

# Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts Environmental Assessment for Encore Circle Patio Expansion

## **1. Introduction**

### **a. Park History**

Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts was authorized October 15, 1966, by Public Law 89-671 "for the purpose of establishing in the National Capital area a park for the performing arts and related educational programs and recreation use in connection therewith..." The name of the park was changed to Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts on August 21, 2002, by Public Law 107-219.

Under Public Law 97-310 the Secretary of the Interior was directed to enter into agreements with the Wolf Trap Foundation (Foundation), a private not-for-profit organization, to establish responsibilities regarding the presentation of performing arts and related educational and cultural programs in the park. The Foundation acts as the park's business partner, administering the performing arts schedule and content for the park, including the 7,000 person capacity Filene Center and the Children's Theatre-in-the-Woods. The National Park Service operates the park to support the performances and develops additional educational and interpretive programs. The agreement between the two organizations recognizes the need for the Foundation to be financially self-supporting to the extent possible and specifically permits the Foundation to receive revenues and fees derived from contractual arrangements for the use of the Filene Center and other park facilities. As with many performing arts organizations, the Foundation must fund-raise to balance its budget, through individual and corporate donations.

### **1.b. Facility Description**

The current Encore Circle facility is a long, narrow, single-story log structure that runs east and west along one side of the farmhouse lawn. A 40' x 40' flagstone patio sits next to the south (farmhouse) side of the building. A low fieldstone retaining wall, about 16" high, extends the length of the east side. An open framework of aluminum poles holds up a tent covering over the patio during the performing season. Off-season, the tent fabric is removed; the aluminum poles presently remain in place year-round.

The original portion of the Encore Circle log structure was built in 1978 and was known as the "Wolf Trappers' Cabin". It was later re-named the "Shelter". In 1995 the structure's original small stone patio was expanded for use as a Foundation donor facility, and the whole entity renamed "Encore Circle." In 1997 the building was expanded to include restrooms and a kitchen area to service as a visitor reception functions for the Wolf Trap Foundation. In 1998, the stone patio was expanded a second time to its present size. In 2005 the building was expanded again to enlarge the bathrooms and storage. The Encore Circle now consists of an indoor gathering space, restrooms, a small catering kitchen, and an outdoor patio that has a tent covering during the performing season.

Encore Circle is currently used as part of the Foundation's ongoing fundraising activities in support of the park's performing arts programs.

### **1.c. Purpose and Need for Action**

Donors to the Wolf Trap Foundation expect certain benefits and recognition, much like donors receive at numerous nonprofit, educational, theater, and sports venues. The Encore Circle is a donor facility that provides a gathering place for Foundation donors, who by extension, are donors to the "business" conducted at Wolf Trap - the presentation of a variety of live performances. This facility, albeit unique in national parks where exclusive use of areas is unusual except through established permit processes, is an important and necessary facility that contributes greatly to Wolf Trap's success. Encore Circle has been in use as an entertainment area since it was built, and by the Foundation as a donor facility since 1995.

Over the last ten years, the patio area of Encore Circle has been increasingly extended onto the adjacent farmhouse lawn through the use of stanchions, ropes and potted plants, in order to accommodate the number of attendees. The need to expand onto the grass during the 2006 performing season occurred for approximately one third of the performances (30 performances). Having Encore Circle patrons use the grass is far less than ideal, particularly in wet/inclement weather. The patio area needs to expand about 50% to 60% to accommodate the current number of users.



## **2. Affected Environment:**

### **2.a. Park Setting**

Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts is comprised of approximately 117 acres; the park holds tree-cutting easements on an additional 13 acres along the eastern boundary. It is surrounded by residential neighborhoods on the east, west, and north, and bordered on the south by the Dulles Toll road. Located in long-established Fairfax County and only 30 minutes from the nation's capital, the park provides a physical and visual relief from the urban and suburban development of the Washington metropolitan area. Trap Road, a minor arterial maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, connects the town of Vienna with Route 7, bisecting the park and providing the only vehicular access. About half the park is heavily developed and maintained, with structures, parking lots, paved roads, trails, mowed lawns & meadows. Within the park are four distinctive areas—fenced grassy fields that convey the pastoral quality of the past farm use; the Filene Center theater complex; the old farmhouse and its associated buildings and gardens, (original residence of the park's founder, Catherine Filene Shouse), and the remainder, relatively undisturbed woodlands. The Encore Circle building defines the northern edge of the farmhouse lawn area; the proposed project would be located in the lawn area of the old farmhouse.

