

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
8787 Georgia Avenue • Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Jeff Zyontz, Division Chief, Countywide Planning Division
John Hench, Supervisor, Park Planning and Resource Analysis (PPRA) *JZ*
Lyn Coleman, Trail Planning Supervisor, PPRA *Lyn*
Brenda Sandberg, Legacy Open Space Program Manager, PPRA *BGS*

FROM: John Turgeon, Legacy Open Space Senior Planner, PPRA *JT*

DATE: November 7, 2003

RE: Hoyles Mill Conservation Park Proposed Natural Surface Trail Plan

Recommended Actions

1. **Approve the natural surface trail plan proposed for Hoyles Mill Conservation Park as shown in the attached map (See Attachment 1).**
The proposed trail alignments were identified during development of the park management plan for Hoyles Mill Conservation Park. Staff's plan for trails and public access is described in detail later in this memorandum. The trail plan was developed in accordance with the natural surface trail planning process set forth in the recently amended Countywide Park Trails Plan (See Attachment 2).
2. **Approve the proposed natural surface trail alignments as an amendment to the Countywide Park Trails Plan.**

Trail Plan Objectives

The trail system shown on the attached map (See Attachment 1) consists entirely of natural surface trails that provide opportunities for hikers, equestrians, and cyclists. The plan is guided by the following objectives:

- The plan seeks a balance among environmental and recreation objectives. The Plan establishes a network of natural surface trails to provide safe

and enjoyable access for a variety of trail users while maintaining the significant resources of Hoyles Mill Conservation Park. The trail system maintains large blocks of undisturbed interior forest.

- The trail plan accommodates equestrian activities including traditional fox chasing, which the Commission is required to allow in the Park by deed covenant. The plan also provides connectivity to equestrian trails on neighboring properties.
- The plan establishes a shared use natural surface trail connection through Hoyles Mill Conservation Park between South Germantown Recreation Park and Black Hill Regional Park. This is an important “through” trail corridor identified in the Countywide Park Trails Plan (See Attachment 3).
- The trail network will provide opportunities for interpretation of the Park’s considerable resources.
- The plan recommends establishing an ADA accessible natural surface trail, the first of its kind in County parkland.
- The plan identifies convenient and safe gravel parking areas to provide trailhead parking.
- The plan provides two trail loops within the interior of the Park.

Overview of Hoyles Mill Conservation Park

Hoyles Mill Conservation Park is located in northern Montgomery County within the Piedmont physiographic region. It is situated along the south side of White Ground Road (Maryland Route 121) in the community of Boyds, and west of Germantown. The Park is approximately 800 acres in size and is mostly forested. The Park is part of a much larger area of contiguous forest known as the Hoyles Mill Diabase Area. Underlying this area is a large sill of diabase bedrock, one of the few of its kind in Maryland, and there are many diabase rock outcrops throughout the Park.

The Commission purchased Hoyles Mill Conservation Park in March of 2002 as part of the County’s Legacy Open Space program. The property is one of the natural resource sites identified for protection in the Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan, approved by the Planning Board and County Council in 2001. The site was also recommended for conservation park acquisition in the County’s Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Master Plan of 1998. Acquisition of the Park was entirely funded, in the amount of 7.2 million dollars, by the State of Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ GreenPrint Program. The GreenPrint Program was established to identify and protect the State’s

network of green infrastructure. The purchase represented the largest single acquisition of conservation parkland ever in Montgomery County.

The Hoyles Mill Diabase Area has long been considered one of the County's most significant biodiversity areas, with considerable statewide significance as well. The Park contains a variety of exceptional natural resources including mature upland and floodplain forest with over twenty species of State rare, threatened, endangered, and watchlist (RTEW) plant species. This diversity is due to the unique soils that derive from the diabase bedrock. There is greater diversity of trees species in Hoyles Mill Conservation Park than found elsewhere in the County. The contiguous woodlands provide excellent bird habitat as well. Also flowing through the Park is Little Seneca Creek, a partially self-sustaining trout stream, along with several tributaries and associated wetlands.

