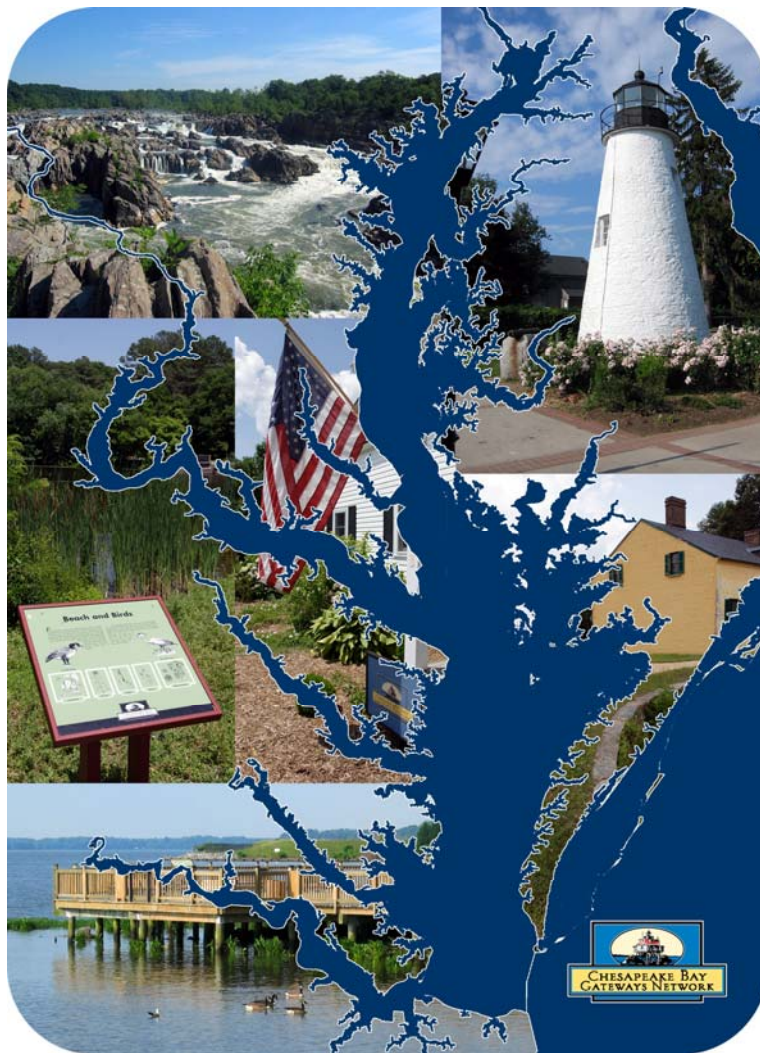




U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General



Administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and Grant Program National Park Service

July 2006
Report No. W-IN-NPS-0006-2005

*Photos courtesy of Office of Inspector General (OIG)
evaluators Bryan Brazil and Rebecca Booth*




United States Department of the Interior

Office of Inspector General
Western Region
Federal Building
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Sacramento, California 95825

July 28, 2006
7430

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

From: Michael P. Colombo 
Regional Audit Manager

Subject: Evaluation Report – *Administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and Grant Program, National Park Service*
(Report No. W-IN-NPS-0006-2005)

This report presents the results of our evaluation of the National Park Service's (NPS) administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network (Network) and Grant Program (Grant Program), authorized by the 1998 Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act (Initiative Act). (Highlights of the Initiative Act are outlined in Appendix 1.) Our objective was to determine whether NPS was (1) meeting the objectives of its role as coordinator of the Network and (2) ensuring that Grant Program activities complied with the Initiative Act. Our scope and methodology are detailed in Appendix 2.

We are pleased to report that NPS is making progress in meeting Network objectives and has responded to congressional criticism by improving its monitoring of the Grant Program. We also believe, however, that NPS could further improve its monitoring to ensure project completion and recommended that it terminate relationships with grantees failing to perform and that it adequately review grant fund expenditures.

