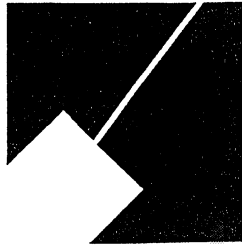


M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MCPB  
Oct 17, 2002

Item # 1

October 11, 2002

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: John E. Hench, Ph.D., Supervisor  
Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John E. Hench", is written over the printed name of the supervisor.

Lyn Coleman, Trail Planning Supervisor  
Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit

**SUBJECT: Recreational And Environmental Perspectives On Mountain Biking In Parks: Maryland Off-Road Enthusiasts (More), the West Montgomery County Citizens Association, and the Sierra Club, Montgomery County Group— No Public Testimony Will Be Taken On This Topic**

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David Scull, a representative of MORE, will make a brief presentation to the Planning Board about the increasing popularity of off-road cycling. This item was originally scheduled before the Board on June 5, 2002 but due to time constraints, the item was removed from the agenda. MORE is concerned about the design of trails for mountain bike users and access to a variety of terrain within the park system.

Ginny Barnes, representing both the West Montgomery County Citizens Association and the Sierra Club, Montgomery County Group, will present concerns regarding the use of mountain bikes in parks, especially conservation parks. Ms. Barnes' letter to the Board on this topic, dated June 12, 2002, is attached. (See attachment 1).

Attachment 2 identifies parks where shared use natural surface trails are open to cyclists.

**Staff Comments on Terminology:**

The term "mountain biking" often leads people to think of cyclists who enjoy jumping obstacles, climbing difficult terrain, and speeding along rock and log strewn paths. Staff believes this type of recreational activity should be accommodated in the County

park system on trails specifically planned, designed, engineered, and constructed for that purpose. At present, no such facility exists in Montgomery County parks although such a facility has been constructed in Seneca Creek State Park, at Schaeffer Farm.

However, there are currently a number of natural surface trails in Montgomery County parks that are open to hikers, equestrians, and cyclists; these are shown in Attachment 2. These "shared-use" trails are geared toward more casual bike riders who are seeking a pleasant excursion in the parks but enjoy some degree of physical exertion while sharing the trail with people on foot and horseback. As noted in the October 2002 Central Atlantic edition of Audubon Naturalist in an article entitled "Natureways", "the bicycle can be [a great tool] for exploring our natural world."

Sharing trails requires courtesy and common sense by all trail users as stated in the Audubon Naturalist article and echoed by a cyclist in a recent e-mail:

.... As far as the safety of bikes on the trail with hikers, we encountered a few other bikes while we were out, and some hikers, but the woods were clear enough where we did not "sneak" up on anyone, nor were we surprised by anyone... Thanks to cycling groups such as Bike Washington, MORE, DCCAMB, Trail Chicks, Washington Women Outdoors and many others in the area, most bikers these days are well versed in trail etiquette and know the proper "procedure" when approaching hikers, other bikers, and animals, to include horses especially. Thanks to these same groups, cyclists are also very well educated on trail preservation - the MORE group I noted above is famous in the area for their work in some of the area state parks for trail maintenance. You may have some inconsiderate bikers that come down the trail from time to time, but if you close the trail to bikes, you'll still have those same bikers coming down the trail.

In summary, accommodating off road bicyclists requires two types of facilities. For the mountain bikers seeking challenging terrain and a high degree of difficulty in terms of jumps, steepness, downed logs, and rocks, trails need to be designed and designated for that purpose. There is a need in our park system to provide such trails, just as we have accommodated the recreational needs of equestrians at Woodstock Equestrian Park. The shared use trails in our parks that accommodate hikers, bikers and equestrians are intended for casual cyclists who are seeking an outdoor experience rather than a sporting event. The success of these trails depends on all users following trail etiquette.

