

# Background

## A. Description of the Study Area

### 1. Boundaries

The Study Area includes that portion within the boundaries of the Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space which is identified as Rural Density Transfer. The Study Area is shown in Figure 1. The Agricultural Reserve itself is 91,000 acres. The Study Area is approximately 108,600 acres. The Study Area spans the northern portion of Montgomery County bounded on the west by the Potomac River, on the north by Frederick and Howard Counties, and on the east by the Patuxent River, Howard County, and Georgia Avenue (MD 97). Three municipalities are located within its boundaries – Poolesville, Barnesville, and Laytonsville. These three jurisdictions have their own planning and zoning powers and are therefore not included within the master plans of Montgomery County.

### 2. Land Use

The Study Area contains farmland, rural centers, large parks, wildlife habitats, rural open space, and forests. A limited number of industrial uses, such as mineral extraction and power generation, also exist in this area, along with public uses, such as composting facilities and landfills. There are distinct rural centers within the area. These centers typically serve the shopping and service needs of area residents. Historic village cores and traditional main streets add an air of charm, identity, and community pride to these rural communities. The rural character of these centers is to be maintained and their expansion limited to meeting the needs of a rural lifestyle.

Agriculture will continue as the primary and preferred use in the Agricultural Reserve. Viable agriculture is the basic and essential foundation of County public policy in the Agricultural Reserve. This has been explicitly set forth in the 1980 Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space, related zoning statutes, and other laws, regulations, and plans. Nothing in the Rustic Roads Law or Functional

Master Plan intends or should be construed to place any limits on the building of farm structures and homes in the Agricultural Reserve, beyond the limits otherwise imposed by County law.

This area is also an invaluable resource for Montgomery County beyond its agriculture use. Maintaining large amounts of rural open space protects the environment - especially sensitive headwater areas, conservation areas, wildlife habitats, and flood plains - from the impacts of development. It also serves as a "clean air shed" to cleanse the atmosphere, as well as a mechanism to protect the quantity and quality of water resources. This area also provides recreational opportunities and preserves a rural lifestyle. It completes the housing density spectrum available within the County by providing the very lowest density housing for residents who make their living from the land or prefer a pastoral lifestyle.

This portion of the County is rolling country with farm fields and wooded areas. The views from the roads which traverse this area are frequently long vistas across the countryside towards landmark features such as Sugarloaf Mountain. The high point of the County is just north of Damascus. Several of the State roads which traverse the area, such as Darnestown Road (MD 28) and Damascus Road (MD 650), are beautiful country roads. Some of the County roads are old, narrow, and go through small crossroads communities such as Dickerson and Lewisdale. The only route to Virginia from this part of the County is across Whites Ferry at the end of Whites Ferry Road.

To travel from the densely populated and developed areas of Washington, D.C., Bethesda, and Rockville to the Agricultural Reserve is a total change of environment. Many people are surprised to find such a rural area so very close to a metropolitan center. For people from the suburbs or the center city, coming to the Agricultural Reserve is like a holiday treat. The roadways are used by different people with differing needs, and part of the challenge of this Master Plan is to find a way to accommodate and serve all groups.

In addition to farmland, residences, and parks, several public uses exist within this Study Area. The management of these facilities and the associated transportation needs affect the roadway system.

#### **a. The NIH Animal Center**

This is a research facility bordered by Elmer School Road and Club Hollow Road. It generates only a small amount of traffic.

#### **b. Neutron Products in Dickerson**

This is an industrial building located on Mt. Ephraim Road near the railroad tracks. Most traffic uses Mt. Ephraim Road to Dickerson Road (MD 28) to Darnestown Road (MD 28). This facility produces radio isotopes and, as a by-product of manufacturing, produces radioactive waste which requires special handling and disposal.

#### **c. The Oaks Landfill**

This landfill, located east of MD 108 near Laytonsville, does not appear to put traffic on rustic roads. This landfill is scheduled to close when the PEPCO/Resource Recovery Facility is opened. Trucks bring trash to the landfill along roads west of the facility.

#### **d. The PEPCO/Resource Recovery Facility**

The PEPCO/Resource Recovery Facility (incinerator/compost facility/proposed landfill) in Dickerson is a large facility located west of Martinsburg Road, south of Martinsburg Road, and west of Wasche Road. The PEPCO smoke stacks are one of the orienting features for roads throughout the western part of the County. They can be seen from many miles away. Access to this facility is by Martinsburg Road south of Dickerson Road (MD 28). A railroad spur runs into the site crossing Mouth of Monocacy Road. The fly ash site for ash from the incinerator is located south of Martinsburg Road and the haul road from the incinerator to this site crosses Martinsburg Road.

