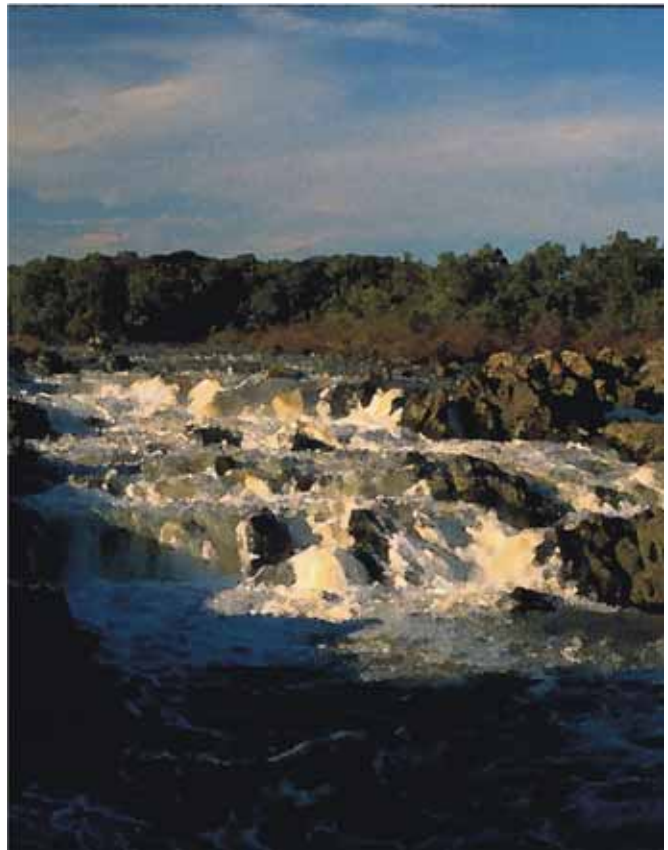


CHAPTER 2

Description of Management Zones and Alternatives



Great Falls Park Draft GMP/EIS

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CHAPTER 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT ZONES AND ALTERNATIVES

A discussion of alternatives is a critical component of a GMP/EIS (the plan) and is necessary to provide decision-makers with sufficient information to evaluate various management options. Section 1505.1 (e) of NEPA requires that a “range of alternatives” be discussed in an EIS. The range of alternatives includes those reasonable alternatives that are evaluated throughout the document, as well as all considered alternatives that were eliminated from detailed study. The NPS Director’s Order on Park Planning (DO-2) provides further guidance that a GMP/EIS should first define what kind of resource conditions and visitor experiences should be maintained in the park and then apply those decisions to all actions that are subsequently taken in the park. DO-2 also recommends that alternative concepts be fundamentally different among competing sets of resource conditions and visitor experiences.

The park undertook a second public consultation process in the Fall/Winter of 2003. Newsletter 2 was published in November 2003, where three alternatives for the future use and management of Great Falls Park were presented for evaluation. These alternatives were revised to two main alternatives, subsequent to more than 300 public and agency comments that were received, as well as additional review by the internal planning team. This draft GMP/EIS evaluates the two revised alternatives that are summarized as follows:

- Alternative A (Continuation of Current Conditions) maintains the status quo in the park, and describes resource conditions where existing practices continue to guide park management.
- Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) would balance the protection of natural and cultural resources with the provision of a variety of recreational opportunities for visitors.

Subsequent to receiving public comments on this draft plan, the park will release a Final GMP/EIS where it will either, select Alternative A or B as the preferred course of action, modify the alternative based on comments received, or explore additional alternatives.

The alternatives present a reasonable array of management options, fulfill the park purpose and needs, and address the management concerns identified in Section 1.3.3, Issues and Concerns, of this document. Following their general definition, the development of the alternatives included identification of management prescriptions that were potentially applicable to the park.¹ Each management prescription was defined by desired visitor experiences and resource conditions. This helped to establish the kinds of activities or facilities within each prescription that would achieve those targeted conditions. These are described in Section 2.3 of this document. The management prescriptions were then mapped to specific areas of the park to illustrate the preferred alternative evaluated in this Draft GMP/EIS.

¹ A management prescription is an approach for administering or treating the resources or uses of a specified area that is based on desired outcomes. Management prescriptions include target goals or objectives for one or more resources and/or visitor experiences that are present within the prescription area.

While developing the two alternatives, several others were also considered, as described in Section 2.4 of this document. However, these were eliminated from further consideration due to one or more of the following reasons: public feedback; significant potential impact on the park's resources; or, operational concerns.

Mitigation is another key element used in the development of the two alternatives. In the legislation that created the National Park Service, Congress charged it with managing lands under the stewardship “in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”.² As a result, NPS routinely evaluates and implements mitigation whenever conditions occur that could adversely affect the sustainability of park resources. Mitigation and best management practices were included throughout the formulation of the alternatives included in this plan.

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES FOR EVALUATION

The alternatives considered for Great Falls Park are conceptual and offer possibilities of how the park could be managed in the future. A description of these alternatives is included in Table 2.1, Description of Alternatives.