The ruins of the historic Hoyles Mill along the Little Seneca Creek and associated residential structures represent significant cultural resources found in the Park, and there may also be archaeological sites in the Park that have relevance to the historic African American community of Boyds. In addition, Native American rockpiles typically found near major streams may be present near Little Seneca Creek. All in all, Hoyles Mill Conservation Park represents a signature asset in the County's network of conservation parkland.

Conditions Governing Use of Park

The park classification system outlined in the PROS Master Plan, describes conservation parks as:

"...generally large areas that preserve specific natural, archaeological, or historical features; are typically located in upland areas; and are acquired specifically for environmental preservation purposes. Conservation area parks may include outstanding examples of natural communities, self-sustaining populations of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species, or unique archeological and historical resources. Given the sensitive nature of the resources in conservation parks, development is very limited and generally restricted to passive recreation areas and opportunities such as trails, fishing and picnic areas, and nature study."

There is an existing network of natural surface trails in Hoyles Mill Conservation Park used by equestrians who access the trails from neighboring properties (See Attachment 1). The trails are also used for traditional equestrian fox chasing activities held by the Potomac Hunt Club. As a condition of purchasing this property, the Commission is required by deed covenant to allow general equestrian activities in the Park. Traditional fox chasing is also allowed by deed covenant, subject to a special permit issued by the Superintendent of Montgomery Parks.

In return for funding acquisition of Hoyles Mill Conservation Park, the State of Maryland required that a conservation easement in perpetuity be recorded for the Park that covers most of the site. The purpose of the easement is to protect and preserve the natural environment of the Park. The easement allows for the construction of natural surface trails to accommodate non-motorized recreational uses and associated pervious surface access areas such as gravel parking lots. The easement expressly allows equestrian use of the park including traditional fox chasing.

Park Management Planning Process

The management plan for Hoyles Mill Conservation Park is being developed to implement the stewardship goals for conservation parkland set forth in both the Legacy Open Space and PROS Master Plans. Park management plans are internal, staff-level documents that provide guidance to Montgomery Parks' operating divisions on the management and maintenance of natural and cultural resources, trails, public access, as well as constructed facilities. These documents typically include an inventory of existing resources and conditions accompanied by detailed management recommendations and protocols. The estimated budget impacts of recommended actions across affected operating divisions are also included. The trails and public access component of the management plan establishes the general location of park trails and parking facilities. It also determines the uses of the trails. To date one management plan for Bucklodge Forest Conservation Park has been completed for parkland acquired through the Legacy Open Space program. In addition to Hoyles Mill Conservation Park, a management plan is currently in progress for the Red Door Store Special Park, also purchased through the Legacy program.

Park management plans do not typically require the approval of the Planning Board. The Superintendent of Parks and/or a Division Chief typically approve these plans, followed by presentation of the approved plan to the Planning Board as an information item. However, in accordance with the trail planning and implementation process set forth in the Countywide Park Trails Plan, the trails and public access component of the management plan is subject to review and approval by the Planning Board. It is this component of the management plan for Hoyles Mill Conservation Park that is recommended for Planning Board approval in this memorandum.

Staff Trail Plan

The specific natural surface trail alignments for the park are described in detail in the following paragraphs. The proposed trails are also identified on the attached trail plan map corresponding to the letters below:

- A. Construct a shared use natural surface trail connecting South Germantown Recreation Park with Black Hill Regional Park through Hoyles Mill

Conservation Park and the future Boyds Local Park. This trail will be open to hikers, cyclists, and equestrians. A significant portion of this trail will utilize Hoyles Mill Road, which is closed to motor vehicle traffic from just south of the intersection with White Ground Road to the WSSC pump station south of Little Seneca Creek. Hoyles Mill Road is a dirt and gravel surface road. A pedestrian bridge across Little Seneca Creek is proposed where Hoyles Mill Road fords the Creek. As part of this trail, construct a gravel parking lot at the intersection of Hoyles Mill Road and White Ground Road to serve as a trailhead main entrance to the Park. In addition, provide trailhead parking for this trail in South Germantown Recreation Park, either by constructing a new parking lot or using existing parking areas. Staff will also explore the possibility of making the section of the trail using the closed Hoyles Mill Road an ADA accessible trail, with potentially a small gravel parking area serving this trail along Hoyles Mill Road. An ADA accessible fishing area may also be provided where the road meets the Little Seneca Creek.

