

Friends of Huntley Meadows Park

Summer 2018

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Defend Huntley Meadows Park From Two Paved Bike Trails

By Cathy Ledec, President

Friends of Huntley Meadows Park (FOHMP) has been working very hard to ensure that EMBARK fully reflects an environmental vision that promotes a healthier environment with all redevelopment. This includes ensuring the protection of the rarest habitats, plants, wildlife, and historic resources of national and global significance here in Fairfax County.

As part of the EMBARK Plan Amendment approval by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in March 2018, there were follow-on motions by Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay and Lee District Planning Commissioner Magliaccio concerning two paved bicycle trails (not yet constructed) that would cut through Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) in both the northern and southern sectors. FOHMP supports Supervisor McKay's and Commissioner Magliaccio's request for Comprehensive Plan Amendments (PA #2018-IV-BK1 and PA # 2018-IV-TR1) to remove these paved trails from the Comprehensive Plan and from the Bicycle Master Plan, due to their expected severe adverse impacts on sensitive natural and historic resources.

FOHMP Supports Bike Transportation But Not These Trails:

FOHMP encourages and supports bicycle trail transportation--just not these paved bike trails, because they would be in the wrong place. Some locations are not appropriate as transportation corridors because of the resulting harm to sensitive natural and cultural resources present in these areas. These 4-8 feet wide "shared-use" and "minor paved trails" (paved bike trails), including the substructures needed to support them, are equivalent to narrow paved roads. [See the maps in Karen Sheffield's related article on page three of this newsletter.]

Unfortunately, the construction of these paved bike trails within HMP would severely damage nationally significant historic resources; eliminate vernal pools and other wetlands; harm rare plant and wildlife species and their associated habitats; and change the water flow regime, leading to greater flooding risks in adjacent communities.

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Eastern Bluebird pair sitting on natural nest. Photo by Ed Eder.



Go Green with Paperless Newsletter

If you wish to receive the quarterly newsletter via email please notify us at: friendsofhmp@gmail.com.



FOHMP does not share our email list with any other organizations.

Weekend Staff Profile

Beth Bosecker has worked as a Naturalist In Charge at Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) since April of 2017, and she loves it here! She started out at the Park by volunteering for Frog Call Surveys, back in 2013. Her favorite things about the Park include: seeing the little kids (and adults) get so excited about nature and seeing how the Park changes so much from week to week. Beth appreciates how welcoming the other staff, volunteers, and visitors have been to her.

When she is not at HMP, Beth works in the emergency management field. She has a BS in Environmental Science (minors in Biology and Chemistry) from the University of Evansville in Evansville, IN, and an MS in Environmental Science and a Masters of Public Affairs from Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) in Bloomington, IN. In her free time, Beth is a member of the Fairfax, Virginia Master Naturalists and the Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia Tree Stewards volunteer organizations. She also enjoys being outside, traveling, playing and watching sports, gardening, cooking, and going back to Vincennes, IN, to visit her family on their farm, along the Wabash River.

Beth in a milkweed meadow.



The Meaning of Stars

By Todi Carnes, President Friends of Historic Huntley

The six black stars appearing on the front of Historic Huntley's privy/storage house are more than just aesthetic decor. They hold in place metal bars that run the width of the building from front to back, similarly locked in place on the building's backside by identical black stars (with the exception of one that is missing). The metal bars help hold the structure's walls together, ensuring against their outward collapse in the event of an earthquake, hurricane, or other violent natural event. Thus, the rows of stars implicitly pay homage to Mother Nature and the force of her powers.

