

The Environment

Forest Glen is a developed community. As such, the natural features and systems within the community today have been altered from their original condition by human activity. In such older, established communities, environmental concerns deal primarily with preserving those natural resources which remain and investigating opportunities to improve degraded resources.

Forest Glen is situated on a watershed divide separating Rock Creek and Sligo Creek (a subwatershed of Northwest Branch). Both stream systems have been degraded by years of development; however, opportunities to improve existing water quality and stream channel problems have become available since the adoption of the 1978 Sector Plan. (See Section B, below.) A small number of developable and re-developable properties exist in the Sector Plan area. State and County law provide for the protection of water quality and the prevention of channel erosion in streams receiving runoff from new development.

Other areas of concern in the Sector Plan include excessive

vehicular noise and air quality problems. These two issues were noted in the 1978 Sector Plan and continue to be important issues that will be addressed in this Plan.

A. Environmental Features

The Forest Glen Sector Plan area possesses a number of environmental features worthy of note. The Sector Plan area has many large, mature deciduous trees and some forest cover located on private property. Additionally, a small unnamed tributary to Rock Creek, referred to as the Right Fork in the Capitol View Sector Plan, flows along the western boundary of the Forest Glen Sector Plan area. Since the 1978 Plan, a number of environmental laws, regulations, and guidelines have been passed and/or strengthened. These include:

- Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law
- Montgomery County Planning Department,

“Environmental Guidelines”

- Executive Regulations for Stormwater Management
- Federal and state wetlands permitting process, Section 404
- Section 59-D, Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance

These laws and regulations are designed to protect and improve sensitive environmental features such as forest, streams, and wetlands. They are appropriately applied at the time of subdivision.

B. Water Quality

Much of Forest Glen and the surrounding neighborhoods outside of the Sector Plan area were developed prior to the requirement to address stormwater runoff. During rainstorms, high volumes of runoff from streets, parking lots, and rooftops flow into storm drains which direct flows into local streams. In response to these heavy volumes of water, stream banks erode, trees along streams are uprooted, aquatic life suffers, and water quality is degraded. The problem is not caused solely by Forest Glen; rather, in the case of lower Rock Creek and Sligo Creek, it is generally a watershed-wide concern. The effects of suburban and urban growth can be seen in both streams within Forest Glen.

In response to a continual decline in water quality and habitat, the County developed Executive Regulations for stormwater management in the early 1980s. Today, all new development is required to submit stormwater management plans to the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for review and approval prior to construction. On-site quality and quantity controls and/or a contribution to the DEP waiver program are often used to meet the requirements of the Regulations.

This Plan recognizes the need to protect and improve

water quality in the Rock Creek and Sligo Creek watersheds. In addition to on-site controls, DEP, in conjunction with other agencies including M-NCPPC, investigates other ways to improve aquatic environments. A DEP contract study of stream erosion and aquatic habitat degradation in the Rock Creek watershed is to be completed in early 1996. This study will prioritize the severity of observed problems and identify potential sites for retrofit projects and stream channel enhancements. DEP will take the results of this study and conduct modeling assessments on the effectiveness and impacts of remediation alternatives. As part of this assessment, DEP will establish a public outreach program to work with residents of the watershed to establish watershed protection goals and evaluate the alternatives for meeting these goals. The resultant product will be a Watershed Restoration Action Plan which identifies a series of capital projects, operating programs, public education, and volunteer initiatives which the County proposes to undertake to improve water quality and stream habitat conditions in Rock Creek.

In Sligo Creek, a recently completed watershed study identified a number of potential sites for retrofits and stream enhancements. Over \$2 million were spent to control water quantity and improve the water quality and aquatic habitat in the Sligo Creek. One innovative project, the Wheaton Branch stormwater management retrofit project, immediately north of the Sector Plan area, allows this tributary of Sligo Creek to support a variety of species that were not able to survive previously due to severely degraded conditions. The County will continue to address stormwater issues relating to new development. Due to the limited amount of developable land remaining in the Sector Plan area, future efforts to improve habitat quality will focus on retrofits to existing stormwater management facilities, storm drainage outfalls, and the addition of new stormwater controls and stream restoration projects where feasible and beneficial to the overall stream environment.

OBJECTIVE A:

Protect existing water quality from the effects of new development.