The farmhouse complex is integral to the history and “feel” of Wolf Trap. The farmhouse, now used as the administrative headquarters for the park, is the oldest building in the park and was the original house purchased and used by the Shouses in the 1930's. Over the 30 years that Mrs. Shouse resided in the house, she created a distinctive landscape around it, transforming it from a working farm to a “gentleman's farm” and entertainment showpiece. Around the farmhouse the Shouses constructed a decorative log smokehouse, and brought in and reconstructed an historic log cabin to serve as a caretaker's house. Set at the very top of a hill, the farmhouse has views to the east and an extensive view to the west, across the open fields. Garden plantings included lilacs, dogwoods, and extensive lawn areas, and garden decorative features included the old hitching post and old lamppost. The Shouses used their property to host important social events that were intertwined with Washington business. For example, in 1944 the Shouses hosted an informal meal on the lawn for the members of the United Kingdom delegation to the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. A plaque mounted on a large shade tree for many years attested to this event. In the early years of the park, Mrs. Shouse hosted receptions for dignitaries on the lawn area, including a dinner for President Gerald Ford in 1975. The park tradition of the holiday sing-along began with informal gatherings in the lawn area in the early years of the park.

Although no longer used for these kinds of large-scale events, the farmhouse and surrounding lawn now serve as the symbolic heart of the park. The farmhouse bell,

mounted on a post just south of the farmhouse, is rung before each Filene Center performance to alert patrons that the show is about to start (or restart after intermission), and for patrons to take their seats. A bronze bust of Mrs. Shouse is permanently mounted in the garden near Encore Circle. Access to the exteriors of the farmhouse, its outbuildings and gardens, and the bust of Mrs. Shouse, is integral to the public use of the park.

## **2. b. Natural environment**

The terrain at Wolf Trap consists of rolling hills, some of them relatively steep. A permanent stream (Wolftrap Creek) that flows through the park is a dominant feature. The developed areas include grassy hills that are used for parking, picnicking, and occasional events. The park administrative buildings and the entrance to the Filene Center sit atop a ridge that dominates the center of the park, and that offers broad vistas to the west and north. The undeveloped areas of the park are almost entirely wooded, and range from flat wetland areas to steep hillsides (over 30% gradient with a vertical height of 50 feet).

### **2.b.1. Water resources**

The main water resource of the park is Wolftrap Creek, a permanent stream that winds around and through the park. Two small tributaries, Courthouse Branch and an unnamed watercourse, join Wolftrap Creek within the park. Wolftrap Creek is a part of the Difficult Run watershed, in the Potomac River basin, and ultimately part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. A two-acre former farm pond, now surrounded by forest, provides habitat for a variety of amphibians, migrating and resident birds, two species of water turtle, and on occasion, beaver. The park also contains several permanent springs and several acres of permanent wetland. The park's water resources are major contributors to both the scenic value of the park and its biological diversity.

Wolftrap Creek has been moderately to heavily impacted by the increasing urbanization within its watershed. Runoff from the surrounding suburban residential areas and the Tysons Corner commercial area bring pollutants, trash, and frequent flash floods. Impacts from the park operations are possible, although they have never been measured. These impacts might include pollution from runoff in vehicular areas, and sedimentation due to erosion of the hillsides that is aggravated by heavy foot and vehicular traffic. Water quality in Wolftrap Creek is consistently poor, according to data collected by Fairfax County and the NPS.