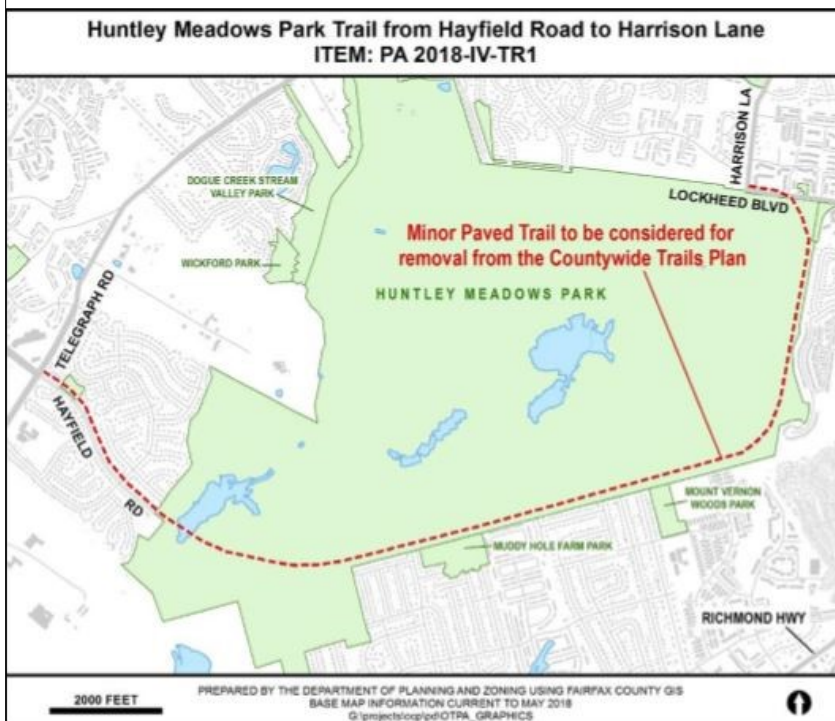


Park Manager Message: **Proposed County Comprehensive Plan Amendments Related to** **Huntley Meadows Park**

By Karen Sheffield

This fall, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors will be voting on changes to the County Comprehensive Plan, and Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) will be part of that discussion. It helps to understand what a County Comprehensive Plan is. It is a plan document required by state law to be used as a guide in decision-making about the built and natural environment by the County's Board of Supervisors and other agencies, such as the Planning Commission. Sections of the Comprehensive Plan can be updated periodically through County Comprehensive Plan Amendments, if approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Changes have been recommended to the Comprehensive Plan by Lee District Supervisor McKay, and I'd like to share the details with you. The two Plan Amendments proposed by Supervisor McKay request removal of two conceptual bike trails (on a plan but not built) through HMP. The images included in the newsletter show these conceptual bike plans.



Huntley Meadows Park Trail from Hayfield Rd to Harrison Ln. shown via red dotted line.

These conceptual bike/hike trails were conceived in 1975 shortly after the land for HMP was transferred from the federal government to the Fairfax County Park Authority. A Park Master Plan was created in that same year that outlined these trails. The trails were then incorporated into the County Comprehensive Plan.

At the time of the transfer, the land comprising the Park showed little of the resources we now enjoy. Since the 1975 land transfer, changes to natural resource management and beaver activity in 1978 that dammed a creek in the Park, natural areas have rebounded. It was these beavers that created the Park's central wetland, which continues to thrive in the same location today. Over the years, the Park Authority has and continues to assess, manage and document the natural and cultural resources at HMP.

The Park Authority fully supports Supervisor McKay's request to remove these conceptual bike/hike trails from the County Comprehensive Plan. Highlights of the Park's resources in these trail locations include:

- Wetlands, rare plants and rare animals exist in significant numbers/amounts along the bike routes.
- Unconsolidated soils in the southern and western portion of the Park have a water table at or just below the surface, often within 3-4 inches of standing water lasting a significant portion of the year. The ecological and engineering constraints including flooding and unconsolidated soils make it unsuitable for trails.

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Importance of Huntley Meadows Park:

HMP is a premier Fairfax County Park Authority property, established in 1975. We are lucky to continue to have this important natural area conserved and protected. The Park’s natural resources provide many ecosystem services for our region. These include wildlife habitat, flood prevention, cleaning the air of pollutants, noise buffering, erosion control, storm water absorption and filtering, stress reduction for healthier lifestyles, reduced urban heat island effect, and more.

HMP is also an internationally recognized nature and wildlife tourism site that brings tourism revenue to the County. With a Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence, HMP is rated as #2 of 97 things to do in Alexandria. Fairfax County’s Economic Development Agency uses

the County’s nature and wildlife to attract new residents and businesses, as seen in recent full-page ads in *Birding* magazine. It is important to protect these tourism revenues by conserving the diverse natural habitats and abundant wildlife that make HMP such a special place.

HMP’s freshwater wetland is one of the rarest habitats left in Fairfax County (Stallman, 2015). Fairfax County regards the protection of this habitat as a high priority, as evidenced by its 2014 investment in a \$3 million Wetland Restoration Project. This project is intended to sustain a healthy wetland habitat for the long term, supporting diverse plants and wildlife (including many rare species) while fulfilling important flood protection functions for the surrounding area. In 2014, the Virginia Natural Heritage Program (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation) classified sections of HMP as Coastal Plain Depression Swamp in very good condition. This is a globally uncommon natural community (Rhur, 2016; Stallman, 2015).

