

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The APE encompasses a mix of suburbs, surviving rural areas, and historic towns. The northernmost part is in the Fall Zone, and the remainder is in the Coastal Plain. In the Coastal Plain the land is formed on layers of sand and gravel washed down from the ancient mountains, shaped into gentle hills and mantled with various types of sandy loam and silt loam. Most soils are well drained, except in the floodplains of the streams. The only steep slopes in the APE are the banks of streams, and there are no high hills or deep valleys. Before the land was cleared for farming, it supported a mixed deciduous forest dominated by oaks and hickories.

The SR 1 corridor crosses a series of small rivers that drain eastward toward the Delaware Bay, and several tributary streams. The largest river is the Christina River, which is tidal as far inland as Christiana town. South of the Christina are Red Lion Creek and then the C&D Canal, which occupies the old bed of St. Georges Creek. The largest secondary streams are Doll Run, a tributary of Red Lion Creek, Dragon Run, once a tributary of St. Georges Creek, and Scott Run, another old St. Georges tributary. The Christina River and Red Lion Creek are both lined with marshes, as was St. Georges Creek. Small swampy areas are found around the headwaters of tertiary streams, especially between Wrangle Hill and the canal. Larger marshes abound to the east of the study area, along the Bay. A large freshwater marsh, Churchman's Marsh, is just a few miles northeast of the study area along the Christina River, and this was a major focus of prehistoric settlement.

Along most of the SR 1 corridor, the soils are quite similar. South of U.S. Route 40, most soils are classified as loam or silt loam, with Matapeake Silt Loam the most common variety. Greenwich Loam and Reybold Silt Loam are also common. Some patches of sandy loam are also present. All of these are high-quality agricultural soils. Poorly drained soils are associated with the wetlands along streams. North of U.S. Route 40, the dominant type is Keyport Silt Loam, which is somewhat less well drained than Matapeake but still suitable for farming. Except for stream banks, slopes across the study area are all gentle, less than 5 percent.