

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development, Southeast Virginia & Northeast North Carolina

B. Associated Historic Contexts

None as yet

C. Geographical Data

See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Kit J. Valentine, LTC, Corps of Engineers, Federal Preservation Officer 14 Mar '88
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Amy Schlegel 6/6/88
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register Date

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type _____

II. Description

III. Significance

IV. Registration Requirements

See continuation sheet

See continuation sheet for additional property types

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

- Brown, Alexander Crosby, The Dismal Swamp Canal, Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia. Revised 1970
- Trout, William E. III, The Gilmerton Lock, from An Historical Review, Norfolk County Historical Society of Chesapeake, Virginia. 1966; also unpublished papers on the Northwest Canal and various aspects of the Gilmerton Canal.
- Jacobs, Barry M. Unpublished survey report on the Dismal Swamp Canal prepared for the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, 1980
- Elizabeth City Historic District, National Register of Historic Places--Nomination Form, USDI, NPS (10-300), undated.

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> State historic preservation office | <input type="checkbox"/> Local government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency | <input type="checkbox"/> University |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Specify repository: _____

I. Form Prepared By

name/title Karl B. Kuhlmann, Outdoor Recreation Planner

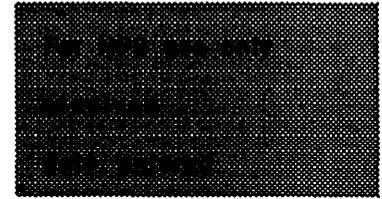
organization Norfolk Dist., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers date December 1, 1987

street & number 803 Front Street telephone (804) 441-3767

city or town Norfolk state Virginia zip code 23510-1096

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

1

C. Geographical Data.

North to south: the Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development is located in southeastern Virginia in the city of Chesapeake and Borough of Deep Creek, both of which encompass the associated contexts in Virginia. In North Carolina, the Dismal Swamp Canal and associated contexts are in Camden County and the village of South Mills. U.S. Route 17 is located on the east side of the Dismal Swamp Canal between Deep Creek and South Mills.

For this Multiple Property Documentation Form to identify the entire canal and associated development, ten (10) points will be located geographically in Virginia and North Carolina. The specific nomination of the Federally-operated Dismal Swamp Canal will require only four of the above points. The points will be referred to 1927 North American Datum. It is important to note that this nomination is by and large linear because it identifies an historic navigation channel varying from 50 to 100 feet wide. Acreage figures on their own would be misleading. Lands of the United States administered by the Corps of Engineers will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places; other lands, such as the northern end of the Gilmerton Canal and a portion of the village of South Mills, NC, are private. Assistance in providing acreage revisions appropriate to Form NPS 10-900 will be sought from the SHPOs of Virginia and North Carolina. Again, the old navigation channel waters are "owned" by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the United States, and the State of North Carolina.

Point 1 - Gilmerton Canal at confluence with Southern Branch, Elizabeth River, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR831708

Point 2 - Cross lock (ungated), Deep Creek, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR804676

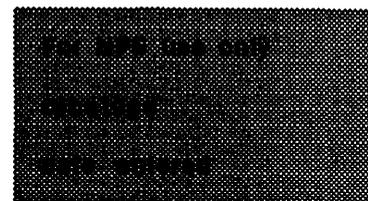
Point 3 - Deep Creek lock; beginning of contemporary Dismal Swamp Canal, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR804674

Point 4 - Probable beginning of Northwest Canal at its junction with Dismal Swamp Canal, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR767528

Point 5 - Northwest Canal at junction with Northwest River, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR862509

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 2

Point 6 - Mouth of Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond, Chesapeake, VA; UTM
18UR761504

Point 7 - Feeder Ditch at Lake Drummond, Chesapeake, VA; UTM 18UR706508

Point 8 - South Mills lock, South Mills, Camden County, NC; UTM 18UR813334

Point 9 - Turners Cut-Moccasin Track area, Camden County, NC; UTM
18UR816320

Point 10 - Turners Cut at Pasquotank River, Camden County, NC; UTM
18UR847277

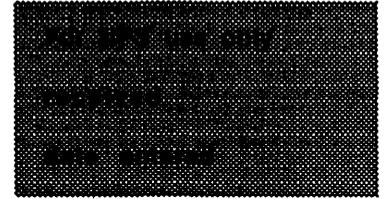
E. Statement of Historic Contexts.