In its May 19, 2006 response (Appendix 3 of the attached report), NPS concurred with our recommendations. Based on the response, we consider the recommendations to be resolved and are referring them to the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget for tracking of implementation (see Appendix 4 of the attached report). We will include information from this report in our next semiannual report to Congress.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by NPS staff during our review. A response to this report is not required. However, if you have any questions regarding the report, please call me at (916) 978-5653.

cc: Director, National Park Service
Director, National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Program Office
Audit Liaison Officer, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Audit Liaison Officer, National Park Service

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Acronyms

EPA.....	Environmental Protection Agency
NM.....	National Monument
NPS.....	National Park Service
NWR.....	National Wildlife Refuge
OIG.....	Office of Inspector General
OMB.....	Office of Management and Budget

Protecting the Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay, extending for 180 miles from southernmost Virginia to northernmost Maryland, is the largest and most biologically diverse estuary in the United States. Through centuries of human settlement, the Bay and its tributaries have sustained the region's economy and defined its traditions and cultures. The Bay has 12,000 miles of shoreline, and more than 16 million people live within its 64,000 square-mile watershed. With development has come a decline in the Bay's ecological health, resulting in the establishment in the 1980s of the Chesapeake Bay Program, a multi-jurisdictional partnership that has worked to restore and protect the Bay and its resources.



In 1998, Congress enacted the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act (Appendix 1). The primary purpose of the Initiative Act was to increase public awareness about and access to the Bay by creating a network of "gateways," defined as parks, refuges, historic sites, water trails, or other special places in and around the Bay, through which the public could experience the Bay's resources.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and NPS are partners in administering the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network (hereafter referred to as Network). Essentially, EPA



is responsible for improving water quality in the Bay, while NPS is responsible for bolstering the public's connection to the Bay by making it easier to see and experience the Bay. NPS objectives are to raise public awareness by (1) enhancing interpretation and education about the Bay's special places and stories;

(2) increasing access to these places through information, maps, guides, a system of gateways, and linked land and water routes; and (3) helping the public appreciate the part they play in the Chesapeake's survival and ways they can become involved in conserving and restoring the Chesapeake's natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources. The Grant Program, also established under the Initiative Act, provides grant monies to both governmental and nongovernmental agencies to assist NPS in meeting Network objectives.

In fiscal years 2001 through 2004, Congress appropriated about \$6.4 million to NPS for implementing the Initiative Act. NPS used about \$2.1 million to pay for salaries and other expenses related to creating and



administering the Network. NPS used the remaining \$4.3 million for



grants. These grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$150,000, were awarded annually to federal and nonfederal parks and nonprofit organizations to complete a variety of projects. These projects include land and water trail signs, informational kiosks, wayside interpretive panels, expanded recreational facilities, and habitat and cultural restoration.

Schedule of Funds Used				
Fiscal Year	Appropriated	Grant Program	Network-Wide Initiatives	Administration Costs*
2001	\$798,043	\$556,582	\$235,905	\$5,555
2002	\$1,199,829	\$828,895	\$370,934	\$0
2003	\$1,964,041	\$1,381,206	\$563,868	\$18,967
2004	\$2,445,703	\$1,516,560	\$805,218	\$123,926
Total	\$6,407,616	\$4,283,243	\$1,975,925	\$148,448

* NPS spent an additional \$1.6 million in fiscal years 2001 through 2004 for salaries, travel, training, and equipment. These administrative costs supported activities associated with the Network, the Grant Program, and the long-standing Chesapeake Bay Program.

Members of Congress have expressed their concerns about Grant Program achievements. Specifically, in February 2005, the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for the Committee on Appropriations, criticized NPS's overall management of the Grant Program, citing the lack of Grant Program accomplishments and poor monitoring of grant recipients.

Results of Evaluation

NPS has made progress in meeting its objectives to bolster the public's connection to the Bay. During fiscal years 2001 to 2004, NPS focused its attention on coordinating and establishing new gateways for the Network, planning educational and interpretive programs for the public, and providing technical assistance to individual gateways. Its efforts have paid off in a substantial increase in the number of gateways - from 23 in 2000 to over 140 in 2005. In fiscal year 2005, in response to criticism by a House of Representatives subcommittee report, NPS also took significant steps to improve the overall administration and monitoring of its Grant Program, as follows:



Administration

- Ensured that about two-thirds of appropriated funds were used for the Grant Program, consistent with NPS's action plan to improve its management of the Network.
- Developed a strategic plan for the award of grants.
- Developed an outcome-based measurement process to evaluate grant effectiveness.
- Developed and used a checklist to certify that grantees met all applicable requirements prior to grant award.
- Improved guidelines for awarding grants to federal parks.

