

July 7, 2004

TO : Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA : Jeff Zyontz, Chief, Countywide Planning Division
John Hensch, Supervisor, PPRA Unit

FROM : Lyn Coleman, Trail Planning Supervisor 301-650-4391
Park Planning and Resource Analysis Unit
Countywide Planning Division

SUBJECT : **RACHEL CARSON GREENWAY TRAIL CORRIDOR PLAN:** Plan Objectives,
Outreach Strategy Recommendations and Plan Schedule- *Approval*

Recommended Board Action:

1. APPROVE planning objectives for the Trail Corridor Plan
2. APPROVE Community Outreach Strategy Recommendations.
3. APPROVE schedule for plan completion

Background

The Countywide Park Trails Plan proposes three cross county greenway trail corridors (see Figure 1). One of these is the Northwest Branch Greenway Trail Corridor, recently renamed the Rachel Carson Greenway. The Plan objective for the Rachel Carson Greenway corridor is to "provide a natural surface trail from the Beltway north to the Patuxent River that provides a high-quality passive recreation experience."

The Countywide Parks Trails Plan recommendations for this corridor include:

- Study and plan the Rachel Carson Greenway Corridor comprehensively as a natural surface trail system.
- Incorporate the Rural Legacy Trail concept and commemorate the Underground Railroad as proposed in the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan.
- Affirm the White Oak Master Plan objective to enhance the trail system to provide better access and connection to adjoining communities and neighborhoods.

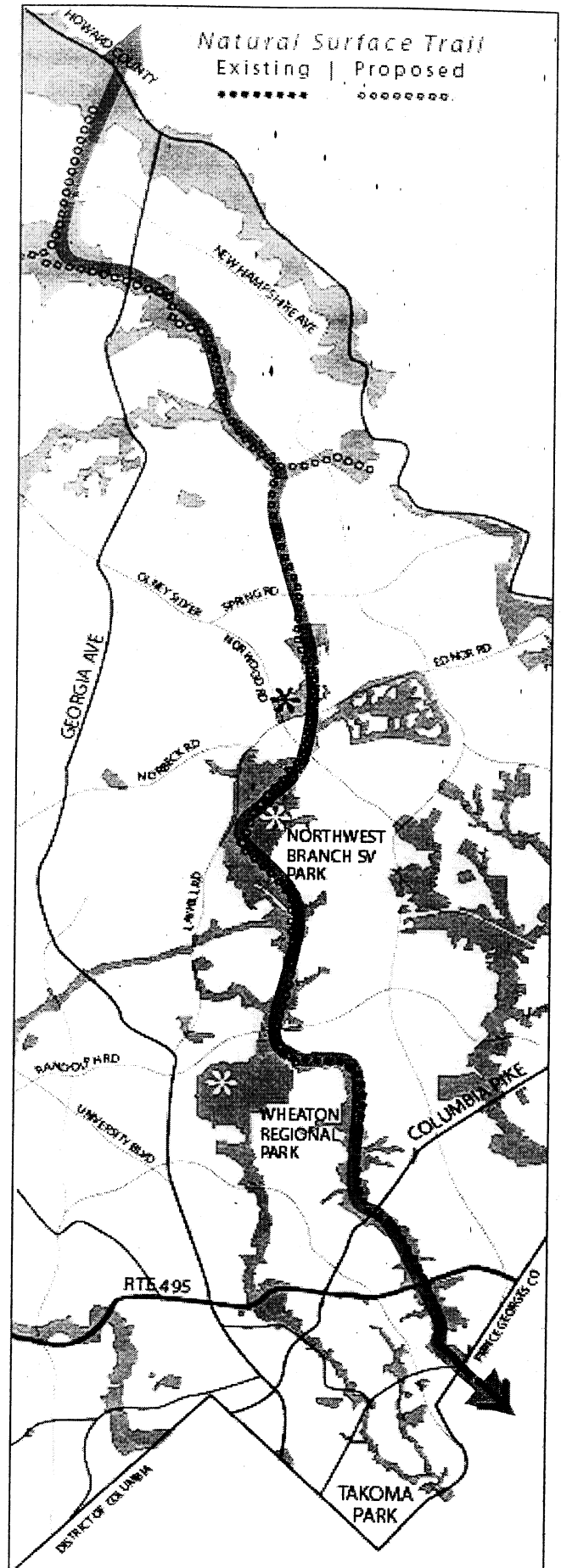
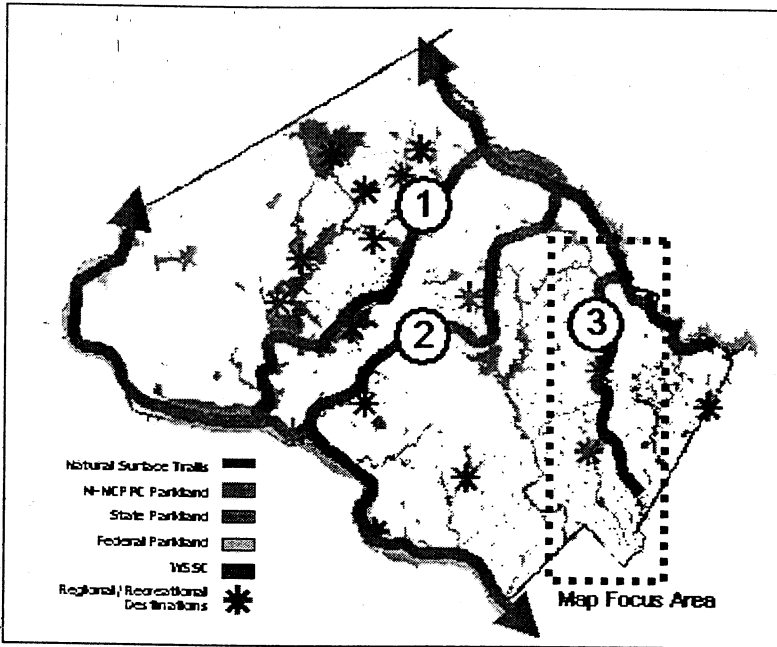
Figure 1