- B. Retain the existing network of natural surface trails currently used by equestrians, located west of Hoyles Mill Road, for use by hikers and equestrians only. A short section of this trail at the south end of the Park crosses privately owned property identified for future park acquisition. Equestrian users of this trail have previously obtained permission from the property owner to use this section of the trail. If and/or when the County acquires this property as parkland, this section of the trail will not be publicly maintained. Signage will also be placed to notify trail users where they are entering private property and that consent of the property owner must be obtained to use this trail section.
- C. Construct a new natural surface trail for hikers and equestrians only that leads from White Ground Road along the PEPCO power line property and connects with the existing trail along Little Seneca Creek. As part of this trail, construct a gravel parking lot along White Ground Road to serve as a trailhead.
- D. Construct a new natural surface trail for hikers and equestrians only from the existing trail entering the park along White Ground Road to the proposed Hoyles Mill Road trail. This trail will be located as close to White Ground Road as possible to prevent fragmentation of the park's interior forest.
- E. Construct a new natural surface trail for hikers and equestrians only that leads from the east side of Hoyles Mill Road through forest and former crop land in the eastern section of the Park and connects with the proposed shared use trail in the future Boyds Local Park.
- F. Construct a new natural surface trail for hikers only that leads from Hoyles Mill Road near the WSSC pump station north to Little Seneca Creek to

provide fishing access. As part of this trail, construct a small gravel parking area or pull-off along Hoyles Mill Road to serve as a trailhead.

In addition, the management plan will state that opportunities for additional shared use natural surface trails in the neighboring South Germantown Recreation Park will be explored if, and when, more parkland is acquired there. If approved by the Planning Board, implementation of this trail plan will begin as part of the FY 2005 Trails Work Program, already approved by the Board.

Public Input On Trails Plan

Over this past summer, staff held a series of meetings with the public to present and gather input on the Park's management plan, including the proposed trail and public access element. Staff presented a concept version of the management plan with proposed trail alignments at a general public meeting held on June 24, 2003, at the Up-County Regional Services Center in Germantown. Workstations were set up at this meeting to gather public input on the plan recommendations. Trails were of particular concern to meeting attendants. A number of citizens representing the off-road cycling community expressed considerable opposition to the proposed trail plan for limiting bikes from most of the proposed trails.