- Support the Executive Regulations for stormwater management and the DEP's efforts to implement those Regulations.
- Support County efforts to implement feasible and desirable projects and programs to maintain and improve stream quality and habitat conditions in Rock Creek and Sligo Creek.

OBJECTIVE B:

Improve existing water quality within Rock Creek and Sligo Creek.

- Support the ongoing studies to identify stormwater management retrofit sites and stream channel improvement opportunities within Rock Creek and Sligo Creek.

C. Noise

Forest Glen is located at one of the busiest intersections in the Washington Metropolitan Area, the Capital Beltway (I-495) and Georgia Avenue. The noise associated with traffic in that area is a major concern. Extended exposure to noise levels at or above 70 DBA Ldn have been shown to have adverse psychological effects on humans.

A goal of this Plan is to protect the residents of Forest Glen from exposure to harmful noise levels. The Environmental Planning Division of the Montgomery Planning Department has developed guidelines which set 65 DBA Ldn as an attainable goal for residential noise exposure.

OBJECTIVE A:

Avoid exposure of new residential development to outdoor noise levels higher than 65 DBA Ldn.

- Consider noise compatible (i.e., nonresidential) land uses, including open space and special exceptions, along Georgia Avenue for vacant and re-developable parcels in high noise areas. Non-residential uses along Georgia Avenue should be permitted only in residential-looking structures in order to maintain consistency with the Green Corridors Policy and the land use recommendations of this Plan.
- If residential uses are desirable in high noise areas, land should be dedicated by the developer for the construction of noise attenuation devices consistent with the Green Corridors Policy.
- If other means of attenuating noise are infeasible, acoustically treated windows and noise sensitive site design standards should be incorporated into new residential development in high noise areas.

OBJECTIVE B:

Reduce excessive noise levels affecting existing residential units.

- If road improvements occur, sufficient area should be dedicated for the construction of noise attenuation berms, walls, or fences, where possible. This is particularly true for the proposed reconfiguration of the interchange of Georgia Avenue at the Capital Beltway.

D. Air Quality

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require that air quality be considered on a regional basis. The Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area, including Montgomery County, does not meet the federal standards for ozone and is considered a non-attainment area. Ozone is formed in the atmosphere when exhaust emissions and sunlight react under certain conditions.

In order to conform to the federal ozone standard, the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee has recommended the reduction of mobile source emissions from single occupancy vehicles. This will be the most likely remediation measure affecting Forest Glen. This Plan recognizes the intent of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and the need to protect the residents of Forest Glen from degraded air quality.

OBJECTIVE:

Reduce ozone and other forms of air pollution within the sector plan area.

- Support measures intended to reduce the use of single occupancy vehicles by encouraging alternative forms of transportation (e.g., transit, bicycling, walking). (See the Transportation chapter in this Plan.)
- Support land use patterns intended to facilitate the use of transit.

E. Importance of Individual Action

Individuals can do a great deal to improve the water quality of their local streams. Judicious use of fertilizers and pesticides, reporting hazardous spills and illegal dumping activities into the storm drain system, and planting trees along streambanks can all significantly improve existing water quality.

Community initiatives are extremely important to the prevention of sudden flooding and erosion problems. Trash, fallen leaves and tree limbs frequently block storm drain inlets and can even block large streams. Stormwater conveyance systems must be kept open at all times. Residents can help prevent problems by collecting and removing leaves and other yard trim, by not dumping trash, household items, or Christmas trees in or near streams, and by performing periodic visual inspections of local storm drain inlets.

Residents can follow the recommendations within the "Chesapeake Bay Community Action Guide: A Step-By-Step Guide to Improving the Environment in Your Neighborhood," or the "Bay Book: A Guide to Reducing Water Pollution at Home." Many local non-profit groups organize neighborhood efforts to monitor and restore water quality and habitat.

This Plan recognizes the need to develop and support citizen participation activities that might help achieve the objective cited below.

OBJECTIVE:

Community Action to Restore the Environment

- The County should continue to provide environmental education programs for residents, in areas such as proper use of fertilizers and pesticides, yard trim recycling, and proper use of stream buffers and other natural areas.
- Community groups should be encouraged to volunteer for projects such as stream restoration, reforestation, park clean-up, homeowner education on recycling, and proper trash disposal.
- The County and M-NCPPC should continue to provide opportunities and programs to assist in community projects.