

Regional Conservation Priorities 2007

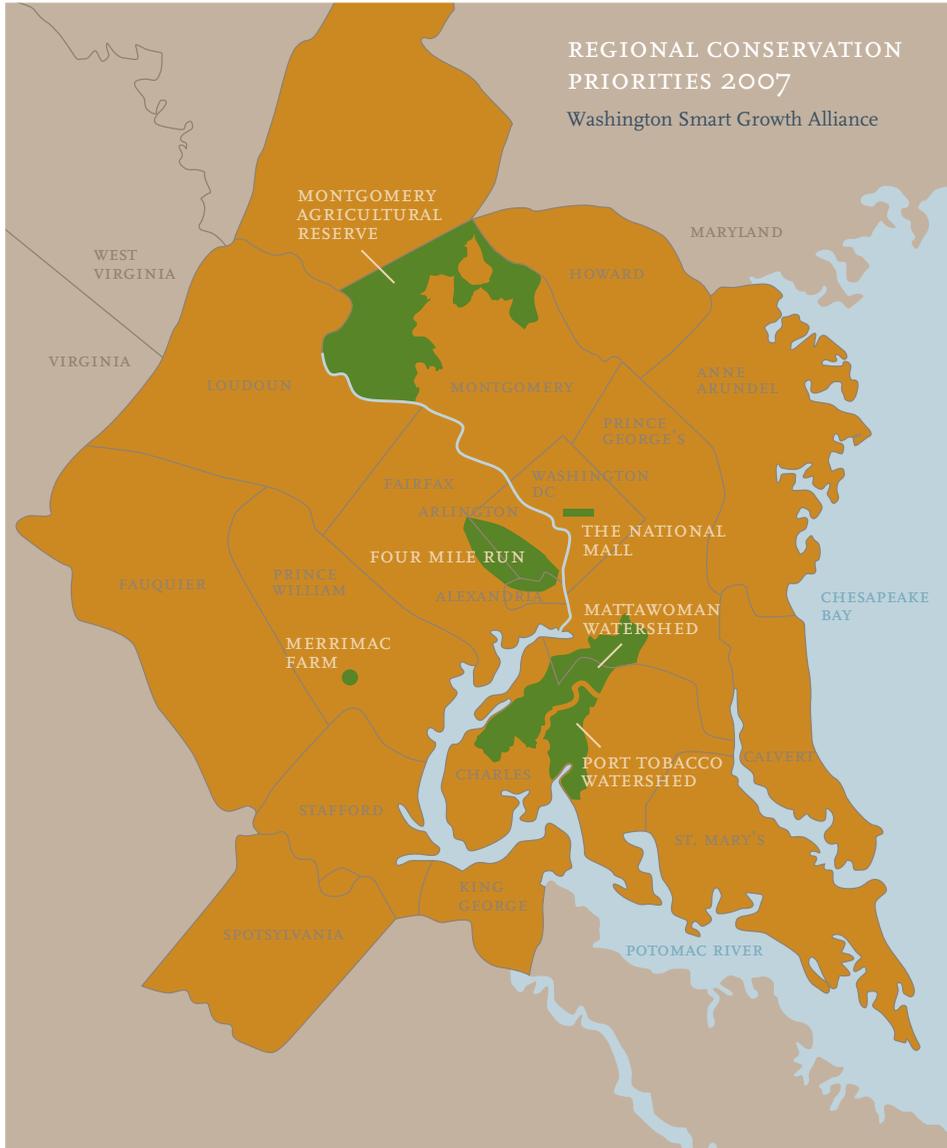


A CALL *to* ACTION



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES 2007

Washington Smart Growth Alliance



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INTRODUCTION

In 2030, the Washington metropolitan region will have two million more residents. This growth raises major questions:

- › Where will our children or grandchildren play in 2030?
- › Where will we enjoy a nature trail or bike ride?
- › Will we have adequate, clean drinking water?
- › Will farms and forests be part of our lives and our economy?

Although population growth naturally raises questions and possible solutions for smart development, no development scenario is complete without *smart conservation*.

