

- **Natural Resource Acreage** - If the county does not have enough locally owned recreational lands to meet it's overall 30 acres per thousand goal, it may apply a portion of locally owned natural resource lands, which include 1/3 of Stream Valley, Conservation and undeveloped portions of Regional Parks.

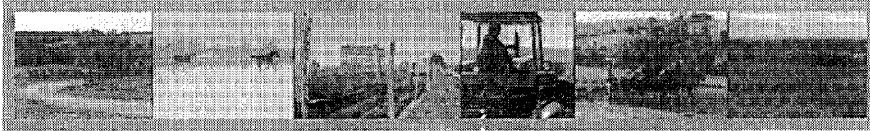
Montgomery County currently has 26,362 acres that count toward meeting this goal, and could meet the State's land acquisition goal with 1,897 additional acres. The following table indicates how land proposed for acquisition could provide 2,650 acres of qualifying parkland, which will enable the County to exceed the State's goal.

M-NCPPC - Montgomery County Park System Future Land Acquisition Needs To The Year 2020		M-NCPPC Future Parkland Acquisition Certification Potential To Year 2020	
PARK TYPES	ACRES	STATE PERCENT ALLOWANCE	POTENTIAL CERTIFIED ACRES
<b>County-wide</b>			
Stream Valley	3,204	33%	1057
Regional	368	33% of 1/3 - 2/3 Policy	80
Recreational	283	100%	283
Conservation	1,149	33%	379
Special	708	100%	708
Historical Cultural	16	100%	16
<b>County-wide Subtotal</b>	<b>5,729</b>	<b>County-wide Subtotal</b>	<b>2524</b>
<b>Community-Use</b>			
Urban	2	100%	2
Neighborhood	0	100%	0
Local	123	100%	123
Neighborhood Conservation Area	1	33%	1
<b>Community-Use Subtotal</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>Community-Use Subtotal</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,855</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,650</b>

### *Montgomery County Recreation Department*

Recreation programs provide many key values and benefits for individuals, families, and the community, including creating critical community focal points, offering activities that strengthen the family unit, promoting health and wellness, reducing isolation and facilitating social and cultural interaction, providing positive alternatives to drug and alcohol use, enhancing public safety, and promoting economic growth and vitality.

This Plan has been fully coordinated with the Montgomery County Recreation Department and includes a small amount of information regarding Montgomery County Department of Recreation facilities and programs. They are covered in more detail in the 'Recreation Facility Development Plan, 2005 Update' prepared by the Recreation Department and incorporated by reference as a part of this report."



## **Agricultural Preservation Programs**

Through FY2004, Montgomery County has protected 61,032 acres of farmland through the preservation programs offered to its residents. According to the national publication, *Farmland Preservation Report*, Montgomery County ranked first in the nation in preserving agricultural land.

The *Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan* was adopted by the in 1980 and proposed the creation and application of two zoning techniques, the Rural Density Transfer (RDT) and the Rural Cluster (RC) Zones, in conjunction with a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system. These techniques have enables Montgomery County to preserve large amounts of the County for agriculture.

Montgomery County has established a goal of protecting 70,000 acres of farmland. Through FY2004, the County is about 87 percent of the way towards reaching that goal. By examining the trend of development versus the trend of agricultural land preservation, achievement of the goal should be attained by the year 2010, provided no significant economic and political disruptions occur. In order to reach our 70,000 acre goal by the year 2010, we will need to protect an additional 8,968 acres.

It should be recognized that as we approach our goal of protecting 70,000 acres of farmland, it will become more difficult to preserve the unprotected lands that remain. The land we have protected thus far has become extremely valuable for development. The remaining unprotected agricultural lands are often directly adjacent to protected properties. Developers and real estate agents use our protected lands as another selling feature amenity that adds value to an unprotected property and encourages rural landowners to pursue development options. Rising real estate values will require diligence by program staff to ensure that valuation of farmland for agricultural preservation easements provides fair and equitable compensation for farmers. In the absence of fair and equitable values, the land will most likely convert to other land uses and be lost to preservation.