Threat to a Unique Historical Resource:

There is a nationally significant historical resource located in the area proposed for the southern paved bike trail. In this portion of HMP property are the northern boundary markers of George Washington’s estate. These valuable historical resources are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to their association with George Washington, our nation’s first president. These property boundary markers, double ditches with earthen berms, would be severely damaged or destroyed by construction of this proposed paved trail.

Damage to Rare Natural Resources:

Both paved bike trails are likely to have significant adverse impacts upon HMP’s rare species and ecosystems. Both trails and their associated substructures would have a significant footprint on the ground, eliminating important vernal pools and other habitats used by State-designated rare wildlife and plants. Moreover, because of the low-lying, often wet ground and unconsolidated soils, both paved bike trails would likely need dikes or similar structures to elevate them. Each paved trail, with its supporting structure, would therefore likely function as a dam, changing the water flow regime and probably also the surrounding vegetation. In



Ribbon Snake on central wetlands boardwalk in front of blooming Lizard’s Tail (*Saururus cernuus* L.).

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addition, these paved trails would inevitably lead to increased human disturbance to adjacent sensitive habitats and rare species. Small animals such as frogs and turtles would be run over by fast-moving bicycles.

Construction of the northern paved trail would destroy multiple vernal pools within a densely forested area. It would threaten two, documented 200 year old County Co-champion Swamp Chestnut Oak trees. It would likely also affect the water flow that sustains the central wetland and its abundant wildlife and diverse plant community. Clearing of trees for bike trail construction might warm the water flowing into the central wetland, potentially disrupting the delicate environmental balance that has been restored through Fairfax County’s \$3 million investment in the Wetland Restoration Project.

In addition to destroying an important historical site, the southern paved bike trail would also threaten highly significant natural resources. This trail would pave over, and otherwise alter, an ecologically significant grassy wetland with several rare plant species. It would also pass very close to the Coastal Plain Depression Swamp.

Among the rare, locally-occurring species that stand to be harmed by the construction of either or both of these paved bike trails are two State-rare reptiles, five State-rare plants, breeding habitat for six State-rare breeding birds, and habitat for an International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List species that is under review for federal listing (Rhur, 2013; Gardner, 2016).

Neighborhood Flooding Risks:

By acting as dams and changing the water flow regime, these paved bike trails might also increase the flooding risks for adjacent neighborhoods. In the case of the northern paved trail, any obstruction of water flow from the Park’s upper watershed into the central wetland could lead to greater storm water-related flooding in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Alternative Routes In Place And Being Used

Bike transportation and commuting alternatives are already mapped into the Comprehensive Plan and Bicycle Master Plan and are being actively used. Jeff Todd Way is a direct link between Telegraph Road and Richmond Highway. This route was opened in November 2014 and includes a separate, dedicated bike and pedestrian trail through a long, wooded stretch of Fort Belvoir. In the Stoneybrook and Woodstone communities sharrows (shared vehicle and bike lanes) have also been mapped and striped; they are actively being used as a second link between South King’s Highway and Lockheed Boulevard leading to Richmond Highway. The neighborhoods to the southeast along the HMP power line easement also have alternative routes that have been identified, mapped, and striped and are actively being used. All these alternative routes are already included in the Comprehensive Plan and in the Department of Transportation’s Bicycle Master Plan.

Previous Transportation Project in Same Area Denied by Department of Interior

In the late 1980s Fairfax County requested, as required in the November 26, 1975 Quit Claim Deed for the



County Swamp Chestnut Oak Champion. Called “Grandmother Oak” by the kids at Frog Pond Early Learning Center. FOHH member Robbie McNeil providing scale. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Gamble.

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HMP property, approval from the United States Department of the Interior (DOI) to convert the northern portion of the Park for road (transportation) purposes. In its review of this project, the DOI determined that the “...protection of these unique natural resources must take precedence...” and denied the County’s transportation proposal. The November 30, 1990 denial letter from DOI states: “Huntley Meadows Park is presently (1990) demonstrating increased signs of stress from urban development and the risk of irreversible damage to the wetlands from the construction of Lockheed Boulevard across their water source is too high to permit the project to go forward...To build the proposed road through the park perpendicular to the ground and surface water supply presents too high a risk, since it would be irreversible. Its potential to adversely impact this ecosystem through alteration of water flow and the introduction of pollutants and sediments is obvious and technologically unmitigable. Although studies could be conducted, they could well result in more costly measures which attempt to protect the park but offer no guarantees; the potential for failure remains high and the potential for irreversible destruction of the park indicates that little would be served by further pursuit of the road proposal.”