2.1.1 Elements Common to All Alternatives

The two alternatives developed for Great Falls Park differ primarily in their approach to overall management, level of resource preservation and enhancement, and diversity of visitor services offered. There are, however, elements common to both the alternatives, which are identified as follows:

- Maintain or enhance significant viewsheds within the park, and from adjacent areas including the Potomac River and the C&O Canal National Historical Park;
- Provide additional protection to natural and cultural resources by reducing conflicts with visitors on trails;
- Improve visual quality, accessibility in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and visitor safety at the three existing overlooks;
- Maintain current public vehicular access points and do not develop new vehicular access points into the park;
- Improve the visitor center to enhance its appearance including the courtyard, use interior space more efficiently, and modify entrance ramps to meet ADA requirements ;
- Rehabilitate existing restroom facilities at the visitor center and comfort facility;
- Continue to provide, and enhance, emergency access at Sandy Landing;
- Improve signage to identify allowable uses on trails;

² NPS Organic Act

- During severe crowding, initiate a one vehicle in, one vehicle out policy;
- Add a “fast pass” vehicle lane and the technology to read passes at the entrance station;
- Develop an Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) to protect sensitive cultural resources from potential vegetation damage. Adopt best management practices (BMPs) to protect cultural resources that are either listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places;
- Encourage boundary changes where there is an interested property owner and land can be added to the park through acquisition, donation or other mechanisms (such as conservation easements). The land addition would be based on the following criteria: the land parcel is contiguous to the park; it helps to reduce fragmentation by connecting separate portions of the park; it is the site of sensitive cultural resources that may not be identified currently; or, it benefits the preservation of a sensitive natural resource such as Mine Run or Difficult Run.
- Encourage partnerships and volunteer opportunities with interested parties; and
- Close public access to the Potomac River from the shoreline adjacent to the northern tip of the Flake to the northern tip of the Sand Box climbing area. Exceptions would be boaters and fishermen entering at Fisherman's Eddy. Entry into the Sand Box area would be restricted to rock climbers where individuals could rappel in and climb out. No one would be allowed to enter or exit Sand Box using walk down trails. Additionally, access to this area would be prohibited without a permit, or unless accompanied by a park employee.

2.1.2 Alternative A – Status Quo/Continue Current Management Practices

The goals of Alternative A would be to preserve traditional visitor experiences and activities and maintain the park’s natural, cultural, and scenic values in conformance with the provisions outlined in Section 1.4 of this document. Under this alternative, Great Falls Park would be managed as it is currently, with no major changes in resources management, visitor programs, or facilities, beyond regular maintenance (see Figure 2.1).

Under Alternative A, the visitor center would continue to function as is, with existing levels of interpretation and educational programs.

Under Alternative A, existing social trails would be evaluated and those that adversely impact natural or cultural resources would be eliminated. The current pattern of trail use would continue, including access to pedestrians, bikers and horseback riders from adjacent trails and properties. The park would allow the proposed Cross County Trail (CCT), Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST), and Georgetown Pike Trail (GPT) to connect to existing trails within Great Falls Park. Climbing activities would continue similar to existing conditions.

Other than the measures identified under Elements Common to All Alternatives (Section 2.2.1 of this plan), there would be no changes in the management of natural or cultural resources within the park.

During busy periods (currently several weekends per year) park staff would periodically check parking lots and inform visitors, waiting in line along Old Dominion Drive, to expect delays. When the parking lots are fully occupied, entry into the park would be suspended. During these periods, only emergency vehicles would be allowed access into the park. Other vehicles would be allowed access only when there are vehicles exiting the park, and would be managed based on parking availability. The park would continue to provide a manual message board, at the intersection of Georgetown Pike and Old Dominion Drive, which would inform visitors of entrance conditions to the park.

The park staff would continue to function out of their offices at the visitor center. The maintenance facility would be upgraded at current location to improve its visual quality at the entrance to the park. The US Park Police (USPP) staff would continue to function from their current location and the stables to house USPP horses would continue to be rented outside the park. The park would continue its use of the existing well water system for potable water supply, including the holding tank on Jackson Lane.

