



Belt Woods State Park

A Natural Environment Area
and State Wildland

Photo Courtesy of Robert Simmon, NASA Earth Observatory



Strategic Management Plan

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Date



Updates



Belt Woods State Park



Strategic Management Plan

Overview

This document is the result of a statewide initiative by the Maryland Park Service to develop strategic management plans for its properties in order to establish a path toward a sustainable future. The purpose of each Park's strategic management plan is to use a collaborative process to identify and evaluate the following essential elements of each park: 1) natural resources; 2) cultural and historic resources; 3) recreational resources; 4) human resources; and 5) infrastructure. Using this background data, a "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis" is performed. The SWOT analysis facilitates the identification of big-picture goals and targeted objectives that are used to develop a work plan for the park.

This Plan documents the process and is divided into five parts:

Part 1: Core Values

This section includes the Maryland Park Service mission and goals, brand promise, and a summary of the features that make the park a significant component of Maryland's park system.

Part 2: Park Resources

This section identifies and describes park-specific resources including natural resources, cultural and historic resources, recreational resources, human resources and infrastructure.

Part 3: Resource Assessment

This section documents a resource assessment using the SWOT Analysis process and identifies park-specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Part 4: Big Picture Goals

Using the SWOT analysis in Part 3, this section identifies "big-picture" goals that are focused on promoting strengths, overcoming weaknesses, maximizing opportunities and eliminating threats. The goals are directly connected to reinforcing the significance of the state park and the core values of the Maryland Park Service.

Part 5: Work Plan

This section serves as a road map that identifies specific actions and projects to effectively achieve the stated goals. It includes a timeline for completion, so that appropriate resources can be dedicated to accomplishment, and employees are empowered to move forward with tasks that support the park's goals and mission.

Maryland Park Service Mission & Goals

The mission of the Maryland Park Service is to manage the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources to provide for wise stewardship and enjoyment by people.

The goals of the Maryland Park Service are as follows:

- ▶ To promote, cultivate, and expand public knowledge, understanding, appreciation and support for the resources and services managed by the Maryland Park Service.
- ▶ To operate the Maryland Park Service in a manner that generates the atmosphere of teamwork, shared information, cooperation and trust at all levels of employment.
- ▶ To manage the Maryland Park Service in a manner that ensures the maximum benefit from each dollar and hour of labor expended.
- ▶ To promote the management of natural and cultural resources to ensure the continuing benefits for present and future generations.
- ▶ To provide diverse recreational services with an emphasis upon public safety and the provision of neat, clean and well-maintained resources.

Maryland Park Service Brand Promise

The Maryland Park Service is dedicated to providing an outstanding experience to all park visitors and is committed to the following principles:

1. Providing a place where visitors can bring their children that nourishes their well-being in ways that only nature can provide.
2. Connecting visitors with each other and their surroundings, through the beauty and serenity of nature, in a safe and welcoming place that belongs to them.
3. Preserving and providing opportunities for visitors to discover important historical sites and relics that tell inspiring stories of people and events that give context and meaning to their lives today.
4. Creating an environment for relaxation with the reassuring presence of a friendly and dedicated park ranger who inspires and supports the desire to be a good steward of the Earth.
5. Imparting visitors with a sense of well-being and happy memories, so when they leave they are feeling stress-free and revitalized.

1 Core Values



Significance Statement

The significance of Belt Woods State Park is:

- ▶ To protect, preserve, and restore Belt Woods as a unique National Natural Landmark and Maryland State Wildland, consistent with the Belt Woods State Wildlands designation and deed restrictions, perpetuating natural old-growth forest habitat and other native ecological communities and species.
- ▶ To provide an area for research, education, interpretation, and passive nature-based recreation to improve the understanding of ecological communities and the species in those communities, including unique old-growth forest areas and other forested areas that characterize the property, ensuring the survival and health of natural communities and native species at Belt Woods.
- ▶ To ensure the conservation of Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS), including uncommon bird species that use Belt Woods for nesting and breeding, the protection of rare, threatened or endangered species, and the preservation of the rich biological diversity of the Belt Woods in the context of the surrounding urban-suburban development.

2 **Park Resources**

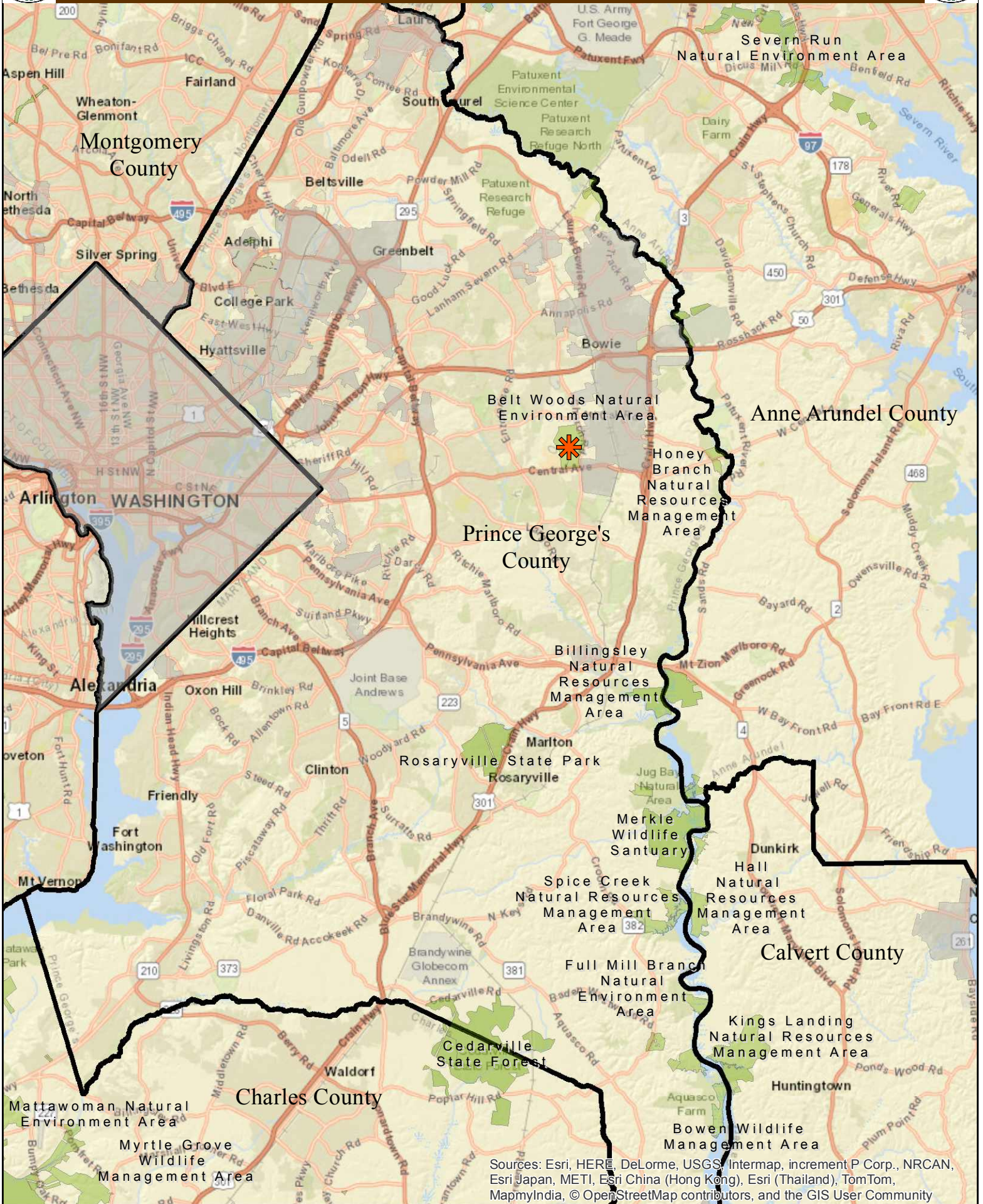
PARK STATS (FISCAL YEAR 2017)	
TOTAL PARK ACREAGE	624
ANNUAL VISITATION 2016	1,500 est.
ANNUAL REVENUE (excluding concession revenue)	N/A
ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET* (excluding classified employee payroll) FY2017	\$12,800 est.
TOTAL CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES** (including filled and vacant PINs)	1 - 12
*OPERATING BUDGET IS PART OF A PARK COMPLEX BUDGET THAT INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING STATE PARKS:	Sandy Point State Park Franklin Point State Park Severn Run Natural Environment Area
**EMPLOYEES SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING STATE PARKS:	Sandy Point State Park Franklin Point State Park Severn Run Natural Environment Area

2 **Park Resources**

YEAR	SCHEDULED CAPITAL PROJECTS	AMOUNT
2018	Tree removal for safety improvements at park entrance	\$50,000
2018	Grading and restoration for safety improvements at park entrance	\$50,000
2018-19	Improvements and expansion of parking area	\$50,000
2018-19	Construction of pull-offs and improvements to access road	\$50,000
2018	Gate relocation and installation	\$10,000
YEAR	SCHEDULED CRITICAL MAINTENANCE	AMOUNT
TBD	Raze structures and restore sites	\$165,000
2018	Remove vegetation from perimeter of Seton Belt Barn	In-house
YEAR	FUTURE CRITICAL MAINTENANCE	AMOUNT
TBD	Stabilize Seton Belt Barn	TBD



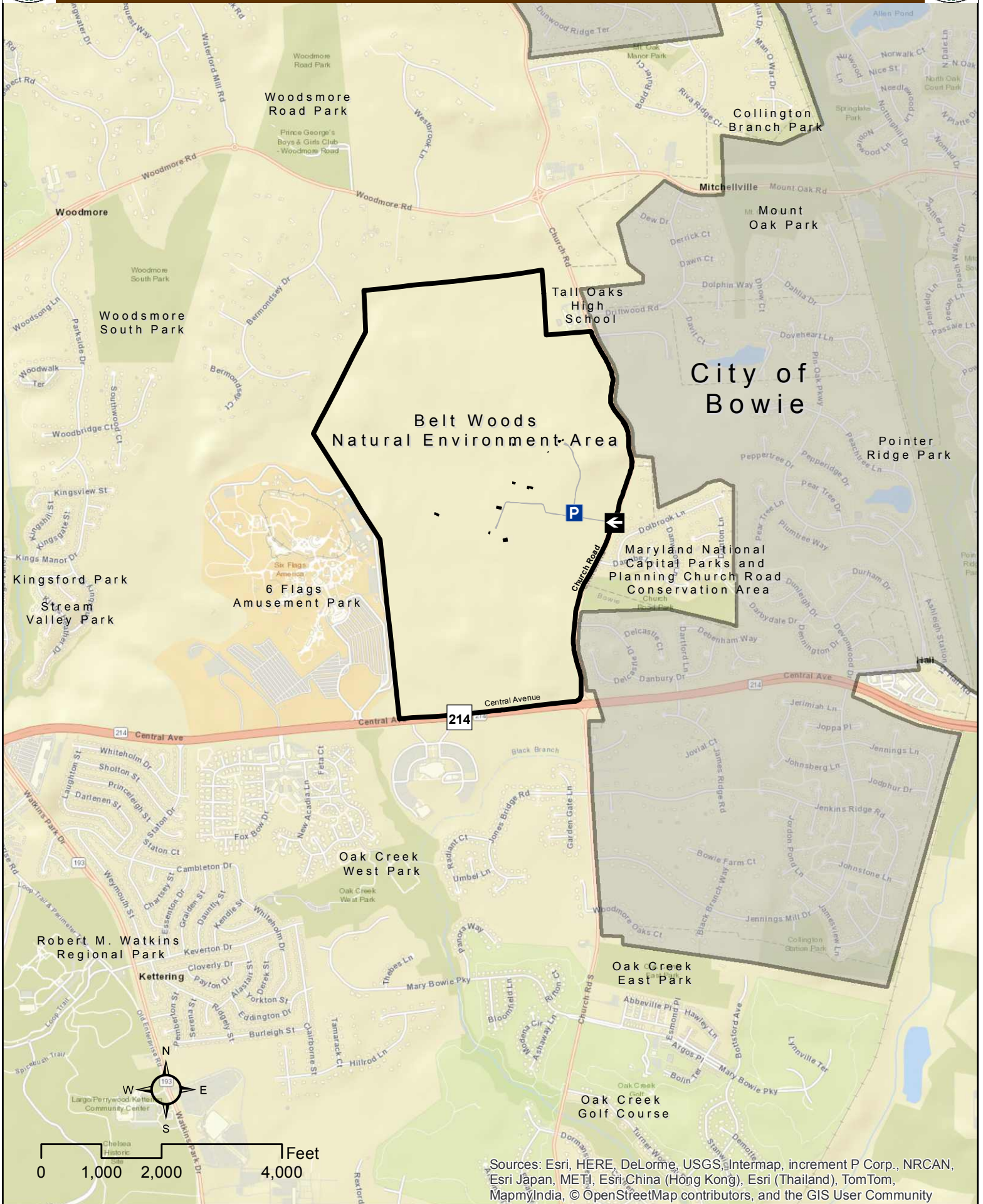
MAP 1: LOCATION MAP (PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY)



Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, USGS, Intermap, increment P Corp., NRCAN, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri (Thailand), TomTom, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community



MAP 2: SITE MAP (PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY)



Natural Resources

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 624 acres total with 610 acres designated as a Type 2 State Wildland.
- ▶ 56.3 acres of National Natural Landmark (NNL) forest area with approximately 45 acres of old growth forest in the southern portion of the park.
- ▶ Approximately 54 acres of older forest area in the northern portion of the park.
- ▶ Approximately 14 acres of nontidal wetlands and vernal pools (additional field assessment / determination needed).
- ▶ Approximately 13,664 linear feet of intermittent and ephemeral streams that drain to the Patuxent River (additional field assessment / determination needed).
- ▶ Designated Wetlands of Special State Concern along the northern boundary.
- ▶ Approximately 604 acres of Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) habitat.
- ▶ Sensitive species including one endangered plant species, one threatened plant species and one threatened aquatic species.

