

# ENVIRONMENTAL FACT SHEET

## INTRODUCTION

The natural environment of Montgomery County, its soils, streams, rivers, wetlands, and woodlands support a variety of plants and wildlife. This environment contributes to the County's high quality of life and to its visual quality and character. As part of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, Montgomery County will continue to develop, but this does not have to be at the expense of the County's natural resources and environmental quality. The critical concern is how to protect the County's air, water, land, and wildlife resources while managing growth and making development more environmentally sensitive.

Since the 1969 General Plan was adopted, there have been many important environmental changes. Although there have been many success stories such as the clean-up of the Potomac River, there is much that needs to be done to protect the environment.

\* Awareness and understanding of the environment have increased dramatically. Today we have a better understanding of how the environment affects human health, how human behavior affects the environment, and how the quality of air, land, and water affect each other. Although we know a great deal more, we still need to learn more, monitor conditions more to increase our understanding of these complex issues, and be more environmentally sensitive in our actions.

\* The environmental context in which we make land use decisions also has changed and will continue to change in the future. The early 1970s were landmark years for federal environmental legislation, which prompted both the state and local government to take additional actions to protect and clean-up the environment. The 1970 Clean Air Act, the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, the 1973 Clean Water Act, and the 1973 Endangered Species Act are part of the federal environmental protection framework. In 1970, the country celebrated its first Earth Day and the Environmental Protection Agency was

created. More recently, the Montreal Protocol required the phasing out of chlorofluorocarbons world-wide by 1999 and the Clean Air Act was amended to include the control of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the air.

\* Environmental issues are given greater weight today when land use planning decisions are made in Montgomery County than they were when the General Plan was approved. Today master plans, subdivision review, zoning cases, special exceptions and site plan review consider many environmental issues such as soil quality, wetlands locations, stormwater management, tree preservation, and building orientation.

\* Many of the environmental challenges facing the County are of a regional nature, and require coordinated and complementary solutions by all contributing jurisdictions. Jurisdictions in the state and region need to work together more than we did in the past to meet these challenges.

This fact sheet provides background information on the environment in Montgomery County. It also discusses how basic services such as drinking water, sewage and solid waste disposal have been handled.

## 1. GEOLOGY AND SOILS

\* Montgomery County is comprised of three geologic areas, the Piedmont Plateau, Triassic Lowland, and the Coastal Plain, all of which extend beyond the County boundaries. As shown on the map, most of Montgomery County is on the Piedmont Plateau. The plateau is the remains of an ancient mountain range and contains bedrock ranging from soft slate to hard granite and gneiss. On the surface, the plateau is characterized by rolling hills and numerous streams.

The second largest geologic area, the Triassic Lowland, underlies the western part of the County and contains soft sedimentary rocks such as sandstone and red shale. A small portion of the County along the Prince George's County line lies on the Coastal Plain, which contains sand, gravel,