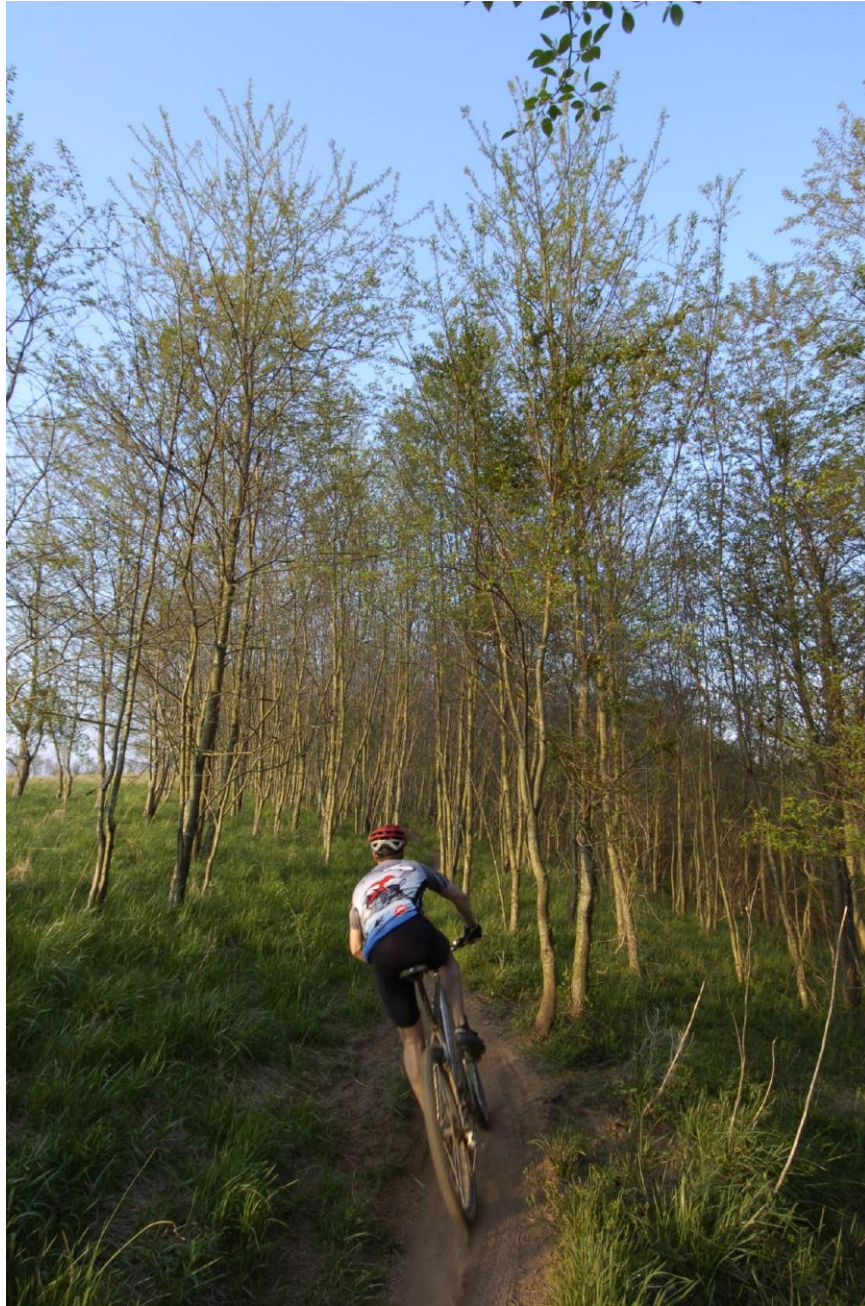


*Mountain Biking in Maryland:  
A Shared-Use Trails Vision for 2020*



**Contributors**

The following organizations contributed to this document.



*Trail Conservancy*



## **Introduction & Core Principles**

This document seeks to provide a vision for what mountain bicycling in Maryland could be in the future—looking at both how and where we ride our bicycles. The mountain bike community has the following goals for the next decade: incorporate trails into our local communities and provide opportunities to experience our local natural areas; create networks that allow us to stretch out and experience the larger open-space in the more remote areas of the state; establish common direction for natural surface trail policy.

Maryland’s Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) has established the goal of creating a network of trails “second to none.” While they have a long way to go, we are excited about the enthusiasm to enhance Maryland trails. Maryland does well today in the middle ground, in trails that provide hour to day-trip length diversions reachable from the core population centers. Open space at areas such as Gambrill, Patapsco Valley, and Seneca Creek provide recreation and escape of a quality comparable to any in the region. But when one looks closer to home or for faraway diversions, Maryland comes up short. Our communities are often poorly connected into the trails and open space, although there are notable success stories, including NCR Trail, Capitol Crescent, and Rachel Carson Greenway. Destination trails are where Maryland compares most poorly to its regional neighbors. Regardless of your modality, when planning weekend-length or longer trips, odds are your eyes and dollars turn toward locations in Pennsylvania, Virginia, or West Virginia to the detriment of Maryland, especially for high country destinations.

While Maryland may not today lead the region in trails, it has the resources and opportunities to do just that. A legacy of land protection at the state and local level has set aside wonderful open spaces that show off the best the Mid-Atlantic has to offer. And in the metro core, corridors are available to link communities to one another and to escape as far as our ambitions will take us.

When considering options to maximize this potential, we recommend focusing on a few core principals. They seek to both inform the discussion and provide general direction as any process moves forward.

### ***Interagency Planning Cooperation/Coordination***

*Local, State, and Federal agencies must work together to create connected complementary trail networks. It is not unusual for larger contiguous expanses of open space to have multiple owners. Seneca Watershed and Catoctin Mountain are but two examples. To reach full potential, everyone must work together.*

### ***Trails Within The Community***

*Bringing trails into the community must become less the exception and more the rule. As traffic and congestion in this region quickly become the worst in the nation, requiring the use of a motor vehicle to access recreation is detrimental to quality of life.*

### ***Trails Spanning The State***

*Maryland is blessed with long-range trail resources like the Appalachian Trail, C&O Tow Path, and Great Eastern Trail. These should provide inspiration to create locally long and/or through trails and to enhance existing trails by providing connectivity.*

***Progression Within Trail Networks***

*While it is not practical to accommodate the needs of every user along a given segment, it is important to provide a variety or “progression” of styles, difficulties, and experiences within each larger collection of trails. This variety should be applied within as well as across modalities. To meet the varied goals of users, this may require selective creation of targeted trail segments. Trails featuring progression will allow users to develop their backcountry skills; techniques moving across the landscape, improved wayfinding. And also allow new discoveries on subsequent visits. Lowest common-denominator or trails lacking progression quickly become stale and discourage repeated use.*

