

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. 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. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Dismal Swamp Canal
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number N/A not for publication
city, town Deep Creek Borough, city of Chesapeake, VA; village of vicinity
state South Mills code VA 51,550 county Camden, NC code NC 37,29 zip code

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district see Form 10-900b
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
_____	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
_____	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Dismal Swamp Canal & Associated Development
Southeast Virginia and Northeast North Carolina

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register None

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

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

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/business
Recreation/outdoor recreation
Industry/waterworks
Transportation/water-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/outdoor recreation
Industry/waterworks
Transportation/water-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation
walls
roof
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G
N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Engineering
Transportation
Maritime History
Commerce
Recreation

Period of Significance

1787-1861 1913-1929
1866-1892 1929-1941
1892-1912

Significant Dates

1787, 1790, 1805
1818, 1829, 1859
1892, 1912, 1929

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

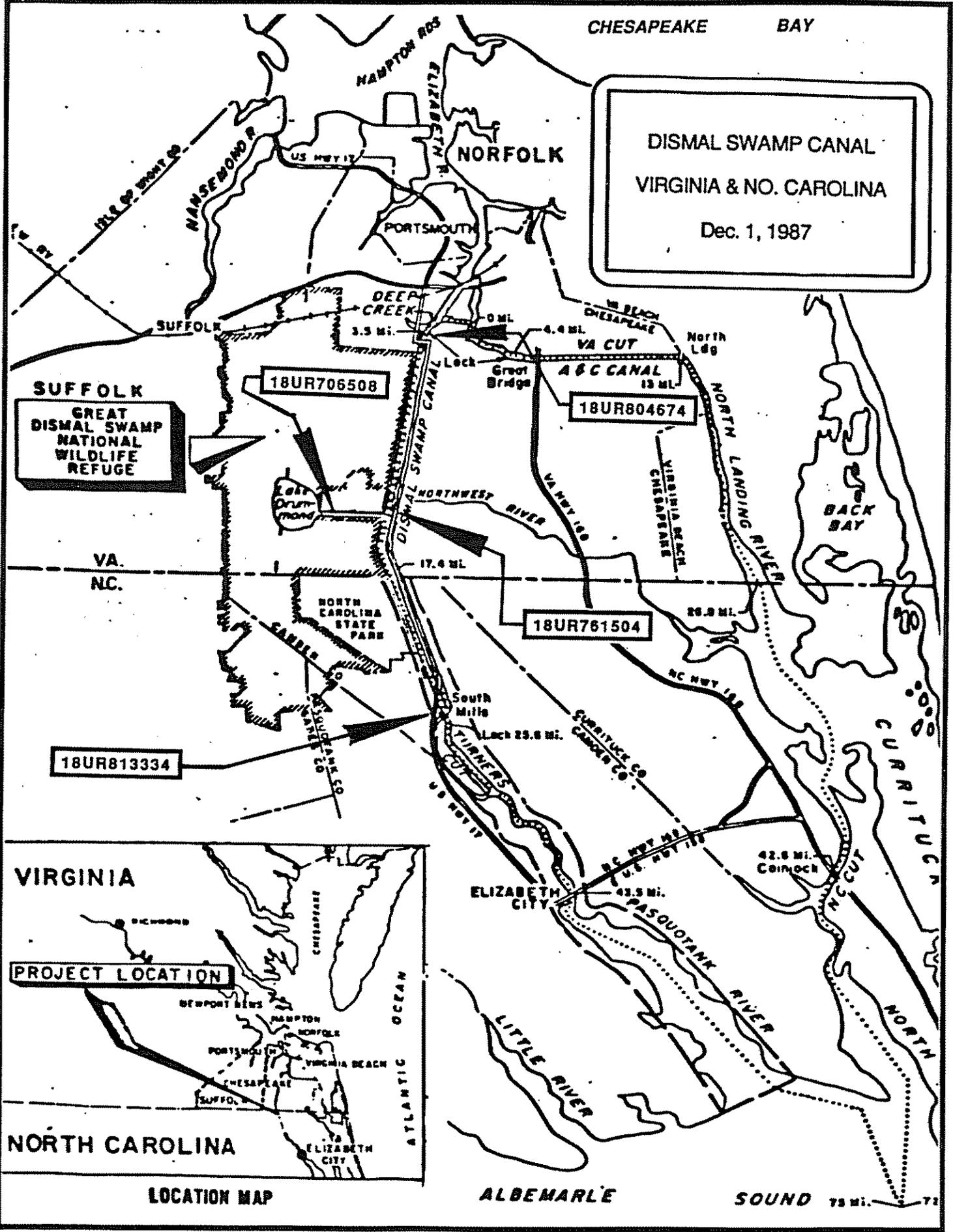
Architect/Builder

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

CHESAPEAKE BAY

DISMAL SWAMP CANAL
VIRGINIA & NO. CAROLINA
Dec. 1, 1987



SUFFOLK
GREAT DISMAL SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

18UR813334

18UR706508

18UR761504

18UR804674

VIRGINIA

PROJECT LOCATION

NORTH CAROLINA

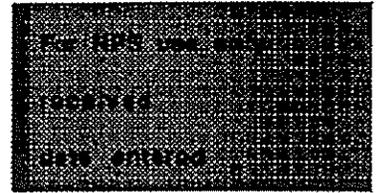
LOCATION MAP

ALBEMARLE

SOUND 78 mi.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 1

7. Description

Archetectural Classification

No style

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

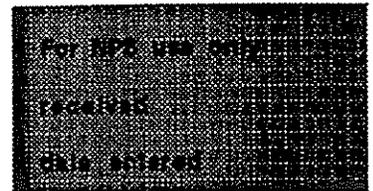
Summary of present condition and operation.