DESCRIPTION

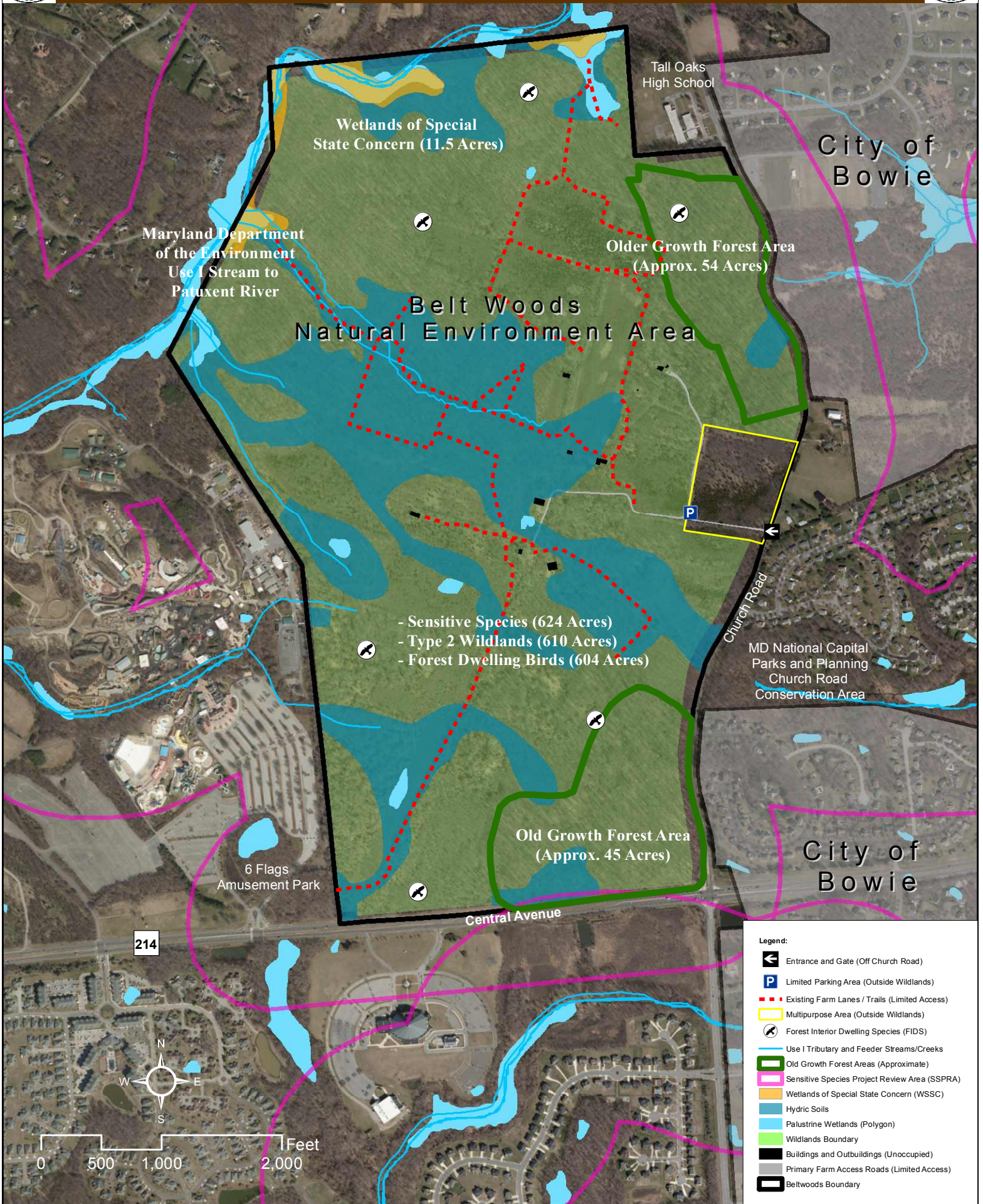
In 1971, the National Park Service designated 56.3 acres of the property as a National Natural Landmark (NNL), located near the intersection of Maryland 214 and Church Road in the southern portion of the current Belt Woods site. This designation is a voluntary commitment by the landowner to protect the resource and does not involve any federal statutory or regulatory requirements. In 1997, 610 acres were statutorily designated a Type 2 Maryland State Wildland, limiting disturbance as per the Wildlands statutes and regulations. Belt Woods is important for natural sciences with a value for education, research, interpretation and appreciation of natural processes.

Belt Woods includes approximately 45 acres of “old-growth forest” in the southern portion of the site. There are approximately 349 additional acres of mature forest on the site, including 54 acres of older growth forest in the northern section. Only 150 acres were in farmland prior to reforestation and natural regeneration. Old-growth forest areas, in which natural ecosystem dynamics have been the dominant forces shaping the forest for a sufficient length of time, include several key characteristics: uneven-aged forest stands, diverse forest understory, soil column species communities dominated by native species, thick layers of leaf litter and humus, and irregular surface topography caused by uprooted / fallen trees in a wide range of decay. Belt Woods provides habitat for several rare, threatened, and endangered species associated with these undisturbed ecological communities (see Appendix C: Ecological Significance). The property includes a large area of hydric soils, and mapping efforts have identified several wetland areas. The “pit and mound” topography of the older forested areas is conducive to the creation of vernal pools, important breeding habitat for frogs and salamanders.

Public hunting (deer only) is permitted at Belt Woods. Regulated deer hunting is used as a cost-effective natural resource management tool to protect biodiversity and site integrity for rare plant species. The hunting program is managed in cooperation with the Wildlife and Heritage Service (WHS) through a public permit / reservation system with a limited number of hunters granted access to the site. Well-defined “No Hunting Zones” will prohibit hunting in sensitive species protection areas.



MAP 3: ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

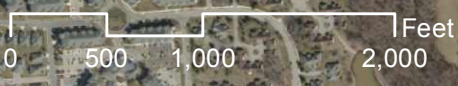
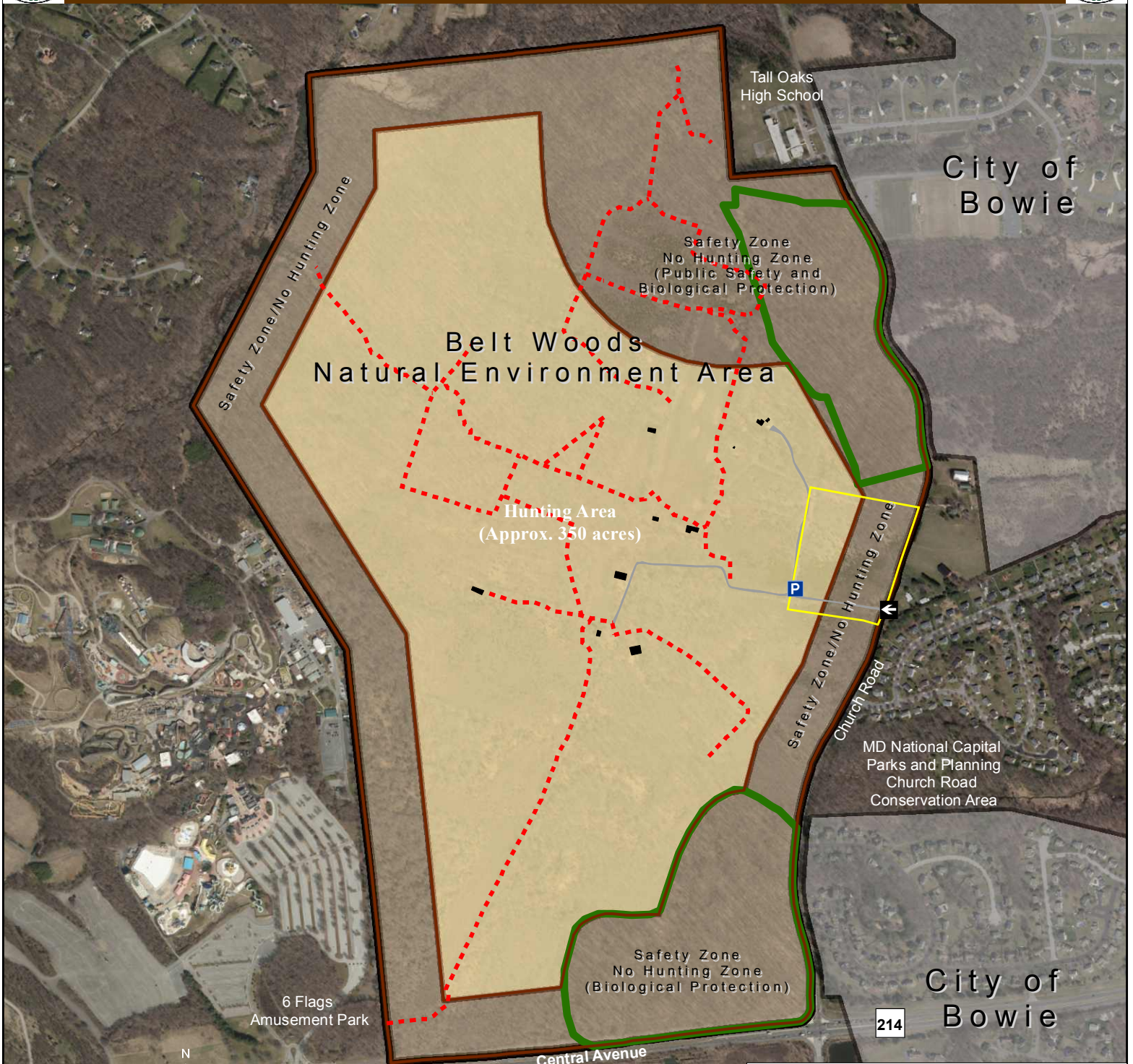


- Legend:**
- Entrance and Gate (Off Church Road)
 - Limited Parking Area (Outside Wildlands)
 - Existing Farm Lanes / Trails (Limited Access)
 - Multipurpose Area (Outside Wildlands)
 - Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS)
 - Use I Tributary and Feeder Streams/Creeks
 - Old Growth Forest Areas (Approximate)
 - Sensitive Species Project Review Area (SSPRA)
 - Wetlands of Special State Concern (WSSC)
 - Hydric Soils
 - Palustrine Wetlands (Polygon)
 - Wildlands Boundary
 - Buildings and Outbuildings (Unoccupied)
 - Primary Farm Access Roads (Limited Access)
 - Beltwoods Boundary





MAP 4: HUNTING AREA MAP (2018 - DEER ONLY)



Note: The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Heritage Service (DNR-WHS) may adjust the Belt Woods Hunting Map on a periodic basis. Revisions may include altering approved and prohibited hunting areas (deer only) to assist with DNR resource management efforts and objectives. Adjustments to the hunting areas will be based on deer management analysis by the DNR-WHS for identified resource protection.

- Legend:**
- Entrance and Gate (Off Church Road)
 - Limited Parking Area (Outside Wildlands)
 - Existing Farm Lanes / Trails (Limited Access)
 - Multipurpose Area (Outside Wildlands)
 - Old Growth Forest Areas (Approximate)
 - 2018 Revised Hunting Areas
 - Hunting Safety Zone (No Loaded Firearms)
 - Buildings and Outbuildings (Unoccupied)
 - Primary Farm Access Roads (Limited Access)
 - Beltwoods Boundary

Cultural/ Historical Resources

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ W. Seton Belt Barn (Prince George’s County: Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties #PG 74A-14); High Victorian Vernacular; Significance – Architectural / Agricultural (additional field assessment / determination needed).
- ▶ Two rustic dwellings.
- ▶ Multiple cemeteries / burial plots (additional field assessment / determination needed).
- ▶ Other structures, old barns, and outbuildings (additional field assessment / determination needed).

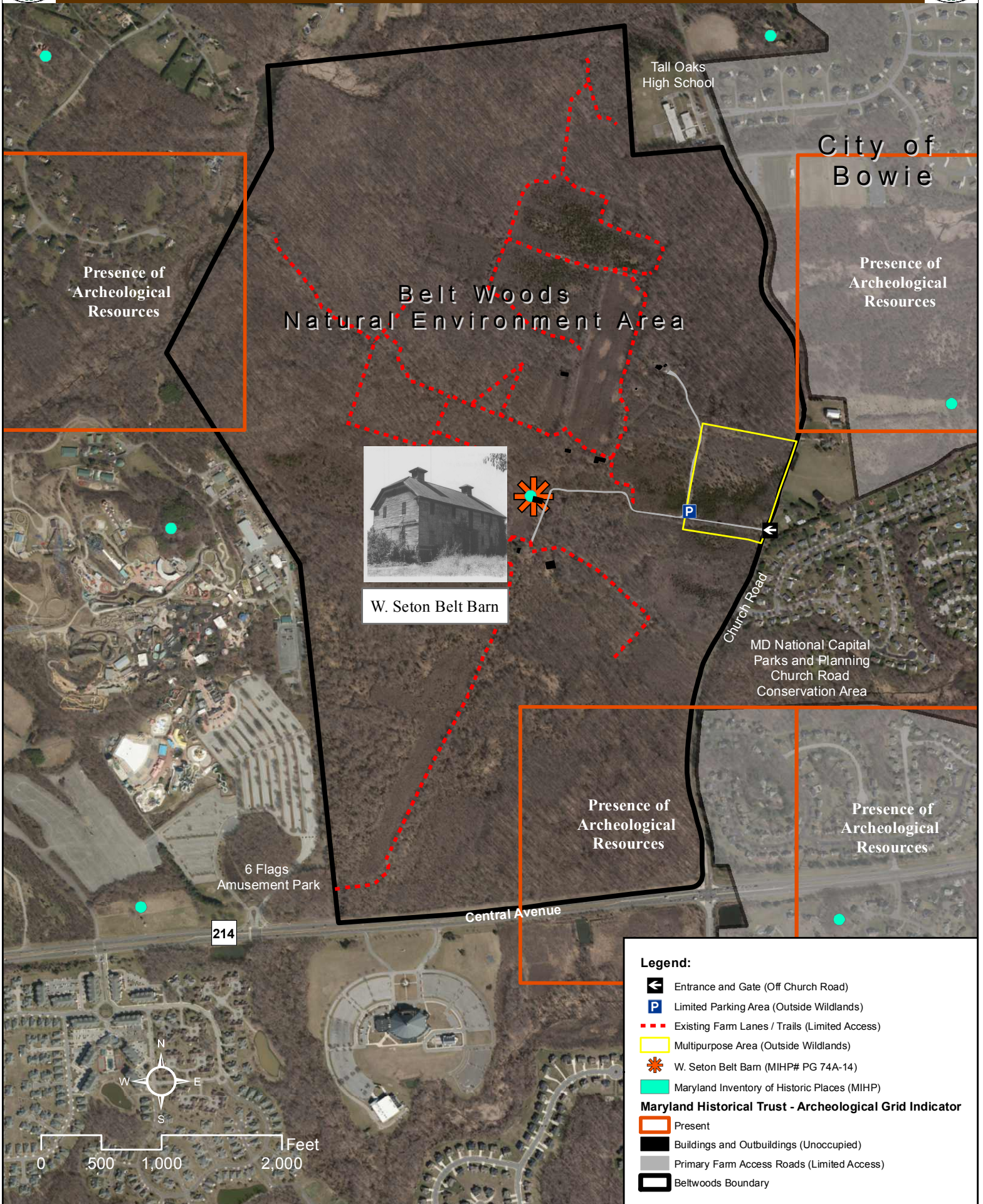
DESCRIPTION

Belt Woods is part of an original plantation known as Oatland, purchased by George and Rosalie Calvert in 1815 (see Appendix A: History of Belt Woods). It was part of a larger ancestral tract owned by the Hall family. The property was used for agricultural purposes including livestock, crops, tobacco, and timber and included several structures, including a slave quarters. In the 20th Century, W. Seton Belt owned the property and managed the forest so as to avoid significant disturbance to selected woodlands (see Appendix E: Biography of W. Seton Belt). Upon his death, the land was transferred to the Episcopal Church. In 1984, the State of Maryland acquired 109 acres of the property, followed by a 1.4 acre purchase in 1986. In an effort led by the Western Shore Conservancy, the remaining 515 acres were acquired in 1997 using the combined resources of the State of Maryland, the City of Bowie, the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, and the Nature Conservancy. Western Shore Conservancy fundraising efforts raised approximately \$1 million to purchase the site.