Monitoring

- Completed a comprehensive review and plan of action for managing incomplete fiscal year 2000-2002 grants.
- Instituted electronic quarterly reporting reminders for grantees and adopted measures to strictly enforce quarterly grantee reporting requirements, including restricting reimbursement if reports are delinquent.
- Issued guidance to grantees requiring supporting documentation, including matching and overhead requirements, for NPS grant project cost reviews.

- Expanded information for annual grantee workshops to include guidance on financial management and responsibilities.
- Provided additional grant management training for NPS staff.

We commend these improvements but believe that NPS should further strengthen its monitoring of the Grant Program by (1) ensuring the timely completion of grant projects and (2) adequately reviewing grantee project costs.

Timely Completion of Grant Projects

NPS must terminate relationships with grantees that lack valid reasons for not completing their projects in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement. As shown on the following table, not all grant funds have been paid out or projects completed.

Status of Grant Funds as of June 10, 2005				
Fiscal Year	Grant Program		Amount Paid to Grantees	Percent Paid of Total Award
	Total	Grants Awarded		
2001	\$556,582	34	\$431,498	78
2002	\$828,895	40	\$457,032	55
2003	\$1,381,206	32	\$552,680	40
2004	\$1,516,560	33	\$147,250	10
Total	\$4,283,243	139	\$1,588,460	37

NPS personnel acknowledged that the lack of monitoring had contributed to project delays, especially during fiscal years 2001 to 2004, when NPS was focusing on establishing the Network of gateway sites and water trails. As previously discussed, NPS took steps in fiscal year 2005 to improve its monitoring in response to the Congressional committee's report. However, it has not terminated the grants of grantees that lack acceptable reasons for delays beyond grant project completion dates.



Of the 23 grant projects tested, 18 had experienced delays, which ranged from 9 months to about 3 years (Appendix 2). Some of the reasons given for the delays were acceptable, in that the delays were precipitated by conditions beyond the ability of the grantee to control. These reasons included (1) changing environmental conditions, such as damage caused by Hurricane Isabel in 2003 or

nesting of the tiger beetle, which temporarily halted project work; (2) redesign of project

work, such as “wayside interpretive panels,” to meet NPS standards; and (3) meeting rigorous internal review processes required for construction on federal park land.

Of the 18 projects, 9 lacked acceptable reasons for not being completed. These reasons ranged from turnover of key grantee personnel to grantees taking on too many projects at one time. For example:

- Only minimal work has been completed on a fiscal year 2003 grant for \$75,000, of which \$25,000 was advanced, to provide landscaping and plantings at trail access points, including interpretive wayside exhibits on the York River Water Trail. The grant agreement stipulated completion by July 31, 2004. This project was managed solely by the grantee’s executive director, who resigned his position during the grant period, leaving financial records in disarray. The loss of key personnel was not a valid excuse for delaying the project. When apprised of this situation, NPS should have quickly terminated the grant and sought reimbursement for the \$25,000.
- A fiscal year 2002 grant to develop a waterproof map and six interpretive wayside signs for the Choptank and Tuckahoe Rivers was not completed by the stipulated date of August 30, 2003. The project has been delayed more than 2 years. We concluded that the grantee had undertaken too many other projects and could not complete them in a timely manner. Taking on too many projects was not a valid excuse for delaying the project. As a partner, NPS should have taken measures to help the grantee complete the project. If these measures again failed, NPS then should have quickly terminated the grant and sought appropriate reimbursement.



If NPS cannot obtain the desired grant performance through improved grant workshops and monitoring, it should terminate the grants, obtain reimbursement from the grantees, and seek new grantees. Such action would help ensure that scarce resources are used to comply with the intent of the Initiative Act. Ensuring the timely completion of grant projects is critical to the ability of NPS not only to meet the requirement of the Initiative Act to conserve, restore, and interpret historic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, but also to demonstrate Grant Program accomplishments.

