

Washington *Smart Growth Alliance*

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More Information

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Smart Growth Alliance Names Top Green Spaces in Need of Protection, Preservation

October 17, 2006 (Washington, D.C.) -- A unique alliance of regional business interests and environmental nonprofits today named six regional treasures in the Metropolitan Washington area most in need of protection and preservation.

The sites selected for the list were highlighted by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance's (SGA) **2006 Regional Conservation Priorities List** as part of its effort to stimulate political support and heighten public awareness for regional conservation needs in the fast-growing Washington region. The list is part of a larger regional strategy undertaken by the SGA to find areas of common ground between the real estate development and environmental communities in the region's heated growth battles. The SGA believes that decisions about where and how we grow – and where *not* to grow -- are critical to our current and future quality of life.

"Protection and preservation of significant open space lands and rural landscapes is increasingly important as our region continues to grow," said Lee Epstein, chairman of the SGA's conservation subcommittee and Lands Director with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. "From safeguarding water quality and water supply to a new place for a family outing, conservation investments provide real benefits to Washington area residents and businesses. Making these initiatives an on-the-ground reality will mark important progress for the region."

Named to this year's list were Crow's Nest (Stafford County); the Rappahannock Trail Easement, which travels through several jurisdictions in Virginia; the Prince William County Greenway; the Loudoun County Stream Valley Parks; the Anacostia Watershed Forest Management and Protection Strategy, which include areas of Prince George's and Montgomery Counties and the District of Columbia; and Journey Through Hallowed Ground, which travels through several jurisdictions in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Through a separate initiative, the SGA has provided support to over 35 private sector development proposals that meet its smart growth criteria. Good smart growth development should go hand-in-hand with effective land conservation. "Convenient access to parks and open spaces is more than just an amenity that many of our customers want," said Jim Williams, Executive Vice President of the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association. "The building industry has a vested interest in promoting policies and projects that preserve and protect our region's natural treasures because they provide long-term value and identity to the region."

Sites selected for recognition on the 2006 Regional Conservation Priorities List were required to meet the specific criteria of significance, urgency and the degree to which protection of the site has already yielded funding or specific plans for implementation. Significance was determined by judging how the preservation or protection of a site or area would "significantly add to the region's network of green infrastructure." Panelists representing the SGA's six member organizations judged applications received from a mix of local governments, non-profit organizations, landowners, and citizens interested in protecting the region's open spaces.

About the Recognized Sites

Crow's Nest

Located 40 miles south of Washington, D.C., in Stafford County – Virginia's second fastest growing county – the Crow's Nest peninsula is rich in natural resources and historic value. It contains some of the best remaining wetland habitat on the Potomac River, and the tract supports mature stands of hardwoods. In addition to providing high quality bird and wildlife habitat, the upland and wetland vegetation maintains local water quality by reducing run-off, filtering sediments, trapping pollutants, and slowing flood waters.

In response to a proposed subdivision, a group of concerned residents and a bi-partisan group of legislators have been working to conserve 1,800 acres on the tip of Crow's Nest. Additionally, a public/private partnership among the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, the Nature Conservancy, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has raised considerable resources for the peninsula's conservation and DCR has agreed to manage the property as a dedicated State Natural Area Preserve, the highest legal protection for land available in Virginia.

The Journey Through Hallowed Ground

The JTHG Partnership is comprised of over 150 partners within the four-state region, to create an economically driven solution that celebrates the cultural, natural and historic features of the region. These partners include 15 local governments, 11 County governments, 30 business organization, numerous educational institutions, developers, preservationists, and 12 destination marketing organizations

Among the Partnerships current efforts are to seek designation as a National Heritage Area and the designation of the Rt. 15 corridor as an All American Road. Both efforts have significant congressional support, the endorsement of Governors Kaine and Ehrlich, and grassroots with over 74 public resolutions passed by elected organizations. These designations, while honorific, will greatly assist local efforts to encourage economic development opportunities through educational programs and heritage tourism promotion.