### *Agricultural Land Preservation Initiatives*

The best way to safeguard, Montgomery County's agricultural reserve is to safeguard the profitability of farming by creating an environment that is conducive to agricultural sustainability and productivity.

We must continue to expand the use of TDRs within the County wherever possible therefore, the recommendations in the TDR Task Force Report must become a part of our future planning goals.

## *Program Development Strategy for Agricultural Land Preservation*

The preservation of farmland itself will not ensure that farming will continue as a viable industry. The State and local government must promote a holistic approach to the preservation of agriculture in terms of preserving agriculture an industry. This concept must include many components in order for a viable future to exist. These components include but are not limited to the following proposals:

**Agricultural Zoning** - The creation of a true agricultural zone is paramount to the future of agriculture as an industry.

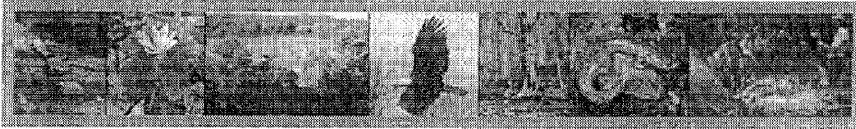
**Right-to-Farm Provisions** - The Legislative intent and purpose of any agricultural zone is to promote agriculture as the primary land use. Ideally, an agricultural zone should incorporate a right to farm provision stating that all agricultural operations are permitted at anytime, including the operation of farm machinery. No agricultural use should be subject to restriction on the grounds that it interferes with other uses permitted within the agricultural zone.

**Master Plan Development** - The development and adoption of a Master Plan establishes a public policy guide or "blue print" for local jurisdictions to formulate a holistic approach to agriculture as an industry and a land use.

**Support to the Agricultural Industry** - The State should work closely with local government to assess the economic contribution agriculture makes to each jurisdiction's local economy. By quantitatively assessing this contribution, local government can define the extent, nature and future direction of the agricultural industry. The agricultural industry within the State is constantly evolving. We must recognize that changing trends in agriculture are not unique to Maryland, nor is it a sign which signifies the ultimate demise of the agricultural industry. Changes are a normal part of an evolving market-driven system. The key for any industry to survive is dependent upon change and the ability for a State, region or county to adapt to these changes. One of the main philosophies the state must employ is to preserve the agricultural land base and let the industry focus on the direction it wants to go. We should not protect farmland for any particular type of agriculture activity or use.

### *Local and State Legislative Support*

We must recommend changes in State Law that limit property tax assessments on protected lands. As the remaining undeveloped farmland increases in value, it is almost certain that the tax assessments will also increase and place increased financial burden on farmers. A change in law will ensure that historic and significant farm related structures are not demolished because they cost too much to retain.



## **Natural Resources Preservation**

The natural environment of Montgomery County, its soils, streams, rivers, wetlands and woodlands support a variety of plants and animals. This environment contributes to the County's high quality of life, visual quality and character. The critical concern is how to protect the County's air, water, land and wildlife resources while managing growth and making development more environmentally sensitive. Currently, about 28,000 acres of locally owned parkland are considered as conservation or stream valley parks (including 2/3 of the acreage of regional parks set aside for natural resource conservation). Approximately 4800 additional acres are proposed as parkland for natural resource protection.

Environmental issues are given much greater weight now when park and community planning decisions are made. Protection of the green infrastructure is a major reason for adding proposed parkland to our master plans and capital program. Park development plans consider a variety of environmental factors including soil type, hydrology, drainage, slope, non-tidal wetlands, stream and wetland buffers, rare, threatened and endangered species, forest interior birds, minimal viable population size, exotic plants, edge effect, natural community type, storm water management, tree preservation, restoration, and mitigation.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Implementation Program*

Montgomery County Park and Planning's program to conserve, protect and enhance natural resources are among the strongest in the state, due to the strong tax base and the commitment of the County government and elected officials to the protection of our natural heritage. The continuing citizen advocacy for open space and natural resource protection is the basis for this level of effort. As the County faces more development pressure, the need for natural resource protection becomes a more critical issue.