### **2.b.2. Floodplains**

Floodplain delineations have been completed for the Difficult Run basin, which includes Wolftrap Creek. The floodplain maps were prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey, in cooperation with the County of Fairfax, as part of a study of urbanization effects on flood discharges. Several structures are currently sited within the delineated 100-year floodplain within the park boundary. These

structures include the Theatre-in-the-Woods, the Meadow Pavilion, and the Meadow restroom located just to the northeast of the Filene Center. The Encore Circle project is not in the floodplain, therefore, compliance with Executive Order 11988 is not required.

### **2.b.3. Wetlands**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed a wetlands inventory for the park in accordance with the National Wetlands Inventory program. There are several acres of wetlands within the park. This project is not located in a wetlands area.

### **2.b.4. Vegetation**

A little more than half of the park, or about 65 acres, is a minimally maintained, natural forest community. The upland hardwoods consist primarily of dry site species, including red, black, and chestnut oaks, and hickories. Understory plants include dogwood, sassafras, and mountain laurel. Bottomland forests in the wetlands and floodplain along Wolftrap Creek include yellow poplar, red maple, river birch sycamore, ironwood, with understories of wild azalea, viburnum, and American holly. One large area in the eastern portion of the park, that was maintained as meadow until the mid 1980's, has subsequently been abandoned and is currently dominated by Virginia cedar, redbud, Virginia pine, and other early successional species.

The open grassy areas consist primarily of managed turf. Although much of the park resembles an open natural meadow, in reality the park has no meadow area, and most of the grassy areas must be heavily maintained, including annual aeration and reseeding. In the vicinity of the Filene Center, park entrances, and park administrative buildings are a number of ornamental plantings, including dogwood, ornamental cherry, sugar maples, and shrubs such as forsythia and lilac.

### **2.b.5. Wildlife**

The park serves as a habitat for a variety of wildlife. Mammals inhabiting the park include raccoon, opossum, red fox, squirrel, groundhog, eastern cottontail, skunk, white-tailed deer, and numerous rodent species. Beaver reside in the park on an intermittent basis. Numerous species of amphibians and fish inhabit the stream and the two-acre farm pond, and the pond hosts two varieties of water turtles. The park is an excellent habitat for birds, with both resident and migratory birds utilizing its abundant edge habitat and permanent water sources. The park's mammal, bird, fish, and reptile and amphibian species have been the subject of formal scientific inventories in the last five years under the NPS Inventory and Monitoring program.

### **2.b.6. Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species.**

With the possible exception of transient individuals, no federally listed or proposed endangered or threatened species, or state species, are known to inhabit

the park. The potential for locating rare species and/or unique natural communities is low, based on the park's natural features (soils, topology, geology), intense use, urbanized setting, and recent agricultural history.

## **2. c. Cultural Resources**

The setting of Wolf Trap, which is comprised of rolling hills and wooded fields, provides a rural atmosphere amidst a highly developed area. The park was originally a small farm and then, beginning with its acquisition by Mrs. Jouett Shouse in the 1930's, a country retreat. The urban and suburban development that Mrs. Shouse foresaw in the early 1960's, which was the genesis of her donation of the land to the National Park Service, has since completely enveloped the park. With the building of the Filene Center and the development of park facilities, most of the physical elements of the original farm have disappeared. The corrals and animal pens and other supporting outbuildings were gradually removed both by Mrs. Shouse and later after the establishment of the park. In 2003, the major barn on the property was determined to be too deteriorated to save and was demolished. It was replaced by a new structure that was deliberately built to resemble the period barn, on the same footprint and with the same approximate proportions, materials, and details.

Some of the historic farm period structures remain, principally the farmhouse itself. While the original log cabin portion possibly dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the earliest documented occupation dates to 1849, and the cabin likely dates to that time, (although it is possible that the occupants made use of a pre-existing tenant house). Very little historical research concerning the house has been done. Nevertheless, the log house contains many original 19<sup>th</sup> century features, including the intact core of a one room log cabin with attic and fireplace, and an array of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century additions typical of farmhouses in the area.