The present Dismal Swamp Canal, which is part of a multiple property submission, is a 22-mile land cut between Deep Creek Borough in Chesapeake, VA, and the village of South Mills in Camden County, NC. It is about 100 feet wide with a maintained navigation channel of 50 feet. The Congressionally-approved project is a channel 50 feet wide by nine feet deep; however, since there is very little commercial use, the channel for recreational boat traffic is maintained at six feet. The canal is oriented north-south in southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina in a region known as the Dismal Swamp which is about 200,000 acres of forested peat, most of which lies on the west side of the canal. Approximately in the middle of the Swamp is one of only two natural lakes in Virginia--Lake Drummond. It is a very shallow body of about five square miles in surface. A three and one-half mile long cut connects the lake to the canal. It is called the Feeder Ditch which is about 40 feet wide and four feet deep. At either end of the canal (Deep Creek and South Mills) are concrete floor-steel sheet pile wall locks. Each is 300 feet long by 52 feet wide with a depth of 12 feet over the sills. There are valves in the lock gates, electrically-operated, that are used to empty and fill the chambers, and they are also used as flood control valves. Attending each lock are small concrete spillways with eight manually-operated gates. During periods of normal rainfall, these spillways control the level of the canal and prevent flooding in the adjacent communities. U.S. Route 17 runs parallel to the canal on the east side. Near each lock in Deep Creek and South Mills it crosses the canal on steel, two-lane bascule bridges. About one-half mile from Lake Drummond on the Feeder Ditch is a two-acre government reservation where is located a 10-gated concrete spillway. This spillway controls the level of the lake. Water is released from the lake under two general conditions--one, to prevent the lake from overtopping, and two, when rainfall is abnormally low, to supplement the canal for the purpose of navigation. Item 3 above lists nine structures as Contributing Structures. Therefore, these are:

- 1 Canal- originally dug 1793 to 1805 (many improvements since)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 2

- 1 Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond- dug 1812
- 2 Lift Locks- U.S. Government- 1940-1941 (most recent manifestations of privately-built locks which at one time numbered 9)
- 2 Steel bascule drawbridges- U.S. Government- 1933-1934 (replaced former wooden bridges of private company)
- 3 Water level control Spillways- Lake Drummond-1935; Deep Creek and South Mills-1963-1964 (replacements for former structures existing under historic conditions with both U.S. and private operators)