#### e. The National Guard Facility in Laytonsville

Military vehicles such as jeeps, large trucks, and personnel carriers routinely use Riggs Road and Mt. Zion Road. Large flatbed trucks are not used in their normal operations. These sections of Riggs Road and Mt. Zion Road are not recommended as rustic roads.

#### f. Parks

The Agricultural Reserve Area contains numerous parks — both small local parks, regional parks, state parks, and the C&O Canal National Park, which extends the length of the Potomac River. This Plan identifies when parks are served by rustic and exceptional rustic roads in the description of those roads.

The South Germantown Recreational Park will be developed as a large park facility. Most patrons of this park will come from the Germantown area.

The C&O Canal National Park is heavily used. The park, which is in the vicinity of this Master Plan Area, is accessed by the four Lock roads: Tschiffely Mill Road, Sycamore Landing Road, Edwards Ferry Road, and the area near Whites Ferry Road and River Road, as well as Mouth of Monocacy Road. The Potomac River is used by boaters who have launch facilities at the end of a number of these roads. Hunters and fishermen also access the park, both along the Potomac River and in the McKees-Beshers Wildlife Area, as well as along the Patuxent River. Sugarloaf Mountain is located just across the County line in Frederick County and is accessed by Mt. Ephraim Road and Comus Road in Montgomery County.

Planning discussions are underway at the state and local levels for a trail which could connect the Potomac River in the vicinity of Great Seneca Creek, through Seneca Creek State Park into Great Seneca Creek (M-NCPPC) Park, and perhaps eventually with the Patuxent River Park. This trail would be accessed from several roads

within this Master Plan Area and within the developing part of the County.

### 3. Profile

The 1993 land use for the 108,000 acres is shown in Figure 4. A total of 69,800 acres (64.2 percent) is currently used for farming. The most important type of farming is crops, the second is livestock other than dairy, the third is what is classified as general farming, and the fourth is dairy farming. Approximately 13,000 acres are identified as single-family detached residential use. Slightly over 8,000 acres are vacant and unused land. Over 11,000 acres are government-owned, primarily as parkland. Approximately one-half of the parkland is federal or state, and one-half is local. Approximately 85 percent of the 108,000 acres is zoned rural density transfer (RDT) although current land use does not show all of that land to be used for farming.