***Trail Is Not A Four-Letter Word***

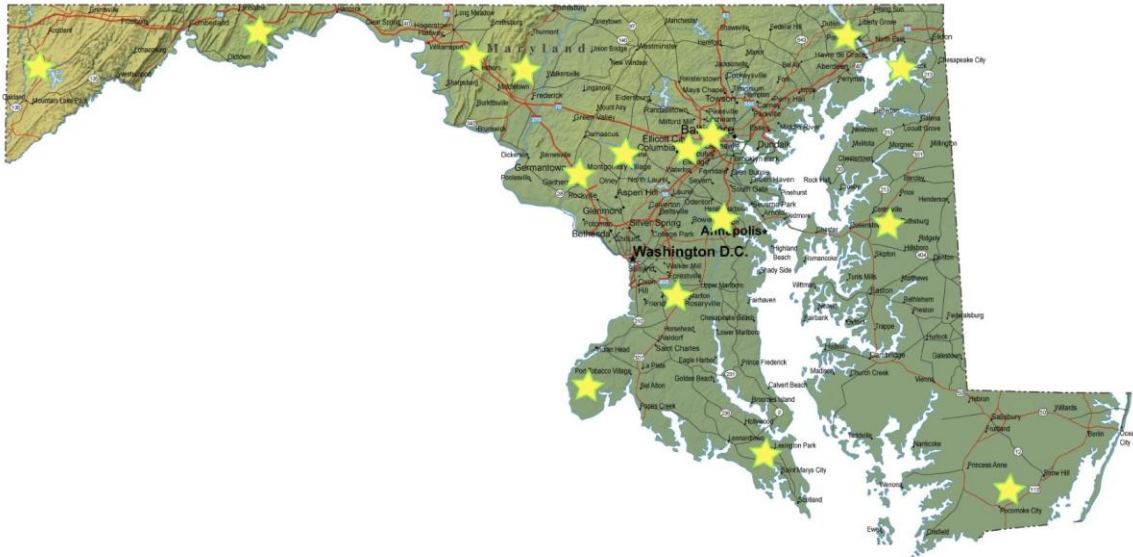
*Many right-of-ways designated as trails in Maryland are actually decommissioned roads, extraction routes, or game/social paths. Never intended for continuous long-term service, more often than not they have degraded to a poor condition that harm the resource and provides an inferior user experience. It should be a goal to restore these corridors and replace them with well-designed single & doubletrack paths that better meet user expectations and integrate with the landscape.*

*Further, some landowners actively shun trails entirely. Examples include the watershed managers for the Baltimore and Washington metro areas. Sustainable single & doubletrack trails provide opportunities to provide responsible escape & recreation where space is at a premium. They provide education and interpretation to encourage protection and preservation of our last great places.*

This last point cannot be overstated. Moving forward, efforts must be made to create and maintain trails that are physically (do not result in continual long-term damage to the resource) and socially (provide experiences to satisfy the full range of park visitors) sustainable. Sometimes physical constraints and demands for access require that these goals be bent. But as a general rule, trails that do not satisfy these requirements must eventually be closed and reclaimed. While it is not possible to create a single trail, or even a single system, that meets the needs of every visitor, it is possible to reach this goal within a given region and across the state.

While beyond the scope of this document, the creation and maintenance of trails requires consistent funding heretofore not seen from state, county, and municipal government. Development of new and/or creative funding sources must accompany any discussion of trails.

## Potential Trail Projects



### ***Project Sites...***

*Annapolis/Bacon Ridge  
Cosca Regional Park/Rosaryville State  
Park  
Deep Creek Lake/Garrett County  
Elk Neck State Forest & Park  
Frederick/Gambrill State Park  
Greenbrier State Park  
Greenridge State Forest  
Gwynn Falls Park*

*Montgomery County/Seneca Creek State  
Park  
Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management  
Area  
Patapsco Valley State Park  
Patuxent River State Park  
Pocomoke State Forest & Park  
Saint Mary's Lake State Park  
Susquehanna State Park  
Tuckahoe State Park*

The body of this document contains brief descriptions of potential projects. The set is intended as a representative sample, not a comprehensive wish list. In some cases, a relatively small addition or change will make a huge difference in the success of an existing system – the addition of sustainable water crossings at Tuckahoe. In others, wholesale renovation of a park’s entire trail system is recommended – as at Susquehanna. Distributed throughout the state, some are “shovel ready”, others already actively discussed within the management & user communities, and a few thought-exercises of the ultimate possibilities. All embody the five core principals guiding this vision. If implemented, all will go a long way toward creating “a trail system second to none.”





### ***Trail & Volunteer Synergy***

*Natural surface trails depend on the sweat and passion of volunteers for their construction & upkeep. It is a growing repeating cycles: trails create passion, passion is transferred to the land, and manifested in volunteer efforts, that create more passion among the participants and new visitors ...*

*(City of Frederick Municipal Forest, image courtesy of Joe Whitehair)*

### **Annapolis Area/Bacon Ridge Natural Area – Trails For The Capitol Region**

Annapolis is the capitol of Maryland, and home of the stewards of our state lands – the Department of Natural Resources, yet passive recreation facilities are lacking. Annapolis residents currently drive to trails at Patapsco, Rosaryville, or other points even farther away just to find a natural surface trail of adequate length. Even with few existing trail systems, years of careful land protection and stewardship from a variety of partners has created great potential for trail enthusiasts in and around Annapolis.

Waterworks Park is a 500-acre Annapolis City park located on the west side of town along Defense Highway. The city Parks & Recreation Department recently closed this fee area because of budget shortfalls. While never heavily used, likely because of poor public access, little publication, and a fee structure making the park more expensive to visit than a national park, this area has much potential. The slopes are more gentle than many of the surrounding areas and there are dense groves of mountain laurel, which gives the setting an alpine air and helps regulate the easy creation of new social paths. The park used to maintain a few miles of singletrack trails, all of which are still in good shape, though there are a few aligned on fall lines. There are a number of existing road beds, many connections into the surrounding communities, and recently, new ATV-generated trails throughout. The park has similar water challenges that other area parks have, but much potential.

The Waterworks trail system was previously closed to mountain bikes and is now officially closed to all users. The mountain bike community would be willing to spearhead a reopening of the park, adopt the trail system, provide maintenance and courtesy patrols, if the City would allow bicycle access to the natural surface trails.

The centerpiece of any trail opportunity in the Annapolis region is the Bacon Ridge Natural Area. Comprising more than 1,000 acres paralleling I-97 once planned expansion is complete, this new park would be the largest passive recreation area in central Anne Arundel County. Bacon Ridge would serve the residents of the Annapolis area as well as West County, neither of which has passive recreation facilities. The park's status has long been held up by issues surrounding a land transfer between the State and County, but is slowly moving forward.

Although there are a number of water challenges, there sheer size of this park presents the opportunity for miles of sustainable trail. Existing byways, most commonly created by nearby residents using ATVs, in general follow old roadbeds. These are often aligned poorly and suffering from erosion. The County has created a steering committee to look at this land and determine appropriate uses as well as trail potential. The mountain bike community hopes to see equestrian, hiking, birding, and mountain bike use in the greenway.