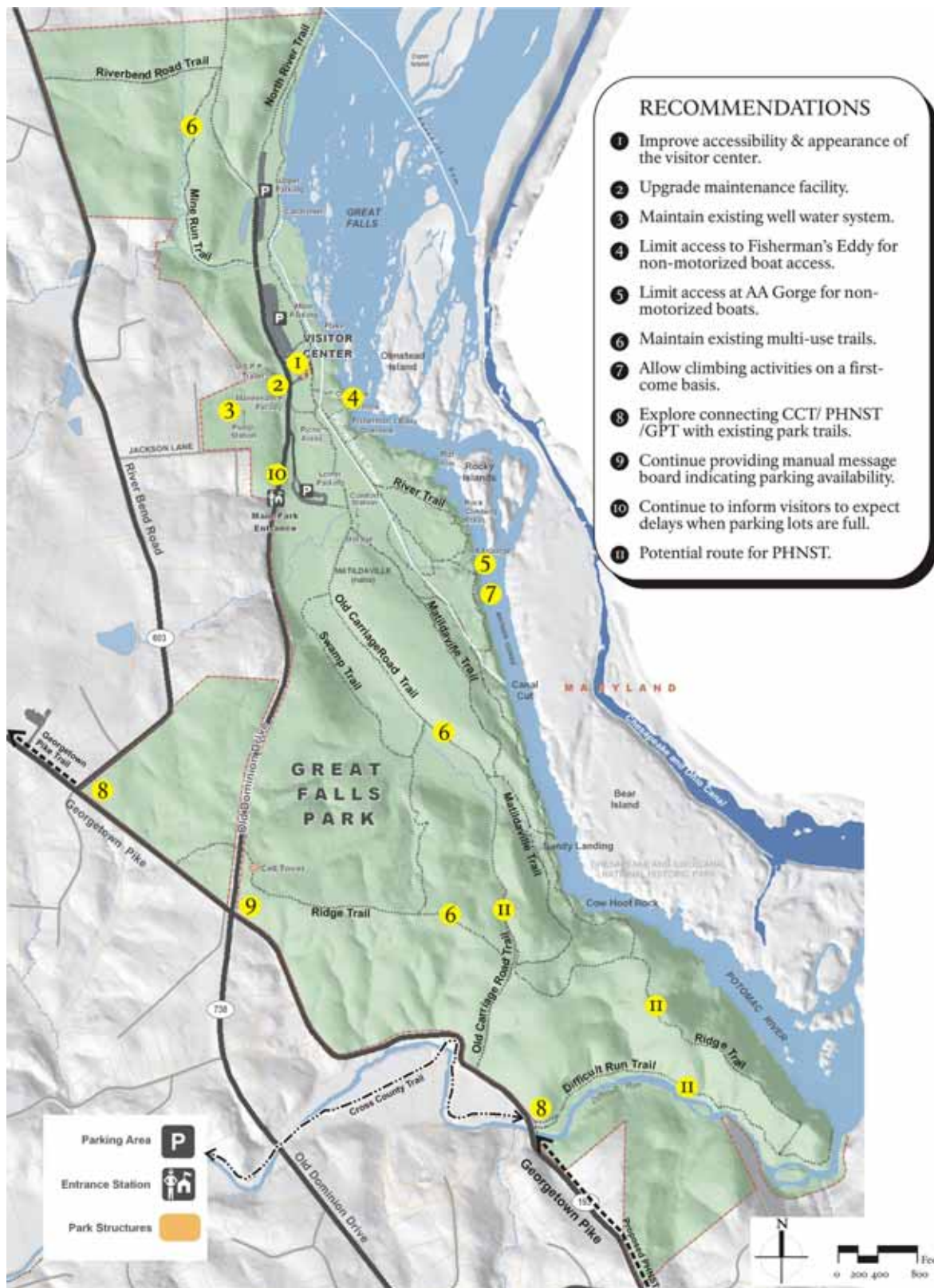


Figure 2.1: Alternative A (Continue Current Management Practices)

2.1.3 *Alternative B – Preferred Alternative*

The preferred alternative is based on an overall goal for the park of balancing the opportunities for recreation at the park while protecting the sensitive natural resources and cultural resources. To achieve this balance the plan provides the following recommendations (see Figure 2.2):

Management under Alternative B would focus on efforts to improve visitor understanding of the park's sensitive resources and how to safely and responsibly enjoy the park. The interpretive programs would be designed to enhance a visitor's experience and understanding of the features that contribute to the park's significance including the Patowmack Canal, Matildaville, the Potomac Gorge, presence within the Potomac River watershed and the linkage to the area's American Indian heritage. The programs would include educational materials and exhibits located at the visitor center and at some of the resources.

Visitor services would be improved by adding new exhibits to provide an enhanced interpretive experience. The current maintenance facility would be replaced with a new operations facility that would accommodate park staff (relocated from the visitor center), as well as maintenance staff and equipment, and U.S. Park Police staff. Since the site is already disturbed, the potential to impact sensitive resources is least at this location. The new facility would be designed to be aesthetically pleasing to enhance a visitor's entrance experience into the park.

Recreational use would be allowed, but managed so as to reduce conflicts with sensitive natural and cultural resources. Horseback riding would be allowed on designated trails, provided portions or entire trails are realigned or closed in areas where this use could impact a sensitive resource. For example, Mine Run Trail would either be realigned in the vicinity of Clay Pond and Mine Run, or closed, depending on the impact on these water resources from horseback riding. Similarly, climbing would be designated with anchors on routes where the potential to impact sensitive resources, such as rare plant species along Mather Gorge, is minimized.

Cultural resource management would include a plan to stabilize Matildaville, as well as controlling visitor access in areas where sensitive resources are present. Social trails would be assessed for their impacts on sensitive resources and, in most cases, eliminated. Access trails to resources for interpretation purposes would be redesigned to minimize the potential for visitor-related impacts.

Natural resource management would include improved interpretation of the natural systems present within the park and their linkages to resources outside the park's boundary. The park would develop a technical assistance program where it would demonstrate best practices in water resource management within the park and convey this information to park visitors and park neighbors. Such demonstration would include the use of storm water management techniques, to reduce run-off and improve water quality, during the construction of the new operations facility (at the existing maintenance facility site).

Traffic management would include improved signage along Georgetown Pike and improved operation at the entry gate, particularly at peak times.