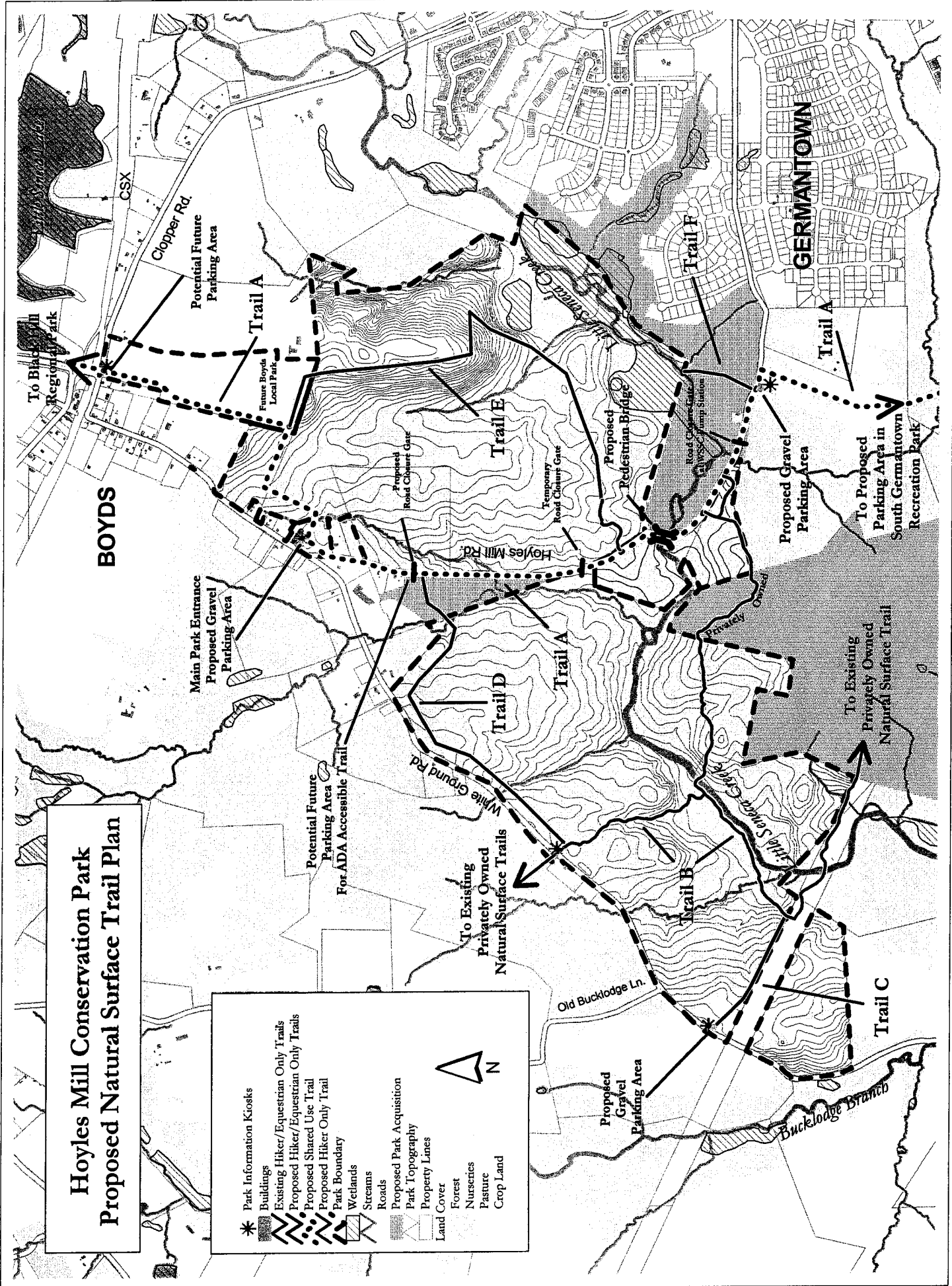
Staff also met individually with representatives from the citizen groups most concerned about the park's uses to discuss and obtain further input on the management plan proposals including the trail plan. The discussions at these meetings are summarized below:

- On August 12, 2003, staff met with representatives of the Sierra Club, the Audubon Naturalist Society, and the Legacy Open Space Advisory Group to discuss environmental issues relating to the management plan. They expressed general support for the proposed trail network and uses, particularly the proposed shared use Trail A, which utilizes the closed portion of Hoyles Mill Road. They expressed concerns about preventing future additional trails due to the Park's environmental sensitivity, monitoring trail use for impacts on ecological resources, and enforcement of trails uses and off-trail activity. Their recommendations included conducting further surveys of rare plants along proposed trail alignments, providing adequate park policing of unauthorized trail uses, providing adequate trail signage, and closing trails when conditions are too wet as well as during bird nesting season. Staff will incorporate these concerns and recommendations into the management plan.
- On August 14, 2003, staff met with members of Mid Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts (MORE) representing the interests of off-road cyclists, who advocated for increased bike access to the proposed trails at Hoyles Mill Conservation Park. MORE supports having a shared use connection

between Black Hill Regional Park and South Germantown Recreation Park. MORE reiterated its dissatisfaction with limiting bike use to the proposed Trail A. As a result of this meeting, staff amended the FY 2004-2005 Trails Work Program to include a trail assessment study for a shared use natural surface trail that would connect the State's Schaefer Farm off-road cycling facility with South Germantown Recreation Park (See Attachment 3). Another trail assessment would then look at extending this shared use connection west of the existing hard surface trail in South Germantown Recreation Park to the proposed shared use trail leading to Hoyles Mill Conservation Park. Since this meeting, the Planning Board approved the Trails Work Program to include these items. In addition, staff will explore additional shared use natural surface trails for South Germantown Recreation Park if new parkland is acquired there.