The W. Seton Belt Barn requires stabilization for preservation until a determination can be made regarding status (e.g. removed from the site and reassembled or left in place and restored). Other structures on the property, including two dwellings, many barns, and miscellaneous sheds and outbuildings, have uncertain historical significance. Any areas with underground cultural remnants, foundations, archaeological artifacts, and cemeteries/burial plots are state protected sites and will require identification and mapping for further investigation. Historical and cultural resource-related actions will be coordinated with the Maryland Historical Trust. It should be noted that the existence of structures within the Belt Woods Wildland is consistent with the original Wildlands legislation for the site, which allows the State to access the area to maintain or remove structures.



MAP 5: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES



Recreational Resources

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Approximately 10 miles of existing gravel dirt roads and unimproved trails (limited vehicular access).
- ▶ Unimproved grass parking area for approximately eight (8) vehicles with bulletin board and portable toilet (seasonal).

DESCRIPTION

Recreational resources on the property are limited to existing gravel and dirt farm roads and a network of old unimproved trails that transect the property. Vehicular access is prohibited with the exception of areas outside the Belt Woods Wildland. Existing trails (hiking only) have evolved from deer trails and limited human use over time. In some areas, the trails are in poor condition and in undesirable locations. There is no basic signage on-site (instructional, trail signage, or wayfinding aids etc.), which is needed.

Conservation is a primary objective for the property, and management of the property shall be designed to maintain it in its natural state with an emphasis on scientific study, educational programs and natural resource management / restoration activities. Public access will be permitted, but will be limited to passive uses. Uses will be monitored by the Maryland Park Service to gauge impacts. Activities should promote the health and long term sustainability of the rare, threatened, and endangered species on-site.

Most of the property is a state-designated Wildland therefore, the use of motorized vehicles or mechanized transport vehicles by the general public, including bicycles, is prohibited. Existing roads, farm lanes, and trails can be adapted and appropriately designated with basic signage to facilitate limited public access for walking trails, bird walks, interpretive educational tours, and research activities. Regulated hunting, serving as a natural resource management tool, is not permitted on Sundays in State parks. The Maryland Park Service will coordinate with official birding and other groups to manage potential conflicts with hunting times and promote a sense of safety.



MAP 6: RECREATIONAL FEATURES



Legend:

- Entrance and Gate (Off Church Road)
- Limited Parking Area (Outside Wildlands)
- Existing Farm Lanes / Trails (Limited Access)
- Multipurpose Area (Outside Wildlands)
- Wildlands Boundary
- Buildings and Outbuildings (Unoccupied)
- Primary Farm Access Roads (Limited Access)
- Beltwoods Boundary

Human Resources

KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ The Maryland Park Service has 12 full-time/classified employees assigned to the Sandy Point State Park Complex which includes Sandy Point State Park, Franklin Point State Park, Severn Run Natural Environment Area, and Belt Woods Natural Environment Area.
- ▶ The Maryland Park Service has 65 seasonal/contractual employees assigned to the Sandy Point State Park Complex.
- ▶ Other Maryland Department of Natural Resources staff includes Forest Service, Wildlife and Heritage Service, and the Natural Resources Police.

DESCRIPTION

There are 12 full-time classified Maryland Park Service employees assigned to the Sandy Point State Park Complex, including one Park Manager, one Assistant Park Manager, one Park Services Supervisor, five Park Services Associates (Park Rangers), one Park Maintenance Program Supervisor, one Park Technician, and two administrative staff. This team works primarily out of Sandy Point State Park and, in addition to the Belt Woods Natural Environment Area, is responsible for Franklin Point State Park and the Severn Run Natural Environment Area.

Sandy Point State Park's seasonal labor force is typically about 65 people, and includes visitor services attendants, seasonal rangers, naturalists, contact station attendants, maintenance workers, lifeguards, and concessions attendants. Depending on daily visitation at Sandy Point, appropriate staff will assist with various maintenance and operation needs at Belt Woods, Franklin Point, and Severn Run.

As this Strategic Management Plan is implemented, activities will be monitored on-site by the Maryland Park Service, and adjustments made where necessary, including adjustments to staffing levels and land management practices, if appropriate. Volunteers and stakeholders, including the possible creation of an official affiliated foundation (e.g. "Friends of Belt Woods"), can assist the Maryland Park Service with protecting and preserving Belt Woods. The hunting program will be monitored in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service, and site policing will be performed by the Natural Resources Police.

2

Park Resources

Infrastructure

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Existing gravel/dirt roads (old farm lanes).
- ▶ Approximate 14-acre multi-purpose area located outside the Wildland, providing access and parking.
- ▶ Unimproved grass parking area for approximately eight (8) vehicles with bulletin board and portable toilet (seasonal).
- ▶ Unimproved entrance (former farm lane/driveway) at Church Road (Prince George's County Road).
- ▶ Two gates, one near the entrance and one on the access road/farm lane that leads to a former residential structure in the northern portion of the property.

DESCRIPTION

Most of the Belt Woods property is undeveloped. There is an existing primary gravel entrance road extending east to west and leading to the center of the property. An existing network of farm trails is located throughout the property. There is a gate located off Church Road to regulate access to the property via a gravel road that leads to an existing rustic and dilapidated dwelling. There is another road that heads roughly north from the main access road and provides access to a second rustic and dilapidated dwelling.

The current entrance/egress onto Church Road, is not safe in accordance with the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards for horizontal and vertical sight distance for at-grade intersections. This is related to oncoming traffic heading south on Church Road and is a potential public safety concern. The existing parking lot is basic and provides eight parking spaces with poor drainage, adverse undergrowth, and small sinkholes in random areas, which can damage vehicles. Infrastructure improvements to the entrance and parking, which are located outside the Belt Woods Wildland, are needed.

The status of utility service to Belt Woods is unknown. Power lines do exist on the property, indicating the potential for power availability. According to the Maryland Forest Service, these power lines require maintenance by Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE). The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) has a 60' right-of-way on the southern portion of the property for a water line acquired from W. Seton Belt and Mercantile Deposit, noted in the Prince George's County Land Records (Liber: 3831/Folio: 789). The use and location of the waterline is unknown, requiring research and mapping.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- ▶ Prince George’s County and the City of Bowie have designated Belt Woods as an important Special Conservation Area in County / City plans.
- ▶ The property is designated a Type 2 State Wildland.
- ▶ Property includes 56.3 acres of National Natural Landmark (NNL) forest (National Park Service).
- ▶ Over 90 acres of old growth forest, approximately 350 acres of mature forest and approximately 610 acres of forest interior bird habitat with one of the highest identified breeding bird densities.
- ▶ Includes rare, threatened, and endangered species habitat.
- ▶ Roughly 15 acres of nontidal wetlands, vernal pools and extensive areas of hydric soils provide habitat for many amphibians.
- ▶ There is an extensive network of intermittent and ephemeral streams on the property.
- ▶ There are designated Wetlands of Special State Concern.
- ▶ One of the few natural areas in an urban-suburban region.

Weaknesses

- ▶ Much of the forest has not been monitored or actively managed for several years.
- ▶ There is a need for active management (stewardship), particularly to control invasive species.
- ▶ The deer population presents a threat to the proper ecological balance of the area and will require consistent management / lethal reduction, and monitoring to avoid adverse impacts to rare, threatened, and endangered species.

Natural Resources

Opportunities

- ▶ Site presents opportunities for research related to neotropical migratory birds.
- ▶ Regular monitoring of invasive plant species in Belt Woods, using fixed plots, can determine if shade is limiting their spread, if they are negatively impacting forest regeneration and if control efforts are needed.
- ▶ Regulated public deer hunting is the most cost effective method for managing the deer population at Belt Woods and will also benefit the surrounding natural and urban communities.
- ▶ Regular monitoring of rare, threatened, and endangered plant species is needed to determine if their range is expanding or shrinking and whether human impacts (including hunting) are playing a role,
- ▶ Removal of invasive species, particularly in the old growth areas, using methods with the least impact (hand pulling versus herbicide) during non-sensitive times of the year is needed. Many invasive species can be removed during the winter when plants are dormant. Proper identification is imperative so native plants are not removed by mistake.
- ▶ Improve habitat that provides bird nesting sites for Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS).

Threats

- ▶ There is an overabundance of deer because of the surrounding urban-suburban development and related lack of control, i.e. regulated hunting.
- ▶ There is clear evidence of significant deer browse throughout the property.
- ▶ Numerous invasive exotic plants pose a significant threat to the natural ecosystem of Belt Woods.
- ▶ Invasive plants include Johnson grass, Canada thistle, Japanese honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, tree of heaven, stilt grass, garlic mustard, Euonymus alatus, Euonymus fortunei, privet, Japanese barberry, and English ivy.
- ▶ White-tailed deer and brown-headed cowbird have the ongoing potential to expand their populations to the point where other species are negatively affected.
- ▶ Predatory foraging and the presence of domestic cats and dogs, as well as feral animals, may depress populations of Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) or other valued species.
- ▶ Human impacts and unauthorized use may adversely impact resources, and should be monitored.
- ▶ There has been some discussion and concern about lead bullets from hunting and effects on wildlife feeding on deer remains (e.g. raptors).

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- ▶ The property was a farmsite dating back to the 19th century with several unique historical/architectural resources.
- ▶ The property has had very little significant human disturbance, i.e. development, or alteration since agricultural activities ceased.
- ▶ The W. Seton Belt Barn is an excellent example of high Victorian agricultural architecture.
- ▶ Belt Woods is significant as a historically "undeveloped open space area" in a largely urban-suburban area.
- ▶ The site is referred to as "Oatlands," and may have an important history, as well as significant archeological resources such as burial plots, and older structures / ruins dating back to the early 1800s or the late 1700s.

Weaknesses

- ▶ The W. Seton Belt Barn has deteriorated and is in poor condition, requiring prompt stabilization.
- ▶ There are several barns and outbuildings that are currently in poor condition and continuing to deteriorate.
- ▶ Deteriorating structures have been subject to squatting in the past and will need to be removed or razed.
- ▶ Deteriorating structures are a public safety hazard.
- ▶ The Wildlands designation, and associated restrictions, adds complexity to the ability to properly manage and maintain the historical structures on-site.

Cultural / Historical Resources

Opportunities

- ▶ The W. Seton Belt Barn is a unique structure, listed on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, and can be stabilized and protected from further deterioration.
- ▶ Moving the W. Seton Belt Barn from the Wildlands could facilitate long-term preservation and adaptive re-use for access and interpretation.
- ▶ The W. Seton Belt Barn provides an opportunity for interpretation of historic farming practices, including the use of slaves in historic agricultural operations, as well as W. Seton Belt's management of the property.
- ▶ The undisturbed site provides opportunities for other historical and cultural site research.
- ▶ Interpretive opportunities exist to tell the story of the Oatlands plantation, as an agricultural operation, and W. Seton Belt's efforts to preserve it.

Threats

- ▶ Deteriorating structures are a public safety hazard.
- ▶ Existing deteriorated structures are an "attractive nuisance" and need to be evaluated for historic significance / removal.
- ▶ General threats include risk of fire, severe weather, inadequate maintenance, and visitor impacts (graffiti, theft, destruction of property, normal wear, etc.).
- ▶ Capital funding is needed to stabilize, preserve, restore, or relocate the W. Seton Belt Barn.
- ▶ Historic documents, artifacts, and photos of the Belt Farm need to be assembled, properly organized, documented, and archived.
- ▶ The potential for arson is always present.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- ▶ The property is located in an area with limited open space / public lands that is underserved by passive nature-based recreation.
- ▶ The property is a “natural oasis” in the middle of a developed urban-suburban area.
- ▶ The Wildlands designation and deed restrictions provide the highest level of resource protection.
- ▶ Beltwoods provide opportunities for research and education.

Weaknesses

- ▶ The property offers very limited recreational opportunities.
- ▶ There is only a small area of the property outside of the Wildland area that can be used for recreational facilities or amenities such as parking and restrooms.
- ▶ Deed restrictions and Wildlands designation prohibit some types of uses.