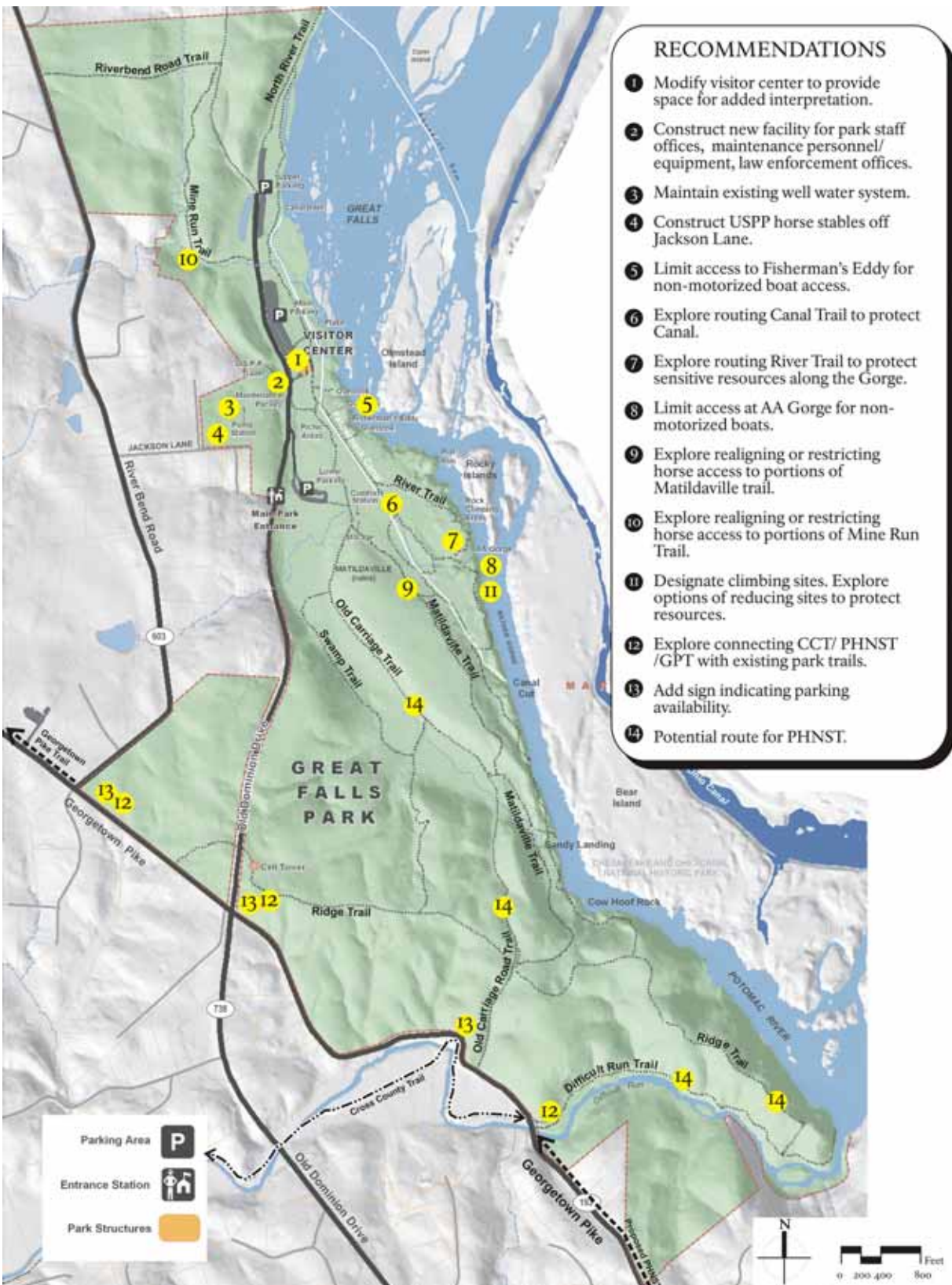


Figure 2.2: Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)

Table 2.1: Description of Alternatives

	Alternative Concept A: Continuation of Current Conditions	Alternative Concept B: Preferred Alternative
Description	<i>Continue current management practices.</i>	<i>Balance the protection of natural and cultural resources with the provision of a variety of recreational opportunities for visitors.</i>
Visitor Services	The visitor center (VC) would function similar to existing conditions, with educational and food facilities.	Rehabilitate VC to improve exhibits and establish an educational component that would focus on resource interpretation, as well as providing information on safe and responsible use of park resources for recreation.
	Rehabilitate restroom facilities.	Rehabilitate and expand existing restroom facilities at current locations.
	Maintain food service concession seasonal at current levels.	Evaluate existing services provided by the concessionaire to determine whether to expand or reduce services.
Recreation Management	Evaluate existing social trails and eliminate any that adversely impact resources. Maintain existing multi-use trails. Allow access to pedestrians, bikers, and horse-riders into the park from adjacent trails/properties.	Prepare a Trail Management Plan (TMP) including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inventory of all formal and social trails, their conditions, needed improvements, and whether to maintain or eliminate trails; 2. Remove most social trails, and prohibit new social trails; 3. Explore realigning or closing horse access to portions of Matildaville Trail and Mine Run Trail. Control equestrian access through permitting to limit damage to resources.
	Connect Cross County Trail (CCT), Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST), and the Georgetown Pike Trail (GPT) to existing trails within the park.	Same as Alternative A.
	Allow climbing activities on a first-come basis.	Prepare a Climbing Management Plan (CMP) including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Designate climbing sites with anchors; 2. Explore options of reducing climbing sites to protect sensitive natural & cultural resources; and, 3. Control access through permitting.
	Provide limited access to Fisherman's Eddy/AA Gorge for non-motorized boat access, while protecting the Forge site.	Same as Alternative A.

	Alternative Concept A: Continuation of Current Conditions	Alternative Concept B: Preferred Alternative
Natural/Cultural Resource Management	Leave buried ruins and other potential cultural sites buried for protection.	Leave buried ruins and other potential cultural sites buried for protection except in a few locations where uncovering them would significantly benefit interpretation at the park and not damage the resource. Improve interpretation related signage at VC and at resources.
	Continue existing policies to manage Matildaville.	Develop a plan to stabilize Matildaville.
	Continue current policies regarding maintaining existing viewsheds.	Prepare a Viewshed Management Plan that would maintain or enhance sensitive viewsheds.
	Continue existing water resource management policies.	Provide technical assistance to neighbors on water resource management, including stormwater management techniques aimed to reduce run-off from impervious surfaces and improve water quality. Demonstrate the use of these techniques within the park when improving the VC or constructing the new operations facility (at the existing maintenance facility site).
Traffic Management	Check parking lots and inform visitors waiting in line to expect delays when Old Dominion Drive experiences back up because the park is full.	Same as Alternative A.
	When parking lots are full, suspend entry into the park and allow only emergency vehicles to enter.	Same as Alternative A.
	Continue to provide manual message board at the intersection of Georgetown Pike and Old Dominion Drive.	Provide traffic and parking message boards at satellite locations along transportation routes leading to the park, and providing a radio announcement that informs visitors about traffic conditions at the entrance station.
Administration	Maintain staff offices at the visitor center. Upgrade maintenance facility at its current location. Retain USPP facilities at the current trailer.	Demolish existing maintenance/US Park Police (USPP) facility. Construct a new facility at the same location. Relocate staff offices from the VC to this new facility. Also, locate maintenance personnel/equipment and law enforcement staff offices and holding cell at this new facility.
	Stables for USPP horses rented outside the park.	Construct USPP stables within the park, off Jackson Lane.
	Maintain existing use of well-based water system with existing holding tank on Jackson Lane.	Maintain existing use of well-based water system with an expanded holding tank on Jackson Lane. If necessary in the future, explore bringing public water to the park's facilities.