The term "stewardship" refers to responsible management of natural and cultural resources. Balancing the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources while concurrently providing a variety of recreational opportunities for park users (e.g., mountain bikers) is perhaps the greatest challenge we face as stewards of the County park system. Toward this end, staff have assembled and mapped an extensive amount of information on natural and cultural resources over the past decade. This information includes the location of rare, threatened, endangered, and watch-list species of plants and animals, the relative size and health of their populations, and threats to their continued existence. Monitoring efforts allow staff to up-date this information on a somewhat regular basis. Not surprisingly, staff continues to find that these resources occur not just in large, countywide parks (e.g., conservation parks),

but rather that they are scattered across the county in a variety of stream valley and upland settings. Accordingly, the balance staff strives for can only occur on a case-by-case basis given full consideration for the recreational benefit and associated environmental or cultural impacts of any proposed park or trail use.

### **Clarifying the Trail Planning Process and How Trail Use is Determined**

During the Planning Board's work session on the Muddy Branch Stream Valley Park Trail Corridor Plan in January 2002, staff reviewed the trail planning process for hard surface trails. Following that meeting, staff continued to refine the process, especially with regard to opportunities for public involvement in decision-making. Our on-going dialogue with representatives of the environmental community as well as hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians, has clearly revealed that the same level of attention needs to be focused on the natural surface trail planning process.

Accordingly, staff is currently developing a planning and implementation program for natural surface trails that focuses on the following elements:

- Trail Use Philosophy
- Planning Process
- Trail Categories
- Decision Making Criteria for Determining Trail Categories
- Trail Monitoring and Maintenance

Later this fall, staff will present the draft program to the Planning Board as an amendment to the Countywide Park Trails Plan. A Public Hearing will be scheduled to seek community input. After the Public Hearing and Planning Board work sessions, the approved program will be included in the Countywide Park Trails Plan.

JEH:LC/ccq

WEST MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1947

P.O. BOX 59335 • POTOMAC, MARYLAND 20859-9335

June 12, 2002

RECEIVED  
0910  
JUN 13 2002

Mr. Arthur Holmes, Chair  
Members of the Planning Board  
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Md. 20910-3760

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN  
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

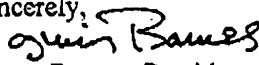
Re: June 13, 2002 Agenda, Item #11: Presentation on trail design for mountain biking

Dear Mr. Holmes,

There is a growing public perception that MNCPPC is losing sight of it's responsibility to steward our County parkland.. We understand that as the population of Montgomery County grows and people devoted to particular sports look for ever more places to practice them, the pressure increases on the entity charged with stewarding our parkland. But MNCPPC has a greater ethical responsibility to future generations to look beyond individual sporting agendas and consider the greater good and the long term viability of the green spaces which rightfully make this County famous. In these discussions and deliberations about park use it is important to remember that parks are open to everyone, anyone may enjoy the beauty and serenity of these beautiful parks.

It was with concern that I read the agenda for this week and found an item innocuously titled but raising questions about why such a presentation would be allowed before the Board. I was even more concerned when Community Planning was kind enough to fax me the memo for this agenda item which includes a map showing the areas of the County where recreational biking is allowed. Regardless of whether it is in County or State parkland, a great deal of vital parkland has already been opened to the practice of this sport. I had no idea that Bucklodge Forest Conservation Park was among them. This hardly seems an appropriate use in a so-called "Conservation" park and begs the question of just what the word means in Montgomery County. The public we represent believes that the word "conservation" park means just that. The primary function being conservation with activities restricted to only the most passive such as walking.