It would be possible to link all of Bacon Ridge from north to south with natural surface trails. Additionally, there is potential to create a trail network similar to many areas in Montgomery County that would connect to adjacent parks, only here it would mean connecting to the Fair Grounds, Golf Course, and eventually Waterworks Park. In their Y2K atlas, the Maryland Greenways Commission proposed just such a route. There are many challenges to create this long trail network, but with thousands of acres already preserved and owned by state, county or city governments, the system only needs a coordinated effort to make it a reality.

### **Potomac to Patuxent: Cosca RP & Rosaryville SP – Pearls On A Necklace**

Prince Georges County Parks is actively working to create a trail connection between the Potomac and Patuxent. With more *Project Open Space* commitment from both the State and County parks to purchase lands along the way, and more conveyed during development, this connection could happen in our lifetime. While the corridor is still intact, in some places development has already claimed the desirable upland areas. Since, in these select segments there is no longer any choice but to be close to the flood plain, the trail will require both elevated and/or paved as well as natural surface construction.

For the trail enthusiast the corridor offers two significant destinations along the way: Rosaryville State and Cosca Regional Parks. Surrounding a core of picnic and ball-sport infrastructure, Cosca's near 700 acres host a network of natural surface trails crossing the park's dramatic stream valley terrain. The system is particularly popular with the many equestrians who live adjacent to the park. While the current trails are not well-aligned and are in poor condition as a result, a public/private effort between Prince Georges Parks, Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts, and Trail Conservancy is hard at work renovating the system into a sustainable state. Cosca's campground, one of two in the county system, makes it an important stop on the route between the rivers. Of particular interest to mountain bikers is the proposed special-use skills park proposed for the northwest corner of the property in a re-purposed industrial site.

In the six years since its "re-opening", Rosaryville State Park has become **the** trail destination for Marylanders south of DC. The park's rolling meadows provide opportunity for equestrian fox hunting as well as competitive jumping. Its 10 miles of sustainable rolling-contour trail are particularly popular with mountain bikers. Planned improvements to the park include rerouting a section on the Perimeter Trail to move it away from the US 301 forest buffer. Completion of the internal trail, started in 2007, the addition of bridging/boardwalking on chronically wet areas throughout, and a new mid-park connector trail, would increase the utility of the existing network.

The corridor's northern terminus occurs along the Jug Bay section of the Patuxent. Jug Bay hosts one of the most significant and diverse ecological communities in the state. More than 200 bird species are observed annually and, while the first statewide survey is now underway (2010-2014), it is likely Jug Bay will lead the state in amphibian & reptile diversity. A wide range of public open space is available as well; Anne Arundel's Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary, State Park's Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary, in addition to the Jug Bay Natural Area site of Prince George's Patuxent River Park. All three offer superlative opportunities for interpretive trail use. Especially on the contiguous Prince Georges & State Park properties, joint planning and improved connectivity can better leverage these resources.





***Western Wilds***

*Washington, Alleghany, and Garrett Counties provide natural splendor as bold & inspiring as any in the eastern US.*

*(Green Ridge State Forest, image courtesy of Nathan Shearer)*

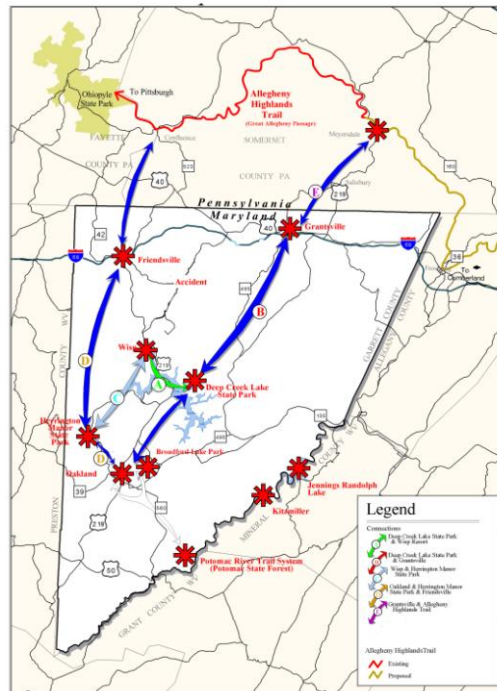
## **Deep Creek Lake & Garrett County — A Trails Resort Community**

Garrett County is a rural county in far western Maryland. Geographically and historically aligned with Appalachia, Garrett County is a stunningly beautiful natural wonderland with mountains, rivers, lakes and woods including the virgin Hemlock forest at Swallow Falls Park, Deep Creek Lake, lovely forested New Germany State Park, the Youghiogheny, Casselman, and Savage Rivers. Garrett County has **more than 700,000 acres of state owned land, more than any other county in the state** and comprising approximately 20% of the entire county land area. While the county has 130 miles of trails, none of these trails are more than 15 miles long with most being very short. Existing trails also need maintenance and better signage. Garrett County has a particular interest in leveraging its public lands as well used, sustainable recreational use areas that draw guests and are used by local population. Development of specialized recreation more suitable on private land, such as lift-served trails at Wisp or other unique paths at Adventure Sports Center International (ASCI), would be more attractive to these developers if a larger connected network leveraged their investment. Greater coordination with DNR, a major land manager in the county, would be helpful.

Garrett County is renowned for its world-class whitewater and the same amazing scenery and interesting terrain will make it a popular destination for all types of biking and hiking. Garrett Trails, the local trail development and promotional organization, seeks *a well-used network of outstanding quality trails that provide access to Garrett County's historic, municipal and environmental treasures and that link to trails outside the county*. The Master Recreational Trail Plan developed by Garrett Trails in 2002 envisions this interconnected trail system. The plan has been further fleshed out and prioritized as follows.

**Interconnect trails—trunk trails**—that are useable by a variety of users. These main trails will connect diverse parts of the county and connect the county to major routes outside the county. They will be wide, hard surface trails suitable for casual walking or bicycling. Currently, the top priorities for the primary 'trunk' trails are segments of the Garrett Loop. The Garrett Loop takes several existing long trails in the county and links them together into a 150 mile loop through the center of Garrett County and connects to the Great Allegheny Passage (132 miles of destination bike trail to our north that connects Pittsburgh to Cumberland). The concept of the Garrett Loop is to connect areas of the county and to provide a logical 3 to 5 day biking trip through the county. Extending Meadow Mountain trail, adding a Casselman River trail and several roadside trails are segments on which Garrett Trails is working.

**Great Garrett Loop**  
Proposed Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail



### **Premiere, Destination Mountain Bike Areas**

*Margraff Plantation.* This approximately 8-mile singletrack mountain biking network was developed by volunteers and is located in Savage River State Forest. It needs maintenance and signage to be more user-friendly.

*Fork Run.* 550 acres owned by the county is envisioned as a mountain biking, hiking and climbing area. The primary mountain biking loop is currently being developed by ASCI and Garrett Trails.