2.2. SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The following table (Table 2.2) provides a summary of impacts of the two alternatives on various resources. Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences) of this document provides a more detailed discussion of these impacts.

Table 2.2: Summary of Impacts

Impacts Common to All Alternatives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor, short-term adverse impacts on visitors due to renovation of VC, restrooms, and overlooks. However, the long-term impacts would be positive. • Minor adverse impact on a casual visitor due to restricted access to the Potomac River. Negligible impact on boaters and fishermen. Positive impact on visitor safety. • No impacts on neighboring population and neighboring socio-economic conditions. • Positive impact on cultural/natural resources from improved trail signage and protection measures aimed to reduce conflict with trail users. • Potential positive impact on cultural and natural resources from development of an Integrated Resource Management Plan and Best Management Practices. • Potential positive impact on Forge site due to restricted access to the river. • Negligible beneficial impact on air quality due to addition of fast pass lane. • Continued minor adverse impact on visitor access when parking lots are full and entry into the park is suspended. • Potential positive impact on visitor safety due to enhanced emergency access at Sandy Landing. • Positive impact on visitor access to the park due to addition of a fast pass lane. 	

	Impacts of Alternative A: No Action/Status Quo	Impacts of Alternative B : Preferred Alternative
Land Use and Socio-Economic Conditions	No impacts on surrounding land uses.	Potential minor, short-term adverse impacts on surrounding uses from potential simultaneous construction activities within the park and construction of proposed regional trails outside the park.
	Land uses within the park function similar to existing conditions.	Land uses within the park function similar to existing conditions.
	Minimal visitation change anticipated in the short term. Over the long term, potential adverse impact from increase in visitation due to regional increase in population.	Minimal visitation change anticipated in the short term. Over the long term, potential adverse impact from increase in visitation due to regional increase in population.
	Minor, short-term impacts on visitors due to renovation to maintenance facility. No long-term impacts.	<p>Positive impact on visitor experience due to: creation of an education component at the VC; and increased interpretation of Matildaville and other resources.</p> <p>Minor, short-term adverse impacts on visitors due to demolition/construction.</p> <p>Potential adverse impact on horseback riders due to potential trail realignments/closures.</p> <p>Potential adverse impact on visitor experience due to potential reduction in climbing sites.</p> <p>Potential positive impact on emergency services due to availability of additional water from expanded holding tank.</p> <p>Potential positive impact on emergency access due to reduced back-ups along Old Dominion Drive resulting from proposed message boards and radio announcement.</p>
Cultural Resources	<p>Minor positive impact due to elimination of social trails in conflict areas.</p> <p>Potential adverse impact due to continued trail use for horseback riding in the vicinity of sensitive resources.</p>	<p>Potential positive impacts due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a Trail Management Plan that would eliminate most social trails, restrict new social trails and explore realigning or restricting horse access on Matildaville and Mine Run Trails; • Creation of an education component at the visitor center focused on responsible use of park resources for recreation; • Controlled access to AA Gorge; • Continued preservation of buried ruins; and • Plan to stabilize/protect Matildaville.
	Minor visual improvement at the park entrance due to upgrading of the maintenance facility.	Potential positive impact on visual conditions at park entrance due to new facility at location of maintenance building.

Natural Environment	<p>No impacts on geophysical resources, or biological resources.</p> <p>The VC and two northern parking lots would continue to function in the 100-year floodplain.</p> <p>Existing trails would continue to experience erosion-related impacts from current uses.</p>	<p>Potential minor adverse impact on vegetation due to the proposed stables and paddock area for USPP horses.</p> <p>Potential minor adverse if portions of the new operations facility are located within the 100-year floodplain.</p> <p>Potential positive impact due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of an education component at the VC focused to provide classes/ information about responsible use of park resources for recreation. • Enhanced resource interpretation. • Preparation of a Climbing Management Plan to designate trails and eliminate those with potential to damage sensitive resources. • Preparation of a TMP that would recommend elimination of social trails, as well as redesign designated trails, in areas where these adversely impact sensitive resources. • Use of BMPs in the construction of the new operations facility to reduce stormwater run-off and improve water quality.
	No impacts on air quality in addition to those under Impacts Common to All.	<p>Minor short-term adverse impacts on air quality due to demolition of maintenance facility and construction of new facility.</p> <p>Potential minor positive impact on localized air quality due to reduction in vehicular back-ups.</p>
	No impacts on noise.	Minor short-term adverse impact from noise due to demolition of maintenance facility and construction of new facility.
	No cumulative impacts anticipated.	Potential temporary cumulative impacts due to construction activities within the park and construction of trails segments for the CCT, PHNST, & Georgetown Pike Trail.
Transportation System	No impacts on vehicular access in addition to those under Impacts Common to All. Continued adverse impact on properties along Old Dominion Drive when traffic to park is backed up.	<p>Potential positive impact on vehicular access due to proposed dynamic message boards/radio announcement.</p> <p>Potential temporary cumulative impacts due to construction-related vehicles on area roadways.</p>
Site Utilities	Negligible impacts on water and sanitary sewer systems due to improvements to existing restrooms.	Positive impact on water supply from expanded water tank off Jackson Lane.