Adequate Cost Reviews

Our review of grantee files and evaluation of grantee costs to produce the goods and services for 23 grant projects confirmed the need to periodically assess whether grant project costs, such as labor, materials, in-kind contributions, and administrative charges, were accurate, allowable, and reasonable in compliance with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines. Of the 23 grant files tested, we concluded that 18 lacked

adequate reviews of the actual costs incurred by grantees to produce the goods and services stipulated in the grant agreement. In addition, all 23 files lacked evidence that reviews were performed to ensure that grantees met the Initiative Act's dollar-for-dollar grantee matching requirement and the 10-percent limit on administrative costs. For example:

- NPS provided a grant of \$57,400 to the U.S.S. Constellation Museum to overhaul its audio tour and to modify exhibits to accommodate the tour. The audio tour allows visitors to use a hand-held device to learn the history of the U.S.S. Constellation and its presence on the Bay. The Museum improperly used expenditures of \$41,079 after the grant project period ended to help meet the matching requirement. As such, these expenditures violate Grant Program guidelines and OMB guidance. NPS should comply with its own guidelines.

While previously cited NPS improvements in Grant Program monitoring will greatly assist in cost reviews, NPS use of OMB guidance would provide a more thorough review of project costs, including ensuring adherence to the grantee matching requirement and the administrative cost limitation. For costs determined to be unallowable, NPS should seek reimbursement from the grantees in accordance with OMB guidance.

Recommendations

To ensure the timely completion of grant projects at reasonable and allowable costs, we recommend that the Director, National Park Service, require Grant Program managers to:

1. Terminate relationships with grant recipients that lack valid reasons for not completing their projects in accordance with the terms of the grant agreements.
2. Periodically assess whether grant project costs, such as labor, materials, in-kind contributions, and administrative charges, were accurate, allowable, and reasonable in compliance with OMB guidelines.

NPS Response and OIG Reply

In its May 19, 2006 response, NPS concurred with our recommendations to “strengthen the NPS guidance” for managing the Grant Program. Overall, NPS agreed to eliminate the backlog of incomplete grant projects, put all grants on a reasonable and documented timeframe for completion, establish procedures for review, and perform third-party audits of grants to ensure that project costs are in compliance with OMB guidelines. The response stated that with implementation of the changes, “the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network will continue to fulfill the intent of Congress to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and . . . be a model for collaborative conservation.”

Based on the response, we consider the recommendations to be resolved and are referring them to the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget for tracking of implementation. The status of the recommendations is shown in Appendix 4.

Appendix 1

**Highlights of the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act of 1998
(Public Law 105-312, Title V)**

The Secretary of the Interior, in cooperation with the Administrator of EPA, shall provide technical and financial assistance in cooperation with other federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector to:

- Identify, conserve, restore, and interpret natural, recreational, historical, and cultural resources within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Identify and use the collective resources as Chesapeake Bay gateway sites for enhancing public education of and access to the Chesapeake Bay.
- Link the Chesapeake Bay gateway sites with trails, tour roads, scenic byways, and other connections as determined by the Secretary.
- Develop and establish Chesapeake Bay water trails comprising water routes and connections to Chesapeake Bay sites and other land resources within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Create a network of Chesapeake Bay gateway sites and water trails.

Components of the Chesapeake Bay network of gateways and water trails may include (1) state or federal parks or refuges; (2) historic seaports; (3) archaeological, cultural, historical, or recreational sites; and (4) other public access and interpretive sites as selected by the Secretary.

The Secretary, in cooperation with EPA, shall establish a *Chesapeake Bay Gateways Grants Assistance Program* to aid state and local governments, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector in conserving, restoring, and interpreting important historic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Secretary, in cooperation with EPA, shall develop appropriate eligibility, prioritization, and review criteria for grants. Criteria include the requirements (1) that nonfederal matching funds, including in-kind contributions of services or materials, be at least 50 percent of total project costs and (2) that administrative costs not exceed more than 10 percent of all project costs.