Below: The Countywide Park Trails Plan proposes three cross-county trails to link the Potomac and Patuxent trail systems:

- 1 - Seneca Creek Greenway
- 2 - Muddy Branch/Watts Branch/Rock Creek
- 3 - Rachel Carson Greenway (formerly named the Northwest Branch)

Right: Close-up of the Rachel Carson Greenway

Countywide Park Trails Plan Concepts



The Planning Board included the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail Corridor Plan in the Trails Work Program for FY04-06.

This memo identifies Plan objectives, outlines a work program to complete the trail corridor plan and proposes a community outreach program.

Overview of the Trail Corridor Study Area

Figure 2 depicts the Rachel Carson Greenway Corridor Study Area and identifies the hard surface and sanctioned natural surface trails. The term "sanctioned natural surface trails" refers to those natural surface trails that are signed, mapped, named and routinely maintained. There are many, many more miles of informal or unsanctioned trails that have been created by hikers and walkers in the park system.

The only hard surface trail is located south of the Beltway and extends into Prince Georges County where it connects to the Anacostia Tributary Trail System. The relationship of the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail to the Anacostia Tributary Trail System will be addressed in the Corridor Study but the main planning focus will be on the natural surface trail component.

Proposed Plan Objectives

The Countywide Parks Trails Plan identifies the need to "study and plan the Rachel Carson Greenway Corridor comprehensively as a natural surface trail system." The following objectives will guide the planning process:

1. *Ensure a continuous, natural surface trail can be provided within the trail corridor.* Most of the trail corridor is in public park ownership. However, there are "gaps" in the ownership pattern, most notably in the northern portion. The Countywide Park Trails Plan and the Legacy Open Space Plan have identified the need to "close" these gaps.

2. *To designate trail locations that achieve environmental stewardship objectives.* As stated in the Countywide Park Trails Plan, completing an environmental inventory is the first step in the Trail Corridor Plan process. A preliminary inventory has been completed for the Rachel Carson Greenway Corridor using GIS analysis of existing data, including steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, stream valley buffers, historic and cultural features and documented rare, threatened and endangered plant species. The key environmental features are shown in Figure 3. The inventory will continually be updated as more information becomes available during the plan process. As the plan proceeds, balancing the protection of natural resources with goals relating to trail interpretation and public access will be a key topic of discussion

3. *To explore and identify interpretation opportunities related to two themes:*

a. *Natural environment.* The Rachel Carson Greenway includes many examples of natural habitats that should be interpreted for enjoyment and education of trail users. Rachel Carson lived near Northwest Branch and enjoyed walking there herself. Her home, now a National Register Landmark is located approximately ¼ mile east of the trail. One of the concepts to be explored during the Trail Corridor process is whether the trail could help interpret the ecological principles espoused by Rachel Carson. One option, shown in Figure 4, would link different segments of the Greenway to natural features identified by Rachel Carson in her book, **The Sense of Wonder**.