The basic Dismal Swamp Canal itself is a 22-mile land cut between Deep Creek in Chesapeake, Virginia, and South Mills in Camden County, North Carolina. Its origin was a charter in 1787 by the Virginia General Assembly, ratified by North Carolina in 1790. The private Dismal Swamp Canal Company began construction in 1793 at both ends of the proposed cut to connect the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River near Norfolk, Virginia, with the Pasquotank River in Camden County, North Carolina, which provides access to numerous sounds, bays, and rivers in that state. The through cut came in 1805. Adjacent to the canal on the east side was constructed a toll road, made largely of material dug from the canal. It was opened in 1804. U. S. Route 17 now parallels the east side of the canal; since the canal was widened a number of times in its history, it is not known how the highway relates to the original toll road.

During early operation, the Dismal Swamp Canal could accommodate only small flats, most of which probably carried shingles out of the Dismal Swamp. In order to attract interstate waterborne commerce, the canal had to be improved by widening and deepening, locks had to be built, and something done about the supply of water for navigation. Early on, the canal supporters believed that the entire region was quite flat; therefore, the canal would be nearly a river-level route, not summit level. They were wrong about this and also about the supposition that because the canal was built in a "swamp" there would be a plentiful supply of water. Droughts proved this wrong. One of only two natural lakes in Virginia lies in the Dismal Swamp. It is Lake Drummond, a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

3

five-square mile shallow body of dark brown water colored by the tannic acid of peat and humus. In 1812, a three and one-half mile long ditch was cut perpendicular to the canal to the lake for the purpose of tapping that source to augment navigation. In paragraph B above, this is the Feeder Ditch.

Associated Developments

In 1820, not far north of the Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond, work commenced on another satellite canal. A narrow, shallow waterway was dug perpendicular to the main canal running eastward about six and one-half miles to the Northwest River. This route was first dug to assist in spilling excess water from the main canal; later, it was improved to a navigable canal itself which gave access to Currituck Sound, another large body in North Carolina.

Below the lock at Deep Creek in Virginia is a short, dredged channel to Deep Creek. Deep Creek itself contains several twisting bends before it reaches the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River. In the early 1800s, this made navigation difficult especially during low tides on an already shallow access. The Dismal Swamp Canal Company dug a narrow, straight canal a little over two and one-half miles cutting off one of the bends and shortening the overall route. This was (is) called the Gilmerton Cut, which was completed in 1843. It had but one major lock at the northern outlet end (which is in excellent repair today) and a stone stop gate near the southern end. Down Deep Creek from the southern end, a tumbling dam in Deep Creek was constructed. It was a low structure which backed up sufficient water to flow naturally into the Gilmerton Cut to provide a water supply. In 1899, it was replaced by a new tumbling dam with a cross lock near the lock at Deep Creek. The Gilmerton navigation is no longer used in its entirety at present.

At the south end of the Dismal Swamp Canal in the village of South Mills the historic canal route left the lock via Moccasin Track and Joyce's Creek before it entered the Pasquotank River. This twisting, narrow waterway impeded navigation and caused delays. In 1856, the company dug Turners Cut to the Pasquotank River which straightened the channel and greatly improved navigation.

Historically, there were a number of small communities or landings along the Dismal Swamp Canal. Most of these were for loading and off-loading cargo from individual farms. Today, only South Mills remains as a viable community

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

4

on the canal, but there is little or no commercial use of the canal by its residents. Just northwest of the present steel drawbridge at South Mills is Norris' store, perhaps the oldest canal-related commercial structure still standing in North Carolina. Where this store stands, a former mercantile establishment burned down in 1902. The newer structure was built in 1904; it served as a sort of commissary for employees of the canal. While the northern end of the canal is in the Borough of Deep Creek in Virginia, there are no canal-side commercial facilities there.

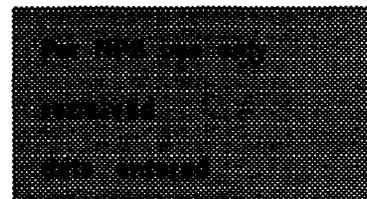
From 1804 to 1929, a period of 124 years, the Dismal Swamp Canal was in private ownership and operation. In 1929, the United States purchased the canal which by then consisted of the 22-mile cut and the Feeder Ditch. The U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers has operated the project for 58 years. Thus, the project itself has been in operation for 182 years. Insofar as is known, the Dismal Swamp Canal is the oldest operating canal in the United States.