*Potomac-Garrett State Forest.* With more than 11,000 acres, this State Forest already contains the popular Swallow Falls to Herrington Manor Trail and could easily be developed to include many miles of interconnected biking and hiking trails.

*Wisp Ski Resort.* Wisp is the premiere lift-served mountain in Maryland. Already host of gravity-focused mountain bicycling events, the mountain has potential to host world-class downhill & freeride-style trails. Supported by existing resort infrastructure and complemented by a significant traditional backcountry network, such trails will draw visitors from the surrounding metro areas and beyond.

### **Scenic Hiking Areas**

Garrett County already has several hiking areas that could be further developed including Mt. Aetna trails, New Germany State Park, Monroe Run Trail, and Big Savage Mountain Trail.

Key to the long term success of the Garrett trail vision is significant cooperation among all land managers, all land owners, public and private alike. Various local and state agencies must work with a single shared purpose to create a successful system. Further, private landowners must be encouraged to participate as well. There are numerous examples of similar approaches being employed with great success. Park City, Utah is a community very similar to Garrett County. In 1992, the greater Park City area had 10 miles of trail. Today there are more than 330 miles crossing public & private lands, connecting communities, providing recreation, and increasing the quality of life of the whole area. Boise Idaho's Ridge To Rivers network applies a similar approach to a more traditional urban setting.

### **Elk Neck State Park – Extending The Bay’s Reach**

Elk Neck State Park is the northern gateway to the Bay region. Just south of the town of North East, the park is situated at the confluence of the Elk & North East Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. The park contains a mix of upland habitat on high bluffs overlooking wetland marshes. The historic Turkey Point Lighthouse sits atop a 100’ promontory overlooking the Bay. Visitors are accommodated by more than 250 campsites in addition to picnic and water-based recreation infrastructure.

Sadly, the trails do not rise to the quality of the setting nor the other recreation opportunities. While 13 miles of trails are blazed to create the park’s network, it is not a well-used resource. As currently configured, the trails are not attractive to visiting campers or area residents. Many segments follow “paths of least resistance”, traversing direct routes across flat low-lying areas or straight up fall-line alignments. The result is chronic wetness or continual erosion, in either case trail that negatively impacts the resource in closest proximity to the Chesapeake Bay. Without a wider range of recreational opportunity, use at Elk Neck is not what it could be. Once out of the warmer season, attendance dips strongly with a small bump for hunting season.

But Elk Neck has the potential to be a great trails/natural resource destination, one that compliments and reinforces its water-based opportunities. And to be interconnected via trails with its peer northeast public lands. At more than 2000 acres, Elk Neck has the potential to host a stacked-loop trail system that better highlights the natural wonder of the area. Easier trails more suitable for families, young people, and novice backcountry enthusiasts can be positioned convenient to campgrounds and picnic areas. Narrower, more rugged, trails will take more experienced longer-legged visitors deeper into the park interior and/or higher on its bluffs. With new sustainable single and doubletrack routes in place, segments that negatively impact the resource can be closed and reclaimed. Ideally, any Elk Neck trail system will be tied into a larger network, linking to area state forest lands, and possibly onto Fairhill State park and even properties in Delaware and Pennsylvania, creating a truly trail interconnected northern Delmarva. Area trail advocates in the Elk Neck Trails Association have proposed just such links, creating an Elk Neck Trail linking state park & forest to North East and the Mason Dixon Trail.

Local advocates, including Elk Neck Trails and the Delaware Trail Spinners, are already working together to present a proposal to park management. A potential first phase suggests transitioning the park system toward one modeled on the stacked-loop concept. Ideas include creation of an easier “campers loop” linking the accommodation infrastructure plus an initial backcountry loop. To truly become a region destination, a goal of 20 miles of trail in Elk River, plus connections to surround public properties, are proposed.





### ***Trail Progression***

*Many park visitors never leave their vehicles. Most of those who do stay close to developed facilities. For those few who leave their comfort-zone and enter the backcountry, provide opportunities to experience it, immerse ones self in it, to be challenged by it. A range of trails that provide a full progression of challenges & experiences only compliment protected open-space.*

*(Patapsco Valley State Park, image courtesy of Joe Foley)*

### **Frederick: Gambrill, Cunningham Falls, Catoctin – North To Michaux**

Frederick County has the potential to be a true mountain bike trail destination that attracts visitors from far and wide. The largest county area-wise in Maryland, it has significant open space and a network of trails to serve as a starting point for building out a trail system “second to none.” Weather conditions allow for year round trail use except for extreme circumstances, such as the Blizzard of 2010. The native topography and rocky terrain provide the experience desired by many of today’s riders.

At its heart Frederick City is a suburban outdoor mecca, drawing visitors and residents alike due to its close proximity to active recreation opportunities. Sitting at the eastern edge of the Appalachian Mountains, it has amenities to attract out of town recreational users and keep them here for days while providing outdoor opportunities from mountain biking to hiking to kayaking a short distance from the city. The center of downtown Frederick is a mere 6 miles from Gambrill State Park. Thurmont is a similar distance to Cunningham Falls State Park. Continued evolution of area trails will allow Frederick and its neighbors to join Boulder CO and Hood River OR as premier communities for outdoor-minded residents.

A large network of shared-use trails that are available to all non-motorized users needs to be established. Many of today’s trail enthusiasts are looking for long distance options. With Gambrill State Park, the Frederick Municipal Forest, Cunningham Falls State Park and Catoctin Mountain Park providing contiguous green space, the potential to ride from the City of Frederick to the Pennsylvania state line and beyond exists if equitable access were established. Pennsylvania’s Michaux State Forest can easily be connected, extending the network nearly to Harrisburg, PA. Challenges to creating this link include: obtaining trail easements across private land, the Wildland designation in Cunningham Falls and the scoping process to open any natural surface trail in a National Park unit to bicycling. Any trail system that is viewed as “world class” or “second to none” has facilities that will keep users engaged for several days to a week. Frederick County’s forests have a good start, but access needs to expand and trail quality improved.

Many trails on all four pieces of property are actually legacy extraction roads, never intended for long term use and not designed for sustainability. Lack of maintenance and alignment along fall lines has caused substantial degradation across the entire system. In many cases, trails need to be relocated to be sustainable and provide a quality user experience.

Enhanced wayfinding (blazing, signage, maps) goes hand-in-hand with any trail improvements. Both locally within a single park and consistently over the range of parks. Frederick Municipal Forest lacks wayfinding aides almost entirely (currently being addressed by a working group, including Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts & Potomac Appalachian Trail Club).

Creating links from the high country to the town communities will leverage both sets of infrastructure. The importance of multi-modal trail links between park and people cannot be overstated. These transportation networks serve many purposes: from allowing local users to access the parks via foot, hoof, or bicycle, to reducing traffic, to allowing visitors to arrive at their vacation spot and then move about without an automobile, to allow thru-travelers to drop out of the hills to refresh their persons and provisions.