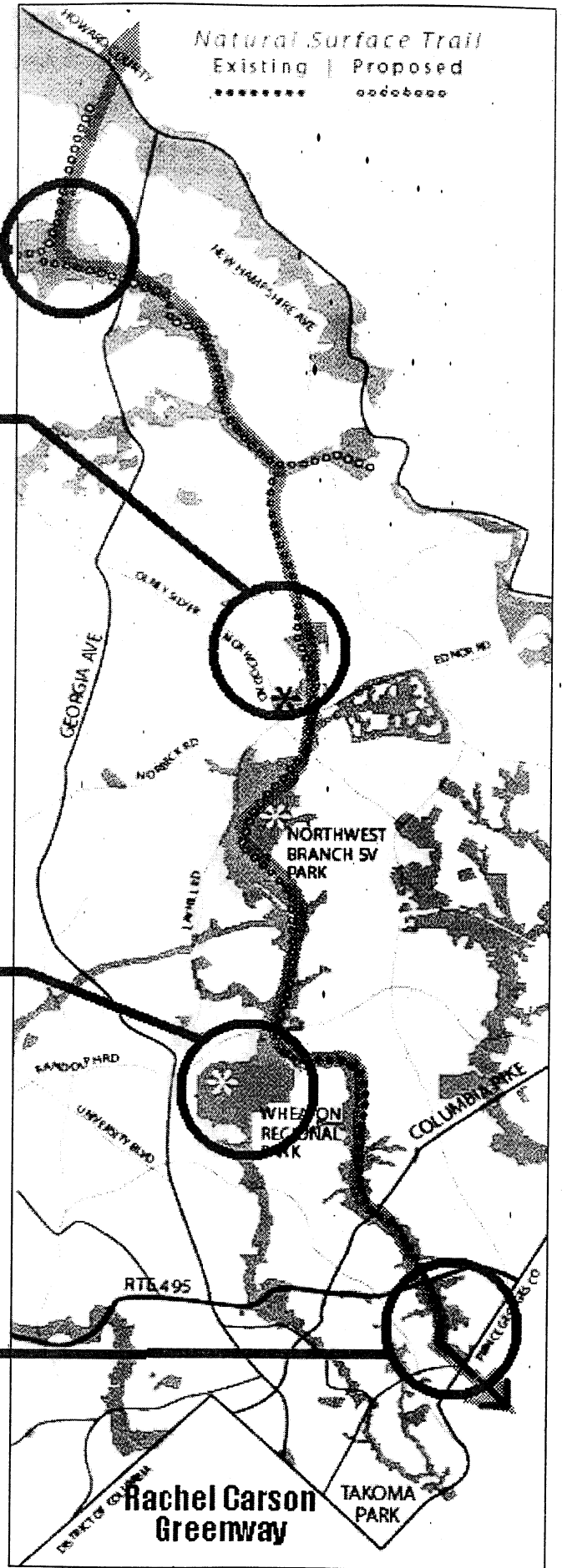
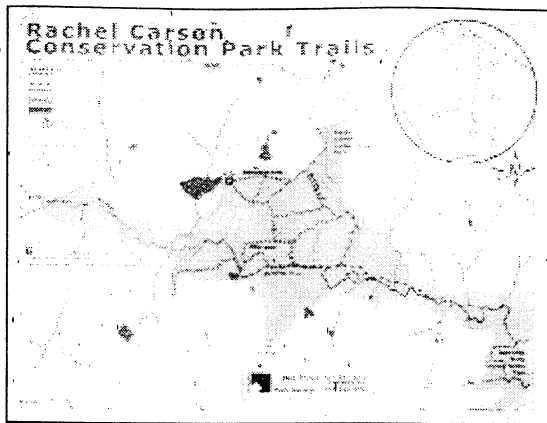


Figure 2

Rachel Carson Study Area existing sanctioned natural & hard surface trails. **From the Top:** Rachel Carson Conservation Park Trail Map. The start of the Rural Legacy interpretive trail at Woodlawn. Wheaton Regional Park, home to our first Heart Smart Trail. The hard surface portion of the trail which continues into Prince George's county.