JTHG lies within one of the fastest growing regions in the United States. Because of this, the National Trust for Historic Preservation selected JTHG as one of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in America. More information about JTHG can be found at www.hallowedground.org.

Anacostia Watershed Forest Management and Protection Strategy

The Anacostia River is often thought of as a D.C. river, but more than 80% of the Anacostia Watershed lies within Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The Anacostia Watershed is one of the most densely populated areas in the Chesapeake Bay drainage, with more than 800,000 residents. Whereas the population density of the Chesapeake Bay watershed is about 250 persons per square mile, the Anacostia's is greater than 4,900 persons per square mile.

While some progress has been made in the Anacostia River's restoration within the District of Columbia, there has been less emphasis on the critical role of 'upstream' forest conservation in relation to the Anacostia's restoration. This began to change with the 2001 "Anacostia Agreement" and the companion report, *Anacostia Watershed Restoration Indicators and Targets for the Period 2001-2010*.

From this, a working group comprised of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) and other Anacostia-affiliated agencies released the Anacostia Watershed Forest Management and Protection Strategy (FMPS). The critical first step of any effective conservation strategy is scientifically and strategically identifying the priority parcels for conservation, and the FMPS does this. The next and perhaps most critical step is identifying funding mechanisms and the political will to implement these priorities.

Prince William County Greenway

The Prince William County government, state and federal agencies, real estate development companies and volunteer organizations are completing the first phase of a project to establish a multi-use trail and “greenway” parallel to the Potomac River between the Occoquan River to the north and Quantico National Cemetery to the south.

This proposed trail will accomplish the following:

- Conserve significant ecological and historical resources
- Create physical connections for non-motorized travel and outdoor recreation between the historic Town of Occoquan, the planned Belmont Bay Science Center, Occoquan National Wildlife Refuge, Leesylvania State Park, Prince William Forest Park and several local creeks, as well as commuter rail stations and local schools.
- Establish a critical segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, a partnership to create and maintain a network of locally managed trails between the Chesapeake Bay and the Allegheny Highlands.

Phase I (between Belmont Bay and Leesylvania State Park) is nearly funded, but two more phases are still needed to complete the segment.

Rappahannock Trail Easement

The Commonwealth of Virginia is blessed with many historic and beautiful rivers. Providing public access to these natural resources helps ensure their conservation and stimulates growth of a constituency for river protection in the future. This proposal involves placing a conservation easement on more than 4,000 acres of land alongside the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers for 20+ miles from the City of Fredericksburg through five Virginia counties. The goal is to provide a water trail with public access points located throughout the alignment.

The City of Fredericksburg will hold the easement. The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Outdoors Foundation and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will all be co-easement holders.

Loudoun County Stream Valley Parks

Loudoun County, Virginia is developing a corridor of park lands, trails and related resources between the border with Fairfax County and Goose Creek Keep Loudoun Beautiful Park. This “linear park” – almost 15 miles long – is a priority in the Loudoun County General Plan and in the County’s Long-Range Transportation Plan. It is intended for hiking, transportation, education, and other active and passive pursuits. In addition to county and regional parklands, the corridor embraces regenerating forests, fields, suburban streetscapes, stream valleys and golf courses as well as Civil War fortifications, American Indian pathways and other places of historic and cultural importance.

Loudoun County, with the support of the Loudoun County Parks Advisory Board, the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, the Loudoun Convention & Visitors Association and private land owners, is seeking designation of a 15-mile linear park as a segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.

About the SGA

Founded in 2002, the SGA is a collaborative coalition of developer, civic, and environmental interests: the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, Enterprise Community Partners, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, the Metropolitan Washington Builders Council and the Urban Land Institute - Washington District Council.

The goal of the SGA is to enhance regional collaboration; encourage mixed-use, pedestrian- and transit-oriented development projects; promote housing and transportation choices for a range of incomes throughout the region, particularly in infill situations; and respect and conserve significant environmental, cultural, and recreational resources. More information about the SGA can be found at www.sgalliance.org.

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