

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK

Significance statements identify the resources and values central to managing the park and express the importance of the park to our natural and cultural heritage.

- Great Falls Park contributes to creating and preserving the spectacular scenic views of the Potomac River Falls, the Potomac River Gorge and the Potomac Palisades.
- The park contains one of the first canal systems built in the country (1785-1802) often referred to as George Washington's "Dream Canal". This National Historic Landmark was one of the first river navigational systems that supported trade with the West.
- Despite its urban location, the Potomac Gorge is one of the most noteworthy natural areas in the National Park System. It extends 15 miles along the Potomac River, from a location above Great Falls south to Theodore Roosevelt Island. Due to the unusual hydrogeology, the Gorge is one of the country's most biologically diverse areas serving as a meeting place for more than 200 rare plant species and communities. It also contains a diversity of habitats of the scoured bedrock floodplain communities.
- The Gorge on the Potomac River drains a watershed of approximately 14,670 square miles from four states (Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania), making it the second largest contributor to the Chesapeake Bay.
- Great Falls Park is home to one of the few known Native American petroglyphs in the Washington metropolitan area.
- Great Falls Park offers a diversity of resource-based recreational experiences in close proximity to the nation's capital. Activities range from picnicking, guided ranger programs, hiking, horse back riding, bicycling through scenic wooded trails, rock climbing along the Gorge, to white water activities on the river.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

Activity	Anticipated Date	Public Involvement
Gather information/identify issues	Winter 02/03	Scoping meeting, Newsletter & website input
Develop & evaluate alternatives	Winter 02/03 to Spring 03	Public meeting, Newsletter & website input
Identify a preferred alternative; prepare draft GMP/EIS	Spring to Fall 03	Public review of draft, public meeting & website input
Revise & publish final GMP/EIS	Winter 03 to Summer 04	Final Plan distributed to public

The planning process involves four broad steps. During the first step, the planning team reaffirms the purpose, signifi-

cance, and mission of the park; identifies issues and desired futures; and collects data related to the issues. The second step includes compiling and analyzing public comments on issues; and identifying alternative approaches for managing the park. The third step consists of identifying a preferred alternative and preparing a draft GMP/EIS that evaluates the environmental impacts of the alternatives. The final step consists of preparing a final GMP/EIS and includes responses to public comments on the draft document.

### WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED BY THE GMP?

The following are a few of the preliminary issues to be addressed in this general management plan. We would like your ideas and comments on these and any additional issues and concerns that you may have.

#### Access and Circulation

**Vehicular Access to the Park:** Old Dominion Drive provides the only public vehicular access to the park. During peak visitation period, this road gets congested adversely affecting the experience of visitors, and impacting neighboring residents, park officials and emergency access to the park.

**Multiple Non-Vehicular Access Locations:** The park staff does not currently monitor the non-motorized entrances, and therefore, has no control over who accesses the park from these locations.

**Social Trails:** There are a number of locations in the park where visitors wander away from assigned trails and create 'social' trails. A number of these social trails have the potential to damage significant cultural and sensitive natural resources.

**Conflict Between Users:** The park staff often finds visitors such as bikers or horse riders on trails that are not open to them.

#### Natural & Cultural Resource Management/Protection

**Impact of Rock Climbing on Sensitive Vegetation:** Existing and increasing demand for rock climbing causes concern due to the sensitive ecosystem that exists along the edge of the Gorge.

**Conflict between Vegetation & Cultural Resources:** Existing native vegetation, such as large established trees that grow on the walls of the Patowmack Canal, cause concern as they can significantly damage the structural integrity as well as the interpretive quality of the cultural resources. The Park has a mandate to preserve existing vegetation, as well as the cultural resources, which causes a conflict between the management of the two resources.

**Conflict between Visitor Access & Preservation:** In certain locations, existing trails providing access to cultural resources also cause concern due to the potential damage from extensive use.

#### Visitor Activities

**Increasing demand for Rock Climbing:** Increasing competition for the climbing routes could potentially impact visitor experience, and be detrimental to the existing climbing resource.

**Visitor Safety:** There have been a number of cases where visitors have suffered serious injuries while taking part in activities along the river.

#### Facilities

**Space for Park Staff:** The existing office facilities are inadequate for the current staff size and the visitor center building does not offer opportunities for expansion.

**Inadequate Comfort Facilities:** Existing comfort (restroom) facilities are inadequate to handle the amount of visitors accessing the park during peak periods and special events.