In 1997, as part of the development of a General Management Plan, a determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places of the remaining farm buildings, including the buildings brought to the site by Mrs. Shouse, was completed. The NPS, in consultation with the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), determined that these structures, including what is now known as Encore Circle, were not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Also as part of the process for the General Management Plan, an archeological overview and assessment was conducted at Wolf Trap by the NPS staff of the Applied Archeology Center of the Denver Service Center. It did not address the farmhouse area or Encore Circle. In January of 2005, when trenching was done across the farmhouse lawn for utilities, several artifacts were found in and near the Encore Circle project area. These included several sherds of 19th century ceramics, and the base of a Late Archaic Period Halifax dart point dating to circa 3,500 B.C. As a result of these finds, Phase I archeological testing was performed by NPS archeologists on 12/19/2006 within a 25 x 40 ft area of potential effect. Four prehistoric flakes, three sherds of clear bottle glass, three late 19th/early 20th-century stoneware sherds, a wire nail fragment, a porcelain lid

to a child's tea set, and a piece of modern plastic were recovered from the excavation of seven shovel test pits. All the objects were mixed within a thin, buried A horizon. No subsurface features or intact cultural deposits were observed. The testing methodology and findings are documented in an "Archeological Clearance Memorandum" dated 01/17/2007. This Memorandum also includes a recommendation for archeological monitoring of the site during ground disturbing activities.

## **2.d. Social and Economic Environment**

### **2.d.1. Land-use:**

Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts is located in north central Fairfax County in Virginia. The county is an intensely developed suburban area, part of the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Most of the area directly bordering on the park is stable upper middle class residential neighborhoods, consisting of low density, single-family houses. The Dulles Access and Toll Roads, a major commuting corridor, form the southwestern border of the park. While there are no commercial or industrial facilities directly bordering the park, Tysons Corner, only a few miles away, is a major employment and retail center, with numerous high- and mid-rise buildings as well as high density housing.

### **2.d.2. Population and Employment:**

The total population of the Washington-Baltimore combined metropolitan statistical area according to the 2000 Census was over 7,600,000. Fairfax County's population in the same census was 970,000, and was estimated to exceed one million at the end of 2002. The county's population has more than doubled since the park was established in 1966.

Fairfax County's population is very affluent, with a median household income of more than \$84,000, and fewer than 5% of the residents with incomes below the poverty line. Residents are highly educated (56% with a college degree, compared with 24% nationally). The county has become increasingly diverse over the last three decades, with more than a third of the population now made up of minority groups, compared to less than 14% in 1970. Asian/Pacific Islanders are the largest minority group, with 14% of the county's population, followed by Hispanic at 12%, and African-American at 8%. Students in Fairfax County schools come from some 100 nations across the world, and speak about 150 languages.

Fairfax County is a retail and employment center equivalent to a major city. Several Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in Fairfax County, and more than 27,000 payroll establishments that employ nearly 518,000 workers are based in the county. There are more than 175 international companies in Fairfax County, and the county is home to more than 4,000 technology firms.

### **2.d.3. Recreation**

Fairfax County has more than 380 county parks covering more than 20,000 acres, and the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority operates eleven regional parks. Wolf Trap is one of four federally run areas in the county, the others being George Washington

Memorial Parkway (with numerous sites), a portion of Manassas Battlefield, and the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge.

## **2.e. Park Operations**

Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts is the only national park dedicated to the performing arts. While visitors use the park year-round, the vast majority of visitation occurs during the performing season, between mid-May and mid-September. Annual visitation is around 500,000 per year. Visitation averages about 5,000 per show, with the maximum seating (a sold-out show) at 7,024. A director and deputy director, who fulfill the traditional roles of superintendent and deputy/assistant superintendent, manage Wolf Trap. Park management reports to the NPS National Capital Regional Director. The Wolf Trap Foundation, a non-profit foundation and the park's legislatively mandated business partner, manages performer bookings and scheduling, ticket sales, marketing, concessions, and fund raising. The role of the National Park Service is to manage the park facilities, manage the stage operations, provide visitor services, manage the park's natural and cultural resources, and provide interpretive and educational programs.

