



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING**  
DEPARTMENT THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND

**MCPB**  
3/11/10  
Item #10  
Round Table

March 4, 2010

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mark Pfefferle, Acting Chief *MJ*  
Environmental Planning Division

FROM: Katherine Nelson for the Planning Department *KN*  
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SUBJECT: Forest Conservation Program Annual Report

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**Recommendation: Transmit Annual Report to Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)**

**Overview of FY2009**

The State Forest Conservation Law requires all jurisdictions to report to DNR each year regarding efforts to implement and enforce the law. In addition to presenting these findings to the Planning Board and ultimately to the State, we would also like to highlight other aspects of the forest conservation program and forest related issues to the Planning Board.

Data Requested by State DNR	
Man Hours spent on the program	22,363
Exemptions	104
Forest Conservation Plans Approved	78
Financial Security/Bonds Required	24,740
In-Lieu Fees Collected	\$40,839.3
In-Lieu Fees Spent	\$30,000
Mitigation Bank Use	38.6 acres
Enforcements Actions	50

Forest Conservation Plan Data:	Acres
<b>Tract Area of Forest Conservation Plans</b>	2,296
<b>Existing Forest w/in Plan</b>	658
<b>Forest Loss During Development</b>	242
<b>Planting Requirements</b>	157
<b>Forest Retention On Site</b>	421

## Program Database Development Update

The effort to standardize the annual report process by creating a geo-referenced a database for the forest conservation program is now complete:

- 900 plan files closed
- 35 Boxes of files scanned and archived
- Paper Records scanned and available on-line
- Data Geo-referenced and easily analyzed
- Easements and Legal Documents digitized and available on-line
- Older forest conservation plans being pursued for full compliance

The next goal this year will be to develop a mechanism whereby data may be reported and retrieved via Hansen as well as GIS. This database will populate Hansen for the early years of the program, and Hansen will populate this database from that point forward. As a part of this effort all Forest Conservation Program scanned are available online.

## Outreach to Easement Owners

Staff has received universally good feedback from the new easement web page and easement finder tool. We've advertized the site to our contacts among civic organizations and community leaders. Our challenge now is to get easement owners in touch with this information in a way that promotes forest stewardship and leads to a sustainable forest in these areas.

Although the tool was developed to serve the general public, many within the public realm have told us how useful this tool is to their work program. The tool is also serving as a model for several other applications within the Planning Department.

## GIS Forest Layer Update

This year we digitized a **forest layer using air photos from 1951**. Countywide there was less forest than today, and the distribution of forest was very different. Where forest existed, it was generally in larger tracts with much less fragmentation. Some of the largest forest areas of that time straddled the Beltway such as in Wheaton, Aspen Hill, North Bethesda and Potomac. What we now know as the agricultural reserve had much less forest than today. Natural regeneration of abandoned fields (back when that was possible) accounts for much of the forest gains in that area since then.

Although today's forest is greater than in the early 1950s, the forest is much younger. Invasive species and deer browse impact forests today to a much higher degree than they did in

the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Forest fragmentation is also significantly greater today than it was in the past. The forest edge has shown a 250% increase, while the forest area has only increased by about 13%. The forest area to perimeter ratio in 1951 was 332 square feet of interior forest per every 1 foot of forest edge. Today's area to perimeter ratio is 158 sq ft interior to every 1 foot of edge. This means that today's forest has half the mass per edge than the forest did 60 years ago. Considerably more edge habitat exists today, which further contributes to the problems of deer, which thrive in forest edge habitats.

An **urban forest canopy layer** is still under developed within the Department of Environmental Protection. Last year it was estimated that completion of the layer was eminent and long since in use by both Departments. However the work schedule continues to be moved back and we currently have no estimation for a completion time.

## **Reforestation Program**

The reforestation program using in-lieu fees began in the spring of 2008 with a 1.5 acre planting within Reddy Branch Stream Valley Park in Brookeville. Reddy Branch is within the watershed of the Patuxent Reservoirs where stream water quality is particularly important. Planting has continued along denuded sections since then, reaching a total of 3.5 acres and over 500 trees by the end of 2009. Two volunteer groups (Sandy Spring Friends School and the Izaak Walton League) have contributed manpower and materials to this effort.

A second 2.5-acre reforestation project took place in the fall of 2008 along the Rock Creek mainstem in Chevy Chase. This area had already been the subject of extensive invasive control by the Parks Department and was ready to be reforested. Fee-in-lieu money was used for further site preparation, plant material and installation, and deer protection. A "Weed Warrior" volunteer group, specializing in invasive control, has been enlisted to help with maintenance of this site and the 500 trees planted there.

A third 5.5-acre site within Watts Branch Stream Valley Park will be planted in March of 2010. This floodplain area along the mainstem of Watts Branch, just upstream from the Potomac Filtration Plant Intake, has been a contentious area of Park encroachment for some years. Over a 1000 trees will be planted in this field to help jump-start its return to a natural setting.

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