Recreational Resources

Opportunities

- ▶ Existing trails could be selectively improved as natural surface trails for hiker access to the property, while directing users away from sensitive areas.
- ▶ Approximately 14 acres of the property was excluded from the Wildlands designation and identified as a multi-purpose area to allow for improvements such as parking and new buildings for on-site management or interpretation needs.
- ▶ The deer population at Belt Woods is best managed as part of the broader statewide / regional deer management program and implemented on-site through the regulated public hunting program managed with the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service, using a permit / reservation system.
- ▶ Utilizing farm trails and existing gravel roads for walking trails will accommodate limited public access and avoid impacts to sensitive resources.
- ▶ Visitors to the property can learn more about its significance by adding some interpretive signage where appropriate.
- ▶ Research and education can be accomplished through interpretive planning.

Threats

- ▶ There are rare species on the property that could be adversely affected by unlimited / unregulated use.
- ▶ Mountain bikers and all-terrain-vehicles users may be unaware of the Wildllands restrictions and may be attracted to this property because it is convenient to populated areas.
- ▶ The general public and surrounding community may not be aware of the sensitive resources onsite and the use limitations associated with the Wildlands designation.
- ▶ Noncompliance with Wildlands regulations may have a negative impact on the property and sensitive species.
- ▶ Excessive foot traffic in sensitive areas (old growth areas) may cause soil compaction due to overuse.
- ▶ Threats should be monitored by the Maryland Park Service and adjustments to access and land management practices made, when appropriate.

3 **Resource Assessment**

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- ▶ Knowledgeable, committed, and engaged staff at the Sandy Point State Park Complex have been assigned to Belt Woods.
- ▶ Resource experts with the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service, Forest Service, and Chesapeake and Coastal Service are engaged to provide assistance and expertise, where applicable.
- ▶ Law enforcement support and resource protection is provided by the Natural Resources Police.

Weaknesses

- ▶ Maryland Park Service staff is shared with Sandy Point, Franklin Point, and Severn Run.
- ▶ There are currently no full-time staff assigned exclusively to Belt Woods.

Human Resources

Opportunities

- ▶ The Maryland Park Service can explore opportunities for volunteers to supplement staff presence, promote the park as a community resource, and assist with the monitoring, maintenance, and educational activities on-site.
- ▶ The Maryland Park Service can explore hiring seasonal employees to provide staff at Belt Woods.
- ▶ Stakeholders can form an official “Friends of Belt Woods” affiliated foundation to assist the Maryland Park Service in protecting and preserving the site.
- ▶ Department of Natural Resources staff and experts from other units (Forestry, Wildlife, etc.) can assist the Maryland Park Service in protecting and preserving the site.
- ▶ Groups with specific expertise (birds, rare plants, etc.) can assist with ongoing resource assessments (bird counts, site surveys) to monitor populations of sensitive species.

Threats

- ▶ Demands on staff at the Sandy Point State Park Complex during the summer months limit staff time available for work at Belt Woods.
- ▶ Without a concentrated effort to accomplish modest capital improvements, it will be challenging to manage Belt Woods as an area for research, education and interpretation to improve the understanding of ecological communities and the species in those communities

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- ▶ Existing former farm roads provide basic but functional access to the property and parking area.
- ▶ The Wildlands designation prohibits mechanized vehicles in natural areas, including bicycles, allowing the area to remain natural.

Weaknesses

- ▶ The property lacks permanent and adequate infrastructure necessary for safe and appropriate public access, such as a safe entrance and adequate parking.
- ▶ The existing parking lot is small (only eight parking spaces).
- ▶ The existing parking lot needs maintenance to provide better visibility, improve drainage, and fill holes and ruts.
- ▶ Except for the bulletin board at the parking lot, there is no entrance sign, trail signage, or wayfinding signage.
- ▶ There is no basic interpretive signage about the site history and unique ecosystem at Belt Woods.
- ▶ There is no restrictive signage to prohibit access to sensitive areas.

Infrastructure

Opportunities

- ▶ Improvements to the entrance and parking, outside the Wildlands, are needed for public safety.
- ▶ The property includes an area outside of the Wildlands (approximately 14 acres) where additional limited parking, restrooms, and an interpretive kiosk could be located, and which could focus / promote use of the less sensitive areas of the park.
- ▶ The W. Seton Belt Barn could be used as a gathering place for researchers, school groups, and others attending environmental educational programs.

Threats

- ▶ Without improvements to the property's entrance, ingress and egress to Belt Woods is dangerous due to poor visibility and the volume of traffic on Church Road.
- ▶ The existing entrance condition and associated access issues will make it difficult to perform structure demolition and property clean-up.
- ▶ The existing roads are gravel / dirt and are not currently identified for routine maintenance.
- ▶ Potential increases in visitation and vehicular traffic will increase wear on portions of the roads, although the elimination of the two residences will decrease traffic on other portions.
- ▶ The addition of infrastructure, or infrastructure enhancements, may create increased interest / demand for public use.

Big-Picture Goals

NATURAL RESOURCE GOALS

- 1 Compile past and current research, studies, inventories, and assessments on the natural resources at Belt Woods and assemble an electronic database of resources.
- 2 Survey forest health and implement stewardship practices recommended by resource experts to better preserve and enhance the Wildlands and old growth forest at Belt Woods.
- 3 Survey the property and identify locations where invasive species are present to implement a prioritized plan of action for control of non-native invasive plant species.
- 4 Implement a limited public access plan that allows for use of the site for research, study, education, and interpretation, consistent with the site's Wildland designation and unique natural resources.
- 5 Assess, monitor, and manage wildlife species and populations to prevent damage to sensitive natural resources and maintain forest health and overall biodiversity.

CULTURAL/ HISTORICAL RESOURCE GOALS

- 6 Develop a plan to stabilize, conserve, restore, or relocate the W. Seton Belt Barn to facilitate the interpretation of the history of the property, farming practices, forest stewardship, and the region.
- 7 Perform comprehensive research and assemble documentation of other historically significant structures, areas, ruins, or archaeological resources on the property.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCE GOALS

- 8 Develop and implement a trail plan (foot only) for the purpose of improving recreational access and directing access to appropriate areas (away from sensitive resources).
- 9 Develop and implement an interpretive plan for Belt Woods that includes natural resources, historical and cultural resources, sustainability, and conservation.

HUMAN RESOURCE GOALS

- 10 Identify specific staff at the Sandy Point State Park Complex and formalize responsibilities to serve as primary staff for Belt Woods.
- 11 Explore opportunities with interested groups to supplement staff presence and assist with volunteer monitoring, maintenance, and educational activities to promote the park as a community resource.

INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS

- 12 Improve the property's appearance and safety by demolishing certain structures, removing debris, and identifying the property as part of the Maryland State Park system.
- 13 Prepare and implement a plan to provide safe and sustainable access to Belt Woods by improving the entrance, access road, and parking area.
- 14 Develop a concept plan and design program for the multi-purpose area so that necessary site improvements can be identified for future funding and included in the capital improvements program.
- 15 Limit infrastructure improvements and preserve historically important structures consistent with the property's deed restrictions and Wildlands designation.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #1 **Compile past and current research, studies, inventories, and assessments on the natural resources at Belt Woods and assemble an electronic database of resources.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Work with stakeholders to form an affiliated foundation ("Friends of Belt Woods") to work cooperatively with the Maryland Park Service and Department of Natural Resources to provide important information related to site management.	2018-19
Work with volunteers to compile a summary of research projects, studies, inventories, bird counts, fire activity, deer harvests, etc. (existing information) to develop a comprehensive history of natural resource assessments at Belt Woods.	2018-19
Work with volunteers to conduct a new inventory of plant and animal species present in the Belt Woods Wildlands to serve as a species level baseline for future monitoring.	2018-21
Update Geographical Information Systems (GIS) map data for Belt Woods and incorporate future studies and land use changes to the site over time.	Annually
Working with the Wildlife and Heritage Service, train Maryland Park Service staff to identify sensitive species on the property and understand their specific habitat characteristics, so they can better assist with survey efforts.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #2 **Survey forest health and implement stewardship practices recommended by resource experts to better preserve and enhance the Wildlands and old growth forest at Belt Woods.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Erect signage to direct visitors and users, including hunters, away from sensitive "old growth forest areas" (such as "restricted area" / deterrent signage, etc.).	2018
Assess areas that were planted, or are regenerating, and determine what, if any forest stewardship practices are warranted (e.g. invasive species control).	2019
Perform additional survey work in the North Woods and South Woods to determine the forest composition and condition in these areas.	2019-21
Perform additional survey work to determine the location and extent of rare, threatened, and endangered species on the property.	2019-21
Appropriately manage, regulate, and assess public deer hunting to protect rare, threatened and endangered species and control the spread of invasive species.	Annually
Provide adequate staff and resources to monitor and regulate public deer hunting and police the site during hunting season to ensure resource protection.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #3 **Survey the property and identify locations where invasive species are present to implement a prioritized plan of action for control of non-native invasive plant species.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Identify expert resources available for training and assistance such as the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Native Plant Society, Statewide Eyes program.	2018
Utilize available resources to perform a comprehensive inventory of non-native invasive plant species within Belt Woods State Park.	2018
Define priorities and develop a short-term and long-term plan of action for the eradication, control and prevention of non-native invasive species.	2018-19
Submit the plan of action for Department of Natural Resources internal review.	2019-20
Once approved, utilize available resources or seek grant funds to implement the plan with existing staff, Maryland Conservation Corps, volunteers, or ecological service providers.	2020-23
Remove invasive species, whenever possible with the assistance of the Wildlife and Heritage Service providing direction and assistance.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

As part of a Consent Decree involving the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and various other state and federal agencies, the Department will receive funds as part of a settlement related to the clean-up of several landfills spread over a 239 acre area in Rosedale, in Baltimore County. As part of the settlement, \$646,384 has been designated for tree planting and related forest restoration activities at Belt Woods. Initial scoping of the project has started and it is anticipated that some funds will become available in the next year.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #4 **Implement a limited public access plan that allows for use of the site for research, study, education, and interpretation, consistent with the site’s Wildlands designation and unique natural resources.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Develop a permit/use agreement process that utilizes the Department of Natural Resources internal review process to allow for large-group visitation related to site research and education.	2018 (Renew every 3 years)
Protect the property consistent with the deed restrictions and Wildlands designation, including the placement of gates and signage to prohibit unauthorized access to the Wildlands.	Annually
Utilize carrying capacity strategies, such as limiting parking, to regulate and monitor the number of visitors to Belt Woods and ensure that the property is not adversely affected by inappropriate levels of activity, including hunting.	Annually
Manage and regulate public deer hunting for population control to prevent user conflicts, including the annual bird count, education, and other authorized uses.	Annually
Restrict public deer hunting on certain days (e.g. Christmas Bird Count) to accommodate research/education groups that visit the site annually. Site visits by groups will be coordinated through the Park Manager and may require internal review and Minimal Impact Use Agreements.	As requested

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #5 **Assess, monitor, and manage wildlife species and populations to prevent damage to sensitive natural resources and maintain forest health and overall biodiversity.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Use regulated public deer hunting, managed in partnership with the Wildlife and Heritage Service through a permit/reservation system, to reverse, prevent, and control any overpopulation of white-tailed deer and associated damage to rare, threatened and endangered species habitat.	Annually
Work with the Wildlife and Heritage Service to monitor and assess the deer hunting program, develop appropriate reports, and make adjustments as needed based on scientific evidence and the recommendations of resource experts.	Annually
Provide adequate staff and resources to monitor and regulate public deer hunting and patrol the site to ensure resource protection.	Annually
Perform other natural resources studies on the property, including breeding bird surveys, forest surveys, wetland delineations, and rare, threatened and endangered species research as resources are available.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #6 **Develop a plan to stabilize, conserve, restore, or relocate the W. Seton Belt Barn to facilitate the interpretation of the history of the property, farming practices, forest stewardship, and the region.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Seek funding to stabilize the W. Seton Belt Barn, a High-Victorian barn with unique architectural features from the Victorian era.	2018-19
Implement interim stabilization measures (remove vegetation, secure doors, cover open roof sections, etc.) at the W. Seton Belt Barn to prevent further deterioration while coordinating with the Maryland Historical Trust on future action.	2018-19
Research and determine potential courses of action for the future of the W. Seton Belt Barn to include a determination of relocation and restoration strategies (due to the Wildlands designation and barn location), as well as the barn’s history. Explore opportunities for adaptive re-use.	2019–20
Develop a plan with the Maryland Historical Trust to restore, on or off-site, the W. Seton Belt Barn in a manner consistent with the United States Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation.	2019-21

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

Interim stabilization measures for the W. Seton Belt Barn are currently underway. Encroaching vegetation has been removed from the perimeter of the structure as of April 2018.

Maryland Park Service Historic Sites Planner to begin working with Maryland Historic Trust on options for the preservation of the Seton Belt Barn and related interpretation.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #7 Perform comprehensive research and assemble documentation of other historically significant structures, areas, ruins, or archaeological resources on the property.

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Assess other structures at Belt Woods for historic significance and, if significant, pursue the development of a Historic Structures Report describing stabilization and/or restoration.	2018-19
Research, map, and document other historic site features not already identified, including historic remnants, a family burial plot, and a possible slave / tenant graveyard.	2018-19
Perform historic resource assessments and surveys to obtain more information about the historical and cultural resources that comprise the Oatland Plantation site, which may include archaeological surveys.	2018-21
Develop historical research and documentation related to the Oatland Plantation and the early history of the property (18 th and 19 th Centuries), including the site's substantial African American history.	

