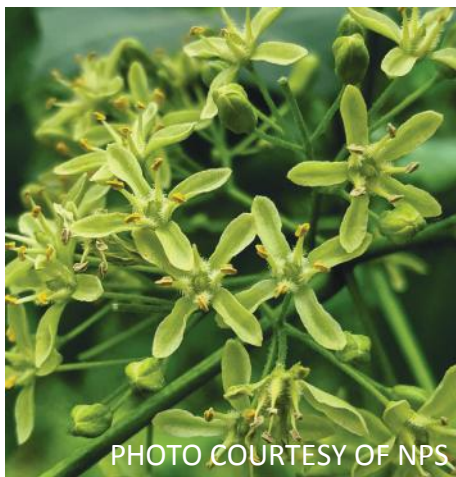


PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS



PHOTO BY FRANCIS GRANT-SUTTIE

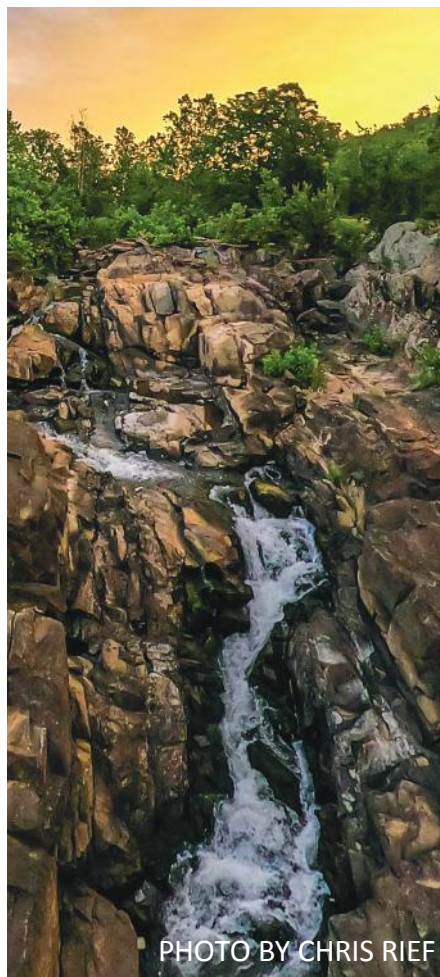


PHOTO BY CHRIS RIEF

## ***Expand support for invasive plant management and promote native plants throughout the park.***

- Support with funding, staff, and volunteers the NPS's objectives for removing key invasive plant species in priority areas, with a minimum of 100 acres controlled through Trust-initiatives by 2028.
- Enhance awareness and education about the importance of native plants, NPS conservation efforts, and engagement opportunities.

## **Fostering Biodiversity**

### ***Did You Know?***

*Since 1971, over 1,500 plant species have been identified in the park, including over 200 rare, threatened, or endangered (RTE) plants, some of which are globally rare and unique. But that number appears to be dwindling. Between 2008 and 2021, just over 100 previously identified RTE species were found along the C&O Canal. The remaining plants are likely now locally extinct. Invasive non-native plants, regional urbanization, and surging visitation have all taken their toll on the fragile habitats that make such diversity possible.*



LEFT PHOTO BY NICHOLAS CLEMENTS  
RIGHT PHOTO BY TRUST STAFF



# BUILD A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT AND STEWARDSHIP

We will cultivate a broad and vibrant canal community dedicated to preserving the C&O Canal. Together, we can ensure a thriving, resilient park and inspire a new generation of stewards committed to its preservation.

## ***Grow philanthropy, volunteerism, and outreach among park users and stakeholders.***

- Expand fundraising by 40% by 2028, strengthening major donor engagement, expanding individual giving, and enhancing legacy gift outreach.
- Increase volunteer base by 5% annually, ensuring sufficient numbers of Canal Stewards, Quartermasters, and other volunteers to achieve goals.
- Grow partnerships and strengthen the canal community's connection to the Trust and one another by offering a range of high-quality engagement opportunities throughout the park.
- Leverage financial and volunteer support to help the park improve access, amenities, and aesthetics in high visitor-use areas.



## Engage and inspire the next generation of park stewards.

- Raise \$250,000 to support the park's Canal Classrooms education program, which has engaged nearly 70,000 K-12 students to date throughout the State of Maryland. Funds raised will help support the program's expansion into the District of Columbia.
- Engage 25% more youth volunteers by 2028.
- Increase educational programs for youth in the park by 50% through key partnerships by 2028.



PHOTOS BY FRANCIS GRANT-SUTTIE

## Did You Know?

*In 2024, volunteers contributed a record-breaking 7,000+ hours of service to ensure the park remains beautiful, safe, and welcoming. In total, volunteers collectively removed over 20,000 pounds of trash and invasive or overgrown vegetation, and refurbished over 200 features, resulting in a combined contribution of over \$300,000 of in-kind support. Over 14,000 volunteers have contributed nearly \$2 million of in-kind support since 2007.*



LEFT PHOTO BY TURNER PHOTOGRAPHY  
RIGHT PHOTO BY TRUST STAFF

Collective Stewardship





PHOTO BY JIM KIRBY

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