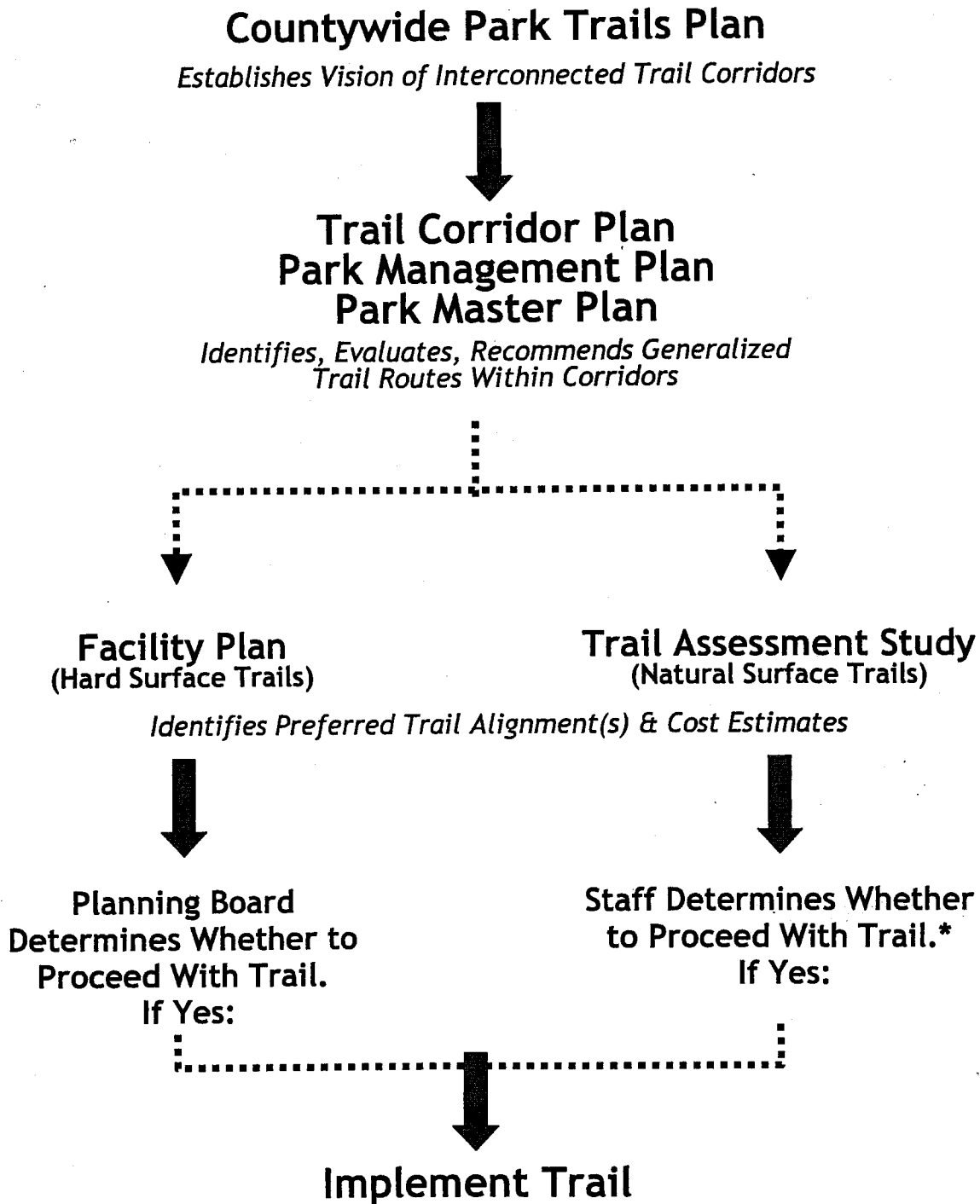
- On August 18, 2003, staff met with members of the Potomac Hunt Club and Trail Riders of Today (TROT), representing the interests of equestrian users of the Park. They expressed general support for the trail plan, but desired an additional connection between the existing trail entering the Park from White Ground Road, and Hoyles Mill Road. This connection is considered critical to the continued use of the Park for equestrian fox chasing. Staff added this connection to the trail plan (Trail D), which was not part of the initial concept plan. Staff determined that providing this connection is in keeping with the deed covenant requiring the Commission to accommodate the covenantees' reasonable use of the Park for traditional fox chasing. However, the trail route proposed avoids as much as possible further fragmentation of the Park's interior forest.