The goal of the Washington Smart Growth Alliance's annual Conservation Priorities List is to recognize and support the initiatives most likely to improve the quality of life in our met-

ropolitan region over the next several decades. This year's list, like its predecessor, highlights initiatives that are at a turning point or reaching a major milestone, such as:

- › A time-sensitive need for greater public awareness,
- › A funding decision,
- › An agreement under negotiation, or
- › A legislative or regulatory approval.

Because the Alliance is made up of business, environmental, and affordable housing organizations, our support signifies not only that these initiatives are critical to our region's natural heritage and working landscapes, but they will also attract thriving businesses and enhance job creation and retention.

For more information on these initiatives and on how to get involved in supporting them, visit our website at <http://www.SGAlliance.org>.

THE NATIONAL MALL



WHY A PRIORITY?



- › The National Mall is America's Front Yard, reflecting and commemorating our country's rich history for Washington residents and 25 million annual tourists.
- › The National Park Service has begun a comprehensive planning process for the National Mall's management, usage, and improvement that requires public input.
- › The Mall Plan, which will lay out a 50-year vision for the park, will require support from individuals through its private-sector partner, the Trust for the National Mall.

The National Mall is arguably the most significant 600 acres in our nation. It is the great lawn and centerpiece of the District of Columbia. Although more than 25 million tourists and Washington residents visit the National Mall annually, many do not realize the significant threats to the integrity of our country's premier park. The sea wall at the Jefferson Memorial is rapidly sinking, and parts of the adjacent trail on the Tidal Basin are washed out during high tide. The constant tread of visitors' footsteps compacts the soil, jeopardizing trees and landscaping. Tent stakes from events have permanently damaged the great lawn's sprinkler system. Balancing park preservation and the constitutional right of citizens to use the space is a challenge that requires constant and costly upkeep.

The National Mall can and should set the standard for a beautiful, well maintained, living commemorative civic space. Most Americans expect that Congress will automatically finance the care and maintenance of the National Mall, but nothing could be further from the truth. Understandably, with budget constraints and an overall maintenance backlog of over \$5 billion in America's national parks, our urban park and the nation's front yard—the National Mall—is at continued risk.

In late 2006 the National Park Service launched a comprehensive planning process to define a long-term vision for the management, use, and improvement of the National Mall. With an estimated \$300 million in deferred main-

tenance, significant challenges created by the Mall's use by more than 25 million annual visitors, new security demands, and the passage of 30 years since its last comprehensive plan, the National Mall faces serious challenges for its revitalization. The Park Service has set up an inclusive planning process among representatives from the District government, more than a dozen coordinating agencies, and its private sector funding partner, the Trust for the National Mall, all of which have a stake in the preservation of the National Mall. The Alliance supports both the planning process and the fundraising necessary to bring the National Mall Plan to fruition.



For more information:

TRUST for THE NATIONAL MALL

<http://www.nationalmall.org>

202.207.3930

CONSERVATION PRIORITY

PORT TOBACCO RIVER WATERSHED ACTION PLAN



WHY A PRIORITY?

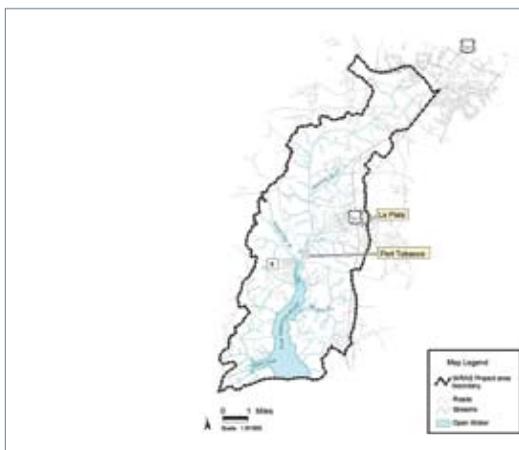
- › The Port Tobacco River has reached a water-quality crisis point.
- › Non-profit organizations, government agencies, and citizen volunteers have made great strides in restoring water quality.
- › Those efforts have culminated in a Watershed Restoration Action Strategy that needs full implementation.

