

# **Rock Creek Park Multi-Use Trail Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment and Section 106 Evaluation**

## **Introduction**

The National Park Service (NPS), in collaboration with the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to assess the potential effects of various alternatives to rehabilitate the existing Rock Creek Trail in Washington, DC. The Rock Creek Park Multi-Use Trail is administered by Rock Creek Park under the jurisdiction of the NPS.

This EA will analyze the potential environmental impacts that would result from the implementation of the no action alternative along with two action alternatives for the rehabilitation of a 3.7-mile segment of the existing Rock Creek Trail and a 3,000-foot segment of the existing Rose Park Trail, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), NPS Director's Order #12: *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impacts Analysis and Decision-Making* (NPS, 2001), and FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8a.

Rock Creek Park is a 2,100 acre park under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The park is located in the northwest portion of Washington, DC; the park boundaries are roughly defined as Sixteenth Street on the east, Oregon Avenue and Branch Road on the west, Klinge Road to the south, and the District line and Parkside Drive on the north. The proposed action includes the rehabilitation of a 3.7-mile segment of the existing Rock Creek Trail and a 3,000-foot segment of the existing Rose Park Trail; and resurfacing the trail along Piney Branch Parkway from Beach Drive to Arkansas Avenue at Taylor Street. The proposed rehabilitation of the existing trails includes resurfacing, trail widening where environmentally feasible, modifications to the trail alignment and road crossings, and additional modifications to improve safety, erosion control and connections to and from the trail. The majority of the proposed improvements occur on NPS land, with some additional improvements located on District of Columbia land.

## **Purpose of Action**

The National Park Service is in charge of preserving the natural resources of Rock Creek Park while providing a high quality visitor experience. The purpose of this action is to improve the safety and connectivity of the deteriorating Rock Creek Park multi-use trail system in order to enhance visitor use and experience within Rock Creek Park. The proposed action would result in:

- improved visitor safety and experience and protection of park resources;
- improved access to the Rock Creek Park multi-use trail system from other pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as the surrounding neighborhoods; and
- more effective erosion control, and thereby reducing maintenance.

The proposed action would improve the multi-use trail experience for park visitors while preserving park character, and ensuring sensitivity to environmental resources, cultural resources, and interpretation opportunities.

## **Needs for Action**

### **Safety**

- The trail surface is deteriorating (heaving, cracking, roots, etc.), creating potential safety issues.
- Access crossing points, sightlines, grade changes, curves and approaches may not meet current guidelines for multi-use trails. Narrow trail widths in some segments impede the ability of trail users (pedestrians, bicyclists, runners, those enjoying nature, etc.) to safely pass one another, augmenting the potential for user conflicts or accidents.
- Drainage and ponding issues occur on segments of the trail in rain and storm events.

### **Environmental Protection**

- Soil erosion occurs where drainage issues are present along the trail.
- Soil compaction and destruction of vegetation occurs in some areas where users leave the trail to take shortcuts or maneuver around other users.