Big visions like this take coordination between multiple agencies, but the end result is a trail system that attracts residents and out of town visitors and brings money to both the parks and the local municipalities. Additionally, viewing and planning trails systems as one may help spur conversations and preservation actions which also view open spaces as a single contiguous whole, encouraging more effective management outcomes.

### **Greenbrier State Park – New Opportunities In The Outer Suburbs**

An established park with a large campground, man-made swimming lake, and a network of decommissioned roads that host a number of trail-based events each year, it may seem odd to use the phrase *new opportunities* when describing Greenbrier. But the eastern and northern portions of the park are just that for trail enthusiasts. Nestled above the bedroom communities for both Baltimore and Washington, these underutilized slopes provide an excellent venue to provide additional sustainable singletrack opportunities to relieve use-pressure from close-by parks at Gambrill and Seneca Creek.

Though arguably more convenient, with its closer proximity to the highway, anecdotally Greenbrier sees a fraction of the trail use of Gambrill State Park. Within the mountain bicycling community two reasons are stated: that there is not enough mileage and that the road-based trails do not provide the experience many are seeking. These two actually compound one another; wider road-based routes provide a less “dense” trail experience, making Greenbrier’s approximately 10 miles of paths seem like far less. While there are trails distributed around much of the park, most visitors confine themselves to those which lend themselves to loops, in the area “behind the lake” in the southwest corner, exacerbating even further the perception of limited mileage.

The slopes of Bartmans Hill and the area between the park gate and the boat ramp area provide an opportunity to “close the loop” with the rest of the park and create a more functional trail system. Recent acquisition of the inholding previously bisecting the Water Tank Trail makes the creation of a new sustainable singletrack segment on the lower reaches of Bartmans Hill even more attractive. While the northern area is currently free of trails, it does support existing infrastructure in the form of the park maintenance facility and the access road to an adjacent natural gas station. Closing the loop will better tie together the range of park recreation facilities (backcountry areas, campground, lake, visitors center), creating a synergy where the sum is larger than the component parts. And as a fee-based facility, increased visitation from improved trails will generate additional revenue.

Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts has been working with park management to propose a phased set of trail improvements including the Bartmans Hill to Boat Ramp singletrack trail addition. The first phase, a lakeshore bypass to separate traditional trail users from fisherman, was completed in early 2010. If it proves successful, any Bartmans Hill/Boat Ramp addition might be followed up with the creation of new sustainable singletrack to replace the decommissioned road/trails, which could then be formally closed and re-contoured. A new singletrack trail system would then be in place at Greenbrier, creating an all-new recreation opportunity in the outer suburbs.





### ***Connections***

*The C&O Canal Tow Path is just the longest and most well known trail connection in the region. There are others. Connect and leverage them whenever possible. Use the C&O, the NCR Trail, the Seneca Greenway, to turn a 5 mile trail into a 50 mile loop. The relatively minor efforts required to “fill the gaps” in the Patapsco Valley thru-trail will create a natural surface corridor linking the heart of Howard & Carroll Counties to the edge of Baltimore City.*

*(C&O Canal National Historical Park, image courtesy of Nathan Shearer)*

## **Green Ridge State Forest – Maryland’s Mountain Playground**

Just west of Hancock, Sidling Hill provides a visual and physical gateway to Maryland’s mountain west. Passing through the cut on I-68, it is clear a visitor has finally left behind Maryland’s metro suburbs and firmly entered the state’s western wilds. Sadly, many Marylanders bypass this experience for surrounding states. Pennsylvania (Raystown Lake, Huntingdon), Virginia (Douthat State Park, Clifton Forge), and West Virginia (Canaan Valley, Davis) all offer weekend camping/trail destinations that provide discovery/recreation/accommodations far superior to any in Maryland’s mountain west. Green Ridge State Forest, just west of Sidling Hill, offers an opportunity to reverse this trend.

Green Ridge is Maryland’s second-largest state forest. Spanning the breadth of the state, from Mason-Dixon to Potomac, the forest’s 46,000 acres and 1,600 feet of vertical relief create a canvas for visitors to see some of the best of Maryland, all within two hours of the Baltimore and Washington metro areas. Currently, this canvas is mostly bare. There are few trails in the forest, most of which are re-purposed roads that do not provide users with a connection to the landscape. Further, many of these trails are standalone parallel north/south segments that do not allow the looping opportunities desired by many visitors. The permanent 12-mile mountain bike loop is isolated, uninviting, and too short to warrant the trip from the metro areas. A small visitors center is located far from the heart of the forest, access to camping and most trails requires visitors to return to the highway and travel to another exit. Numerous camping opportunities exist, but the primitive sites are widely spaced, discouraging group or extended-family activities.

While current conditions do not rise to the level warranting a visit by many today, Green Ridge has arguably the most backcountry recreation potential of any open space in the state. Rising from the banks of the Potomac to the border of Pennsylvania, Green Ridge provides a wide range of terrain to host a network of trails. The scarcity of existing trails actually simplifies the creation of all-new sustainable routes and loops. Home to a portion of the C&O Canal Tow Path and Great Eastern Trail, any new trails are by default linked into two larger networks, allowing Green Ridge to be a stop for longer legged thru-travelers. The C&O’s PawPaw Tunnel in particular is a signature feature for trail visitors to the park. While a patchwork of Wildland designations may compromise larger muscle-powered shared-use loop options, at the same time they also offer opportunities to host solitude-based trail segments. When combined with the existing motorized recreation and river-based opportunities, a new modern & sustainable natural surface trail network will provide the full spectrum of backcountry opportunities. Last but not least, Green Ridge’s unique dry-mountain ecosystem and varied history provide excellent opportunities for educational interpretation.

The immense potential of Green Ridge makes it a challenge to suggest one area to host a prototype development. Spanning I-68 and the Potomac and convenient to the visitors center and existing camping infrastructure, perhaps the 15 Mile Creek Area could be the site of an initial new trail system. To become a long-day or weekend destination, total mileage of a sustainable singletrack loop system should reach 50 miles or more. This mileage could be broken into two or more subsets linked together via a Tow Path backbone.

## **Gwynns Falls Trail – Recreation and Connections Through The Heart Of Baltimore**

In pursuit of a trail system "second to none", MDNR should take notice of a shining jewel in Baltimore and Maryland's Bike/Ped infrastructure, and help provide the final touches to make it an example to any region in search of the ultimate multi-user greenway. The Gwynns Falls main trail extends 15 miles from Middle Branch Park and Baltimore's Inner Harbor all the way to the northern end of Gwynns Falls and Leakin Park at Security Blvd and I-70. It is supported by a *Trail Council*, formed in 1998, and made up of active members of the community as well as public officials. Their mission statement includes working to *publicize, raise funds for, generate volunteer involvement in, monitor the City's management of, and in other ways support and improve the Gwynns Falls Trail*. This council has been very active and quite helpful, serving as eyes and ears on the trail for the City and helping prioritize projects and develop the trail in smart ways.