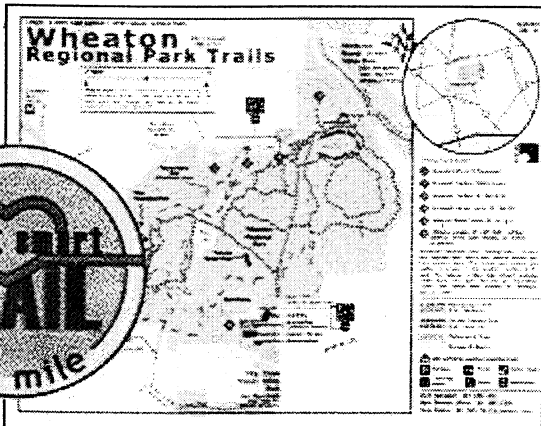
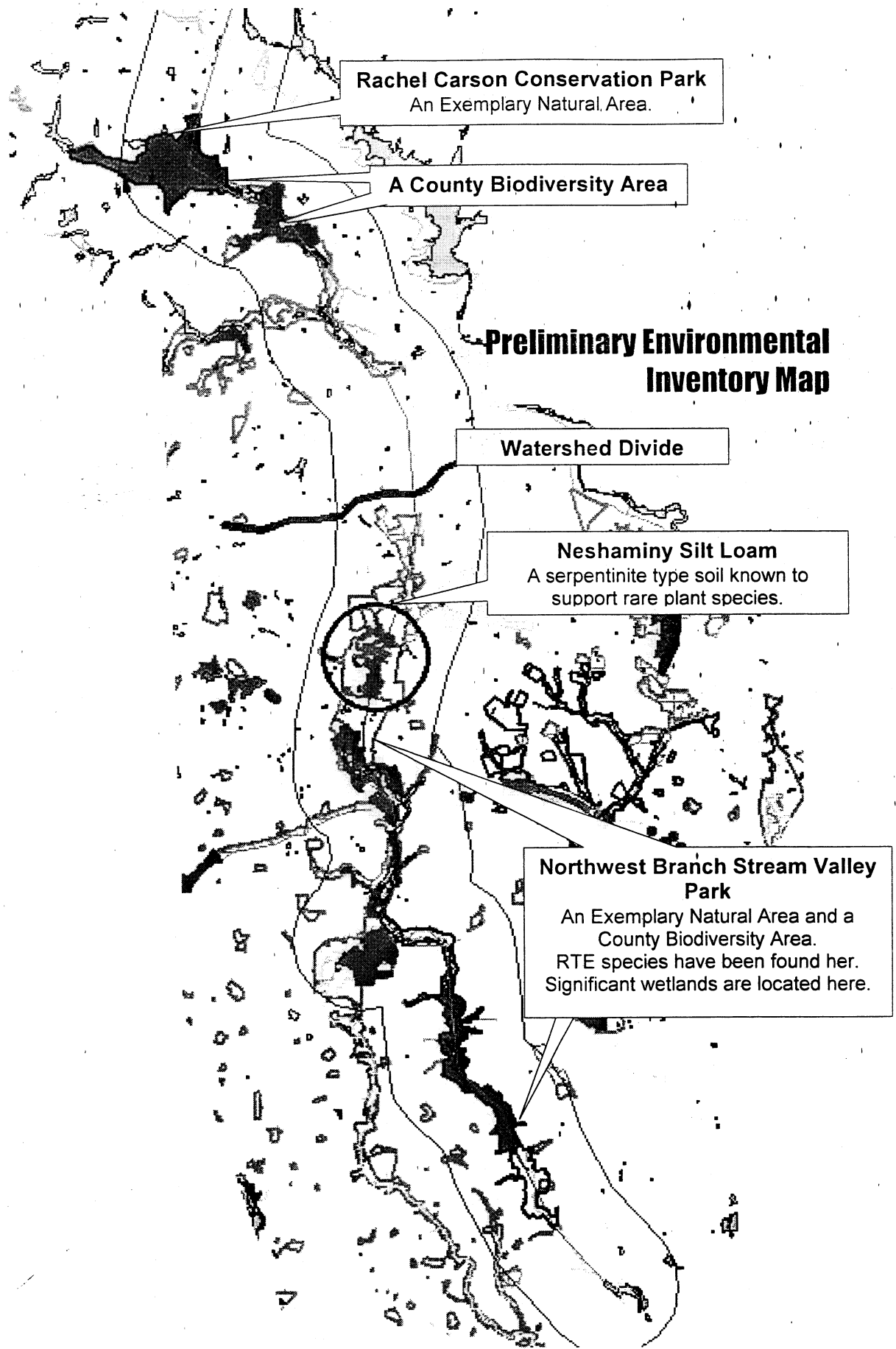


Figure 3



b. *Historical/Cultural.*

Underground Railroad/Quaker Heritage. A portion of Rachel Carson Greenway traverses the historic community of Sandy Spring. A "Rural Legacy Trail" commemorating the role of Montgomery County in the Underground Railroad was opened in the Sandy Spring area in November 2001. During the Trail Corridor Plan process, opportunities to strengthen and expand this trail concept will be explored. The importance of an interpretive trail in this portion of the corridor is discussed in the Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan (November 2002).

Industrial Heritage/Prehistoric Era. The Rachel Carson Greenway contains a number of opportunities to interpret the importance of 18th and 19th century milling industries along the Northwest Branch and other parts of the trail alignment, i.e., Burnt Mills and Kemp Mill, etc. There are also numerous opportunities to understand how prehistoric peoples as far back as 12,000 B.C. used our Park stream valleys for seasonal resource camps and quarrying activities.

4. *To Identify ways to allow trail users to safely cross roads.* The Countywide Park trails Plan identifies many dangerous road crossings in the Trail Corridor, including Colesville Road, Bonifant Road, Ednor Road and Norwood Road. Developing ways to allow trail users to safely cross these streets is important.

5. *To provide better access to the trail corridor by identifying opportunities for trail access along the corridor.* The Rachel Carson Greenway is 22 miles in length. Trail access points that include parking are needed at different locations along the greenway so people can hike shorter sections of the trail. Locations for horse trailer parking also need to be identified.