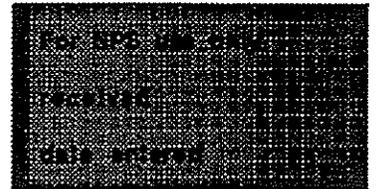
Under present conditions, the Dismal Swamp Canal is operated eight hours a day, seven days a week year-round. It is one of two alternate routes of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway in the southeast Virginia-northeast North Carolina area. The alternate route is the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal which carries virtually all the commercial traffic on the AIW as well as the recreation craft too large for the Dismal Swamp Canal. Both projects are operated under private contract to the Corps of Engineers. Where the Dismal Swamp Canal (DSC) is concerned, one operator mans the lock, spillway and bridge at Deep Creek and one at South Mills. There is also one operator stationed at Lake Drummond to man the spillway and supervise the reservation which is also a recreation area. Here, visitors arriving via the Feeder Ditch may raise their small boats to the level of the lake by means of a small rail tramway and cart. A very important aspect of operating the DSC is that in 1974, Congress established the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia and North Carolina adjoining the west side of much of the canal's length. It now occupies about 105,000 acres including Lake Drummond. In 1976, the Refuge Manager and the District Engineer made an agreement whereby a limit was put on the extent to which Lake Drummond could be drawn upon for navigation. This was based on the fact that in creating the refuge, Congress made navigation subservient to conservation needs within the refuge, especially control of the lake. Lands that the Corps of Engineers manage in association with the DSC amount to about 1,200 acres and are comprised of a narrow strip on either side of the canal and Feeder Ditch and some larger parcels set aside for disposal of dredged material. Very little land has changed hands since the government purchased the canal project from private interests in 1929.

Summary of Significant Change

The Dismal Swamp Canal was authorized by an Act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1787, ratified by North Carolina in 1790. The private

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

4

over the waterway. South Mills itself is a small, neat rural community with buildings and houses of frame construction.

8. Statement of Significance

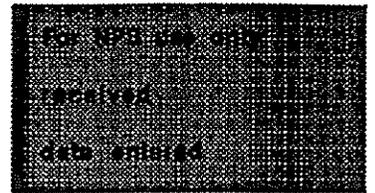
State Significance of Property; justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:

Summary Paragraph. The Dismal Swamp Canal is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the Nation's history. It was an early, major engineering achievement accomplishing much more than creating a profit-making waterway for private interests. It provided an inland link between two great regions, produced cultural exchanges, became a link in the entire intracoastal waterway, and spurred other, unrelated projects in Virginia and North Carolina. It is said that present day Elizabeth City, North Carolina, on the Pasquotank River owes its beginning to the canal which provided vital communication with the Virginia markets. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, an inland waterway along the East Coast was promoted by government and industry alike, but private interests made the initial efforts to produce waterways in the most difficult of areas i.e. Cape Cod Canal, Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, Dismal Swamp Canal, and Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. The Corps of Engineers realized the importance of these projects to maritime shipping, and therefore recommended to Congress that Federal funds be expended for maintaining channels associated with them. An unusual feature about the Dismal Swamp Canal was that at one time both the Federal Government and Virginia held stock in the private company.

The Dismal Swamp Canal represents a significant factor in the historic development of the localities in two states. It represented a remarkable achievement of hand labor construction at the turn of the 19th century in one of the most uninviting areas of the region. The economic ledgers of the two operating companies showed red much of the time, but this was not because of mismanagement, rather it was high maintenance costs, the need for costly improvements, and most of all, adversity--the arrival of a competitive canal and the Civil War. The Dismal Swamp Canal was staggered by its adversities, but recovered so well that it bettered its competition, the A&C Canal. The blow from which the DSC could not recover was the Federal Government's purchase of the A&C Canal and making it toll free. Many other canals succumbed to the railroad. Probably, both Virginia-Carolina canal companies saw the handwriting on the wall when pressure by maritime interests brought about a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

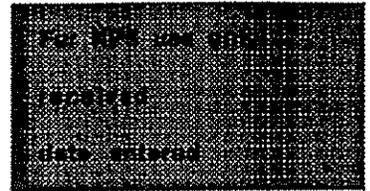
5

toll-free inland waterway through government purchase of the Cape Cod and Chesapeake-Delaware Canals.