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #8 **Develop and implement a trail plan (foot only) for the purpose of improving recreational access and directing access to appropriate areas (away from sensitive resources.)**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Erect signage to direct visitors and users, including hunters, away from sensitive "old-growth forest areas."	2018
Conduct a trail inventory, survey, and assessment with the Maryland Park Service Trail Planner.	2018-19
Develop a visitation and trail plan that provides for public access in a way that ensures that natural resources are not adversely affected by human activity, including unauthorized access.	2018-19
Use the trail plan to develop a sustainable trail and wayfinding system, and modify trails as needed to protect sensitive resources.	2019-20
Focus trail planning efforts in the northern area of Belt Woods and erect appropriate signage to protect sensitive areas.	2019-20
Prohibit motorized and mechanized vehicles of all types, including bicycles, consistent with the Wildlands designation.	Annually
Facilitate and promote recreational activities related to the property's unique environmental features such as bird watching, educational hikes, and tree and plant identification.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

Maryland Park Service Trail Planner will add initial trail planning for Belt Woods to the 2018-19 Trail Work Plan.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #9 **Develop and implement an interpretive plan for Belt Woods that includes natural resources, historical and cultural resources, sustainability and conservation.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Work with Maryland Park Service staff, other Department of Natural Resources units, and the Maryland Historical Trust to identify interpretive themes.	2019-21
Include the Belt Woods affiliated foundation group (when formed) in interpretive planning efforts as well as any exhibit design / development, to solicit site-specific knowledge.	202-21
Develop interpretive information, signage, and exhibits (possible waysides) in locations to be determined outside the State Wildlands boundary.	2021-22
Coordinate interpretation efforts and programming with nearby Watkins Regional Park.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #10 **Identify specific staff at the Sandy Point State Park Complex and formalize responsibilities to serve as primary staff for Belt Woods.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Identify key staff as the primary Maryland Park Service presence at Belt Woods, and provide training and resources to enable them to learn about, manage, and protect the property.	2018-19
Work with stakeholders to form an affiliated foundation group ("Friends of Belt Woods") to work collaboratively with the Maryland Park Service on the projects and actions identified in the Strategic Management Plan.	2018-19
Identify key volunteer resources to assist with various maintenance, restoration, and conservation activities, including resource experts.	Annually
Work with the Wildlife and Heritage Service to train Maryland Park Service staff and volunteers on the identification, care, preservation, and protection of rare, threatened, and endangered species onsite.	Annually
Monitor staffing levels, land uses, and impacts at Belt Woods.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

After entrance improvements have been completed, Maryland Park Service staff will begin a regular schedule of trash pick-up along the Church Road boundary and will work with the City of Bowie as appropriate.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #11 **Explore opportunities with interested groups to supplement staff presence and assist with volunteer monitoring, maintenance and educational activities to promote the park as a community resource.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Work with engaged stakeholders to create, organize and implement a new "Friends of Belt Woods" affiliated foundation with non-profit status.	2018-19
Formally establish the affiliated foundation and execute an affiliated foundation agreement to coordinate volunteer activities.	2019-20

COMMENTS/ PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #12 **Improve the property's appearance and safety by demolishing certain structures, removing debris, and identifying the property as part of the Maryland State Park system.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Implement a volunteer program for regular trash pick-up along the roadsides adjacent to Belt Woods.	2018 (Annually)
Remove deteriorated structures and clean-up building sites with Maryland Historical Trust review, where appropriate.	2018-20
Remove invasive species, as resources allow, with the assistance of the Wildlife and Heritage Service.	Annually
Monitor demolition and clean-up activities to ensure compliance with specific activities permitted by the Wildlands legislation to preserve historic structures.	Annually

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #13 **Prepare and implement a plan to provide safe and sustainable access to Belt Woods by improving the entrance, access road, and parking area.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Prepare a plan for the park entrance that includes the minimum necessary clearing and grading (outside the Wildlands area) to provide the necessary sight distance for safe ingress and egress.	2018
Implement park entrance improvements.	2018
Evaluate the access road to determine what, if any, improvements are required for safe vehicular and pedestrian passage, and implement these improvements.	2018-19
Develop a design to improve the existing parking area and provide a stable gravel parking area for 12 to 15 vehicles.	2018-19
Relocate and/or add gates as needed to restrict vehicular access to the designated Wildlands area.	2018-19

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT



MAP 7: CONCEPTUAL ENTRANCE IMPROVEMENTS

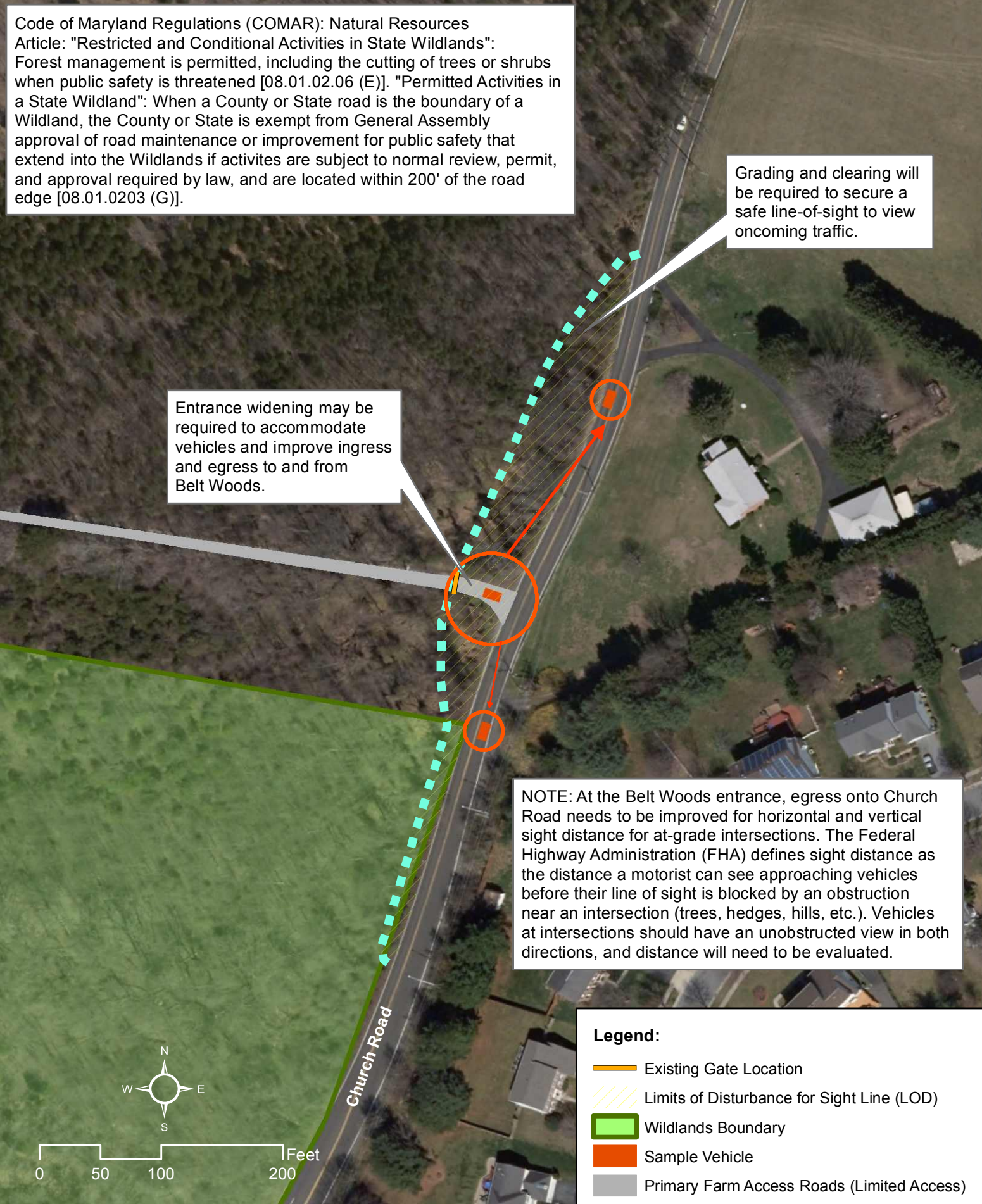


Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR): Natural Resources
 Article: "Restricted and Conditional Activities in State Wildlands":
 Forest management is permitted, including the cutting of trees or shrubs when public safety is threatened [08.01.02.06 (E)]. "Permitted Activities in a State Wildland": When a County or State road is the boundary of a Wildland, the County or State is exempt from General Assembly approval of road maintenance or improvement for public safety that extend into the Wildlands if activities are subject to normal review, permit, and approval required by law, and are located within 200' of the road edge [08.01.0203 (G)].

Grading and clearing will be required to secure a safe line-of-sight to view oncoming traffic.

Entrance widening may be required to accommodate vehicles and improve ingress and egress to and from Belt Woods.

NOTE: At the Belt Woods entrance, egress onto Church Road needs to be improved for horizontal and vertical sight distance for at-grade intersections. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines sight distance as the distance a motorist can see approaching vehicles before their line of sight is blocked by an obstruction near an intersection (trees, hedges, hills, etc.). Vehicles at intersections should have an unobstructed view in both directions, and distance will need to be evaluated.



Legend:

- Existing Gate Location
- Limits of Disturbance for Sight Line (LOD)
- Wildlands Boundary
- Sample Vehicle
- Primary Farm Access Roads (Limited Access)

Conceptual Improvement Drawings

Illustration I: Multi-Purpose Area Improvements

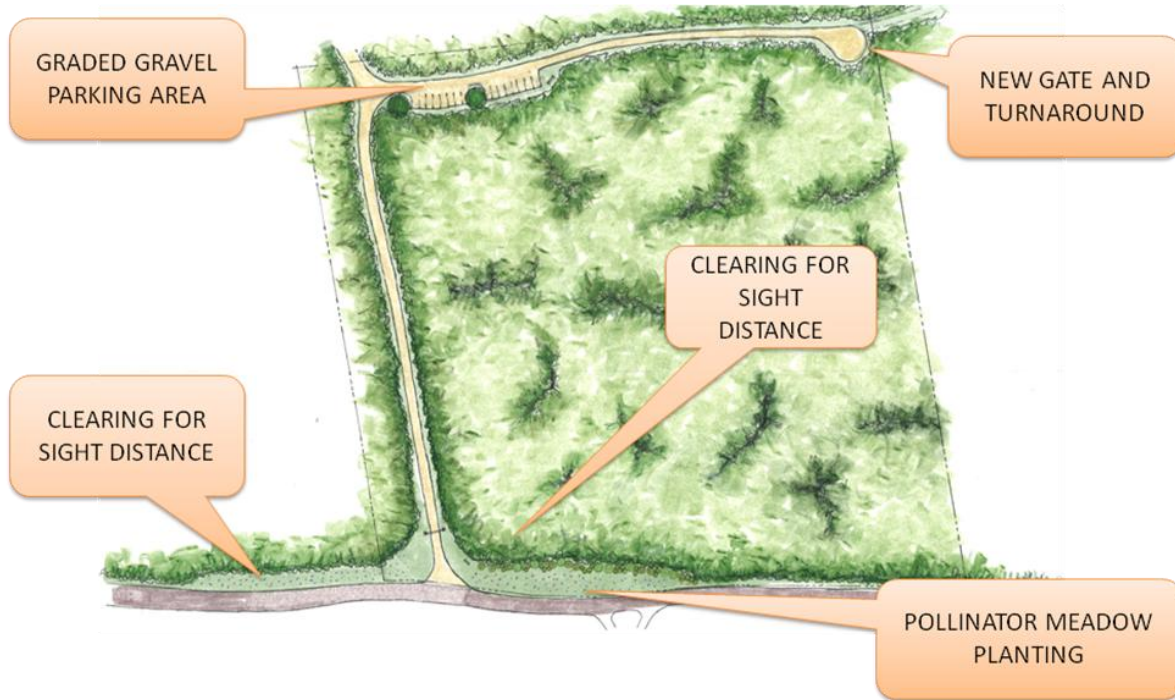
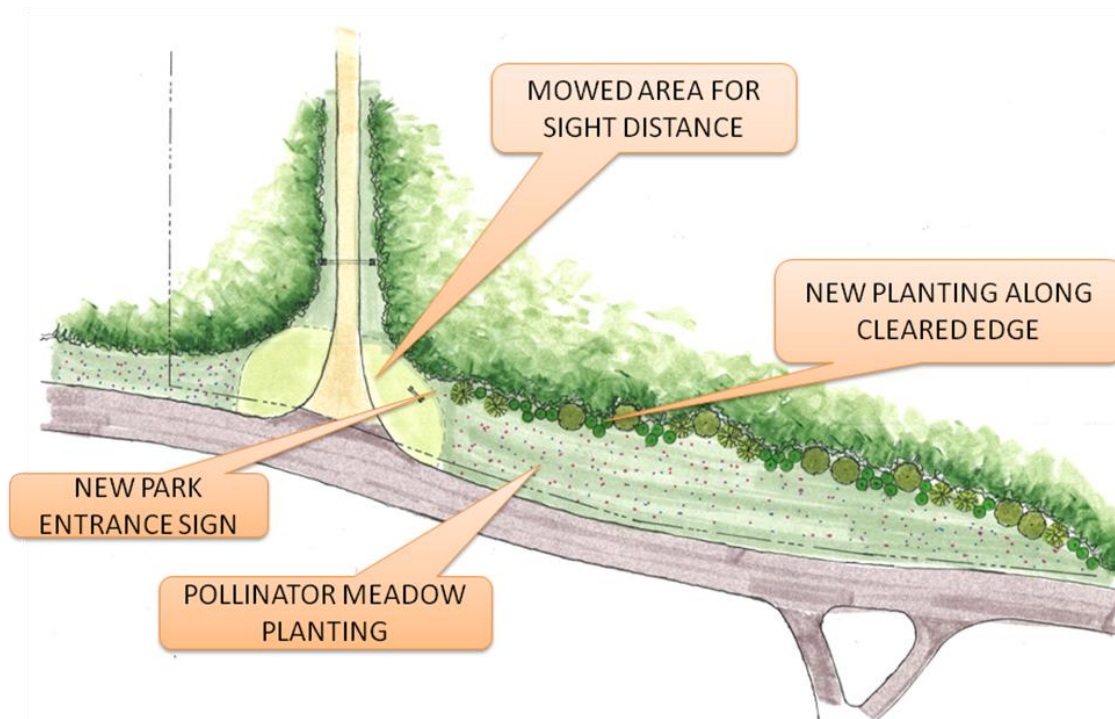


Illustration II: Entrance Detail



5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #14 **Develop a concept plan and design program for the multi-purpose area so that necessary site improvements can be identified for future funding and included in the capital improvements program.**

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Develop a concept plan for infrastructure improvements at Belt Woods.	2019-20
Present the plan to stakeholders and revise as needed.	2020
Based on the concept plan, develop a design program for identified capital improvement project(s).	2020

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

Planning staff to work with Engineering and Construction and Park staff to develop a concept plan for the multi-purpose area and to pursue landscape design and civil engineering services as needed.