6. *To explore how historic buildings at US Rte 29 can be integrated into the trail corridor concept.* Two buildings on either side of US Rt 29 were constructed as part of the Burnt Mills Water Filtration plant. Completed by WSSC in 1936, the filtration plant was the principal source of reliable clean water in Montgomery and Prince George's counties until the 1950's. The buildings, examples of Georgian Revival style architecture, are part of the Robert B. Morse Historic District.

7. *To identify opportunities for making portions of the trail accessible to people with limited mobility.* Finding areas in the greenway where people with limited mobility can enjoy key interpretive elements is an important plan objective. The proposed Rachel Carson Greenway trail will be natural surface and will traverse some challenging topography. Making short trail loops and some interpretive areas available to people with disabilities will help assure universal enjoyment of the trail experience.

Key Planning Assumptions

As recommended by the Countywide Park Trails Plan, the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail will be natural surface. In keeping with the interpretive character of the greenway, permitted trail uses that will be considered are hiking, walking and horseback riding.

The Countywide Park Trails Plan identifies three major cross-county greenway connections. The western greenway, the Seneca Creek Greenway Trail, is open to cyclists, equestrians and hikers northeast of MD 355. The mid-county greenway has yet to be planned.

The Rachel Carson Greenway is the eastern greenway and has always been envisioned as an interpretive trail, emphasizing ecological principles and historic traditions, related to the Underground Railroad. Trail users will be encouraged to read interpretive material as they walk, spend time observing the natural features and participate in guided interpretive tours. In the area of Sandy Spring, where trails users will be transported back to the mid 19th Century, people traveled on foot or by horseback. Other modes of travel would conflict with the intent of the trail experience.

Night Voices
Watershed Divide
Hawlings River to
Patuxent River

June 2004

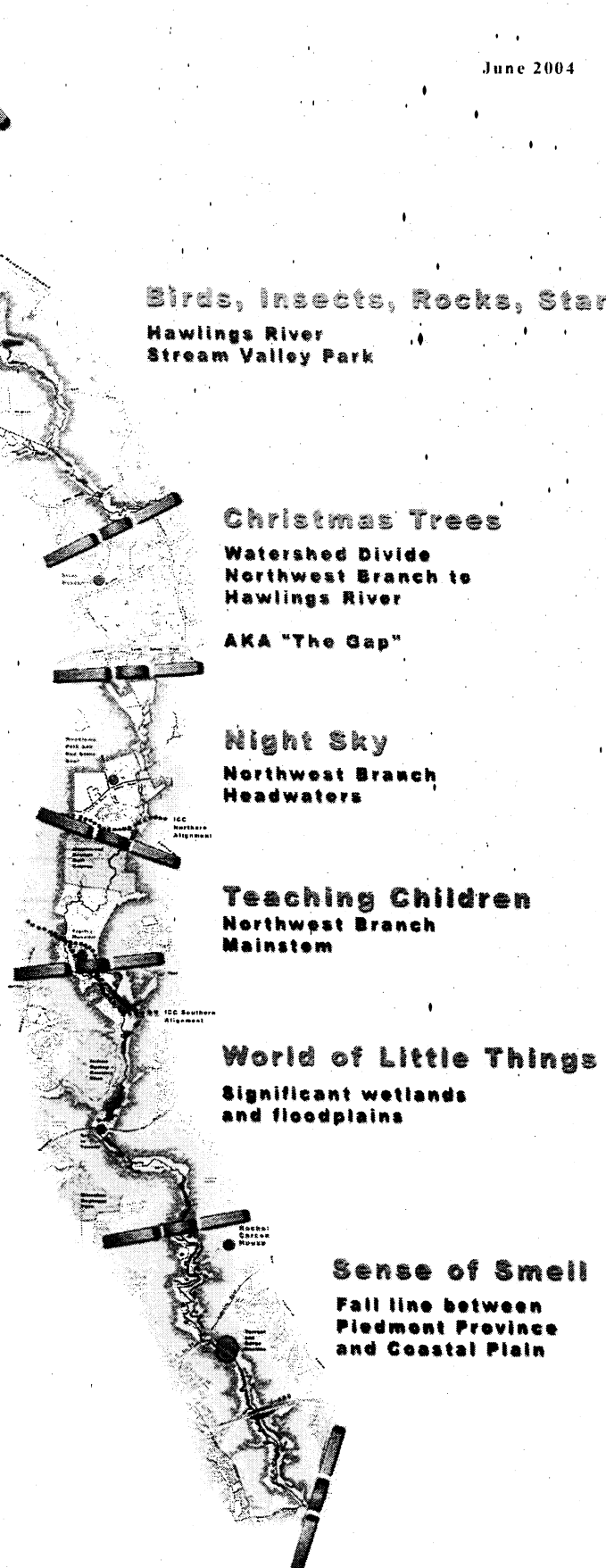
Rainy Day
Biodiversity Area

Birds, Insects, Rocks, Stars
Hawlings River
Stream Valley Park

Interpreting the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail

*(Based on "A Sense of Wonder"
by Rachel Carson)*

Figure 4



An experience full of nature's power and wonder...
Imbued with human history...
From the Fall line of the Coastal Plain into the
Piedmont Province...
through a gorge carved along a raging river...
then surrounded by low lying wetlands, next
arching over ridge tops...
and into the forests filled with moss covered banks
and glades of fern.