Areas of Significance: Maritime History. The Dismal Swamp Canal is one of the Nation's earliest. The Virginia General Assembly passed the Act in 1787; it was ratified by North Carolina in 1790. Work by hand labor began at both ends in 1793, and the cut-through came in 1805. In its early days, the canal could handle only narrow flatboats largely carrying shingles out of the Dismal Swamp. Some years ago, the canal could not achieve National Register status because the project had been changed many times over the years. It is maintained herein that it is well qualified. Since 1805, the two managing companies and the Federal Government had to make changes to keep pace with the maritime industry. Furthermore, historic research should be able to document the changes. Transportation. The DSC was the key transportation artery between southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina from 1805 until the rival Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal opened in 1859. It became a very important link between Elizabeth City in North Carolina and the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. As the canal was widened and deepened, a variety of vessels used it including schooners, barges, passenger vessels, and military craft. The DSC was of sufficient importance to attract visits by two Presidents, James Monroe in 1818 and Andrew Jackson in 1829. Engineering. The Dismal Swamp Canal probably did not require the engineering skills that others such as the James River-Kanawha Canal and the C&O Canal did. In fact, before the canal was built, it was mistakenly believed that the whole Dismal Swamp region (likely two million acres) was very flat. George Washington (who incidentally had nothing to do with the DSC) believed that there was no more than one or two feet of elevation difference. Actually, there is ten feet. This is why the canal is a summit level route, rather than sea level. Furthermore, this is why the Dismal Swamp Canal Company had to increase the number of locks during 1812. Another early error was made when it was believed that because the canal cut through a "swamp," water supply would be no problem; drought proved this wrong. Therefore, in 1812, the Feeder Ditch was cut perpendicular to the canal to tap the waters of Lake Drummond in order to supplement the water for navigation. Over the years, both the Dismal Swamp Canal Company and its successor, the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company, made significant improvements to navigation, not only to attract commercial use, but also to meet the competition from the A&C Canal. Engineers calculated that if the canal was widened and deepened to near the level of the receiving waters, the number of locks could be reduced to two (one at either end). This was accomplished during the period 1896-99. A very interesting and unusual

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

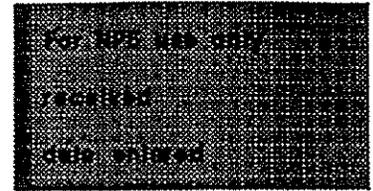
Item number

Page 6

engineering feat took place with the design of the Gilmerton Canal north of Deep Creek in Virginia; however, this is outside the limits of this nomination request, but is included in Form 10-900-b for the Dismal Swamp Canal Multiple Property Documentation Form. Most of the above attests to the fact that the builders and operators of the Dismal Swamp Canal through continual planning and change certainly served human needs (the maritime industry). Commerce. Commerce and trade along the DSC began with lumber and wood products largely out of the Dismal Swamp itself. Shingles and barrel staves made of juniper and cypress were paramount. Later, schooners began to haul logs, lumber, cotton, flour, tobacco, and hogs from North Carolina to Norfolk, Virginia. In return, fertilizer, coal, and cement were carried to Carolina. Passenger and military vessels also used the canal; in fact, in 1866 passenger service was started between Norfolk and Elizabeth City. After the A&C Canal went into service in 1859, lively competition commenced between the two routes. The A&C Canal was wider and deeper, and over its entire route of 72 miles it was three miles shorter (the two routes have common beginning and ending points). Of course both suffered greatly during and after the Civil War. The DSC nearly succumbed, but in 1892 the project commenced under the management of the Lake Drummond Canal & Water Company. With significant improvements made from 1896 to 1899, the DSC began to outdo its rival aided by the location of Elizabeth City, NC, on the route. Even after the Federal Government took over the DSC in 1929, the navigation channel was no more than 50 feet wide with a depth of nine feet. Most inland waterway commerce in the middle Atlantic area is carried by large, pusher tugs with barges 195 feet long and 35 feet wide. This precludes use of the Dismal Swamp Canal. Nowadays there is little to no use of the canal for commercial purposes. Recreation. The Dismal Swamp Canal is used by a variety of recreational craft ranging from very small boats and canoes to yachts and sailing vessels drawing less than six feet. The city of Chesapeake, Virginia, constructed a boat ramp and parking area on the canal about one mile north of the mouth of the Feeder Ditch. Many of the small, trailered boats launched here proceed up the Feeder Ditch to the Corps of Engineers' small recreation area at the Lake Drummond Reservation. Here, there is camping, picnicking, and a small tramway where boats can be elevated to the lake level and thus tour Lake Drummond which is part of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Many of the larger vessels transiting the canal are making use of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway from points to the north and south; some local vessels make a weekend tour of the DSC one day and the A&C the second, or vice versa; others make Elizabeth City a stopover. Elizabeth City makes a specific point of attracting visits by boaters using the DSC with waterfront improvements for this purpose. It is not unusual to see