The following is a brief chronology of the history of the Dismal Swamp Canal in its entire context:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Highlight</u>
1787	Virginia General Assembly passes enabling legislation for a navigable canal connecting the Elizabeth River in Virginia with the Pasquotank River in North Carolina.
1790	The North Carolina legislature passes bill authorizing the canal in that state.
1793	The Dismal Swamp Canal Company, a private enterprise, started digging the canal from both ends utilizing hand labor.
1804	The causeway or road adjacent to the east side of the canal opened; road eventually became present U.S. 17.
1805	Canal opened to flat boat traffic; cargo largely shingles from the Dismal Swamp. Canal had two locks and maximum width of 15 feet.
1812	The 3 1/2 mile long Feeder Ditch cut westward to Lake Drummond to tap water supply for main canal during low rainfall periods. Three or four locks were added.
1814	A 20-ton, decked vessel passes through canal for first time.
1818	The canal was visited by President James Monroe.
1820	Work commences on North West (Northwest) Canal linking Dismal Swamp to Northwest River and Currituck Sound.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

5

- 1827-29 Significant canal improvements made; waterway widened deepened; locks converted from wood to stone; President Andrew Jackson visited canal. The Lake Drummond Hotel or Halfway house opened astride the state line alongside canal.
- 1843 Gilmerton Cut navigation north of Deep Creek completed.
- 1856 Turners Cut to the Pasquotank River completed; eliminated Moccasin Track of Joyces Creek.
- 1859 Rival Albemarle & Chesapeake Canal opened; roughly parallel, route was wider, deeper, and shorter.
- 1861-65 Civil War wreaks havoc with both canals.
- 1866 Passenger service started on Dismal Swamp Canal.
- 1878 Canal badly deteriorated; company nearly bankrupt; assets sold.
- 1892 Lake Drummond Canal & Water Company takes over.
- 1896-99 Canal widened, deepened; only two locks required (as now); Gilmerton Cut was abandoned; business increases; outdoes rival A & C Canal. United States in process of establishing toll-free inland waterway on East Coast.
- 1912-13 Corps of Engineers takes over A&C Canal; improves route; DS Canal cannot compete with toll-free operation.
- 1925 Congress authorizes purchase of Dismal Swamp Canal.
- 1929 Purchase made (\$500,000; same as A&C); Corps manages.
- 1933 Canal dredged to provide channel 50 feet wide, 9 feet deep.
- 1933-34 New U.S. 17 drawbridges completed at Deep Creek and South Mills.
- 1935 New control spillway built on Feeder Ditch near Lake Drummond.
- 1940-41 New concrete and steel sheetpile locks built at Deep Creek and South Mills.

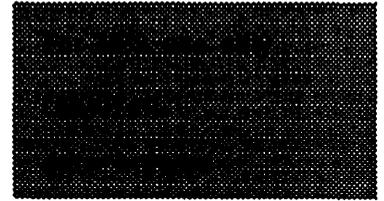
F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type: Canal Operational Structures; Secondary Property Type: Buildings Related to the Dismal Swamp Canal (not included herein).

II. Description: The various segments briefly described in Section E above comprise the entire extent of canal operation by the Dismal Swamp Canal

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

6

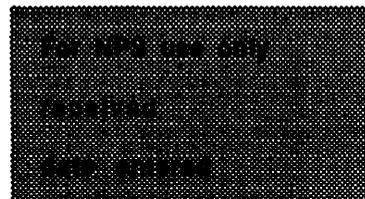
Company and later the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company. The village of South Mills was not owned by either company, but a portion of it was directly related to canal operation. The Northwest River navigation was begun by the Dismal Swamp Canal Company in 1820 as a spilling or waste ditch to release excess water from the main canal. By 1832 it was opened as a canal to attract business from the east and south down the Northwest River. The Gilmerton Cut and Canal successfully joined upper Deep Creek at the main canal north entry locks with the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, thus eliminating the need to navigate the twisting, shallow and silt-laden portion of Deep Creek itself which formerly had caused aggravating delays to both north and southbound vessels. The narrow canal circumventing the oxbow had but one lift lock at the north end. This was (is) a stone structure which leveled out the elevation difference between Deep Creek and the Southern Branch. A low head tumbling dam built across Deep Creek below the south entrance to the Gilmerton Canal created a lake-like effect whose elevations normally kept water in the canal; a stop lock with a single pair of gates was built in 1848 to guard the banks of the cut against rises in the "lake." By 1899, when the main Dismal Swamp Canal was completely renovated the Gilmerton Canal was bypassed and a new tumbling dam built for it at Deep Creek lock, because the same renovation returned the main channel to Deep Creek itself, which was dredged and straightened.