Park operations at Encore Circle area are limited. The donor entertainment and hospitality operations of Encore Circle are solely the responsibility of the Wolf Trap Foundation, including all kitchen operations and equipment, food services, and cleaning. The Foundation is also responsible for the tent and tent structure, including setting up the tent fabric in the spring and removing the tent after the performing season. The park is responsible for maintaining the basic structure and utilities of the building and the patio, as well as the surrounding gardens and lawn. Each year, the park interpretive staff hold seven to ten pre-performance previews ("PPPs"), on the lawn area on this side of the farmhouse. PPPs are discussions, lectures, and demonstrations by invited speakers held prior to a performance, that give visitors greater insight into the particular performer or art form that the patrons are about to see on the Filene Center stage. The set-up for PPPs involves a small platform or lectern set up on the lawn at the south end of the farmhouse, with rows of chairs set up across the lawn towards Encore Circle.

## **3. Description of the Alternatives and Environmental Consequences of Each**

### **Alternative 1:**

#### **No Action**

Under this alternative, the Encore Circle patio and tent support structure would not be expanded. The current arrangement of extending the patio onto the farmhouse lawn through the use of stanchions, ropes and potted plants would be continued. No park resources would be impacted. Park operations would not be impacted.

In evaluating this alternative it was felt that continued expansion of services onto the grass is less than ideal, particularly in wet/inclement weather, and that the "jury-rigged"



like appearance of the expanded operation is not to the visual standard that the park strives to maintain. The Foundation, must raise money through fund-raising and Foundation donors expect certain benefits and recognition from the Foundation, much like donors receive at numerous nonprofit, educational, theater, and sports venues. In addition, the donors expect a high standard of quality of the facilities and services that they receive. A reduction in the number of donors and donations to the Foundation would lead to a reduction in the amount of support for the park that the Foundation can provide.