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

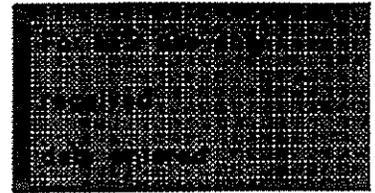
7

vessels tied-up at its waterfront that are from Canada, Europe, and far away states. Historically, before the DSC became toll-free, recreational use of the canal was by excursion vessels and passenger vessels plying between Hampton Roads, Virginia, and Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Pleasure boating on an individual basis was not nearly so popular as it is today. When the Corps of Engineers assumed operation of the canal, pleasure boating was on the increase. A visit to Lake Drummond by boat gained in popularity; smallcraft tour service became available. Also, before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took over much of the Dismal Swamp, there were a number of small cabins on the shores of Lake Drummond which were largely used by deer hunters. Access was by small boat using the canal and Feeder Ditch.

When the Corps took over operation of the DSC, Lake Drummond was relied upon for water during periods of low rainfall or drought. The Corps, however, set a limit as to how low the lake level should be drawn down before quitting altogether. After this the canal was closed to through navigation. Even when the canal was closed, its level as well as that of the lake continued to fall primarily from evapotranspiration and lock gate leakage. There has been times when both the canal and lake have been nearly dried out. The situation cannot be rectified until sufficient rainfall saturates the peat which acts very much like a sponge. In 1974, Congress passed Public Law 93-402 which created the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge which lies adjacent to and on the west side of the canal. It also includes Lake Drummond. The Act made two important stipulations where this paragraph is concerned. One, navigation in the canal was made subservient to water conservation needs within the refuge. This marked the first time that the Congress ever usurped the 1787 Virginia Charter for the canal. The second stipulation was that the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Corps should enter into an agreement concerning control of the level of Lake Drummond, or how much it can be drawn upon to support navigation in the canal. In 1976, the Refuge Manager and the Norfolk District Engineer made an agreement on this matter which significantly limits the amount Lake Drummond can be drawn upon. During a Corps of Engineers study of the Dismal Swamp Canal in 1985-86, the Fish and Wildlife Service made the observation that when the lake and canal are at their normal (full) level, this greatly assists water management in the refuge. The goal of this objective is to retain as much water in the swamp as practical so as to dissuade those invading tree species preferring more mesic situations. It has been stated before that in times of plentiful rainfall it is necessary to release water from the lake and canal to avoid flood problems; this water is excess to the swamp also.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 8

If the canal were to be permanently closed to through navigation, then arguably, it would be controlled or operated for the benefit of the wildlife refuge.

Periods of Significance (Explanation)

1787-1861--Enabling legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly, construction of the canal and toll road, and operation and maintenance by the Dismal Swamp Canal Company up to the Civil War.

1866-1892--The Reconstruction Period and the near bankruptcy of the Dismal Swamp Canal Company; a new company, the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company takes over.

1892-1912--The Dismal Swamp Canal makes competition tough for the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, but in order to create a toll-free inland waterway, the United States purchases the A&C Canal.

1913-1929--When purchase of the A&C Canal was requested of Congress, the Corps' Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors warned that the Dismal Swamp Canal would be doomed and that it should be acquired. The DSC was finally acquired in 1929 for \$500,000, the same price paid for the A&C Canal years earlier.

1929-1941--Norfolk District, Corps of Engineers makes numerous improvements to the DSC. As time goes by, commercial traffic wanes and project becomes largely recreational in terms of use.

9. Major Bibliographical References

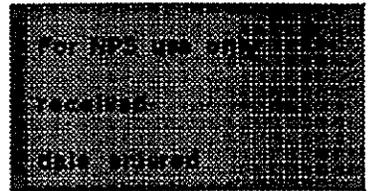
Previous documentation on file (NPS)

In June 1973, Norfolk District, USACE nominated the Dismal Swamp Canal (Federal holdings only) to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The NPS stated that the canal had been modified so many times over the years it would not qualify. The Virginia SHPO, believing that a national wildlife refuge was in the offing for the area, stated that protection via a refuge would be better than placement on the register.

During fiscal years 1985-86, Norfolk District, USACE, made a study of the Dismal Swamp Canal to determine the best course for future operation of the project. In this regard, there was coordination with Virginia and North Carolina SHPOs and the American Canal Society concerning the historic significance of the canal. Its possible eligibility for placement on the National Register was a part of this coordination. The following are quotes from the above sources:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 9

H. Bryan Mitchell, SHPO of Virginia, 8/21/85. "Clearly it (DSC) is an area of historical significance and I feel that the inclusion of this area in the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places would be worthy of consideration."