III. Significance and Registration Requirements: In June 1973, Norfolk District, USACE nominated the Dismal Swamp Canal to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination included only the Federally-owned property operated by the Corps, i.e. the 22 miles of main canal and the 3 and one-half mile Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond. Upon reviewing the original nomination form, the National Park Service was of the opinion that the canal had been altered so much and so many changes made that the canal would not be eligible for the Register. During fiscal years 1985 and 1986, the district made a study of the operating canal from economic and environmental standpoints. The historical aspects were coordinated with both Virginia and North Carolina and with the American Canal Society. In regard to the fact that the canal did not achieve National Register status, the above interests suggested a resubmission under current guidelines adding the elements as above to provide a complete, historic picture.

It appears now that Virginia, North Carolina and the American Canal Society are of the opinion that when carefully documented the alterations and changes serve to enhance the project from a historical viewpoint. In this case, it shows

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

7

the struggles and pitfalls of private canal interests trying to keep pace with demands of the shipping interests, very costly maintenance requirements, and with the Dismal Swamp Canal, stiff competition from a rival waterway. In the 1700s, a great forested peat bog retarded communication and commerce between Norfolk/Portsmouth, Virginia, and the extensive, shallow sounds of northeastern North Carolina. This was the Dismal Swamp. In order to conduct trade, it was necessary to make a circuitous trip by way of the Atlantic Ocean. Also, without an effective travel route, it was very difficult to tap the vast timber resources of the Dismal Swamp and resources of the sounds of northeastern North Carolina. The Dismal Swamp Canal provided the vital link needed for interstate communication. It was far too costly a venture to be profitable over the long term with the maintenance and improvements that had to be made, a Civil War to overcome, and a rival canal to compete with. Still, it was a great civil undertaking in the eastern United States. Other canal projects may have been more ambitious and required more engineering skills, but most of these failed or eventually succumbed to the railroad.

IV. Registration Requirements: It is firmly believed that the Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development fully meets the criteria for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places; namely, Criteria A and C. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. It embodies a distinct characteristic of not only the canal building era but also a survivor of the changes required to keep it operational for almost 200 years.

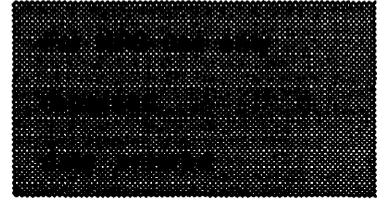
It should be noted that in April, 1987, the present Dismal Swamp Canal (the 22 miles from Deep Creek in Virginia to South Mills in North Carolina) was designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the Committee on the History and Heritage of American Civil Engineering of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). The designation was proposed by both the Virginia and North Carolina Sections of the ASCE.

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

(Note: At this time, only the canal and related Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond which properties are administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, are being formally proposed for nomination.) Preparation of this multiple property submission for the Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development was based on several key elements. First of all, Norfolk District, Corps of Engineers has 58 years of operating and maintaining the canal; more