### **System Connectivity**

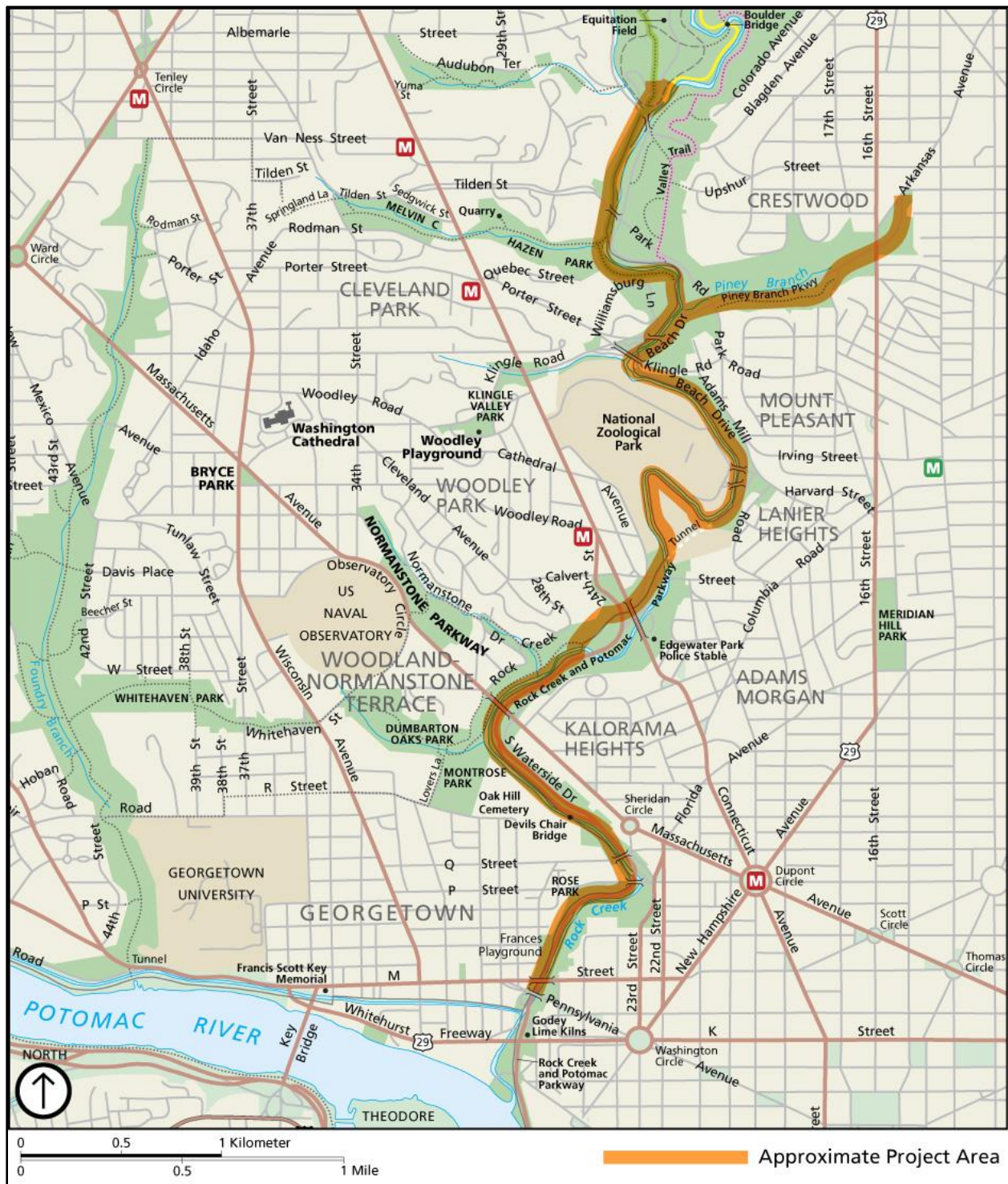
- There are gaps in the existing trail system.
- There is a need for access to other existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities (trails, sidewalks, signed bicycle routes, etc.) in the neighborhoods surrounding Rock Creek Park.

### **Visitor Use and Experience**

- Drainage/ponding issues occur on segments of the trail in rain/storm events.
- Potential for conflicts among multi-user trail groups (bicyclists, runners, those enjoying nature, etc.) in segments that are difficult to navigate and/or pass due to short sight lines, narrow widths, alignment deviations, etc.
- Aesthetics - heaved, cracked pavement is unsightly.
- There is currently a lack of interpretation of cultural and natural resources along the trail (signage, inclusion in programs such as ranger walks, etc.)

## **Project Objectives**

- Improve trail safety
- Provide improved access to the trail from surrounding communities and the larger bicycle and pedestrian network
- Preserve the integrity of Rock Creek Park and its resources
- Maximize the distance between the trail and the stream to the extent feasible
- Minimize ground disturbance from new trail construction
- Minimize the loss of trees and vegetation
- Reuse and/or interpret historic trail alignments to the extent feasible



Project Area