William S. Price, Jr., SHPO of North Carolina, 4/26/85. "...the major importance of resources such as the canal lies in their cultural and educational value as visible remains of events important in our state's history. Although the canal itself is physically altered, its considerable historic significance is undiminished. It continues to retain an important place in the history of the Albemarle region and the state."

William E. Trout, III, VP, American Canal Society, 5/1/85. "I do not agree with the conclusion that the Dismal Swamp Canal is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places...If presented in that (expanded) form the nomination would, I believe, have been successful."

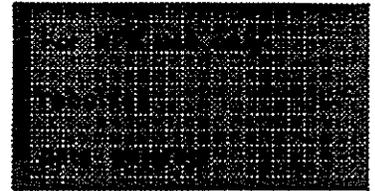
During the above study of the canal, the North Carolina Department of Highways and Transportation stated its intent to construct a rest area between U.S. 17 and the canal a few miles south of the Virginia line. Several meetings were held in Raleigh and northeast North Carolina in which the Department displayed drawings and sketches of how the area would serve both motorists and boaters. The Albemarle Commission, a planning agency in northeast North Carolina, agreed to manage the site, but argued for enlarging the building and making the site more of a visitor center than a rest area. The center would be staffed and tourist information distributed. The center would include future interpretive material developed for both the canal and the nearby Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. At the present time, the center seems to be well on its way to fruition.

In April 1987, the present Dismal Swamp Canal operated by the Corps of Engineers 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.

In May 1987, the Office of the Chief of Engineers issued guidance concerning the historical aspects of properties under jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Army with respect to Public Law 99-662, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986. Section 943 of the Act entitled "Historical Properties" directs that..."The Secretary is authorized to preserve, restore, and maintain those historic properties located on water resources development

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory-Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 10

project lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Army if such properties have been entered into the National Register of Historic Places." The interpretation of OCE was that the Act would apply equally to properties eligible for or nominated to the National Register.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property. The Federal property associated with the Dismal Swamp Canal amounts to 1,202.96 acres. This consists of narrow strips of land on either side of the 22-mile long canal and 3 and 1/2 miles of Feeder Ditch plus several larger parcels near each lock that were originally for disposal of dredged material. Nearly all of this land was obtained from the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company. Near the junction of the Feeder Ditch and canal, some 102 acres of private land were purchased in the 1970s to create a permanent dredged material disposal area. Not all of it was needed, so about 60 acres were transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add to the refuge. However, neither that land nor the 40+ acres of the Corps is included in this nomination.

The UTM references are as follows (north to south):

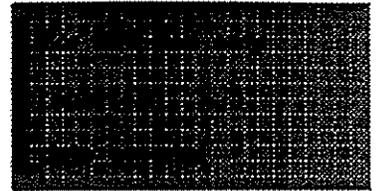
- 18UR804674 Deep Creek Lock
- 18UR761504 Mouth of Feeder Ditch
- 18UR706508 Feeder Ditch near Lake Drummond
- 18UR813334 South Mills Lock

Verbal Boundary Description

The proposed Dismal Swamp Canal property to be placed on the National Register commences at the Deep Creek Lock which is in the Burrough of Deep Creek in the city of Chesapeake, Virginia. It would contain the lock itself, the control houses and small amount of acreage on either side. Immediately to the west of the lock is a 14-acre parcel which has been leased to the city for a day use park. This area also contains the cross lock recently refurbished by the city which would become part of the Dismal Swamp Canal Historic District (see Form 10-900-b). From the lock at Deep Creek, the canal and property proceed southward to the mouth of the Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond. The proposed property would then proceed westward three and one-half miles up the Feeder Ditch to Lake Drummond. The 40+/-acre disposal area at the mouth of the Feeder Ditch would not be included in the nomination. From the mouth of the Feeder Ditch, the proposed property would again proceed southward to and including the lock and control structures at the village of South Mills in Camden

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

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



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 11

County, North Carolina. Later, a portion of South Mills itself may be nominated as part of the District.

Boundary Justification

The boundary described above is Federal property managed as part of the Dismal Swamp Canal route of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The reason it is suggested herein is because it is the property obtained in 1929 from the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company.