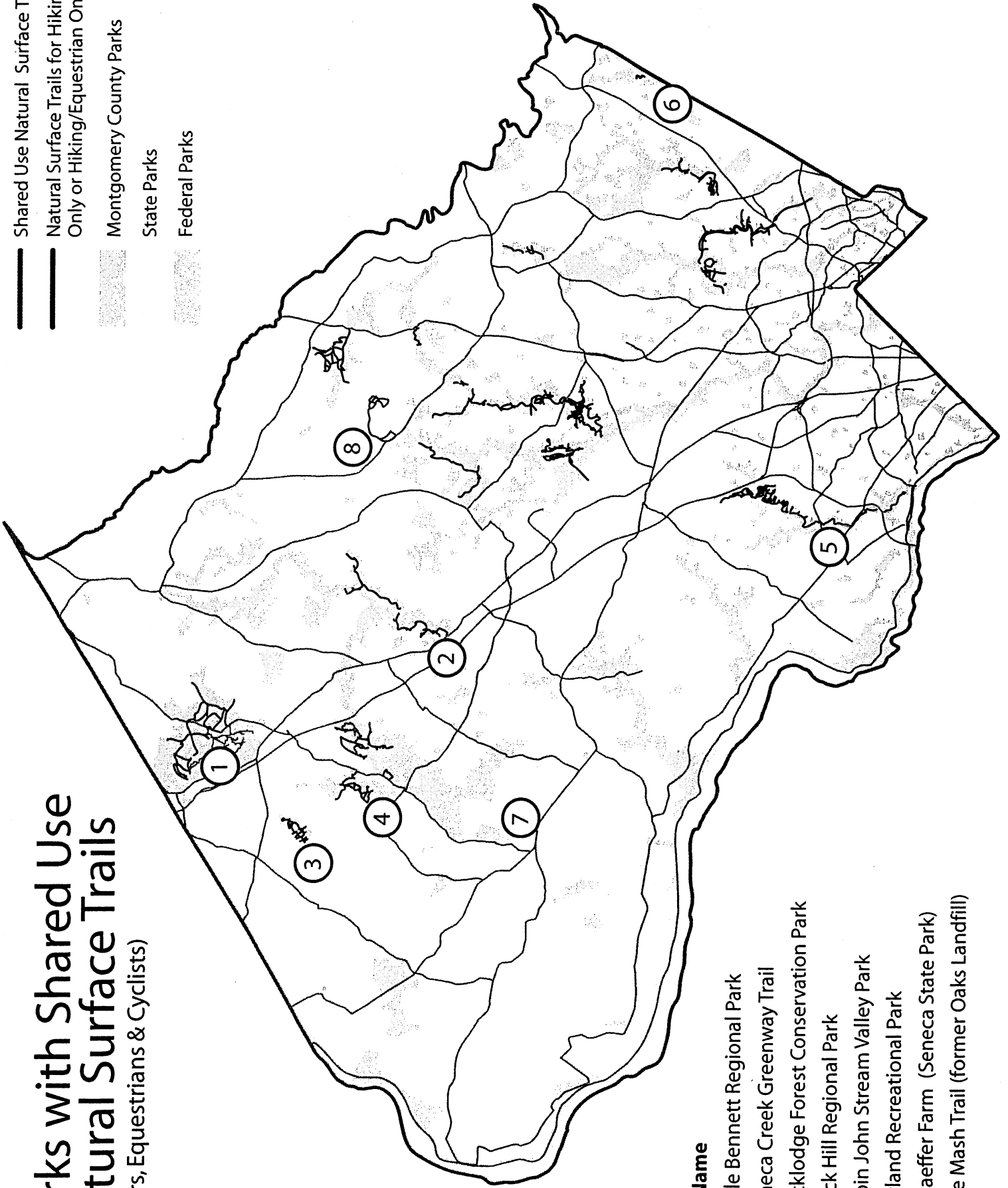
Perhaps the vast majority of the public which has innocently assumed that MNCPPC really is protecting and preserving their parkland water and air quality, healthy ecosystems, forests and wetlands, wildlife populations and plant species had better mobilize and lobby for these assumed functions. We would appreciate being given time before the Board to do just that and look forward to working with you on a date to do so. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
  
Ginny Barnes, President  
10311 Glen Road  
Potomac, Md. 20854  
(301) 762-6423

# Parks with Shared Use Natural Surface Trails

(Hikers, Equestrians & Cyclists)

- Shared Use Natural Surface Trails
- Natural Surface Trails for Hiking Only or Hiking/Equestrian Only
- Montgomery County Parks
- State Parks
- Federal Parks



## Park Name

- 1 - Little Bennett Regional Park
- 2 - Seneca Creek Greenway Trail
- 3 - Bucklodge Forest Conservation Park
- 4 - Black Hill Regional Park
- 5 - Cabin John Stream Valley Park
- 6 - Fairland Recreational Park
- 7 - Schaeffer Farm (Seneca State Park)
- 8 - Blue Mash Trail (former Oaks Landfill)

