

Comments of the Friends of Dyke Marsh on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, National Park Services Concept Plan for the Claude Moore Farm area of Turkey Run Park

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We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the concept plan for the Claude Moore Farm area of Turkey Run Park and we thank you for your April 25 public meeting.

As a friends' group for a "sister" unit of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, we are concerned about National Park Service plans and activities that affect the entire parkway. In addition, many species, like birds, bats and insects, do not respect artificial, human-created boundaries and depend on the natural communities all along the parkway. We believe that NPS should be vigilant in protecting the natural resources on its lands and waters, consistent with the NPS mission: "The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world."

Understanding What's There

We believe it is not appropriate to make decisions about future uses without understanding what natural resources are present on the property. Therefore, we urge you to conduct a comprehensive biological survey in all seasons of all of the natural resources present at this property. We could not find this information at the meeting, in your materials, on your website or in conversations with NPS staffers and consultants at the April 25 meeting. This is basic information, essential for sound decision-making, in our view.

It seems possible that there are state- or federally-threatened or endangered species on the property. The Potomac Gorge is nearby, has some rare plants and is one of the most complex ecosystems in the country. The former farm park could possibly have some of the same species as Potomac Gorge, given its proximity.

How this property will be used and managed should be decided within the context of natural resources present or potentially restored, so that options and decisions are fully informed. In addition, NPS plans should fully consider all environmental impacts and those impacts are difficult to identify and analyze without knowing what natural resources are present that would be affected by planned uses.

Stengthening a Conservation Corridor

In 2012, a Northern Virginia Regional Commission study highlighted the need for and goal of reducing habitat fragmentation and creating and expanding conservation corridors across jurisdictional lines. That study designated many GWM Parkway properties as "high value lands."

GWM Parkway is in part a valuable conservation corridor in a heavily developed, metropolitan area where most natural areas have been destroyed or impaired and much biodiversity lost. We know, for example, that many species of birds and frogs are in decline. The parkway is losing thousands of ash

trees to the emerald ash borer. The Claude Moore property offers a prime and rare opportunity to add or enhance another link in the “green necklace” by preserving and enhancing native habitat. It could be part of an enhanced conservation corridor.

Improve Water and Air Quality

Over 80 percent of Fairfax County’s streams are in fair to poor condition, according to County data. The Potomac River’s health is improving, but challenges remain. Most jurisdictions in the area do not meet federal air quality standards for ground-level ozone. Vehicular traffic is the major source of ozone pollution.

Restoring and preserving natural areas like this park near the Potomac River can help reduce polluted runoff into area streams and the river, filter pollutants and offer other environmental benefits. More development, including active recreation, inevitably will mean more polluting vehicular trips, on an already congested parkway. More traffic and development will likely bring more degradation to our air and water.

Always a Farm?

We hope that this planning process is starting without any assumptions about its past uses and that you not assume it will be an active use, recreational area or be continued as a farm park. The National Park Service already has an interpretative farm in the Washington, D.C., area, the National Colonial Farm in Piscataway Park (<https://www.nps.gov/pisc/index.htm>) where visitors can learn about colonial farming and another farm at Oxon Hill Park (<https://www.nps.gov/oxhi/index.htm>).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. We look forward to working with you on this and other projects and concerns, especially those affecting the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.