- August 20, 2003, staff met with members of Trout Unlimited and Chesapeake Women Anglers to discuss stewardship of the Little Seneca Creek trout fishery. The meeting also resulted in staff revising the initial concept trail plan to include a short hiker only trail leading from Hoyles Mill Road near the WSSC pump station north to Little Seneca Creek (Trail F) for fishing access. Staff will continue to explore the potential for an ADA accessible fishing area as part of planning for the ADA accessible trail using Hoyles Mill Road.



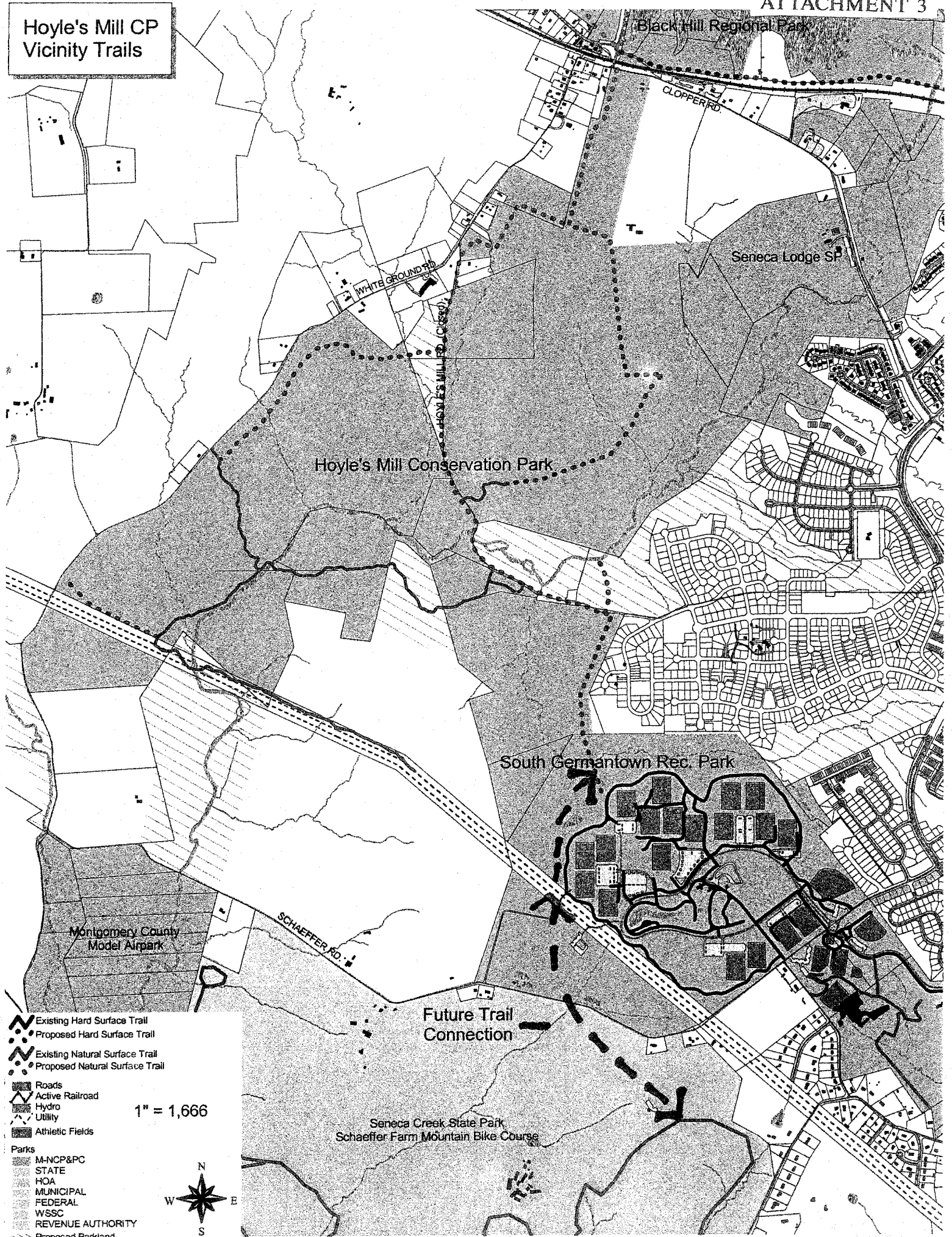
Map Prepared by John Turgeon, Legacy Open Space Senior Planner
 MNCPRC, Murray County Dept. of Park and Planning
 Countywide Planning Division
 Park Planning and Resource Analysis
 November 2003