2.3 POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

This section defines all of the management prescriptions that would be applied to Great Falls Park under Alternative B (Preferred Alternative). The management prescriptions define the desired resource conditions and visitor experiences, including the appropriate kinds and levels of management, use, and development. Under Alternative B (Preferred Alternative), Great Falls Park would contain four management prescription zones - Canal, Cultural and Natural, Mather Gorge, and Developed Zones. These are described below and illustrated on Figure 2.3.

2.3.1 *Canal Zone*

The Canal Zone would include those areas of Great Falls Park that contain remnants of the historic Patowmack Canal and related structural features, including Matildaville. This zone would be managed with the principal focus being the preservation of historic canal resources. Visitor use would be limited to staying on maintained trails and learning about canal features and ruins from brochures, printed materials, and exhibit panels.

Visitor Experience

Visitors would be offered opportunities to observe, and learn about the park's significant cultural resources through wayside exhibits, formal interpretive walks, and informal interaction with regularly roving rangers. The probability of encountering other visitors, both individuals and groups, would be high.

Resource Condition or Character

Cultural sites, natural resources, visitors, and trails would be managed to ensure preservation of sensitive cultural resources.

Appropriate Kinds of Activities or Facilities

This zone would include significant cultural resources present in the park associated with the Patowmack Canal. An unpaved pedestrian trail system would allow visitors to observe the cultural resources. No administration or operational facilities would be constructed in these areas. Vehicular access for operations and emergency purposes would be provided such that the impact on cultural resources would be minimal. Bike trails and horse-riding trails would not be permitted and there would be no areas designated for picnicking and incidental sports.

2.3.2 *Cultural and Natural Zone*

The cultural and natural zone would be those areas of the park that have any archeological, cultural, or ethnographic resources related to the park's prehistoric and historic periods, as well as those areas of the park that have any natural resources related to the diversity of fauna and flora in the Great Falls of the Potomac region. This zone would be managed with the primary goal of preserving a variety of cultural and natural resources, some of which include unexcavated archeological sites, the Old Graveyard, Stout Indian Sites, wetland areas, wildlife habitats, and areas containing rare plant communities. Visitor access and use would be regulated and mainly dependent upon cultural and natural resource preservation needs.



Matildaville Ruins - part of the proposed Canal Zone



Northern portion of the park – part of the Cultural and Natural Zone

Visitor Experience

Visitors would be offered an opportunity to pursue recreation activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and biking on designated trails. There could be limited opportunities for visitors to experience the sensitive cultural and natural resources due to their fragile condition and the need to protect them. There would be some interpretation of the cultural resources through addition of wayside exhibits. Additional interpretation opportunities would primarily focus on orienting the visitor to the history of the trail, its length, difficulty and location in the park. The probability of encountering other visitors would be moderate to low.

Resource Condition or Character

Areas would be managed with an emphasis on preserving both the cultural and natural resources and settings, including significant viewsheds. Management actions would focus on trail management, stabilization of cultural resources, visitor/interpretation waysides, and public safety efforts.

Appropriate Kinds of Activities or Facilities

Visitors would be controlled and required to stay on formal trails to protect cultural and natural resources. The natural environment could be modified for essential visitor and park operation needs, such as the provision of comfort stations and boardwalks provided these are located in areas where there are no impacts on cultural or sensitive natural resources. All changes would be designed to fit within the natural environment. Access to the Potomac River could include areas designated for activities such as fishing and boating.

2.3.3 Mather Gorge Zone

This zone would be located within Mather Gorge of the Potomac River, including the adjacent cliffs and shoreline. The zone would be managed to mainly preserve important cultural and natural resources and to protect employees and visitors. The cliffs, Gorge, and river have inherent natural dangers and are popular areas for recreational users who must have special skills (i.e., white water kayaking, rafting, and technical rock climbing). Visitors would be restricted to designated special use areas and alerted to potentially hazardous conditions and dangerous locations.

Visitor Experience

The Mather Gorge Zone would provide visitors with opportunities to view the Potomac River, as well as to pursue recreational activities such as rock climbing, hiking, boating and fishing in designated areas. Visitors would also experience the diverse natural resources located within this zone through wayside exhibits and ranger-led programs. The probability of encountering other visitors would be high.

Resource Condition or Character

Areas within this zone would be managed with an emphasis on protecting natural and cultural resources while providing visitor access along trails to designated activity areas. Management

actions would include natural and cultural resource management, public safety efforts, and maintenance of trails and viewing areas.

Appropriate Kinds of Activities or Facilities

This zone would include pedestrian trails, designated areas for rock climbing and fishing, and could have location(s) for putting non-motorized boats such as kayaks, canoes, and rafts into the river. Emergency access to the river would be maintained.

2.3.4 Developed Zone

This zone is where administrative, maintenance, parking, and visitor facilities for Great Falls Park would be located. The developments in this zone would serve the needs of park management and park visitors (i.e., maintenance facility, park water system, and visitor center). These developments would be located to minimize impacts on cultural, ethnographic, and natural resources in the park and provide basic visitor services. The public use areas of this zone would receive high visitation on a seasonal basis while other areas within this zone would be restricted to official use only.

Visitor Experience

The Developed Zone would provide a high degree of orientation and interpretation of the park's primary resources. Facilities would be conveniently located and accessible, and would preserve and enhance existing viewsheds. The probability of encountering other visitors or NPS staff would be very high as this area would be seasonally crowded.