In 2001, the Port Tobacco River – whose watershed is located entirely in Charles County, Maryland – had a water-quality crisis. Bacteria in the water were at an unhealthy level. The Port Tobacco River Conservancy, a volunteer organization that has now raised more than \$1 million to support restoration efforts, conducted its own water quality monitoring program that fully documented the river’s urgent needs. Septic system failures, sewer overflows, and development and agricultural practices had rendered the water less and less hospitable for native species, and unsafe for people.

Now, in 2007, the Port Tobacco River Conservancy and Charles County have made amazing progress in reversing the downward trend of this watershed. Activities have included an annual “Wade In” educational event, continued water-quality monitoring, funding for low-impact development projects such as rain gardens at local schools, and funding for septic system upgrades.

Recently, the Center for Watershed Protection completed a Watershed Restoration Action Strategy, which includes measures to address septic system pollution, sanitary sewer overflow problems, land conservation, and best practices for developments and farms. The Charles County Planning Commission has recommended that the County adopt the watershed strategy, and the town of La Plata’s planning commission has also voted unanimously to recommend that the town

council adopt the plan. We believe it will, when fully implemented, significantly help in the River’s restoration, and perhaps become a model for similar work elsewhere around the region.



For more information:

PORT TOBACCO RIVER CONSERVANCY

<http://www.porttobaccoriver.org>

410.326.9473

CHARLES COUNTY DEPARTMENT

of **PLANNING and GROWTH**

MANAGEMENT

<http://www.charlescounty.org/pgm/planning/plans/environmental/wras/default.htm>

301.645.0683

MATTAWOMAN CREEK WATERSHED



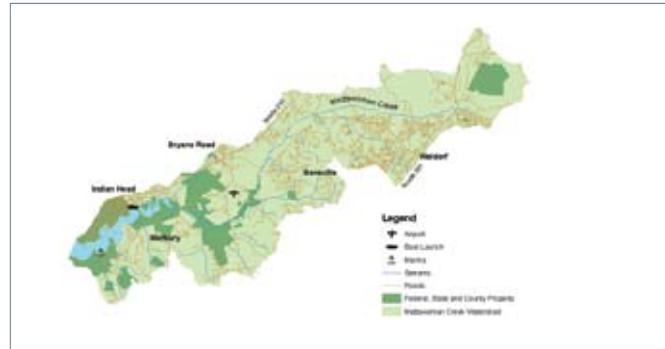
WHY A PRIORITY?

- › Mattawoman Creek is the best, most productive tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.
- › The Creek could face severe negative impacts if growth is not carefully planned and implemented.
- › Non-profit organizations and government agencies are collaborating to implement a watershed management plan.

Mattawoman Creek is recognized by Maryland fisheries biologists as “the best, most productive tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.” The Creek comprises a twenty-mile stream in Prince Georges and Charles Counties that feeds a seven-mile estuary to the freshwater tidal Potomac River at Indian Head, Maryland. Despite its proximity to the nation’s capital, the watershed remains largely forested and supports a high diversity of fish and wildlife. A fruitful nursery for migratory fish, the Mattawoman is important to the Potomac River’s internationally recognized, \$30 million Largemouth Bass recreational fishery. The watershed supports the state’s largest breeding wood duck population and features wetlands rich in amphibians. Current and projected land use trends and highway projects point toward accelerating changes in the character of the watershed and threaten the existing forest cover so essential to protecting the watershed and water quality.

Because of its especially high quality, the Mattawoman poses a sharply defined test of whether we can muster the will to protect Chesapeake Bay resources. In 2003, the Army Corps of Engineers completed a watershed management plan for Charles County, which recommended environmentally sensitive design of new developments, retrofitting existing development with protective measures and, importantly, protecting the stream valleys. Despite these positive measures, the plan foresees under its best scenario a watershed with impervious cover exceeding 15 percent, an amount likely to produce severe impacts. The

Mattawoman Watershed Society is working with stakeholders, including county, state, and federal agencies, to enhance protective measures, prevent destructive policies, and preserve the forested watershed. Joint efforts will be necessary to achieve the goal of maintaining the Mattawoman and its vibrant living resources as a success story in the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac restoration programs. The Alliance endorses these efforts.