Trail Planning & Implementation Process



**NOTE: Trail Assessment Studies for Natural Surface Trails That Are Not Part of An Approved Master Plan Will Be Reviewed by the Board Before Implementation*

Hoyle's Mill CP
Vicinity Trails



Black Hill Regional Park

CLOPPER RD.

Seneca Lodge SP

Hoyle's Mill Conservation Park

WHITE GROUND RD

HOYLE'S MILL RD (CROSS)

South Germantown Rec. Park

Montgomery County Model Airpark

SCHAEFFER RD.

Future Trail Connection

Seneca Creek State Park
Schaeffer Farm Mountain Bike Course

- Existing Hard Surface Trail
- Proposed Hard Surface Trail
- Existing Natural Surface Trail
- Proposed Natural Surface Trail
- Roads
- Active Railroad
- Hydro
- Utility
- Athletic Fields
- Parks
 - M-NCP&PC
 - STATE
 - HOA
 - MUNICIPAL
 - FEDERAL
 - WSSC
 - REVENUE AUTHORITY
 - Proposed Parkland

1" = 1,666



November 6, 2003

Derick P. Berlage, Chairman
Montgomery County Planning Board
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Berlage:

The Legacy Open Space Advisory Group would like to express its support for the draft Hoyles Mill Conservation Park Management Plan and the proposed trail network before the Planning Board next week. Hoyles Mill Conservation Park is one of the jewels in the County park system, with a unique forest ecosystem that is still in excellent condition. The Advisory Group has reviewed the concept Management Plan several times and we feel confident that the results of the management plan process will result in balanced protection of the important resources on the property.

Based on multiple meetings with the Advisory Group and other meetings with the public and specific interest groups, Legacy staff has proposed a trail network for the property that balances protection of the significant areas of undisturbed interior forest while accommodating the needs of the various user groups. The Advisory Group feels strongly that staff has crafted a good compromise that protects the County's investment in conserving this special acreage while meeting the recreation needs of the citizens of the County.

Thank you for your continuing support of the Legacy Open Space program.

Sincerely,

The Members of the Legacy Open Space Advisory Group

Royce Hanson & John Chirtea, Co-Chairs

Ginny Barnes

Barbara Medina

Aleen Starkweather

Vincent Berg

Dolores Milmoie

Charles F. Stuart, Jr.

Susie Eig

Charles Pritchard

Helen Wilkes