The most amazing thing about the Gwynns Falls Trail is the diversity of users. The trail connects 30 distinct Baltimore neighborhoods together, spanning 9 city parks. On any day you will find folks commuting to work, cycling, running, walking, rollerblading, and more. After school there are kids zipping to and from friends' houses and moms with strollers. The combination of transportation and recreation needs that this greenway provides is tremendous, and yet there is room to improve still.

What makes this trail work so well? It meets the needs of so many people. It isn't just a bicycle trail. It wasn't made just for bird watching along the Middle Branch. It isn't just a quick route for commuters. It is all of these things and more. Infrastructure exists to accommodate any trail user: several restroom facilities, multiple trailheads and access points, friendly trail surfaces, and good lighting (most of the way). There are more than 30 informational panels along the trail explaining some of the historic events, ecological relationships, and natural beauty that grace the greenway. Another reason the trail works is because of how much of the city it ties together.

What can be done now to continue the growth and development? First, move ahead with plans for a mountain bicycle skills area to be built at the northwest end of the trail. Too few opportunities exist for people riding bicycles, and a pump track and related skills stations are an attraction for a wide range of cyclists as well as facilitating rider development in a safe setting. Pump tracks are cheap to construct, easy to maintain, and universally enjoyed by young and old, skilled and unskilled riders alike.

In parallel with the bike park development, renovation and expansion of the natural surfaces trails surrounding the Gwynns Falls Trail in Leakin and Gwynns Falls Parks would turn the northern end of the system into a viable destination for mountain bike enthusiasts in the western suburbs. The value of increased use of the trail and surrounding areas to the health of the landscape and adjacent communities cannot be overstated. Additional legitimate trail users will discourage undesirable behavior and create a positive cascade on the greater Gwynns Falls trail area. While there is insufficient land to displace Patapsco Valley from its top perch, the two parks do provide an opportunity to relieve some user pressure at Patapsco while creating a trail system linked into the community and accessible by means other than car.

Additional mileage needs to be in place to ensure the future growth and development of the trail. There are numerous ways to add spurs and extensions onto the existing Gwynns Falls Trail.



***Build The Next Schaeffer Farms***

*Seneca Creek's Schaeffer Farms trail system was the first shared success for MDNR and the mountain bicycling community. A triumph of shared-use, sustainability, and public-private partnerships, it is now also becoming an example of the power of connections & linked trail systems.*

*(Seneca Creek State Park/Schaeffer Farms Trails, image courtesy of Joe Foley)*



### **Montgomery & Seneca Creek SP – “Wheel and Spoke” Connecting Communities**

Seneca Creek State Park is near the physical center of Montgomery County and is very popular with county residents and indeed cyclists from all around the Washington, DC metro area. In 1995 MDNR approved the development of the Schaeffer Farm trail system in a previously undeveloped part of the park. In 15 years Schaeffer Farm has grown to 15 miles of trails and has been linked to MNCPPC’s Black Hill Regional Park, making a 30 mile continuous trail system just minutes from a million residents and a half million jobs. In addition to the Schaeffer Farm trails, about 8 miles of trails in the Clopper Lake day use area of Seneca Park are also open to mountain bikes. MDNR has just approved new natural surface trail sections connecting Schaeffer Farm to Clopper Lake.

Trail users have informally created a Montgomery County “Epic” trail loop. Using the aforementioned crescent through Seneca Creek to Black Hill, bicyclists and walkers use roads and paths to stitch together other sections of trails and open space. The result is a 40-mile loop; clockwise from Black Hill to Little Bennett, Lower Magruder, and Seneca Greenway (all MNCPPC properties) back to Clopper Lake. Making use of Muddy Branch (MNCPPC) and the C&O Path (NPS) extends the loop to over 60 miles. Both contain upwards of two-thirds of their mileage on natural surface trails. There is the potential to increase this percentage is there – the corridors exist, in some cases trail is already proposed to bridge gaps.

Once enough gaps are bridged and the “wheel” grows large & strong enough, connections to the county “spokes” fall into place. The 60-mile loop already ties into the Muddy Branch system extending Seneca Creek’s shared-use reach to the Potomac. Heading north towards Damascus opens the possibility of tying into the Patuxent (MDNR) and Rachel Carson (MNCPPC) systems. Any future trail facility as part of the InterCounty Connector highway (SHA, MNCPPC) would add a link to the Rock Creek system (MNCPPC, NPS).

The Clopper/Schaeffer Farms connector is already underway. Additional trail at Black Hill has been designed and now awaits its turn on the implementation list. Montgomery County is in the planning process for a significant redevelopment of the trail resources at Little Bennett that offer the potential to bridge another large gap. Shared-use challenges exist along the “wheel” (MDNR-managed portions of the Seneca Greenway), and “spokes” (MNCPPC Rachel Carson trail corridor), but a trail-connected Montgomery County is almost here. For some adventurous visionary trailblazers, it is already.

### **Patapsco Valley State Park – Interconnected Systems Equate to Epic Experiences**

A nationally known stream valley park located in the center of MD, the protected banks of the Patapsco River flows 32 miles from rural and agriculture communities through the heart of highly developed urban reaches with over 170 miles of multiuse trails. Patapsco Valley is the original park in the state system. Included in the eight developed areas are three campgrounds, countless picnic facilities, playgrounds and fishing holes; baseball fields, opportunities for canoeing, disk golf and orienteering; barbecue pits, comfort stations, historical sites and friendly user groups.

Connecting nearly all of Patapsco's non-continuous parkland is the Thru Trail, a trail that currently reaches from Elkridge to Sykesville in one epic adventure that takes users on a journey more than 35 miles one way.

The Thru Trail should be considered the backbone through which all communities and developed areas along the river are connected. Using a spoke-type arrangement, users could conceivably travel from Southwest Area Park in Baltimore Highlands to Roaming Run Community Park in Finksburg; Soldiers Delight in Owings Mills to Hugg-Thomas Wildlife Management Area in Gaither; Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park in Baltimore City to Rockburn Branch in Northern Howard County; and to all those points interchangeably. Further, with the additions of rail-to-trail conversions, users can connect to places as far away as Annapolis, Towson, York, PA, Washington, DC, even Pittsburg, PA.

There are areas within Patapsco's boundaries that are jewels in waiting. Connecting them with the Thru Trail would establish a trail system worthy of its epic designation. Moving from Elkridge and points downstream toward Sykesville one can imagine small trail systems serving everyone from bird watchers in Halethorpe Ponds to equestrians in Woodstock. Just downstream of the Avalon and Orange Grove areas lie untapped miles of low relatively flat lands easily traversed by families out for extended hikes and rides. Tying a new southeast gateway for Patapsco into the region's paved trail network via connection with the W&BA would expand car-free park access to the entire Baltimore/Annapolis corridor.