Resource Condition or Character

Resources would be modified for visitor and park operational needs, while providing protection for natural and cultural resources. Visitors and facilities would be highly managed for resource protection and visitor safety. Buildings, structures, and other improvements may be constructed to enhance the visitor experience, and protect resources.

Appropriate Kinds of Activities or Facilities

This zone would include visitor facilities and park administrative and maintenance facilities such as a visitor center, restroom facilities, concession stands, entrance stations, access roads, paved trails, visitor parking areas, constructed overlooks, picnic/incidental play areas, NPS staff offices, U.S. Park Police (USPP) offices and horse stables, storage areas for maintenance equipment and materials, storage facilities for administration needs, volunteers and education materials and exhibits, utility facilities, communication facilities, and parking for NPS staff and maintenance vehicles. There would be a high degree of pedestrian access to visitor services with pedestrian trails that would meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility guidelines. Limited access may be provided to bicyclists and horseback riders.



Mather Gorge – part of the Mather Gorge Zone



Maintenance Facility – part of the Developed Zone

2.3.5 Application of Management Prescriptions

In accordance with this draft plan, the park would be managed as four separate zones under Alternative B (Preferred Alternative). The locations of these zones are summarized below and illustrated in Figure 2.3.

- **Canal Zone:** This zone would occupy 8.9 percent of the park. It would encompass the Patowmack Canal, along with structures listed on the NPS's List of Classified Structures (LCS). The zone would extend from the Wing Dam to the north, to the AA Gorge and Canal Cut area to the south.
- **Cultural and Natural Zone:** This zone would occupy 82 percent of the park. It would be the largest zone in the park and would encompass most of the area to the north and west of the upper parking lot, the area to the west of Old Dominion Drive, and most of the southern portion of the park. This zone would include culturally sensitive sites and natural areas.
- **Mather Gorge Zone:** This zone would occupy 4.5 percent of the park. It would extend along the Potomac River, from the approximately the third (southern) overlook to Cow Hoof Rock, and would include portions of the River Trail, Sandy Landing and rock climbing areas.
- **Developed Zone:** This zone would occupy 4.6 percent of the park. It would include the visitor center, entrance station, parking areas, maintenance facility, existing well water system and the overlooks.

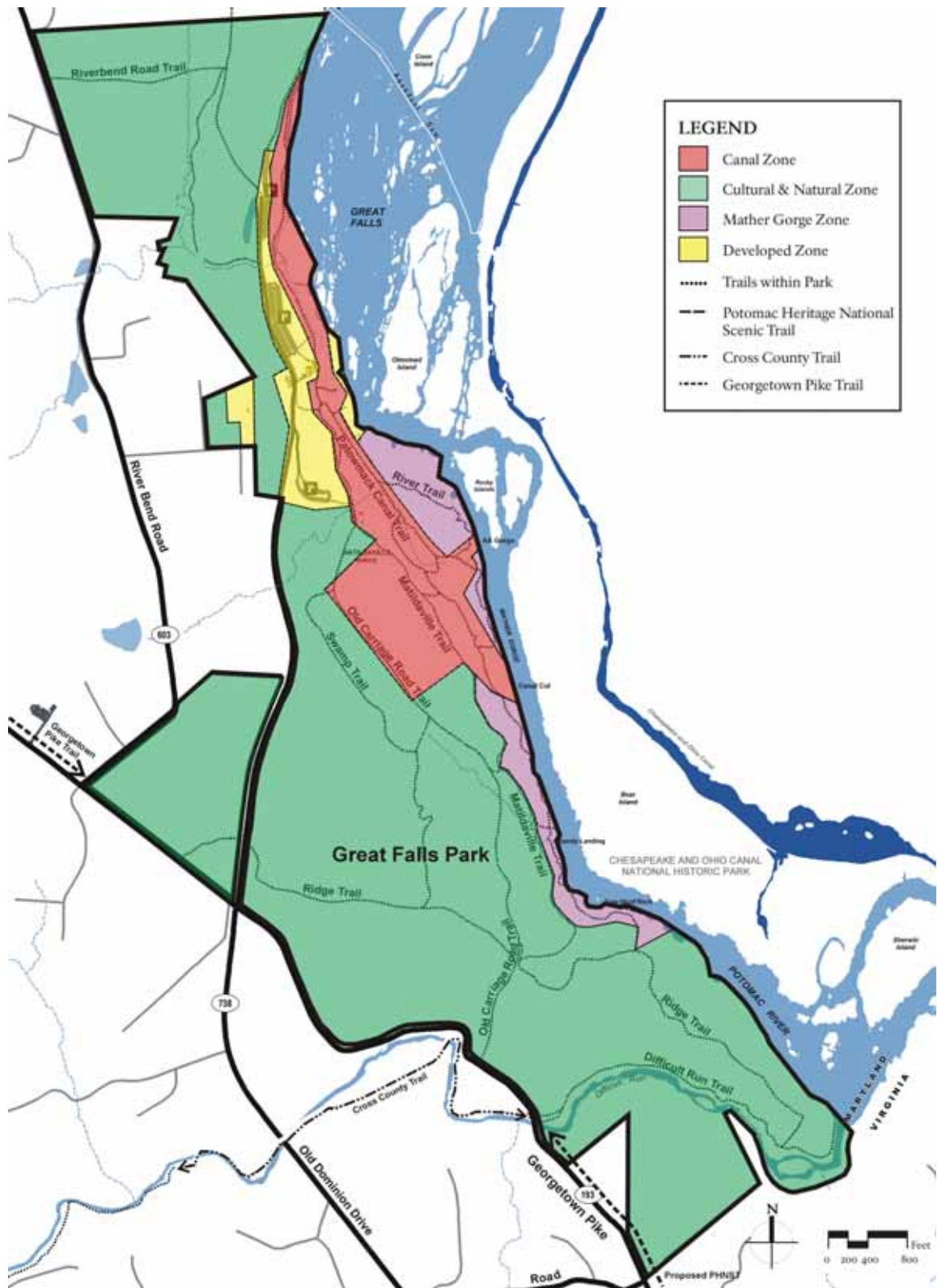


Figure 2.3: Alternative B (Application of Management Prescriptions)