5 **Work Plan**

GOAL #15 **Limit infrastructure improvements and preserve historically important structures consistent with the property's deed restrictions and Wildlands designation**

PROJECTS & ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Survey, locate, and map / mark important site features, including the official statutorily prescribed Wildlands boundary, critical ecosystems (old-growth forests), infrastructure, utility lines, and protected historical and cultural resources such as cemeteries, ruins, etc.	2018-21
Work with identified experts to monitor the ecological and cultural carrying capacities for Belt Woods in relation to planned capital improvements and critical maintenance.	2018-21

COMMENTS / PROGRESS REPORT

Acknowledgements

COLLABORATOR	TITLE	AGENCY/ ORGANIZATION
Nita Settina	Superintendent	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Chris Bushman	Deputy Superintendent	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Mary Owens	Director of Planning and Conservation Programs	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
LeeAnne Chandler	Chief of Planning	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Mike Riley	Southeastern Regional Manager	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Dorna Cooper	Park Manager	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Shane Johnston	Natural Resources Planner	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Rob Jones	Lead Park Ranger	MD DNR – Maryland Park Service
Dave Heilmeier	Southern Region Manager	MD DNR – Wildlife and Heritage Service
Katharine McCarthy	Southern Regional Ecologist	MD DNR – Wildlife and Heritage Service
Dave Gailey	Southern Region Forester	MD DNR - Maryland Forest Service
Perry Otwell	Engineering Director	MD DNR - Engineering & Construction
John Wilson	Wildlands Coordinator	MD DNR – Land Acquisition and Planning
Junior Johnson	Sergeant	MD DNR - Natural Resources Police
Ron Collier	Corporal	MD DNR - Natural Resources Police
Pam Cooper	Stakeholder/Friend	Western Shore Conservancy
Charles Franklin	Stakeholder/Friend	Western Shore Conservancy/Akin Gump LLC
Viktoriia A. De Las Casas	Stakeholder/Friend	Western Shore Conservancy/Akin Gump LLC
Joe Meinert	Director of Planning	City of Bowie
Tiffany Wright	Watershed Manager	City of Bowie
Gary Allen	Stakeholder/Friend	City of Bowie
Dennis Brady	Stakeholder/Friend	City of Bowie
Katina Shoulars	Environmental Planning Supervisor	Maryland MNCPPC
Chris Perry	Stakeholder/Friend	Bourn Environmental
Martha Ainsworth	Stakeholder/Friend	Sierra Club
David O’Leary	Stakeholder/Friend	Sierra Club
Lauren Ragsac	Stakeholder/Friend	Sierra Club
Janet Gingold	Stakeholder/Friend	Sierra Club
Marc Imlay	Stakeholder/Friend	Sierra Club (Maryland Chapter)
Kurt Schwartz	Stakeholder/Friend	Maryland Ornithological Society
Fred Fallon	Stakeholder/Friend	Maryland Ornithological Society
Ken Cohen	Stakeholder/Friend	Audubon Society
Barbara Dowell	Stakeholder/Friend	Audubon Society
Bill Miles	Stakeholder/Friend	Maryland Hunting Coalition



Belt Woods State Park



Strategic Management Plan Appendices

Appendix A

History of Belt Woods

Acquisition

In the latter part of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century, most of the forest lands in Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic States were converted to other uses, or were repeatedly cut for timber products. This forest impact was so massive that the result was much of the original forest character that previously dominated the region was lost.

Among the many people who used the land for their livelihood during this period was the Belt family. Their extensive land holdings in and around Prince George's County, Maryland totaled up to several thousand acres. While much of the Belt family land was actively farmed or otherwise engaged in producing income, two woodland areas escaped significant destructive human activity for many decades. Both of these two woodlands were located in the "Belt Home Farm" located on Church Road. One of these woodlands is commonly known as the "South Woods" and the other is the "North Woods."

In 1959, when W. Seton Belt died, these two tracts of old growth deciduous forest on his land survived largely intact. However, W. Seton Belt was the last Belt family member, so he bequeathed his "Home Farm," to his local church with the requirement that the woods be allowed to continue essentially as they had been during his lifetime. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, only a handful of scientists and outdoors enthusiasts understood the rarity of these woodlands and offered encouragement for protection of the woods. By the late 1960s, economic interests and pressures caused the church to pursue overturning the will to increase the value and usability of the Belt Home Farm. This was accomplished in 1976.

In 1971, while the Belt Home Farm was entirely in church ownership, the National Park Service (NPS) designated 56.3 acres of the South Woods as a National Natural Landmark. This designation heightened awareness of the significance of the site's natural resources, provided for National Park Service monitoring of the site and established a framework for recommendations regarding on-site protection. It is important to note that National Natural Landmark designation alone could not ensure protection of the site's resources.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Belt Home Farm received the attention of an increasing number of private individuals and environmental groups who lobbied for protection of the "Belt Woods." In spite of this interest, the church arranged to have the "North Woods" selectively logged. The veneer-quality white oaks were harvested and sold to a German firm. This left only the South Woods intact.

By 1984, negotiations between DNR and the landowner yielded an agreement for selective state acquisition of the acreage in and around the South Woods. In November 1984, about 109 acres were purchased for \$628,545 using Program Open Space funds. Shortly thereafter, in 1986, legislation was enacted establishing the Belt Woods Wildland. This designation provides the strongest statutory protection for public lands under Maryland law. That same year, the state acquired a one-acre "in-holding" adjacent to Route 214 from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission.

Appendix A

History of Belt Woods

From the late 1980s through 1996, plans were being drawn that would subdivide and develop the remaining 515 acres of the Belt Home Farm in church ownership as an expansive residential community. During this same time, interests aimed at preserving this area were gaining momentum as private citizens increased political pressure, fund raising, and the documentation of the value of the property's resources. Efforts led by the Western Shore Conservancy Inc. helped shift attitudes toward negotiating a potential acquisition. Around this time, legislation was passed authorizing the sale of bonds that would be used by the Western Shore Conservancy to protect the property, and discussions between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, local/regional governments and private conservation organizations grew into a limited partnership with the capacity to amass sufficient funds to support acquisition talks.

With a group of committed partners engaged in a coordinated effort to conserve the property, several major milestones occurred in 1997. The remaining 515 acres of the Belt Home Farm were purchased for \$4,650,000; legislation was enacted that expanded the Belt Woods Wildland to cover about 610 acres of the 624 acres in state ownership; and the Western Shore Conservancy accepted the responsibility to function as interim manager of the property. With the immediate goal of protective ownership of the property accomplished, efforts to complete work on the Belt Woods Management Plan were reinitiated.

Work on the Plan continued in 1998, and negotiations on potential impacts of the planned Church Road improvements occupied much of the Belt Woods Management Council's time. Other important accomplishments included identifying Johnson grass as a significant problem and initiating control efforts, and removing barrels potentially containing hazardous materials. Ultimately, work on the Management Plan reached sufficient consensus among the Belt Woods Management Council that the public review process was initiated. Although the Plan was substantially completed and released as a Draft in 1998, it was never formally approved by the Department of Natural Resources.

Participating Parties

The unique opportunity to protect the natural resources of Belt Woods fostered an extraordinary commitment and partnership. Over many years, many groups and individuals participated in the efforts to protect Belt Woods. For example, the former Belt Woods Technical Advisory Committee supported Department of Natural Resources management decisions and planning on the then 109-acre Belt Woods Wildland from the late 1980s through the early 1990s.

In 1996 and 1997, during discussions regarding the purchase of the 515-acre Belt Home Farm parcel, several participants became major contributors of funds for purchase of the property with the Trust for Public Land acting as primary negotiator. The 1997 purchase of the property used about \$2,700,000 in State of Maryland Program Open Space funds, and the remaining \$1,900,000 were contributed by the City of Bowie, the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, The Nature Conservancy, and the Western Shore Conservancy. Following the 1997 acquisition, these major contributors participated on the Belt Woods Management Council to help generate consensus on a management plan.

Land Cover in the Mid 1970s

In the 1970s, land cover in Belt Woods was a mixture of forest and agricultural fields. Mapping from that time indicates that older forest areas were limited to a small percentage of the 624-acre area shown. These maps also suggest that a significant reduction in active agriculture occurred on the Belt Woods property prior to 1975. The abandonment of agriculture allowed for the initiation of natural regeneration in Belt Woods, and this regeneration activity continued to the present. Land cover and aerial imagery from 1997 show various phases of forest regeneration.

Appendix B

Legal Foundation

Summary

Implementation of the Belt Woods Strategic Management Plan is intended to be consistent with several regulatory requirements, deed restrictions and limited federal oversight. These standards establish the foundation for managing the property, and are summarized below under the categories of State Law, State Regulation, Deed Restrictions, and National Natural Landmark status.

State Law

The Maryland General Assembly built upon the existing Wildlands Statute to create the Belt Woods Wildland by first designating 109 acres in 1986 and then expanding the Wildlands to identify management standards for Belt Woods as a Type 2 State Wildland.

NR§5-1201(c)

"State Wildlands" means Wildlands owned by the State of Maryland and includes the Type 2 listing, which is a unit of importance for all the natural sciences, especially ecology, and with outstanding value for education, research, and appreciation of natural processes. Preservation in the desired natural condition is the prevailing purpose of these holdings. Visitation shall be regulated to ensure this preservation on a permanent basis."

NR§5-1203(d)

"Wildlands" means limited areas of land or water, which have retained their wilderness character, although not necessarily completely natural or undisturbed, or have rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life or similar feature of interest worthy of preservation for use of present and future residents of the State."

NR§5-1203(a)

"Declaration of policy; establishment of State Wildlands preservation system – In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization does not occupy and modify all areas within the State, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is the policy of the General Assembly to secure for the people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of State Wildlands. For this purpose, there is established a State Wildlands preservation system composed of areas in the State designated by the General Assembly as "Wildland Areas." The Wildland Areas shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the people of Maryland in a manner that will leave them unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as Wildlands, to provide for their protection, preservation of their wild-land character, and for gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as Wildlands."

NR§5-1203(k)

"Under the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, that property in Prince George's County, containing 610 acres and described as follows is a Type 2 State Wildland and shall be named the "Belt Woods Wildland": "Beginning at a point... [a metes and bounds description of the Wildland that encompasses all that land in State ownership known as Belt Woods excepting about 14 acres adjacent to Church Road.]

"Existing agricultural fields will be reforested or allowed to naturally revert to a forested condition according to a management plan developed for the area. Agricultural leases may continue within the Belt Woods Wildland until such time as forestation occurs. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this title, the Department of Natural Resources may reforest existing fields using mechanical or motorized equipment.

Appendix B

Legal Foundation

“Existing tenancies within Belt Woods may continue until December 31, 1997.

“All existing structures including the barns, houses, sheds, and electric utility lines within the above described area shall be allowed to remain in the Wildland area. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this title, the Department of Natural Resources may allow the use of mechanical or motorized equipment to remove these existing structures and other existing debris from the Wildlands.

“The Belt Woods Wildland contains unique ecological features including species sensitive to pressure caused by the burgeoning populations of nonnative and domesticated species. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this title, the Department of Natural Resources may, as called for in the management plan developed for the area, remove nonnative or domesticated species of plants or animals and erect fencing, gates and signage associated with the protection and interpretation of unique ecological features.”

State Regulation

To supplement and further implement the statutory directives for Belt Woods, Wildland regulations found in COMAR 08.01.02 specify additional regulation of permitted activities, prohibited activities, and restricted and conditional activities within Wildlands.

In addition to Wildland regulations, other regulations apply based on Department of Natural Resources land unit designation as a State Park. During the State’s ownership of the 109-acre portion of Belt Woods, it was a Natural Environment Area (NEA) and a State Forest the former being part of the State Park system. The property was subsequently designated a State Park with a sub-designation as a Natural Environment Area.

Deed Restrictions

The deeds to each of the three parcels that make up Belt Woods differ in their restrictions. These deed restrictions tend to limit and complicate site management. Therefore, to support site management needs, significant restrictions are listed below. Beyond these restrictions, all Belt Woods parcels also are affected by easements, primarily for utilities. Details of these easements are not included in this appendix.

Deed (L6041/F249) states that “The Grantor [Mercantile Safe Deposit and Trust Company, Trustee] and Grantee [the State of Maryland] agree that the aforesaid property will be maintained in its natural state and that the students and faculty of Queen Anne School will have the right of continued access to the foresaid property for the purpose of scientific and educational studies. As of 2018, the Queen Anne’s school is closed, negating this deed allowance.

Deed (L6409/F183) affirms the absence of deed restrictions by stating, “And the Grantor Covenants that it has not done or suffered to be done any act to encumber the property hereby conveyed; and the Grantor will execute such further assurances of the same as may be required. This warranty does not extend to publicly recorded easements for utilities, other easements which are observable by inspection of the property and easements held by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission.

The 515-acre parcel contains extensive restrictions. The deed states, “To have and to hold the said lots of ground, unto and to the use of said Grantee [the State of Maryland], its successors and assigns, in fee simple SUBJECT TO the express condition and limitation that the premises conveyed shall forever be held as a nature preserve for scientific and education purposes, reforestation and limited public access; that management of the premises shall be limited to that which is in the best interest of the health and integrity of the rare, threatened, or endangered species or exemplary natural communities or ecosystems that may exist thereon, and that the premises shall be kept entirely in its natural state.”

Appendix B

Legal Foundation

Furthermore the deed states, “Notwithstanding the foregoing to the contrary, only such fences and foot trails and other improvements (including without limitation a visitor’s center and a caretakers facility), management and uses shall be permitted (i) which are appropriate to effectuate the foregoing purposes without impairing the essential natural character of the premises or (ii) which comply with or allowed by (a) the terms and conditions of the regulations in Exhibit B (duplicated COMAR 08.01.02 in its entirety as it existed in February 1997) attached hereto and incorporated herein , as if the premises described in Attachment A were designated a “Wildland” or (b) the terms and conditions listed in Exhibit C (Terms and Conditions are the same as the conditions in the 1997 Wildland legislation) attached hereto and incorporated herein or (c) a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy or other qualified steward placed on the premises. Any possibilities of reverter or rights of entry created by this provision shall be vested in The Nature Conservancy. Said condition and limitation shall continue as a servitude running with the premises in perpetuity.” It was the consensus of the participating parties that the enactment of the 1997 legislation designating the Belt Woods Wildland precluded the need for a conservation easement at that time.