Jumping upstream of the primary developed areas of Avalon, Orange Grove, Glen Artney, and Hilton, improvement of properties west and east of Ilchester Road in Howard County would connect existing and new communities and provide opportunities to expand the most popular areas of Patapsco. Opening this region would have an additional positive effect of decreasing and spreading out users in a portion of the park that is by some accounts "loved to death". Making connections between the ever-encroaching privately held lands in and around Ellicott City, State Highways is currently striping roads to accommodate use along its shoulders. With these connections, making the journey from north and south sections of the park becomes a reality for all users. The easiest of all the connections can be made in the Hollofield Area. By establishing the headquarters office as a waypoint, the Thru Trail becomes a vector for MDNR and park leadership to become more tangible to visitors rather than that isolated pullout off US-40. The Pickall Area around the I-70 crossing has one of the largest untapped parcels of beautiful sloped forested stream valley. With a bit of sustainable design, a stacked loop trail network would impact neighbors and common users in positive ways for ages. Parcels between Daniels and Woodstock represent hours upon hours of opportunity to get

lost in our surroundings and literally move back in time. Extending upstream of the McKeldin Area along the North and South Forks, impacts of use can be decreased and visitor experience improved by designing sustainable trails in and around the reaches of the river as it meanders near Sykesville and Liberty Watershed.

The potential of these areas is limitless. All of these destinations could be connected together to create a system of trails that would promote our state as the center of bike-able and walk-able communities that we all strive for.



### ***Shared, Preferred, and Single-Use***

*In the populated areas common to Maryland, shared-use trails are the best approach to meet the escape & recreation demands on the limited open space. Preferred-use trails, still shared but targeted toward the desired experience of a particular group, address a specific need while still welcoming the larger population of visitors. Single-use trails acknowledge that some needs are best accommodated by dedicated areas or trails. These needs may be driven by experience goals or unique modality qualities. Examples include solitude trails and equestrian jump facilities. For bicyclists, this may be a skills park or a directional “flow” trail.*

*(BLM King Range National Conservation Area/Tolkan Bike Skills Park, image courtesy of Jason Barnes)*

**Patuxent River Corridor: – The Unnoticed Central Artery Of The Metro Core**

Navigable deep into their watersheds and passing through the center of the two major cities of our region, the Patapsco and Potomac Rivers dominate many discussions. But it is the Patuxent whose corridor carves its path through the heart of many of our neighborhoods. While great potential for appreciation and recreation exists, for most the Patuxent is just a brief green respite on the rush-hour crawl along MD-97, US-29, I-95, or MD-4.

From its headwaters above Damascus to the mouth on the Chesapeake adjacent to Lexington Park & Solomons Island, much of the Patuxent River corridor is protected, via a combination of state, county, and watershed holdings. Recreation and appreciation occur, but much of it is unstructured or informal. The state lands in the upper reaches are a popular venue for equestrian “fox hunting” events where participants enjoy galloping along a network of unmaintained legacy roadbeds. WSSC manages two significant watersheds at Triadelphia and Rocky Gorge Reservoirs but access beyond the picnic tables requires a difficult-to-navigate permit process open to only select communities. The county parks are the most progressive in their management of the river. Prince Georges in particular is working toward trail and interpretive access continuously along its bank from Laurel to Jug Bay.

The watershed areas, where access is currently most restricted, provide some of the “lowest hanging fruit”. Rather than shun visitors, WSSC could work with county and state parks to create opportunities to show residents their water resource and the importance of protecting it. The large MDNR holding along both banks in the upper reaches also provides a significant venue with the potential to provide open space recreation for poorly served upper Montgomery & western Howard residents. State Parks has made repeated attempts to inventory these parcels but Wildland designation presents a roadblock to reaching out to the full shared-use muscle-powered trail community.

The Patuxent corridor is a golden opportunity for jurisdictions to come together with a common focus to inform and educate citizens on the importance of these resources via low-impact trail based recreation. As described, great potential exists to create interpreted and recreation trail opportunities. Not surprisingly, passing through the heart of central Maryland, any significant trail along the Patuxent provides potential to tie into other trail infrastructure discussed here (Seneca Creek/Montgomery & Cosca-Rosaryville) and otherwise (Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis rail-trail).



### **Delmarva: Pocomoke SF, Tuckahoe SP – Unmet Needs, Untapped Potential**

When most people think Maryland, they think eastern shore, Delmarva. Anecdotally, locals and outsiders alike more often turn toward the eastern shore than the mountains when planning their leisure activities in Maryland. State, federal, and municipal governments have recognized this need by setting aside tens of thousands of acres as public open space. Visitors' recreation needs are well-accommodated during their stay on the Delmarva, so long as they do not want to explore the area via trail. Trail enthusiasts are woefully underserved on the eastern shore, with residents citing only two destinations of note, Tuckahoe State Park in Queen Anne and Naylor Mill Park in Salisbury.

Tuckahoe State Park is an interesting case. Hosting a horse stable and renting mountain bikes, it currently offers more than 20 miles of shared-use trail, much of which is in good condition. For the eastern shore, there is some real terrain at Tuckahoe, offering views over the course and marshes of Tuckahoe Creek, the signature natural feature of the park. But it is this signature feature that makes the trail system dysfunctional. There are currently no dry-foot trail crossings of the creek in the park. Apart from the paved county byway, Crouse Mill Road, users are left to their own devices to find the driest at-grade crossing on any given day. The addition of appropriate shared-use crossings of the creek, potentially a combination of bridges, boardwalks, or armored fords depending on selected location, would vastly improve the trail experience and better leverage the existing trail infrastructure investment. More importantly, it would dramatically reduce the everyday-impact of trail users to the valuable water resources. Taking a more expansive view, making use of the available rail grade and trestle at the south end of the park as a potential new crossing would not only leverage an existing structure, but allows the potential of linking the park via rail-trail to the surrounding communities.

Salisbury is the heart of the Delmarva. Located near its geographic center, Salisbury is the largest permanent population center, the commercial hub, and gateway to Maryland's ocean recreation. More than 150,000 people reside in the metro area and millions pass through each summer on their way to the Atlantic. Each fall Salisbury hosts the Seagull Century bicycle ride, the largest single-day tourism event in Wicomico County. Yet, the only natural surface trail opportunity for this bustling community with a history of bicycle use is Naylor Mill, a municipal park with but 7 miles of singletrack. Pocomoke State Park & Forest, just south of Salisbury, offers the opportunity meet the community's greater trail needs. Currently the domain primarily of motorized recreationalists, Pocomoke's 14,000 acres provide ample opportunity to host a wonderful trail network. Local advocates have identified the areas around Furnace Town & Milburn Landing as offering terrain ideal for natural surface trails. In addition to a stacked-loop system in the heart of the park, the forest's ample distributed acreage stretching north provides the potential to create a distributed trail system reaching right into the suburbs of Salisbury.

