

Environmental Committee Report, Annual Meeting, 20 March 2021

Despite the pandemic, the Park has been open the whole of the past year. The year has been a busy one for Park staff, generally working from home, with limited time in the field. We attended lots of meetings virtually or socially distanced.

1. Park headquarters move. The construction of the new headquarters for the Park has stayed on schedule throughout the crisis. The move has begun and must be completed before the end of next month (April 2021), when the lease on the Hagerstown space expires. We strongly supported the move of the Park headquarters to Williamsport, to a site near the canal. We have had a couple of disappointments, however: the proposed visitor center and bike repair station were deleted from the plans, with little justification and no public input, and impermeable asphalt covers nearly half the site.
2. Historic culvert #2. We continue to coordinate with the neighboring civic associations to fight for the stabilization and restoration of what may be the oldest structure on the C&O Canal. Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen and Representative Jamie Raskin last month sent a letter to the acting director of the National Park Service, recommending that the culvert receive priority funding in the NPS budget for the next fiscal year. We continue to maintain the the remediation should be funded by the intelligence community, which caused the damage. Dredging the canal is not sufficient — the sources of the sediment must be addressed. The silt field has now completely blocked the canal just below the Little Falls pumping station.
3. Glen Echo. The mayor of Glen Echo reached out to us (Bill Holdsworth) to ask if we have an interest in pollution running into the canal and if we want to collaborate on a grant application to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to study the problem. More specifically, the pollutants originate from the Bannockburn neighborhood and from MacArthur Boulevard, pass through the town of Glen Echo, and run into the canal and the river. We gave preliminary encouragement to the idea of cooperation.
4. Deer management. This winter saw the third season of culling of the white-tailed deer herd at Great Falls. The program this year met the Park's target. In November, the Park will survey the deer population and the recovery of the vegetation to see if the program should resume for yet another year.
5. American Legion Bridge/Beltway expansion. Planning, led by the Maryland State Highway Administration, continues on this project. In the most recent iteration, the bridge's footprint goes directly over the upper end of Plummers Island, a biological preserve in the Park, which has been studied since 1903. We will continue to monitor how a widened bridge will impact the Park and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

6. Fletcher's Cove. The Friends of Fletcher's Cove continue to press for both short- and long-term solutions to the problems of the Cove. The short-term issue is repairing the dock and, if necessary, dredging to open for spring shad season. The longer-term (and far more costly) issue is to change the hydraulics of the Cove so that it no longer silts in every year.
7. Amphibians, cryptic mammals, and bats. The Park continues work with Frostburg State University to survey relatively rare animals in the western part of the Park, including Allegheny wood rats, bobcats, black bears, and fishers.
8. Other issues. We continue to follow the issues of the Potomac River sewage tunnels in Georgetown and Cumberland, the boathouses on both sides of the river, and the Georgetown Plan. We should see a new canal boat n Georgetown in coming weeks.