The scope of our evaluation, conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections promulgated by the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency, included NPS Network and Grant Program activities for fiscal years 2001 through June 2005. We visited NPS’s Grant Program office in Annapolis, Maryland, and 19 gateway locations near and around the Chesapeake Bay (see “Gateway Sites Visited,” page 13) to determine whether NPS was (1) meeting its stated Network objectives and (2) administering the Grant Program in compliance with the Initiative Act. To accomplish our evaluation, we reviewed NPS grant files, evaluated operating procedures, and interviewed NPS program managers, project coordinators, and interpretive specialists to complete the following:

- An evaluation of grant eligibility criteria and selection process to assess use of competition.
- An assessment of how Grant Program funds were expended to determine whether the expenditures met objectives of the Initiative Act.
- A judgmental selection of 23 of 106 grants awarded during fiscal years 2001 through 2003 (see the following table) to include a variety of grant recipients, locations, and goods and services. We did not include grants awarded in fiscal years 2004 and 2005 because sufficient time had not elapsed for grantees to complete their projects in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant.
- A validation, for the 23 grants selected, as to whether the stipulated goods and services were produced and the costs to produce them were reasonable and in accordance with OMB guidance. We also evaluated whether grantee matching requirements were met and the extent to which grantee administrative costs were paid for by the grant.

Appendix 2
Scope and Methodology
Page 2 of 5

Grants Reviewed					
Year	Grant Recipient	Gateway	Grant Award	Deliverable	Delay
2001	Audubon Society of Maryland-Wash., D.C.	Pickering Creek Audubon Center	\$6,580	Visitors use traditional workmen's tools while they learn about the Bay	Yes 17 mo.
2001	Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum	Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum	\$19,200	Visitors hear real-life stories from watermen and decoy carvers	No
2001	City of Norfolk, Bureau of Parks and Forestry	Norfolk Water Trail System	\$23,250	Produce new maps, signage, and new or improved launch points	Yes 34 mo.*
2001	National Park Foundation	Yorktown Visitor Center and Battlefield	\$10,000	Produce exhibits at Yorktown Visitor Center	Yes 33 mo.*
2001	Patriots of Fort McHenry	Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine	\$9,380	Develop a new living history program	No
2001	Shady Side Rural Heritage Society, Inc.	Captain Salem Avery House	\$8,900	Produce interpretive panels, kiosk, wayside exhibits, and mooring buoy	No
2001	The Wildfowl Trust of North America, Inc.	Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center	\$25,000	Produce orientation kiosk, interpretive panels, map, and guide	Yes 34 mo.*
2001	Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art	Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art	\$30,000	Produce museum interpretive panels, perform habitat restoration, produce trail with interpretive signs	Yes 34 mo.*
2001	Audubon Society of Maryland-Wash., D.C.	Pickering Creek Audubon Center	\$44,000	Construct "Farm to Bay" interpretive trail with accompanying exhibits, viewing platforms, and a trail guide	Yes 22 mo.
2002	Friends of Concord Point Lighthouse	Concord Point Lighthouse	\$20,000	Produce interpretive panels and new exhibits inside the "Keeper's House"	Yes 23 mo.*
2002	Old Harford Town Maritime Center	Choptank & Tuckahoe Rivers Water Trail	\$28,700	Produce new waterproof maps and six new wayside interpretive panels	Yes 22 mo.*

Appendix 2
Scope and Methodology
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Grants Reviewed					
Year	Grant Recipient	Gateway	Grant Award	Deliverable	Delay
2002	Remember, Inc.	Historic Annapolis Gateway – City Dock	\$8,190	Develop and present live performances at three gateway sites	No
2002	Shady Side Rural Heritage Society, Inc.	Captain Salem Avery House	\$21,615	Develop interpretive program for school children and teacher guide	Yes 11 mo.
2002	Sotterley Foundation, Inc.	Sotterley Plantation	\$63,330	Construct access improvements, including a pier, outdoor learning center, and interpretive panels	Yes 24 mo.*
2002	The Wildfowl Trust of North America, Inc.	Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center	\$13,750	Produce three new signs and four educational workshops	Yes 22 mo.*
2002	UMD Center for Environmental Studies	Chesapeake Biological Laboratory	\$30,058	Produce 5 three-panel kiosks	Yes 22 mo.*
2003	Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary	Kiptopeke State Park and Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR	\$88,000	Produce portable exhibits, videos, and interpretive scripts	Yes 9 mo.*
2003	Fairfax County Park Authority	Riverbend Park and Great Falls Park	\$20,000	Produce 14 wayside signs	Yes 12 mo.*
2003	Mathews County Visitor and Information Center	Mathews Blueways Water Trails	\$45,060	Expand parking, produce wayside exhibits, and launch improvements	Yes 9 mo.*
2003	Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association	York River Water Trail	\$75,513	Produce 20 acres of landscaping and plantings at nine trail access points and interpretive panels	Yes 12 mo.
2003	Potomac Trail Council	Piscataway Park and Fort Washington Park	\$40,500	Construct trail improvements and six new wayside signs	Yes 12 mo.*