To assure a contemplative setting and to reduce user conflicts, bicycles will not be permitted in the Rachel Carson Greenway.

The Countywide Park Trails Plans envisions a countywide trail system that accommodates all types of trail users. In the eastern part of the County, M-NCPPC staffs are working with the members of Maryland Off-Road Enthusiasts (MORE) to provide a north-south trail network to accommodate cyclists in Fairland Recreational Park. This is a more appropriate setting for recreational cycling than the Rachel Carson Greenway.

In terms of accommodating equestrian use, the key planning issue will be how to create sustainable trails for both hikers and horses. In some cases the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail may have to be hiking only and horses will have to divert to more appropriate alignments. These are issues that will be addressed during the plan process.

Proposed Community Outreach Strategy

The first public outreach meeting, an Issues Forum, was held in October 2003. Those attending were asked to identify trail issues, planning concerns and planning opportunities in the trail corridor. The issues listed in Attachment 1 reflect comments from this meeting.

As the planning process continues, additional issues will be identified and added to the plan.

The next community meetings have been tentatively scheduled in October, one in the northern end of the corridor and one in the southern end. A "Trail Corridor Plan Notebook" is being prepared for use by Plan participants. During these meetings, staff will present different options to address the issues listed in Attachment 1 and ask for community comment and review.

Based on the outcome of these meetings, a Staff Draft Trail Corridor Plan will be prepared for Planning Board review.

In general, the community outreach strategy will rely on the following techniques to encourage citizen input and involvement:

Public Meetings

Sponsor community meetings at two locations: the southern end of the corridor and the northern end of the corridor. The planning issues in the northern and southern portion of the corridor are different. South of Ednor Road, issues primarily involve aligning the trail through existing parkland and identifying interpretive opportunities. In the northern portion of the corridor, the trail corridor crosses land not currently in existing or proposed parkland. Trail options need to be identified and evaluated in these areas. Sponsoring a community meetings in the northern part of the corridor will be more convenient to residents and allow a greater emphasis on closing trail gaps.

Small Group Meetings

Be available to attend meetings of local community groups, business groups and groups with particular trail interests whenever possible. As an example, staff has spoken about the trail corridor plan to groups such as Sandy Spring Greenspace, Sandy Spring-Ashton Civic

Association, Neighbors Working to Restore Northwest Branch Workshop and the Heritage Advisory Committee.

E-Communications

Establish a web site to provide information on the project schedule, upcoming meetings, planning process updates and plan documents. The web site for the plan process has been established and may be reached at www.montgomerytrails.org. Staff will rely on the trails web site to keep citizens updated on the plan process, plan recommendations and plan meetings.

Interested citizens and civic groups will be encouraged to become part of our e-mail list. E-mail notices of public meetings and forums will be sent to those on the e-mail list.

For those interested in the Plan who do not have e-mail, press releases will be used to publicize plan meetings.

Staff Recommended Plan Schedule

The recently amended Countywide Park Trails Plan includes a chart describing the steps in the Trail Corridor Plan process. In Figure 5, key work program dates for the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail Corridor Plan are shown in relation to these steps.

Figure 5

TRAIL PLAN PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

ISSUES MEETING WITH COMMUNITY

October 2003

REPORT ON ISSUES, OUTREACH AND WORK PROGRAM TO PLANNING BOARD

July 2004

PUBLIC MEETINGS

October/November 2004

Discuss responses to issues and share ideas about trail plan concepts

STAFF DRAFT

February / March/ 2005

Staff proposes draft plan to Planning Board. Planning Board modifies as necessary and publishes Draft Plan for Public Hearing

PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT PLAN AND PUBLIC HEARING

March/April 2005

PLANNING BOARD WORKSESSIONS

May-July 2005

Planning Board reviews public testimony at worksessions

PLANNING BOARD APPROVAL

July 2005

Rachel Carson Greenway Planning Segments

Segment 8
Rachel Carson Conservation Park to Patuxent

Segment 7
Rachel Carson Conservation Park

Segment 6
Goldmine Road to Georgia Avenue

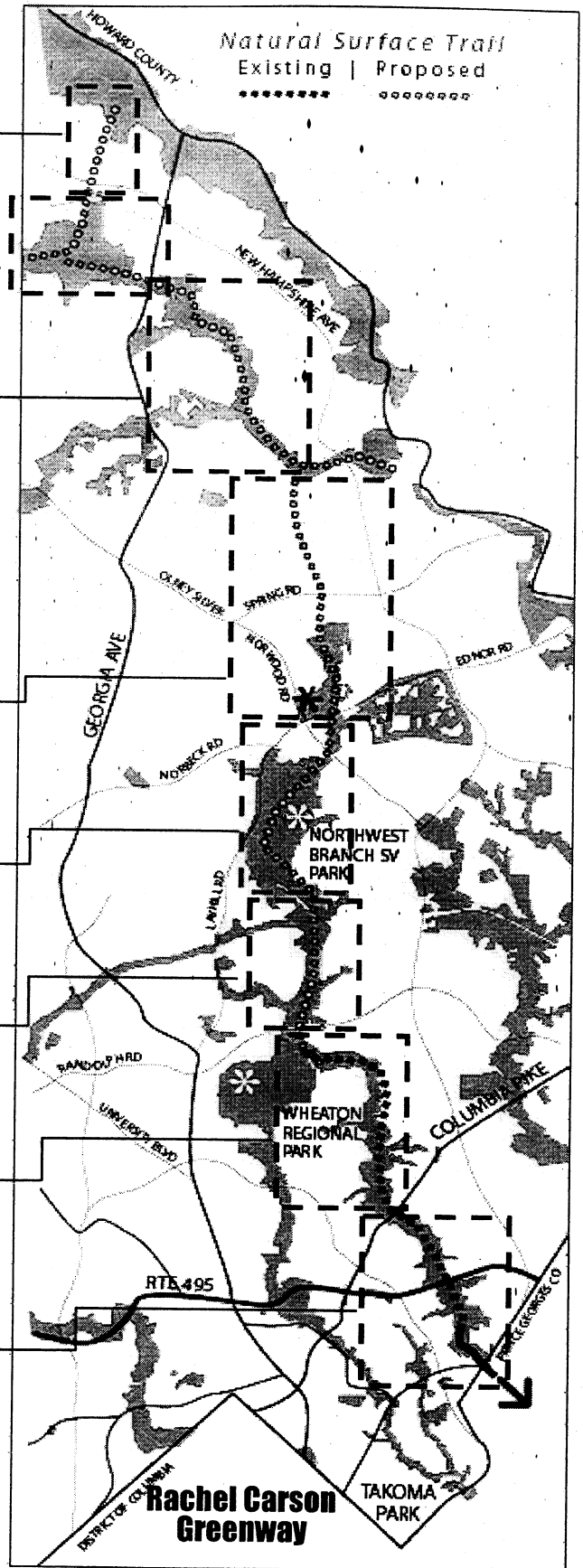
Segment 5
Ednor Road to Goldmine Road

Segment 4
Bonifant Road to Ednor Road

Segment 3
Randolph Road to Bonifant Road

Segment 2
Columbia Pike to Randolph Road

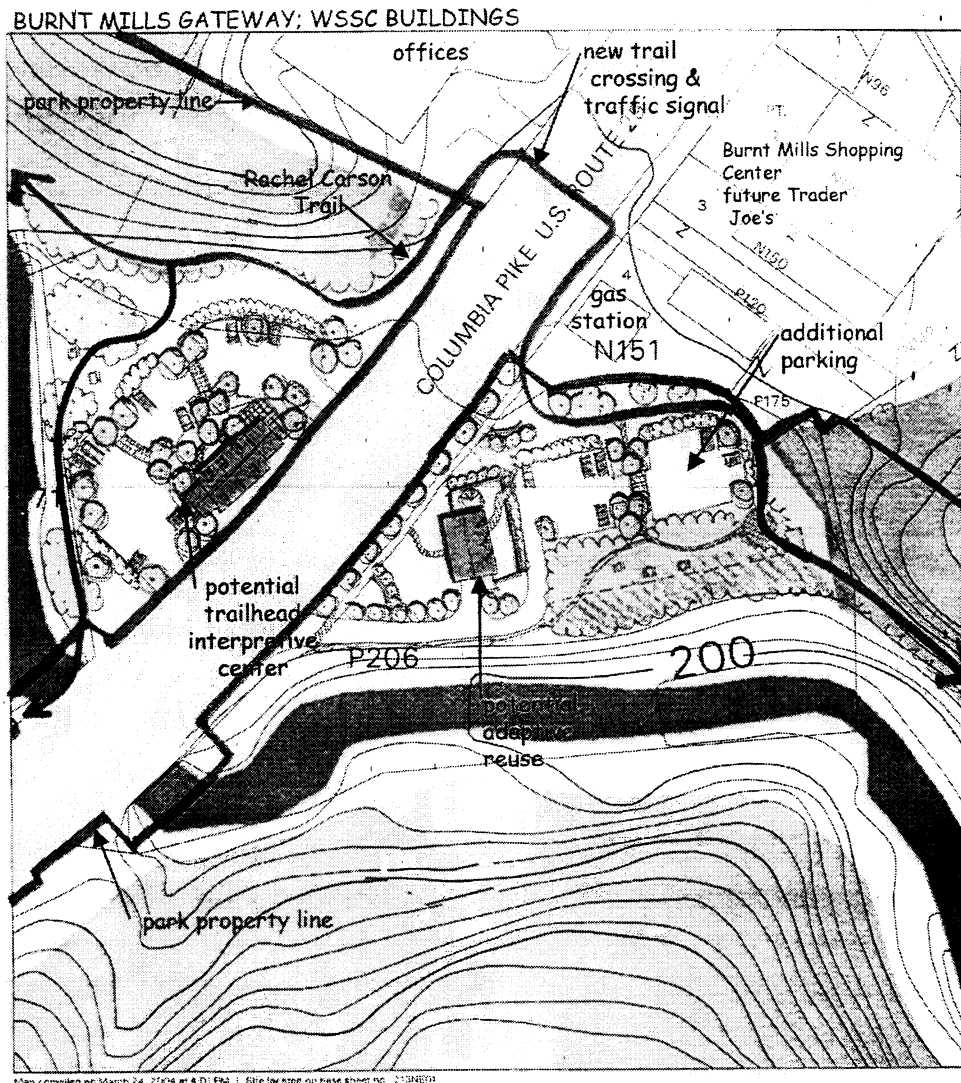
Segment 1
Prince George's County Line to Columbia Pike



