George Washington Birthplace - Convert Farm Fields to Native Grasses Project

George Washington Birthplace National Monument proposes to convert approximately one-hundred and eighteen (118) acres of agricultural land in the park to native grass and wildflower habitat. Establishing native meadow will replace the existing monoculture with plant species that support a diverse range of wildlife including pollinators, birds, and small mammals; reduce pesticide load; reduce storm water runoff; reduce erosion and runoff in nearby riparian areas; improve soil conditions and nutrient cycling; better maintain viewsheds; increase the resiliency of the landscape; increase recreational opportunities; and help protect subterranean historic features.

There is a long tradition of agriculture at the park and the proposed area of conversion is currently leased for farming. The park is committed to using a specialized seed mix and planting plan to retain an agricultural appearance and feel to the landscape. This is of the utmost importance to the park and regular inspections of the field will be completed by Cultural Resource staff to ensure the setting and feeling of the park is not altered by this project.

Implementation of this project will be supported by a partnership with the Southern Grasslands Institute. No-till seed drilling, pendulum spreaders, and hand spreading will be used to plant a mixture of grass and forb seeds. Timing of seeding is subject to IPMT and equipment availability; currently the goal is to plant this winter/spring to ensure success for the species that require cold stratification. Seed mix will be selected based on the current species list for the park to avoid introduction of plants not endemic to the park and to ensure suitability for the site's soil and hydrologic conditions. Minimal site preparation is needed but may require herbicidal treatments. Since the field has been actively in agriculture for many years and was most recently planted with soybeans, this site is ideal for conversion from farmland to grassland.

Long-term maintenance will involve annual brush hogging or prescribed fire treatment to knock back woody plant growth. During the first few years after conversion, treatment of non-native, invasive species will be required to allow the native species to firmly establish. Birds and pollinators will be monitored through a cooperative agreement with the University of Delaware.

Figure 1. Proposed Project Area (in teal).

Figure 2. View of current agricultural field proposed for field conversion, facing north.

Figure 3. Example of farm fields post-restoration.