Appendix 2
Scope and Methodology
Page 4 of 5

Grants Reviewed					
Year	Grant Recipient	Gateway	Grant Award	Deliverable	Delay
2003	Sotterley Foundation, Inc.	Sotterley Plantation	\$28,000	Restore, display, and interpret an old Chesapeake Bay log canoe	Yes 11 mo.*
2003	U.S.S. Constellation Museum	U.S.S. Constellation Museum	\$57,400	Create new audio tour	No

*Number of months delayed as of June 30, 2005.
 Project has yet to be completed.





United States Department of the Interior


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Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

MAY 19 2006

Memorandum

To: Assistant Inspector General for Audits
Attn: Michael P. Colombo

From: Director 

Subject: U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General Draft Report
"Administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network and Grant Program, National Park Service" (Report No. W-In-NPS-006-2005)

The National Park Service (NPS) has reviewed the Office of Inspector General (OIG) draft report, "Administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateway Network and Grant Program," Report No. (W-IN-NPS-0006-2005). We are pleased that the OIG has incorporated the majority of our suggestions and appreciate the clarification added to further discuss the role of managing the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Grant Program (CBGN) and the recommendations to strengthen the NPS guidance.

Authorized by Congress in 1998, CBGN brings sites, volunteer groups, wildlife refuges, historic sites, museums, and water trails together to provide meaningful experiences of the Chesapeake Bay. The primary goal of CBGN as envisioned by Congress is to foster citizen stewardship of the Bay. The NPS remains committed to its role in the conservation and restoration of this great national treasure. CBGN continues to receive recognition as a model of collaborative conservation.

Nonetheless, we concur with the findings and recommendations documented in the report. A summary of our plans for implementing the recommendations is attached.

Specific comments are listed in the attachment. If you should have any questions, or need additional information, contact John Maounis, Director, Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network at 410-267-5778.

Attachment

*The U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Inspector General Draft Report
Administration of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and Grant Program
National Park Service (Report No. W-IN-NPS-0006-2005)*

1. Terminate relationships with grant recipients that lack valid reasons for not completing their projects in accordance with the terms of the grant agreements.

The staff and new director of CBGN have reviewed all incomplete grants from 2000-2005. All 2000 grants are now complete. The CBGN staff have determined that all 74 grants from 2001-2002 will be completed or terminated by September 30, 2006. Almost all of the 2003 and 2004 grants will be completed by this date as well. Those 2003 and 2004 grants that are not completed or terminated by the end of this fiscal year will be completed by the end of the calendar year 2005 grants will be completed by March 2007. Seven grants have been identified for immediate termination. NPS will thus eliminate the backlog of incomplete grant projects and put all grants on a reasonable and documented time frame for completion. We have instituted procedures that will ensure that extensions for current grants (i.e. 2005 and 2006) will only be given with valid reasons as recommend by the Inspector General.

2. Periodically assess whether grant project costs, such as labor, materials, in-kind contributions, and administrative charges, were accurate, allowable, and reasonable in compliance with OMB guidelines.

Procedures are now in place to ensure that all grants are reviewed to ensure compliance with OMB guidelines on appropriate charges and matching funds. Each and every grant is reviewed thoroughly and at close out. In addition, a contract is now in place for a third party audit of grants. Seventeen projects were audited last year and an additional seventeen will be audited this year to OMB standards.

We believe that with these changes, the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network will continue to fulfill the intent of Congress to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and will continue to be model of collaborative conservation.

I want to thank you and your staff for their thoroughness and their professionalism.

Appendix 4
Status of Recommendations

Recommendations	Status	Action Required
1 and 2	Resolved; Not Implemented	We will refer the recommendations to the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget for tracking of implementation.

Report Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Mismanagement



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