For more information:

MATTAWOMAN WATERSHED SOCIETY

<http://www.Mattawomanwatershed.org>

301.751.8039

CHARLES COUNTY DEPARTMENT

of **PLANNING and GROWTH**

MANAGEMENT

[http://www.charlescounty.org/pgm/](http://www.charlescounty.org/pgm/planning/plans/environmental/mattawoman)

[planning/plans/environmental/mattawoman](http://www.charlescounty.org/pgm/planning/plans/environmental/mattawoman)

301.645.0683

CONSERVATION PRIORITY

BUILDING LOT TERMINATION PROGRAM *for* THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY AGRICULTURAL RESERVE



WHY A PRIORITY?



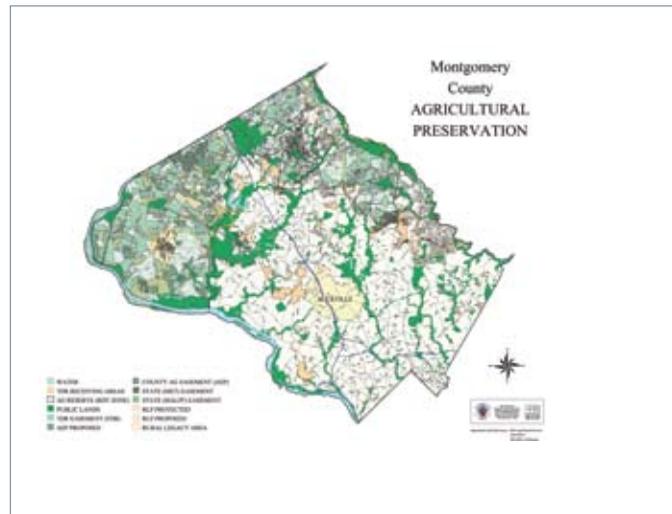
- › In the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, family farming thrives and recreational opportunities abound, all within an hour's drive of Washington, D.C.
- › Sprawl development within the Agricultural Reserve threatens to undermine its long-term integrity.
- › The Building Lot Termination program would fairly compensate landowners for their development potential, thereby providing a fair solution that has broad support.



Twenty-seven years ago, planners and county leaders had the vision to preserve land in Montgomery County, Maryland for agriculture and rural open space. Over those twenty-seven years, despite enormous population growth and a huge influx of non-agricultural jobs to the county, that vision has become a reality: The Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve consists of 93,000 acres where family farming thrives and recreational opportunities abound, all within an hour's drive of Washington, D.C. This is a planning achievement of great local, state, and even national significance.

A little-known fact about the program, however, is that many landowners currently retain the ability to build one house per twenty-five acres even though they are part of the Agricultural Reserve. Building houses on those lots would result in significant fragmentation of valuable farmland. To address this problem, County staff and local landowners have proposed an easement program that would compensate landowners financially in exchange for extinguishing the development potential of their lots. The Montgomery County Council is now examining this proposed Building Lot Termination program. Because it provides fair compensation and would help to preserve the integrity of the Agricultural Reserve, many stakeholders in the agricultural,

conservation and business sectors support this proposed program. The Alliance recognizes this program as one of the region's conservation priorities.



For more information:

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL SERVICES DIVISION**
[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/
agstmpl.asp?url=/content/ded/agservices/
index.asp](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agstmpl.asp?url=/content/ded/agservices/index.asp)

301.590.2830

MERRIMAC FARM



WHY A PRIORITY?

- › Merrimac Farm hosts native habitat, rare plant species, and 100 acres of wetlands adjacent to Cedar Run; the property is strategically located for maximum conservation benefit for wildlife and drinking water protection.
- › Conservation of the site would provide a natural area in northern Virginia for hiking, nature observation, fishing, and cultural and environmental education.
- › This initiative is the result of a broad-based collaboration of conservation groups, the landowner, and the state and federal government.