ATTACHMENT 1: Summary of Key Planning Issues by Greenway Segment

For the issues forum held in October 2004, the Greenway Corridor was divided into 8 planning segments. Large display size maps of each segment were displayed and participants were asked to write issues, comments and concerns on the maps. The comments that were made are presented below by segment. Others have been added by staff.

Attachment 1-A



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MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

6/25/04 2:00 PM

Segment 1

- 1.1 How should a transition be made between the natural surface Rachel Carson Greenway Trail and hard surface Northwest Branch hard surface trail?
- 1.2 What are the options for trail access and parking at Brookview Local Park and Broadacres Local Park?
- 1.3 Is there a need for trail improvements underneath I-495?
- 1.4 Is there a need to realign trail to a better location in this segment, using bridges to cross small streams?
- 1.5 Can safe vehicular access be provided from US 29/Columbia Pike Road? How can trail users safely cross US 29/Columbia Pike Road?
- 1.5.1 How can drainage from beltway be controlled to prevent erosion and runoff damage to trail?

Segment 2

- 2.1 How can the trail entry area be improved in terms of parking, vehicular access from US 29/Columbia Pike, pedestrian access to the west side trail, signage and interpretation? Should the Burnt Mills historic building be considered for trail related uses and interpretation? A staff draft concept plan for this area, see Figure 1-A, has been prepared for purposes of discussion.
- 2.2 Is there potential for connectivity to Rachel Carson's home, now owned and occupied by the Rachel Carson Council?
- 2.3 Does the trail provide adequate access to Wheaton Regional Park? Springbrook High School?

Segment 3

- 3.1 How can trail impacts to the extensive wetlands that are located in this segment be avoided or minimized?
- 3.2 How can the trail be aligned in a way that is compatible with Bonifant cemetery?
- 3.3 What opportunities are there for community connections to the trail?
- 3.4 How will trail concepts be integrated into planning studies for the ICC?
- 3.5 How can a safe crossing of Bonifant Road be provided?

Segment 4

- 4.1 What is the best trail alignment in the vicinity of Northwest Branch Golf Course, Trolley Museum and former landfill?
- 4.2 Is access from Blake High School adequate?
How can the parkland/trail gap in the area between Norbeck Road and Ednor Road be closed?

Segment 5

- 5.1 What approach should be taken to assure trail use on Meeting House Road does not impinge on Sandy Spring Friends Meeting culture and worship activities?
- 5.2 How can sidewalks be provided along Route 108 for safe pedestrian passage to and from Meeting House Road?
- 5.3 How can future plans for Woodlawn Manor and barn complement the Rural Legacy Trail?
- 5.4 Can trail access be provided to the champion ash tree located east of the Rural Legacy Trail?
- 5.5 Can access to Sandy Spring be provided for those with disabilities?
- 5.6 How can the trail be continued north of Maryland 108 and be respectful of existing residential patterns and current farming practices?
- 5.7 While the greenway trail is to be natural surface, would it be appropriate in places to follow roads and sidewalk?
- 5.8 Should additional parkland be acquired to accommodate a trail north of Maryland 108?

Segment 6

- 6.1 How can a sustainable trail be provided in an area with lots of wetlands and floodplain?
- 6.2 How can trail users safely cross Gold Mine Road and Brighton Dam Road?

Segment 7

- 7.1 Which of the trails proposed in the Rachel Carson Conservation Park Master Plan should be identified as the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail?

Segment 8

- 8.1 Where is the most appropriate trail connection between Rachel Carson Conservation Park and the Patuxent River?