The current Fairfax County Department of Transportation (DOT) proposed paved bike trails are specifically intended for transportation and commuting. Construction of the northern proposed paved trail would entail the same conversion of this portion of the Park to a transportation corridor as was proposed in the late 1980s. Due to the deed restrictions for HMP property, pursuing such construction would most likely require federal approval and additional costly actions, including a detailed, site-specific environmental review which has never been done for these proposed trails.



Arial photo of completed berm (straight line in the bottom middle of photo) backing up the water and creating wonderful wildlife habitat. Photo courtesy of Wetland Study Solutions, Inc.

Please Help Protect the Park:

We need you to express your support for removing these two paved bike trails from the Comprehensive Plan and Bicycle Master Plan. Please send an email expressing your support on or before September 15, 2018 to friendsofhmp@gmail.com. We will present these emails to the Fairfax County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors in advance of the public hearings. We also encourage all our supporters to provide public testimony. Please let me know if you need any guidance on this by e-mailing me at friendsofhmp@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support as we work to conserve and protect HMP for future generations to experience.

References:

Gardner, M. 2016. Environmental Comments on Dominion Virginia Power Transmission Line Project. Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning, February 2, 2016.

Rhur, R. 2016. Environmental Review Memo for DEQ 16-003S Belvoir-Gum Springs Transmission Line Re-build Project. Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, February 3, 2016.

Stallman, S. 2015. Environmental Review Comments on Supplemental Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed Army Residential Communities Initiative Properties at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Fairfax County Park Authority, December 18, 2015.

Another Way To Give

Donate to Friends of Huntley Meadows Park (FOHMP) as you shop this holiday season.

If you shop on Amazon, you can identify FOHMP as your favorite charity. For every transaction you complete, FOHMP will receive a donation equal to 5% of your purchase. Simply register FOHMP as your preferred charity at <https://smile.amazon.com>.

This costs you nothing and costs FOHMP nothing. Amazon makes the donation automatically!

Merchandise

Visit the Norma Hoffman Visitor Center gift shop for Friends of Huntley Meadows Park (FOHMP) pins, cinch bags, long and short sleeve t-shirts with heron image printed on the front, and hats, including ball caps. In addition, staff has cultivated a diverse collection of nature and history related items as well as new and used books for sale.

All proceeds from logo items and used book sales go to the FOHMP and Friends of Historic Huntley to support Park activities.



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Huntley Meadows Park Path from Telegraph Road to Lockheed Boulevard
ITEM: PA 2018-IV-BK1



Huntley Meadows Park Path from Telegraph Rd to Lockheed Blvd. shown via purple dotted line.

- Dogue Creek is designated VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) Listed Threatened and Endangered Waters.
- The upstream watershed of the restored Central Wetland would be impacted.
- Historic resources, including those associated with George Washington, exist.

The public hearing on these Plan Amendment proposals will be held at the Fairfax County Government Center on the following dates:

Planning Commission public hearing will be held Thursday, September 27 at 7:30pm.

Board of Supervisors public hearing will be held on Tuesday, October 30 at 4:00pm.

To learn more about the Plan Amendments:

PA 2018-IV-BK1 Huntley Meadows Park Path from Telegraph Road to Lockheed Boulevard

PA 2018-IV-TRI Huntley Meadows Park Trail from Hayfield Road to Harrison Lane

**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
Membership and Renewal Form**

Please support Huntley Meadows Park by joining our Friends group. Dues contribute toward funding new initiatives and programs, and your membership support will help us to be stronger advocates for the Park.

Fill out this form and mail the application to:

Dues information (Annual):

- ☐ \$15 Individual
☐ \$20 Family
☐ \$10 Student/Senior
☐ \$150 Lifetime Membership
☐ Donation

**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd.
Alexandria, VA 22306**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____



Alternatively you can use our PayPal feature on the Membership page of our website <http://www.friendsofhuntleymeadows.org/membership.html>.



**Friends of Huntley
Meadows Park**

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