2.4 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED

Several additional management alternatives were developed for the park. These alternatives were eliminated from further consideration due to either public feedback, significant potential impact on the park's resources, or operational concerns. These alternatives are briefly discussed below.

2.4.1 *Establish Additional Visitor Nodes*

This alternative examined establishing an additional visitor node with parking and visitor service facilities within the smaller parcel to the northwest of the intersection of Old Dominion Drive and Georgetown Pike. The purpose of this alternative was to distribute visitors to additional parts of the park by providing parking and visitor services closer to Georgetown Pike, while reducing traffic along Old Dominion Drive.

The alternative was eliminated from further consideration due to potential impacts on natural resources. The park is predominantly wooded towards the west, and creating a new visitor node would require clearing some of the wooded area. Also, providing a new node with access either off Georgetown Pike or off Old Dominion Drive, closer to Georgetown Pike, would greatly reduce queuing space for vehicles and would result in vehicle back-ups along Georgetown Pike.

2.4.2 *Establish an Additional Access Road to the Park*

This alternative examined establishing a vehicular access road to the park off Georgetown Pike by improving Old Carriage Road Trail. The purpose of this alternative was to provide a second vehicular access to the park. The alternative was eliminated from further consideration due to its potential impacts on Old Carriage Road Trail, a culturally important park resource, as well as the lack of sufficient site distance along Georgetown Pike to establish a safe access road.

2.4.3 *Provide a Shuttle to the Park*

This alternative examined adding a shuttle service from satellite locations to the park during peak visitation periods. The purpose of this alternative was to provide visitors with an alternative mode of transportation. There were two potential scenarios discussed:

- i. Establish satellite parking off-site, and provide a shuttle that would connect the park to the satellite parking. As part of this concept, existing parking at the park would be reduced.

This scenario was eliminated from further consideration at this time due to its operational burden on the park, and potential impact on visitation. For this scenario to be effective, shuttle buses would have to operate regularly and at fairly frequent intervals. It would add considerable travel time for visitors, and given the presence of other parks in the area, may dissuade visitors from coming to the park. If the demand for visiting this park increases significantly in the future, or if a regional strategy is developed to connect parks with a shuttle system, similar to the Tourmobile (a shuttle service on the National Mall), the alternative may be re-examined.

- ii. Eliminate the existing visitor center and establish another center outside the park with smaller visitor nodes within the park. As part of this concept, existing parking at the park would be eliminated.

This scenario was eliminated from further consideration due to its operational difficulty and potential impact on visitation. An alternative location for a visitor center and parking would require splitting staff between the visitor center and the park, adding to operational costs. Also, similar to the previous scenario, it would add considerable travel time for visitors who would park at a satellite location and then use shuttles from the parking location to the park. Given the presence of alternative parks in the area, the added travel time might dissuade visitors from coming to the park.

2.4.4 Eliminate Bicycles and Horses from the Park's Trail System

This alternative examined limiting the existing trails in the park to pedestrians, and eliminating horse and bike access. The purpose of this alternative was to minimize potential for damage to sensitive natural and cultural resources within the park. This alternative was eliminated from further consideration as it would have reduced some of the recreational opportunities identified as important by the public.

2.4.5 Provide Car-Top Boat Access at Sandy Landing and Parking at the Quarry

This alternative examined providing car-top boat access at Sandy Landing for non-motorized boats and adding a parking area, controlled by concessions, at the Quarry for boaters and horse trailers. The purpose of this alternative was to provide additional recreational opportunities including an increased access to the river for boating. The alternative was eliminated from further consideration due to its potential for damage to the Old Carriage Road Trail, a culturally important park resource, and the Quarry site.

2.4.6 Construct a Second New Facility for Maintenance Staff, Materials, and Equipment

This alternative examined constructing two new facilities: one for park staff and USPP; and, the second for maintenance staff, materials and equipment. The first would be located at the site of the existing maintenance facility. The second facility was proposed north of the lower parking lot. The alternative was eliminated from further consideration after additional study.

2.4.7 Construct a New Trail parallel to Old Dominion Drive and Georgetown Pike

This alternative examined constructing a new trail adjacent to Old Dominion Drive and Georgetown Pike that would have extended the proposed Cross County Trail (CCT) and the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST) to the main entrance of the park. This alternative was eliminated from further consideration at this time because the route of the proposed PHNST is still to be determined outside the park, as well as potential impacts on the park's natural resources.

2.5 ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality. CEQ provides direction that “[t]he environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in Section 101 of National Environmental Policy Act, which considers:

1. Fulfilling the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assuring for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserving important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintaining, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieving a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities; and
6. Enhancing the quality of renewable resources and approaching the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources (National Environmental Policy Act, section 101).”

Alternative B (the Preferred Alternative) is identified as the environmentally preferred alternative. By protecting the sensitive natural and cultural resources while also providing opportunities to recreate, the park would meet its responsibility as a “trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;” assure “for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;” attain “the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety;” and, preserve “important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage.”