The success of our program in protecting many resources also results in some of our greatest weaknesses. The sheer size of the land area protected and the complexity of management issues require continuing efforts to improve our program. Control of deer predation and management of non-native invasive species remain a challenge.

Achieving an appropriate balance of natural resource protection with the needs for recreation, access to public lands and providing connectivity for trails, roads and utilities continues to fragment the county's natural resource base. We address these concerns in the area master plans, park master plans and development review process. Continuing efforts are needed to reduce the impact of these facilities.

### *Needed Improvements*

The County is taking the following steps to overcome weaknesses and achieve state goals

- Increasing efforts to manage for over populations of white-tailed deer in order to protect biodiversity within natural areas and protect the viability of farming in the county (recent publications have identified deer as the number one threat to agriculture in the county).
- Increasing efforts to manage infestations of non-native invasive species, which are reducing biodiversity within high quality natural areas.
- Increasing efforts to manage over-all biodiversity on parkland natural areas.
- Increasing efforts to reduce encroachment of adjacent private property owners on parkland resources (i.e., mowing, dumping, tree and understory removal).

### *Future Program Priorities*

The Department of Park and Planning is increasing efforts to address the management issues listed above through increased use of volunteer groups and public/private partnerships. The FY06 work program includes a significant expansion of the non-native species and deer management programs. Stepped-up efforts to address encroachment have paid off and will be continued, especially in areas of critical stream and habitat resources.

Planning efforts to address the need and competition for urban natural resource areas are being undertaken:

- Several new master plan efforts are beginning in the older parts of the county. "Green Urbanism" principles are being applied to restore degraded resources and integrates green building and low-impact development incentives.
- The new "Centers and Boulevards" initiative will look at ways to intensify development around smaller commercial centers and along connecting roads with transit service to create more lively centers with more open space.
- The County Executive is convening a task force to conduct an interagency assessment of current zoning, subdivision, building and road code standards that impede efforts to mitigate the environmental effects of land development.

### *Green Infrastructure Functional Master Plan*

Department of Park and Planning staff are beginning preparation of a *Green Infrastructure (GI) Functional Master Plan* starting in July of 2005. The proposed *GI Functional Master Plan* will be a predominantly GIS-based effort utilizing existing staff resources that will:

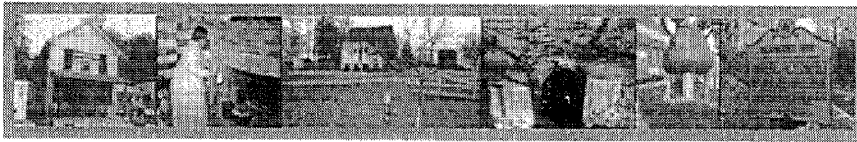
- Identify and prioritize the existing and desired countywide contiguous network of all environmentally important areas, and increase potential for funding open space preservation through programs that promote the preservation of Green Infrastructure;

- Identify and adopt effective implementation mechanisms to preserve, protect, enhance, and restore this network such as established mitigation requirements, and guidance for other environmental protection programs;
- Streamline the preparation of environmental information and recommendations for are master plan and public and private development projects;
- Provide a readily updated countywide natural resources inventory, provide a land use planning based tool to meet the TMDL goal of maintaining water quality; and provide a means for tracking and quantifying progress.

This plan is scheduled be completed in draft in 2007, with adoption in 2008.

### *Recommended Improvements to State Programs*

State funding is needed to protect more land, prepare better inventories (before critical resources are lost) and provide better outreach and education for our citizens on the importance of natural resource protection. Eco-tourism is a possible source of economic benefit, however, facilities would have to be improved and significant effort made to attract people beyond the region. The natural features of most widespread interest are within national or state parkland.