National Natural Landmark

In 1971, the National Park Service designated 56.3 acres of the former Belt property, near the intersection of Maryland Route 214 and Church Road as a National Natural landmark (NNL.) This area of Belt Woods is consequently listed in the Registry of National Landmarks and is monitored annually by the National Park Service. The designation is a voluntary commitment by a landowner to protect the resource, and does not impose any federal statutory or regulatory requirements. However, the designation does allow the National Park Service to offer recommendations and to intercede on behalf of the resource, as was done in the late 1980s for Belt Woods. During the life of the NNL designation in Belt Woods, the National Park Service has performed independent analyses, offered recommendations, submitted testimony, met with stakeholders and generally assisted in promoting protection of the National Natural landmark.

Appendix C

Ecological Significance

Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service - Ecological Significance Assessment: Belt Woods Natural Environment Area– BioNet Tier: 1

Key Wildlife Habitats

- Basic Mesic Forest
- Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest
- Coastal Plain Floodplain
- Coastal Plain Stream

Important Features

- American brook lamprey (*Lethenteron appendix*, state-listed as Threatened)
- Blue-spotted sunfish (*Enneacanthus gloriosus*, state watchlist)
- Glade fern (*Homalosorus pycnocarpon*, state-listed as Threatened)
- Vulnerable state-listed endangered species



Ecological Significance

The old growth forest at Belt Woods is a National Natural Landmark and one of the few remaining old growth stands in Maryland. This mesic upland forest is the core of this site, designated by the State as a Natural Environmental Area (NEA) and Wildland. The old-growth character of the forest is evidenced by the large diameter of many trees, light gaps, standing dead and fallen timber, and well-stratified forest canopy layers. The soils formed from the greensands of the Aquia Formation are rich in potassium from the mineral, glauconite, and calcium from fossil shell material. Once commonly used as fertilizer, and still mined for this purpose, glauconite makes the soils richer and less acidic than typical Coastal Plain soils. There is a well-developed organic layer formed from decaying plant matter that has accumulated over the centuries. The variety of soil fungi supported by the downed wood and other decaying matter play an important role in the growth of trees and other plants of the old growth forest, facilitating the absorption of nutrients and water. The rich, circumneutral soils and lack of recent disturbance have resulted in very high diversity of native species in a relatively small acreage, and a flora more typical of the Piedmont than the Coastal Plain, with lush spring wildflowers. This upland forest type, Basic Mesic Forest, is uncommon in Maryland (State Watch List). The age and ecological importance of the site have been documented in the scientific literature. It is crucial to maintain the few remnants of our native, uncut forests in order to understand how ecological processes operate in unmanaged systems. Old-growth forests are rare in Maryland, and extremely rare in Prince George's County.

Among the diverse herbaceous species carpeting the forest floor is glade fern (*Homalosorus pycnocarpos*), state-listed as Threatened). Typically this species grows in areas with moist, calcium-rich soils. The high organic content of the old growth forest soil helps to retain moisture, so even though the plants grow in the upland forest here, the soil is sufficiently moist to support this species. Unlike the population at Belt Woods, most of Maryland's populations of glade fern grow on the lower slopes of ravines. A small population grows within the interior of the old-growth forest. Although glade fern has a broad range, from the midwest to the Atlantic coast and from Ontario to Louisiana, it is rare or uncommon in the southeastern states, along the Atlantic coast, and in the upper midwest.

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Ecological Significance

Adjacent to the old growth, old fields are reverting to forest to serve as a buffer and increase the area of forest interior. Forested corridors that extend from the old forest to nearby natural areas provide wildlife corridors and a seed source for native vegetation in the NEA. To the west of the old-growth forest, a narrow floodplain forest grows along the banks of a tributary to Northeast Branch. This stream supports a small population of the State-listed Threatened fish, American brook lamprey (*Lethenteron appendix*), that extends downstream into Western Branch. Adults of the non-parasitic American brook lamprey are very short-lived, dying after spawning in riffles over sandy or gravelly stream bottoms. Most of the life cycle of this eel-like fish is spent in the larval stage (4-7.5 years); larvae are referred to as ammocetes. After hatching, ammocetes swim to pools of slower moving water and burrow into the soft stream bottom. Changes in water quality, hydrology, and channel characteristics associated with forest clearing and urbanization are significant threats to the American brook lamprey. Blue-spotted sunfish (*Enneacanthus gloriosus*), a watchlist species has also been observed in the stream.

The complex structure of the old growth forest provides habitat for many wildlife species. Standing dead timber provides sites for cavity nesting birds and flying squirrels, and both standing and fallen logs offer den sites for small mammals. Standing dead trees and fallen logs also provide habitat for a variety of insects and fungal species that are a food source to birds, small mammals, and other wildlife. The site supports an extremely high density of Forest Interior Dwelling bird species, as measured annually and compared with censuses of breeding birds throughout the State. The complex canopy structure provides nesting opportunities to a variety of birds with different nest site preferences. Research has documented that the numerous mid-story and understory trees at Belt Woods support unusually high densities of breeding wood thrushes.

Appendix D

Ecological Management

Native Species that are Rare or Protected by Law

Protection of rare native species, including those that are formally listed (rare, endangered, threatened) and those that are simply uncommon, is clearly an important function of Wildlands management. Prior to 1997, two rare species of plants had been identified in the South Woods portion of the tract. It is reasonable to anticipate that there may be other rare species that also exist. In order to protect these rare species and others that may be identified, the following actions are recommended:

- A Belt Woods Wildlands Rare Species List shall be maintained. The list shall include species that appear on either federal or State of Maryland official listings for endangered, threatened, in need of conservation, rare or similar designation, or the species is believed to be aboriginal or naturally occurring in Belt Woods.
- The overall management goal for each species on the Belt Woods Wildlands Rare Species List should be to maintain a population size and condition for that species that is likely to promote the long term survival of that species within the Belt Woods Wildlands.

Forest Interior Dwelling Species / Birds (FIDS)

The Belt Woods Wildlands is a significant site for many bird species including Forest Interior Dwelling (FID) birds of coastal Maryland. One of the highest breeding bird densities ever reported for a pure deciduous forest occurred in the South Woods portion of Belt Woods. Fourteen of the 19 FID bird species have been sighted in Belt Woods, and 11 have been documented breeding in this area (Stewart and Robbins 1947, Whitcomb et al 1977, Robbins 1989, O'Brien and Dowell 1990). The South Woods is excellent breeding habitat for a number of FID bird species. Since 1947, two FID bird species are no longer found in Belt Woods, the black and white warbler (*Minolta varia*) and the worm-eating warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorus*).

Recommendations for Forest Interior Dwelling Species

- Expand the forest interior by allowing the fields to naturally regenerate and return to forest.
- FID bird populations should be monitored to facilitate the tracking of population trends. Annual bird surveys including the Christmas Bird Count and the May Bird Count can be accomplished in cooperation with local chapters of the Maryland Ornithological Society and the National Audubon Society.
- The population and habitat of the wood thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) should be a particular focus of monitoring. Wood thrush may decline if their favored nesting trees are reduced in number, and the decline of the flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) associated with anthracnose may be a contributing factor.
- Research addressing neo-tropical migratory birds should be considered a high priority.

Invasive Plants

Numerous invasive species pose an existing threat to the Belt Woods Wildlands based on information from numerous sources including the Belt Woods Technical Advisory Committee for the South Woods area prior to 1994, the Prince Georges County Soil Conservation District in 1997, the Maryland Department of Agriculture Weed Control Program Specialist (Lynne Saundwers) in 1998, and by experience accumulated by the Belt Woods Interim Manager Pam Cooper in 1997 and 1998. This listing is presented as a starting point for expansion and greater detail to be assembled in the Work Plan for Goal #3. Known invasive plants include: Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*); Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*); Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*); multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*); mile-a-minute vine (*Polygonum perfoliatum* L.); climbing euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*); oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*); winged euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*); crown vetch (*Coronilla varia* L.); tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*); stilt grass (*Microstegium vimineum*); and English ivy (*Hedera helix*).

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These invasive plant species are either typical of woodlands impacted by human disturbance or poorly managed agricultural fields. In many cases, disturbance tends to be the most influential and significant factor affecting the ground layer of vegetation. Invasive plants have the potential to out-compete native vegetation and to become dominant in a woodland. However, in the interior of the Belt Woods Wildland, growth of Japanese honeysuckle and multiflora rose may eventually be limited by shade alone as trees mature and shade the field areas that are actively regenerating. The Maryland Park Service will work with resource experts, trained staff and volunteers, and university groups to ensure invasive plant identification and removal.

Recommendations for Invasive Plants

In order to address the significant challenges associated with controlling the spread of invasive plants, monitoring of invasive plant species is a priority, and the Maryland Park Service will work cooperatively with the Department's Wildlife and Heritage Service to monitor the property to determine if the plants are negatively affecting natural regeneration and overall forest health and if control methods are needed. Monitoring should include mapping of areas where plants currently exist, where future problems may develop, and where invasive plants threaten rare or sensitive native species.

The Maryland Park Service will survey the property for noxious weed species, as identified under Maryland State law and apply control measures as required. As needed, additional control measures for other invasive species will be implemented if the species show signs of negatively affecting existing forest, forest regeneration, or rare plants. Caution will be used to ensure that control measures are necessary through consultation with the Wildlife and Heritage Service and other technical experts.

The Belt Woods Maryland Park Service staff, in consultation with Wildlife and Heritage Service staff, will coordinate all projects and programs to control invasive species. All efforts will require internal review. Internal review submittals shall include a description of the work, a justification of the eradication/control methods proposed, and appropriate maps. In general, working in small localized sites, using manual controls is preferred and should be considered before other methods or strategies are proposed. Creation of conditions that may be conducive to re-establishment of invasive plants, such as excessive disturbance of the soil, should be avoided. Chemical or biological controls may be used if non-target species will not be significantly affected, direct manual application is used (unless another method offers clear and compelling advantages), and the control is non-persistent (unless the plan demonstrates that persistence offers greater benefit with equal or lesser risk).

Pest Animal Species

There are several species that are present to some degree in the Belt Woods Wildlands that have the potential to degrade or excessively damage the area's ecosystem. Populations of these species and the effects of these populations on the property's resources need to be routinely monitored. Control measures can be implemented as needed through coordination with the Department's Wildlife and Heritage Service and other experts as may be contacted for special expertise.

Brown-Headed Cowbird

The brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) has the potential to become a serious threat by parasitizing nesting neotropical migratory birds. The cowbirds lay their eggs in the nest of other bird species and decrease the host birds' reproductive success. For neotropical species that raise only one brood per year, the impacts can be significant. Action to control the brown-headed cowbird population may be necessary if bird counts indicate that cowbird nest parasitism is directly affecting reproduction and population levels of valued bird species or breeding bird surveys indicate an increasing cowbird population. If action is determined to be necessary, appropriate methods shall be used to minimize adverse effects on non-target species.

Appendix D

Ecological Management

Insects Including Gypsy Moth

There is little information on insect problems in Belt Woods to guide management planning although there was a reference to infestation/defoliation by gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) in the South Woods in the 1994 Draft Management Plan. Although a number of oaks declined from this defoliation, the impacts did not persist and the woodland is generally healthy. Because gypsy moths were introduced from Europe in the late 1800s, they may be considered an unnatural disturbance. Gypsy moths are now likely to be a persistent resident in the Belt Woods Wildland.

Selection of control methods for gypsy moth and any use of insecticide, will involve an assessment of potential adverse effects before any action is taken. A severe gypsy moth infestation of the woodland could cause severe disruption in the ecosystem by potentially killing mature oaks and altering the natural character of the woodland. However, insecticide application may cause negative side effects, including the loss of, or reduced populations of, non-target species that contribute to the overall composition and health of the woodland.

Forest pest monitoring for gypsy moth and other species should occur annually. The Department of Natural Resources works cooperatively with the Maryland Department of Agriculture to provide access to numerous public lands throughout the State to facilitate the placement and monitoring of forest pest traps. If a pest problem is identified, and control is recommended, then available control techniques should be assessed with input from experts as part of the internal review process. Biological controls may be as effective as pesticide application and would be preferred. The selected control method should offer an acceptable likelihood of success for effective control of the target species, the greatest selectivity in species affected and the least impacts on non-target species.

White-Tailed Deer Management

Considering the significant population increases of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) in Central and Southern Maryland in recent years, this species has had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the resources in the Belt Woods Wildland. As development on surrounding properties has taken place, the deer population at Belt Woods has increased. It is likely that the unnatural habitat conditions presented by surrounding suburban land uses are contributing to unnaturally high and sustained deer populations, and that management controls are necessary.

A high deer population density impacts the woodlands at Belt Woods by creating browse lines, decreasing and arresting forest regeneration capabilities, destroying low level nesting habitat for breeding birds, and facilitating the alteration of the natural plant composition to one with reduced food species favored by deer. Additionally, high deer numbers could possibly contribute to increased risk of Lyme disease.

Prior to 1997, the impact of deer on the 109 acre tract in the Wildlands appeared minimal, which was probably a result of hunting by residents and their guests. In 1997, hunting was curtailed during the drafting of the management plan. In February 1998, the first deer population survey, conducted using FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared) found about 45 deer (approximately 46 deer per square mile.) Later in 1998, evidence of excessive deer browse in sensitive areas, including the South Woods, was observed by the site manager. These findings supported the statistical information available from the Wildlife and Heritage Service that deer population densities between 30 and 40 individuals per square mile can cause excessive browse damage.