Located in Prince William County, Merrimac Farm is a 302-acre property on the National Register for Historic Places with important natural resources and a strategic location for conservation within the Occoquan watershed. Conservation of the property will protect more than 100 acres of wetlands along a one-mile stretch of Cedar Run, a major tributary to the Occoquan River. Such wetland protection and stream buffering efforts are a critical part of protecting water quality in the Occoquan watershed, the drinking water source for half of Prince William and Fairfax Counties. The project will also conserve important wildlife habitat as a strategic connection between an existing 300-acre protected wetland mitigation bank and the more than 22,000 acres at the Quantico Marine Corps Base.

Recognizing the importance of the property, the Prince William Conservation Alliance has worked with the owners of Merrimac Farm to identify funding to acquire, permanently protect, and provide public access to the property. In June 2007, the Commonwealth of Virginia—through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation—awarded a grant of \$820,000 to the conservation group, providing some of the funds needed to acquire the property. Now, the Alliance has high hopes that by the end of 2007 the remaining public partners will provide the funding needed

to permanently protect Merrimac Farm. The Washington Smart Growth Alliance endorses this project for both its regional benefits and the collaborative approach being undertaken to achieve those benefits.



For more information:

**PRINCE WILLIAM
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE**

<http://www.pwconserve.org>

703-499-4954

FOUR MILE RUN RESTORATION



WHY A PRIORITY?

- › The channelization of Four Mile Run in the 1970s has prevented flooding, but the ecological and aesthetic qualities of the stream corridor have suffered.
- › This project will provide ecological, social, and educational benefits along the stream corridor, while maintaining or improving the stream's flood-control capacity.
- › A new vision for the future of Four Mile Run was developed by Alexandria and Arlington County citizens in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission.



The lower portion of the Four Mile Run watershed, from I-395 at the upstream end to the mouth at National Airport, marks a rough boundary between Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. The watershed is part of one of the most heavily urbanized drainage basins in Northern Virginia. Recurrent flooding was a problem for the adjacent neighborhoods and industrial facilities until the 1970s, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a flood control channel. Although the channel has successfully prevented flooding since the 1970s, the stream's aesthetic and environmental qualities have been diminished. Arlington County and the City of Alexandria are now interested in bringing both aquatic and community life back to Four Mile Run so it will function as a community amenity and focal point, instead of a barrier between jurisdictions.

Through an exciting coincidence of effort and funds, citizens and staff from Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Northern Virginia Regional

Commission, and Congressman Jim Moran have worked together to complete a master plan for the future of Four Mile Run in 2006. The master plan shows how proposed physical, ecological and aesthetic improvements to the stream corridor need not compromise flood protection. As the plan moves into implementation, a demonstration project on stream corridor improvement is underway, and the partners are identifying and securing innovative funding. The project is worthy of a continued high level of attention and full implementation.

For more information:

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL
COMMISSION**

<http://www.novaregion.org/restoration.htm>

703.642.0700

The goal of the Washington Smart Growth Alliance is to enhance regional collaboration; encourage mixed-use, pedestrian- and transit-oriented development projects; promote housing and transportation choices for a range of incomes throughout the region, particularly infill situations; and respect and conserve significant environmental, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about the Alliance, please visit our website, www.SGAlliance.org.

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Robert Kaufman, *Augustine Land and Development*

Stella Koch, *Audubon Naturalist Society*

Julia Koster, *National Capital Planning Commission*

William Thompson, *American Society of
Landscape Architects*

To download this report, please visit our Conservation Priorities web page at <http://www.SGAlliance.org/lcrp.html>. To nominate a conservation initiative for listing in 2008, see the nomination form at <http://www.SGAlliance.org/RCPL.doc>.

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The Alliance is a partnership among the following organizations:

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

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Greater Washington Board of Trade

Metropolitan Washington Builders' Council

Urban Land Institute Washington

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