## **Cultural Resources Conservation**

Cultural resources (both built and archaeological) are scattered throughout the County and on parkland. They demonstrate how each generation leaves its marks on the built environment. For example, Montgomery County's archaeological history contains a record of the cultural adaptations of pre-historic peoples to changing climate and ecology, from the Paleo-Indian Period of 12,000 years ago to European contact in 1608. The County's architectural history as represented by its built landmarks provides a window into early agricultural life, the end of slavery and the emergence of industry, transportation breakthroughs, suburbanization, and government expansion. Montgomery County has established a comprehensive program to identify, protect, and interpret this three-century-old, diverse legacy.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Preservation Program:*

Montgomery County's preservation program is strong, but needs to reach out in key, new areas. The Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, the body that

heads the County's most visible preservation program, is cited as a model for a well-run local historic preservation commission. The Historic Area Work Permit process also is well defined, and is generally seen as balancing the mandate of historic preservation with property owners' needs for reasonable change.

The Historic Preservation Section has many specific programs to meet State and County goals, including: 1) Researching & evaluating sites for historic designation. 2) Reviewing proposed alterations to designated sites. 3) Reviewing subdivisions & development plans that affect historic sites. 4) Managing MNCPPC-owned historic sites. 5) Directing the countywide archeological program. 6) Undertaking educational and outreach activities. 7) Administering the County Historic Preservation Tax Credit and Historic Preservation Grant Fund

The primary weaknesses of the program are that additional staff is needed in the Historic Preservation office, and that maintenance funds for the upkeep of park-owned properties are severely lacking. Additionally, the historic preservation process is still, unfortunately, seen as a secondary process by some.

### *Improvements to the Implementation Program to Address Weakness*

The following are examples of either needed improvements in or future goals for the Historic Preservation program: 1) Increase the maintenance budget for cultural resources in parks. 2) Augment master plan research of cultural resources during intervening years by adding resources so that sites that show the potential for designation are not overlooked during any planning hiatuses. Additional resources for research staff would assure that inventory efforts are kept more current, and that previously unidentified, but threatened resources that meet criteria are put on a watch list. 3) Add Cultural Landscape Reports and Historic Structure Reports to the repertoire of regular Commission documents. These explore the history behind parks, landscapes and important buildings through primary document research. 4) Conduct more research on twentieth-century resources ("the Recent Past"), whether commercial or residential, which are not yet appreciated and are quickly being lost to new construction. 5) Increase efforts and funding to put park-owned cultural resources into the GIS and Smart Parks system. The new *Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources in Parks* has started this process. 6) Develop an amendment to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* of significant publicly owned and selected privately owned archaeological sites, and identify all prehistoric and historic archaeological sites on County master plans.

### *Future Program Priorities*

Preserve and revitalize older, close-in neighborhoods, both commercially and residentially. Embrace national preservation initiatives such as the registration of archaeological and African-American historical sites, the focus on the Recent Past, use of heritage tourism, and incorporation of in-depth documentation and interpretation of major landmarks and cultural landscapes into the planning and design process. Finally, provide opportunities for paid staff to interpret the cultural resources in County parks something that is standard practice in many other nearby counties.

Implement the goals of the *Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources in Parks*, the purpose of which is to create a blueprint for the future use and priority of County-owned resources. The Strategic Plan:

- Lays out a vision for improving stewardship of park-based cultural resources and establishes priorities critical to implementing that vision.
- Recommends a new way of prioritizing cultural resources in parks based on their potential for long-term use and heritage tourism.
- Presents a "Top 20" Priority Projects List containing sites to be opened to the public by M-NCPPC or via a public/private partnership.
- Defines a systematic approach to stewarding cultural resources in parks based on capital improvements, annual maintenance, and programming (both activity/use/interpretive programming and architectural & engineering programming). This approach crosses over Department divisions.
- Provides a better method for assessing maintenance costs of cultural resources in parks by developing new mathematical formulas.
- Increases agency knowledge about park-owned cultural resources by creating a new GIS park layer with extensive Excel spreadsheet and by sharing that data with Smart Parks.
- Lays the groundwork for ongoing strategic plans because a new cultural resource strategic plan will be developed every ten years and the original plan can serve as a prototype for strategic plans by other divisions.

For more information, see *From Artifact to Attraction: A Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources in Parks* (December 2005).