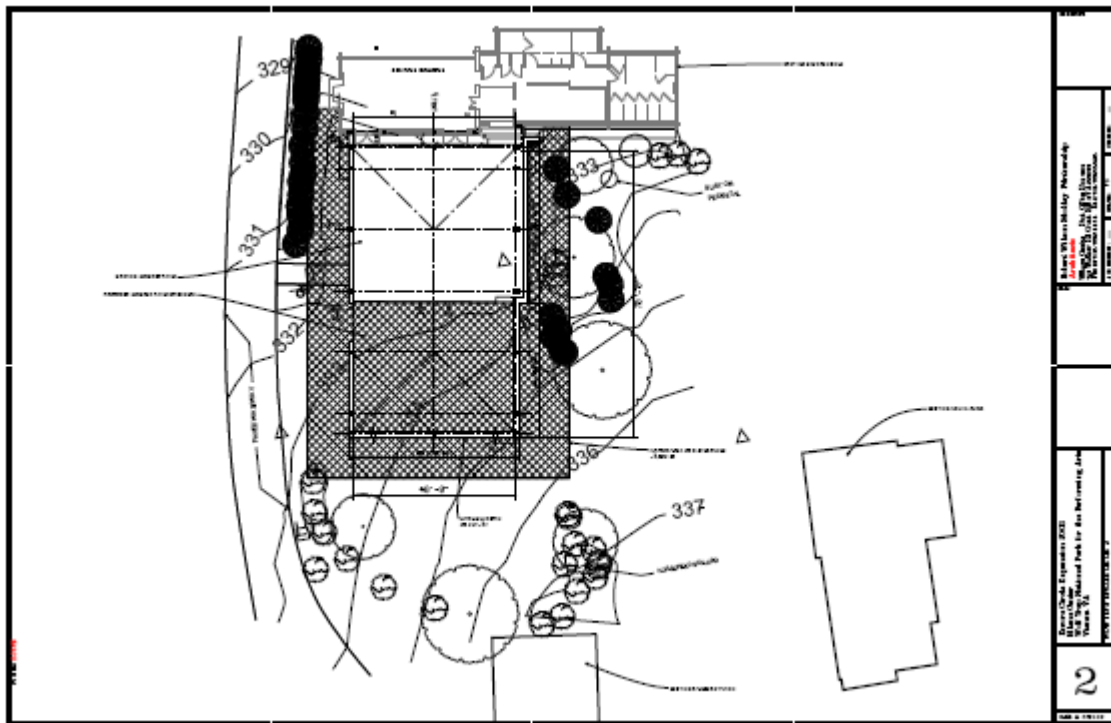
### **Alternative 2:**

#### **Construct 1000 sq. foot rectangular addition to Encore Circle patio on south end of the present patio, and reconstruct a new tent support structure.**

Under this alternative, a 40' x 25' addition would be built on the south end of the existing patio. The finished patio would be a rectangle 40' x 65' long, with the long side extending away from the Encore Circle building and into the farmhouse lawn. A seasonal tent similar to the existing one would be built to cover the entire area. Because the land rises to the south and east, towards the farmhouse, the new patio would need a higher retaining wall, which would rise above 18" on the east side and a portion of the south side. The maximum height from the patio grade to the lawn grade would be about 3' at the southeast corner. Code requirements would necessitate a fence along all portions of the wall that are higher than 18". An estimated 50 to 60 cubic yards of dirt would have to be removed and stored elsewhere.

#### ***Alternative 2 Site Plan***

*Existing patio is in white; shaded area covers the addition and delineates the entirety of the construction zone.*



This alternative is located entirely within a developed area of the park, and does not involve removal of any trees. The only potential impact on natural resources identified was the possible impact on water resources from adding approximately 1000 square feet of impervious surface to the park. The alternative was examined for possible issues with stormwater management and soil erosion, and water damage to the lawn and structures. However, this was not felt to be an issue, since the area drains and percolates well. The current 1600 square foot tent structure has given rise to only convenience stormwater issues such as puddling at the edges of the patio. It was felt that proper subsurface structures such as gravel and drywells, installed at the time of construction, would be sufficient to contain the additional stormwater and allow for steady and slow percolation through the soil.

This alternative would have a negative impact on the archeological site. The shovel test pits that were done in December 2006 were done with this plan in hand, and showed that the new patio and associated construction zone would intrude into the newly identified hilltop archeological site. Based on the shovel test pits, the eastern portion of the patio extension, about 500 sq. ft., would impact the archeological site. Construction of this extension would destroy the archeological resource in that area.

The landscape of the farmhouse and garden area would be impacted by removal of a substantial portion of the existing lawn area, and intrusion into the viewshed of the farmhouse. The tent structure required to cover 40' x 65' would be taller than the existing 40' x 40' tent. The project would essentially enclose the lawn area around the

farmhouse and create a courtyard effect, greatly inhibiting the view to the west from the farmhouse. Conversely, the view of the farmhouse and associated buildings for a visitor walking by the area would also be partially blocked. Currently a visitor approaches the farmhouse complex from the bottom of the hill, seeing what is clearly a cluster of buildings in the farm style. The Encore Circle building and its current patio tent are seen as subordinate buildings, part of the overall complex. The expanded tent would dominate the new scene, blocking the view of the farmhouse, garden, and lawn, and become the dominant structure.

Park operations would be somewhat impacted by this proposal. Since it is currently routine to informally extend the patio area onto the grass, that area is not generally used for other park activities. The current division of responsibilities between the park and the Foundation for operations and maintenance would be continued. The major impact on park operations would be a small increase in garden maintenance for the extension of the 3' wide garden strip that would border the east and south sides of the extension. Utilities in the expansion area would have to be buried more deeply or relocated to the edge of the new patio.

The 50-60 cubic yards of dirt generated by this project could be stored on-site in the maintenance yard for use on miscellaneous future projects around the park.