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

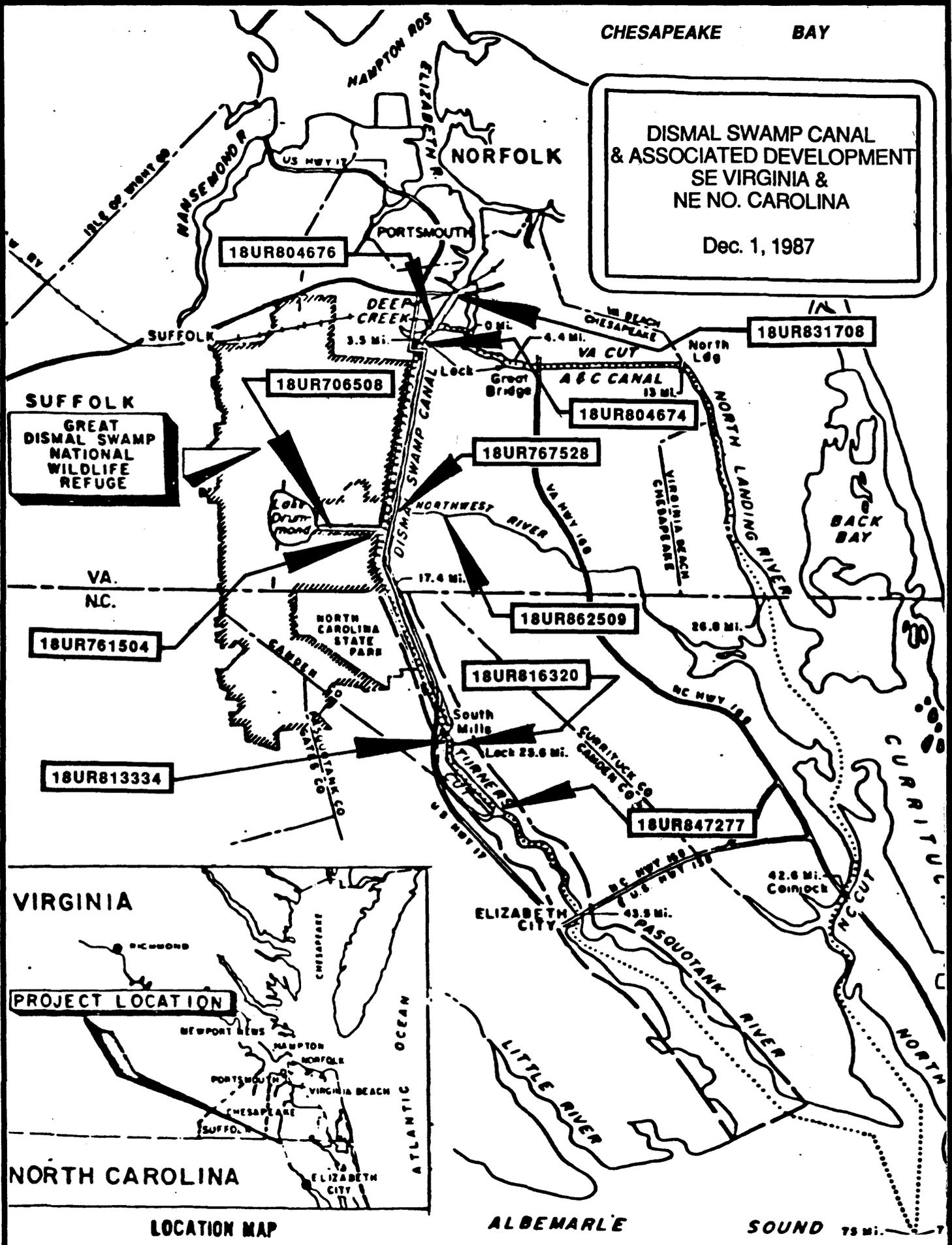
8

than this in operation of the Norfolk portion of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway of which the canal is a part. Secondly, several books, articles, and papers are available which are pertinent to the history of the proposed multiple property submission. Thirdly, and perhaps most important, Norfolk District has recently completed a study of the operation of the Dismal Swamp Canal. During this study, the historical aspects were coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officers of both Virginia and North Carolina, the American Canal Society, the author of the book *The Dismal Swamp Canal*, and a number of local interests. A draft of NPS Form 10-900 was prepared and submitted to the above references. Their critique and suggestions were utilized herein.

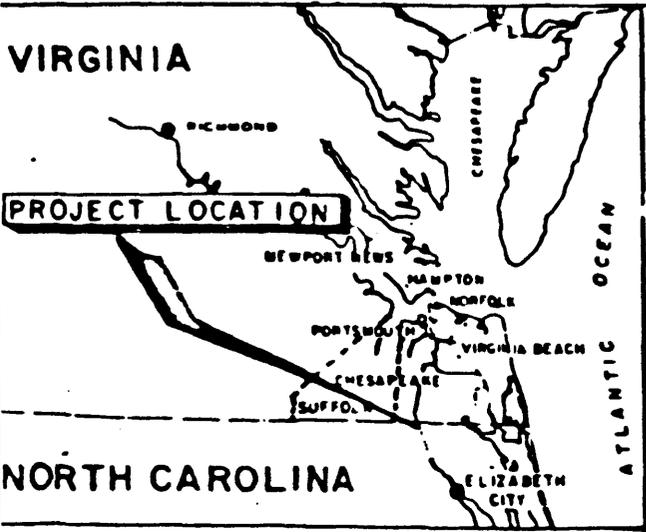
CHESAPEAKE BAY

**DISMAL SWAMP CANAL & ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT
SE VIRGINIA &
NE NO. CAROLINA**

Dec. 1, 1987



**SUFFOLK
GREAT DISMAL SWAMP
NATIONAL WILDLIFE
REFUGE**



LOCATION MAP

ALBEMARLE

SOUND 79 Mi.