Tuckahoe and Pocomoke are but two examples. The eastern shore offers thousands of additional acres of public open space with the potential to support natural surface trails. Family-friendly doubletrack would provide interpretive education opportunities to better inform residents of the fragility and importance of the shore's ecosystem. More backcountry-style singletrack will be a boon to traditional trail recreationalists as well as

the hunting community, so important to the region's economy, that descends each fall and winter. Countless miles of out-of-service rail right-of-way criss-cross the Delmarva, offering the potential for multi-modal connections between communities and to a variety of recreation opportunities.



***The Eastern Shore***

*The DelMarVa is a place of amazing beauty. Use trails to help create passion for Maryland's vital coastal & wetland areas.*

*(Assateague Island National Seashore, image courtesy of Nathan Shearer)*

### **The South: St Mary's River SP & Nanjemoy NRMA– Trails Through History**

Southern Maryland, specifically the land between the Potomac and Patuxent, is rich in Maryland history. St Mary's City is the colony's original capital, Point Lookout was the Union's largest and most horrific prison camp during the Civil War, and Mallows Bay is home of the largest shipwreck fleet in the western hemisphere. Southern Maryland is not blessed with the large contiguous tracts of open space found in other parts of the state. But it does have great parks and even greater opportunity to create trails that link communities & parks together to show off the area's rich historic legacy.

St Mary's River State Park today offers the most significant trail opportunity in the southern region. The 7.5 mile singletrack loop around the park lake is used by hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers. There are opportunities to make improvements to the trail to further its utility to the community. A typical need is for improved crossings of low chronically wet areas. In some cases terrain is available to reroute problematic sections on to higher ground. In other areas, property boundary issues require bridging and boardwalk solutions; in some cases the trail has actually migrated off of park property as visitors seek higher-drier ground, an issue that requires immediate attention. The local park user community has proposed additional sections, reaching into currently underdeveloped adjacent areas of the park to extend trail length. The community has also identified opportunities to connect St. Mary's with nearby parks, such as Chancellor's Run via power line trails, to make a more extensive and lengthy set of trails for users to enjoy.

Designated as Wildland, a significant portion of St Mary's open space is not currently available to host shared-use trails. Given the dearth of bicycling opportunities, this may be a case where state officials consider making an exception to the usage ruling. The next closest significant mountain biking opportunity is Rosaryville State Park in Upper Marlboro, 75 minutes away by car. Allowing access to the broader community would greatly increase awareness of the park's resource issues and expand the volunteer pool. Gaining access to the larger 2,200 acre secondary parcel would permit the creation of a true trail resource that greater defuses any pressure to the lake area. Ideally the trails could eventually tie directly into the surrounding Lexington Park and St Mary's City communities, allowing area residents to enjoy the park free of their cars.

Nanjemoy and the Mallows Bay area are one of the great-undiscovered wilds available in Maryland. Rich in history and natural beauty along the banks of the Potomac, opportunities for recreation and education are significant. Jointly managed by MDNR and the federal Bureau of Land Management, the Nanjemoy NRMA has the potential to anchor a significant distributed trail system linking together numerous parcels via quiet country roads, highlighting both tidal and upland areas. Purse & Smallwood State Parks and Doncaster Demonstration Forest surround Nanjemoy, combining to create more than 5,000 acres of open space within a 5 mile radius. Each provides a unique natural and heritage opportunity: the wrecks at Mallows Bay at Nanjemoy, the hardwood forest & loblolly plantation at Doncaster, the fossils at low tide along the Potomac at Purse, the significant park infrastructure at Smallwood.

### **Susquehanna State Park – Cycling Opportunities North Of Baltimore**

Susquehanna State Park has all the ingredients to be a premier open space destination for the northern Baltimore suburbs. The landscape is dramatic, with high bluffs overlooking the Susquehanna River. Farther inland, streams pass through upcountry forest and meadow habitat offering a relief to the stiff hillsides leading from the river's main channel. History abounds with the restored Rock Run area, Archer Mansion, Jersey Toll House, Steppingstone Museum, and the remains of the Susquehanna Canal. Just upstream, connected to the park by greenway, lies Conowingo Dam & Reservoir. The park is blessed with extensive recreation infrastructure, including more than 60 campsites, upland & riverside picnic opportunities, and boat launch facilities. For mountain bicycling enthusiasts, with large sections of Gunpowder State Park designated as Wildland, Susquehanna is the most convenient trail opportunity north of Baltimore. Yet many potential visitors, or at least potential trail users, stay away, opting to visit Patapsco to the south or Fairhill to the north.

While Susquehanna offers over 15 miles of blazed paths, the types of trail available currently do not appeal to many enthusiasts. A majority of the trails, estimated at more than eight miles, are aligned along the fall-lines of the park landscape. Rising at relentless grades from the Susquehanna, they demand a high level of physical fitness. An additional 3.5 miles are estimated to lie in the floodplains of the park's creeks and rivers, providing chronically wet conditions that continually damage the resource. Nor is their condition inviting to casual visitors. Previous attempts to maintain the fall-line segments resulted in the installation of countless dozens of large phone pole-based wooden waterbars. These wooden structures are so tall they are a physical barrier for some visitors. Older bars, now backfilled with captured soil, create man-made cascades causing more erosive damage than the original unmaintained trail. Held in place with reinforcing-bar sections, where the wood has become displaced or rotted, the trail is now lined with metal bars protruding 8" to 12" from the ground, creating a risk management issue.

Very much like its western peer Greenbrier, Susquehanna has the potential to host a wonderful stacked-loop trail system appealing to walkers, cyclists, and equestrians alike. And at more than 2,500 acres, a trail system substantial enough to relieve user pressure from Patapsco and Fairhill. Local park advocates, including the Delaware Trailspinners, with support of the Belair and Havre De Grace business communities, have proposed an extensive renovation of the park's trail system. A concept plan for a 20+ mile trail system, featuring eight miles of casual/family-style trail and more than 12 miles of backcountry singletrack has already been developed for consideration by park staff. In this plan, a majority of the existing trails, those on the fall-line or in sensitive wet areas, will be closed and reclaimed, replaced by new sustainable routes. Since much of the trail to be closed is fall-line, a significant increase in mileage will result. A training visit for park staff and area advocates by the nationally recognized Trail Care Crew from the International Mountain Bicycling Association is scheduled for Fall 2010. Concurrent efforts to improve the Mason Dixon Trail through the park, enhancing connections to Havre De Grace and beyond are also being explored.





### ***Designations***

*The mountain bicycling community is driven by a desire to preserve & protect our last great places. Peer-reviewed studies conclude that the impacts of human-powered access are similar regardless of conveyance – that is, hikers and mountain bikers have a similar impact. Designating access as a function of appropriate experiences rather than focusing on modality, the broad base of support of these protections would increase and the various user groups could unite behind protection efforts. The mountain bicycling community urges MDNR to convene a task force, comprised of representatives of stakeholder groups and trail scientists, to examine trail access guidelines using science as a foundation.*

*(Spruce Knob-Seneca NRA, WV, image courtesy of Chris Scott)*