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Ecological Management

Consistent management and control of the deer population at Belt Woods is necessary. This includes a baseline study, which can then be annually updated with field determined information from the Wildlife and Heritage Service, such as harvest data. Deer population monitoring should occur annually in late winter (leaf-off). As part of the natural ecosystem, white-tailed deer will be allowed to populate the Belt Woods Wildland. However, chronically high deer populations cannot be allowed to cause permanent damage or otherwise endanger other important natural resources in the Belt Woods Wildland ecosystem. At this time, regulated public hunting of the property with limits on the number of hunters and utilizing a permit / reservation system managed through the Wildlife and Heritage Service has been identified as the most practical and cost-effective method for managing the deer population. The Strategic Management Plan identifies specific actions to ensure that hunting and the activity of hunters does not adversely affect the Belt Woods ecosystem and continues to co-exist with other authorized uses.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service works closely with the Maryland Park Service to monitor and stabilize deer populations on public lands. In Prince George's County, estimates are 60 to 90 deer per square mile of habitat, a high number. Culturally and environmentally, 30 deer per square mile of habitat is ideal, but difficult to achieve due to the suburban environment, and associated lack of hunting opportunities in the region. In 2017, the Wildlife and Heritage Service had a total of 469 reservations made for deer hunting at Belt Woods (out of a possible 736 reservations available). With 92 possible hunting days, at eight (8) reservations per day, this represented a 63.72% use rate. In 2017, no deer were harvested in September; six (6) deer were harvested in October, two (2) deer were harvested in November; and one (1) deer was harvested in December.

As a natural resource management tool, the goal of regulated public hunting is to protect rare, threatened and endangered species onsite. Annual reporting will be required by the Wildlife and Heritage Service. Any adjustments to the public hunting program, recommended by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, shall be based on scientific evidence and the recommendations of resource experts. Programmatic changes will require internal review with the Maryland Park Service. Department of Natural Resources implementation actions include the following:

- 1) Continue to utilize regulated, limited public deer hunting as a natural resource management tool to protect rare, threatened and endangered plant species and annually report statistics, as compiled by the Wildlife and Heritage Service.
- 2) Develop enhanced invasive and animal pest species reporting, as well as a long-term control plan for adverse species management at Belt Woods.
- 3) Update surveys/studies for white-tailed deer counts and activity, Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS), forest health and stewardship, wetland and riparian delineations, and sensitive species.
- 4) Train Maryland Park Service staff on the care, preservation, and protection of rare, threatened, and endangered species for monitoring purposes, including identification of species as well as species health, threats, and impacts.
- 5) Restrict public hunting on identified dates, such as the Christmas Bird Count, to accommodate research / educational groups that annually visit the site. Site visits by groups shall be coordinated with the Park Manager prior to hunting season, and may require internal review. The Wildlife and Heritage Service will be informed of potential conflict dates.

Appendix E

W. Seton Belt Biography

Biography of William Seton Belt, Jr. (Sources: Not Cited)

“He was a very old-fashioned Southern Maryland gentleman, a land owner. He was devoted to his land and his trees. That was his life,” said Father Howard Arnold, former rector of St. Barnabas's Episcopal Church, Leeland, about his parishioner, William Seton Belt, Jr.



Many people know that when Belt died in 1959, he left his extensive land holdings to St. Barnabas's Episcopal Church, and controversy has swirled around this bequest almost from the day he died. However, few people know much about the man behind the land, the trees, and the controversy. This article hopes to correct that situation. Seton Belt may have been considered old-fashioned, a bit eccentric and provincial, but he was curiously ahead of his times, and that is worth knowing.

Ancestry

William Seton Belt, Jr. could trace his ancestry back to a time before the country was a nation--back, in fact, to Sir Humphrey Belt, who settled in Prince George's County in the early 1600's. As early settlers, the Belts acquired a great deal of land; and through marriages with other great land-owning families (Bowie, Clagett, Lee, Berry), they acquired even more. By the turn of the century, they were among the largest land owners in Prince George's County, Maryland. Most of it would come one day to William Seton Belt, Jr. His father, Dr. William Seton Belt, Sr. was a physician and married Eleanor Lee, daughter of Benjamin Lee. She inherited Oatlands, one of the properties that her father had operated as a tenant farm. Soon after the Civil War, the Belts put up a fine Victorian house on the property and renamed it Home Farm. Of their four children, two survived, Benjamin Lee, born in 1852, and William Seton Belt, Jr., born nearly 20 years later on February 14, 1871. Several months before he was born, his father died at the age of 42.

Education of a Land Owner

By temperament Seton Belt was ideally suited to the life cut out for him, managing the family's extensive farm lands. He loved the land. It seems that he never wanted to leave it. One historian's quip: "I think Seton went to Frederick once," was not far from the truth.

His early schooling did not require him to go far. He attended the classes held by Mr. Butler, Rector of St. Barnabas Church, and he may also have had a tutor. When he was 16, though, he was sent to Loyola, a Catholic boarding school in Baltimore. Like other colleges of that time, Loyola offered courses from high school through college. He stayed one night and came home announcing that he would never go back. He was finally persuaded to go back, but not as a boarder. Father Arnold remembers how he went down to the station every day, boarded the train to Baltimore, attended school, and returned in the afternoon. School apparently, had limited charms for him. Father Arnold remembers that he often said: "time flies, but not in school."

However that may be, he compiled a respectable record at Loyola. He occasionally passed "with distinction" in English, and he once was given a rare promotion in mid-year. He graduated from Loyola College in 1893. Others in his graduating class of five included Charles Trinkhaus, who became a priest at St. Mary's, Marlboro, and J. Edward Murphy, who became managing editor of the *Baltimore Sun*.

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He was every inch a southern gentleman. Those who knew him always mention how courteous he was and how soft-spoken. But he also had an air of authority. "When he spoke," said Father Arnold, "people listened." He was a land owner and proud of it, but he was also a gentle, unpretentious man, who could sit on the barn steps, stripping tobacco and "chewing the fat" with a neighbor.

Home Farm: The Productive Years

In the early 1890's Seton's brother Benjamin married Amelia Bowie and moved to her family property, Willow Grove, near Collington. From this point on, Seton managed the Home Farm. Technically, it still belonged to his mother, who lived there the rest of her life. At first the primary crop was tobacco, but Seton gradually added livestock-sheep, and poultry. So wool and eggs became important products, and the farm also had apple and peach orchards. Most of the land was cultivated, but one-fourth of it was wooded, including a unique stand of virgin timber.

A remarkable barn was built on the site, probably in the 1890's. Built for stabling horses, the barn is described by the Maryland Historical Trust as "certainly one of the handsomest of its period...It had a distinctive profile, with its clipped gables, returned cornices, and decorative cupolas with pyramidal roofs and jigsaw detail ... It is an outstanding example of Victorian vernacular architecture." This barn is still standing, although it is in a state of disrepair.



Besides looking after his farms, Belt was one of the organizers of the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Upper Marlboro and was chairman of its board of directors for many years. His mother, Eleanor Lee Belt, died in 1915 at the age of 88. Seton was then 44. She divided her property between her two sons. In 1935, Benjamin died, without children, and Seton inherited all of his lands.

A Brief, Happy Marriage

W. Seton Belt was in his early fifties when he married Ellen Belt Berry (who, of course, became Ellen Belt Berry Belt), and she was in her late forties. According to his niece, Katherine Berry Clagett, the marriage was a happy one. Ellen died in 1928 after five or six years of marriage. "He was something of a romantic," says Mrs. Clagett. "He took a rose from her garden and had it sculpted on her tombstone."



He Cherished Those Trees

W. Seton Belt was 57 when his wife died of a heart attack. He would live another 31 years, and during those years his life centered around two things, St. Barnabas's Church and his land, especially his beloved trees. "He cherished those trees the way a woman cherishes a diamond ring," says George Frisco, a retired lumberman who owned a lumber mill two miles from the Home Farm. Belt was protective not only of the magnificent 109-acre virgin tract of hardwood forest but also of all the other forested parts of his land. In his lifetime, he did not allow a single tree to be felled. If tenants on the farm wanted firewood, they were permitted to take out dead limbs or trees that had fallen. But if Belt saw them with a load of wood, he usually looked through it to be sure that no living tree had been cut.

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"If you offered to buy timber from him, he'd just look at you and laugh," says George Frisco. In 1955, Hurricane Hazel came through with terrific force and blew down more than 300 trees on Home Farm and Locust Hill. Frisco offered to go through the woods on both farms, measure the fallen trees, remove them, and buy them. Seton agreed. Frisco spent 11 days on the project and made an offer. Belt said he would think about it. Frisco waited and then brought it up again. "I thought you'd like to sell them," he said. "Well, I would," Belt said: "but I'm afraid you'll go in there and you'll knock down the younger trees and you'll skin up the older trees. Might do more harm than what it's worth." "He passed up a chance to sell more than 150,000 board feet of lumber," says Frisco. "He just didn't want to sell them." Even when he needed lumber to make repairs around the farm, Belt would go to the lumber mill and buy it rather than cut down one of his trees, Frisco says.

That "Dear Old Church"

Besides his trees, the other great love of Seton Belt's life was his church, St. Barnabas's. By one account, he was on the vestry from his 21st to his 83rd year. Katherine Clagett, whose father, James Berry, was also on the vestry during some of these years, recalls Belt's generosity to the church: "When there wasn't enough money to pay the rector, it was Seton Belt who dug into his pockets," she says. Father Arnold's wife, Madge, remembers that when the church needed a new organ, Belt gave \$1,000. "He and Howard were standing in the aisle after church when he gave Howard a check. I put my arms around him and gave him a kiss. I thought the poor dear would die! I was church organist for many years, and the organ was a joy to play." The only picture Belt had in his room was a picture of St. Barnabas's. Father Arnold recalled that over and over again he would say, "I love that dear old church."

He Did It His Way

As W. Seton Belt grew older, he began to seem old-fashioned and somewhat set in his ways. His driving was legendary. More than one neighbor recalls how he would drive in the middle of route 301, never getting his car out of second gear and backing up traffic for miles. Another story that comes down from many sources is that of his Model T Ford, which he parked in the garage for so long that the thief who stole it had to chop down a tree that had grown up in front of the garage door. This was in 1950 and the car, when recovered by police, still had its 1922 license plates.

During his last few years of life, Belt did not stay at the Home Farm but moved "across the road" where his cousin, Mrs. Bowie Clagett, took a few boarders into her large farmhouse. He had a room and took his meals here. He died there on December 6, 1959. Funeral services were held at St. Barnabas's Church, and he was buried in the family lot in the church cemetery.

Last Will and Testament

In his will, after making bequests to members of his family and to some faithful farm workers, and after giving a 30-acre farm to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church near Collington, Maryland, W. Seton Belt left the rest of his estate, 3,200 acres of land, in trust to the Mercantile Safe Deposit and Trust Company of Baltimore for St. Barnabas's Church. Of the 3,200 acres, he sought to keep about 1,200 from being sold or logged. It was his intention that the Home Farm should be used as a home for retired clergy, "or for such other charitable purpose of similar nature as may be determined upon by said Trustee and the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Washington."

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The four properties "expressly prohibited and enjoined from selling" were the 624-acre Home Farm, the 450-acre Belmont Farm, the 195-acre Locust Hill Farm, and the 6-acre Leeland property. As to the Home Farm, Belt directed that "the timber shall not be sold but shall only be used for the purpose of repairs and improvements to the buildings and fences and for firewood." In 1976, the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and St. Barnabas's Church went to court and succeeded in having the will overturned. The court ruled that the virgin tract of woods should be preserved but that properties could be sold, trees harvested, and proceeds added to the trust. In 1981, a total of 563 oak and tulip poplar trees on the Home Farm were cut and sold for veneer. Maryland stepped in to save the 109-acre virgin tract, which it purchased for \$628,545 in 1984.

The Mercantile Bank, the Episcopal Diocese, and St. Barnabas's made plans to develop the remaining 515 acres. In June 1994, the Prince George's Planning Board approved the trustee's plan for 649 houses to be built on the Home Farm. At this writing, April 4, 1994, no developer had purchased the land, but the Western Shore Conservancy has offered \$5 million. The Conservancy wanted to preserve it in its natural state.

A Modern Perspective

Harry William Dengler, a retired forester for the State of Maryland, once tried to talk Seton Belt into cutting down some of his trees. "He didn't want any trees taken down at all. To me, as a forester, that was wrong. I thought at that time that trees should be harvested when they were mature. But he was adamant. His first purpose was to save his woods. And now, I'm beginning to see that Seton Belt's ideas were right all along."

Historical Notes

The Belts who homesteaded in Prince George's County at an early date all trace their ancestry to Sir Humphrey Belt, who settled in Anne Arundel County, Maryland in the early 17th century. His grandson, Col. Joseph Belt, born in 1680, was one of the best known. He received the rank of colonel when he commanded a Prince George's County Regiment of Colonial Militia during the French and Indian Wars. Three generations later, one of his descendants, Lt. Joseph Belt, USN, married Ellen Bowie, from another Prince George's land-owning family. Their son, William, was born in 1827 and he would become a physician, Dr. William Seton Belt, Sr.

Dr. Belt married Eleanor Lee, daughter of Dr. Benjamin Lee. When he died, Eleanor inherited Oatland from him. The Belts put up a fine country home on the land and renamed it Home Farm. They were members of the Belt family for whom Beltsville was named. Frederick DeMarr, of the Prince George's Historical Society, puts it succinctly, "There is one Belt clan, and Beltsville was named for it." Beltsville was most likely named for Trueman Belt. A letter in the Baltimore and Ohio Magazine of Aug. 3, 1942, says: "Beltsville was named in 1835 by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in honor of Trueman Belt, the original land-owner from whom the original right of way was acquired." After the Civil War, parts of Prince George's County shifted from agriculture to industry, and towns and suburbs grew up in the areas close to Washington, DC. The southern and eastern sections of the county, however, remained entirely rural. Land was the source of wealth.

At the turn of the century, the Belt family was among the largest land-owners in Prince George's County. In addition to the Home Farm of 624 acres, they owned three other large farms in the vicinity of St. Barnabas's Church: Belmont--450 acres; Willow Brook--800 acres, Locust Hill--200 acres, and Oak Farm" 725 acres, as well as the railroad village known as Leeland. Leeland consisted of a cluster of stores, post office, blacksmith shop, and station on the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad near St. Barnabas Church. The village was named for Benjamin Lee.