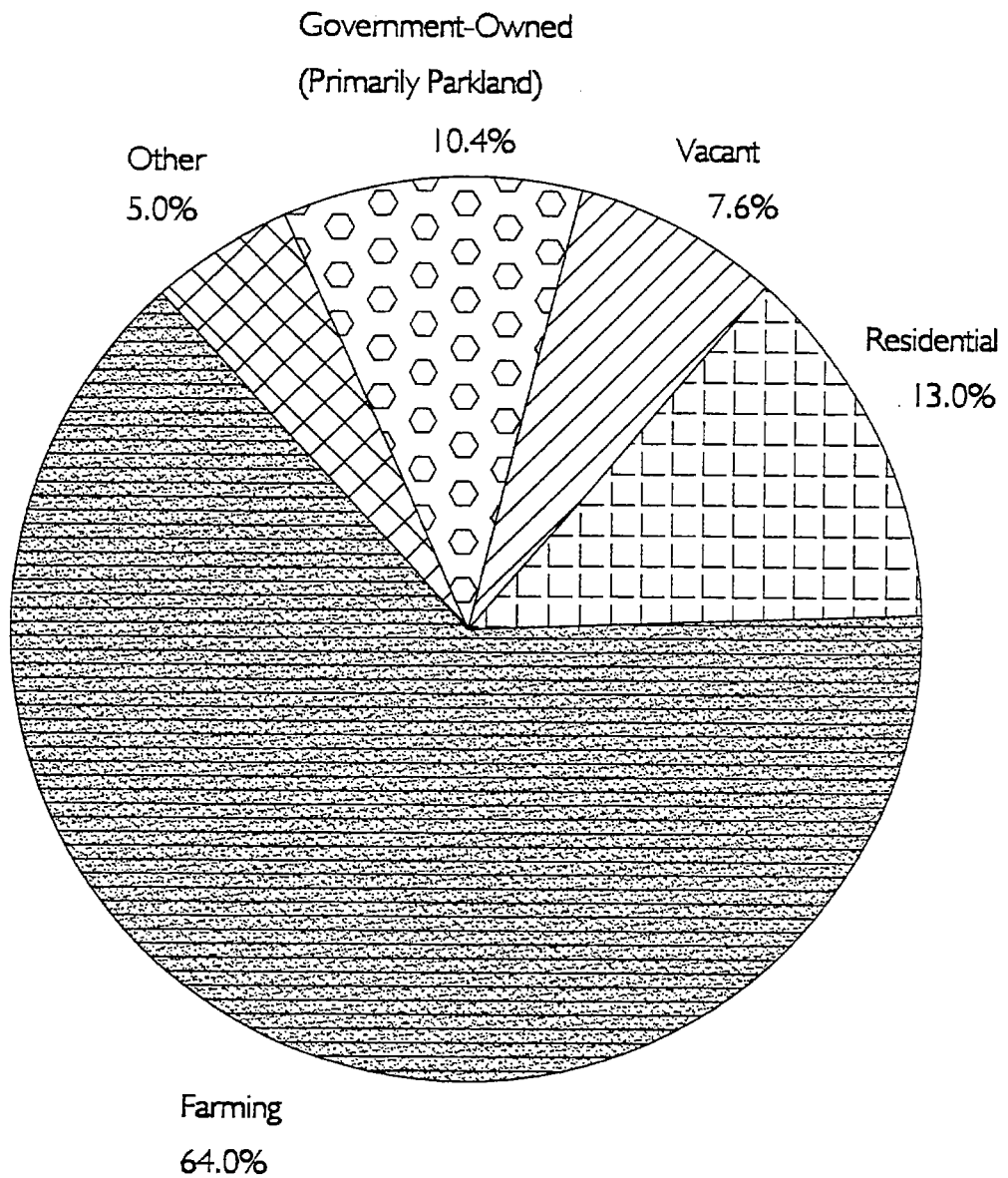
The land area of the Study Area (the 108,000 acres) is approximately one-third of the land in Montgomery County. Census data indicate that, in 1990, this area contained less than three percent of the County's population. This sparse population is consistent with Montgomery County's policy to retain this land in agricultural, and very low density residential uses.

### 4. Changing Conditions

In February 1995, a report titled "Future of Agricultural Study for Montgomery County, Maryland" was released. This report is an important documentation of what is happening to the agricultural industry in Montgomery County. Agriculture is changing and will continue to do so in coming years. The report states that over 40,000 acres have been put into some kind of easement to protect farmland. Montgomery County leads the nation in the total farmland acreage protected by easements. Over 32,000 of these acres are protected through the Transfer of Development Rights, an instrument growing from

# Land Use

Figure 4



Land Use in the  
Master Plan Area  
is predominantly  
Agriculture

the 1980 Agricultural Plan. This report is recommended as an excellent source of current information about agriculture in Montgomery County.

This report, prepared by the Agricultural Advisory Committee, sets forth in some detail the changing conditions of agriculture and the problems and challenges that it faces if the County's public policy goal to maintain agriculture permanently is to be realized. It also documents the important contribution of agriculture to the County's economy. That contribution is increasing each year in terms of economic activity, jobs, and the well-being of all citizens in terms of enjoyment, recreation, fresh food, and environmental quality. There should be a focus on both the importance of agriculture in preserving the County's economy and its contribution to a better overall quality of life.

## 5. Maryland Planning Act and the General Plan

### a. Maryland Planning Act of 1992

The seven visions of the Maryland Economic Development, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992 (the Planning Act) are embraced and confirmed in the Master Plan Amendment.

The seven visions of the State Planning Act, as stated in Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland, are:

- "1. Development is to be concentrated in suitable areas;
2. Sensitive areas are to be protected;
3. In rural areas growth is to be directed to existing population centers and resource areas are to be protected;
4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is to be considered a universal ethic;
5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption is to be practiced;

6. To assure the achievement of paragraphs 1 through 5 above, economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are to be streamlined;
7. Funding mechanisms are to be addressed to achieve these objectives."

### b. General Plan for Montgomery County

The 1993 General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County will amend the 1964 General Plan, commonly called "... *on Wedges and Corridors*," and the 1969 *Updated General Plan for Montgomery County* (approved in 1970). The General Plan Refinement provides the framework for the development of more specific area master plans, functional plans, and sector plans. It provides clear guidance regarding the general pattern of development in Montgomery County, while retaining enough flexibility to respond to unforeseeable circumstances as they arise.

The General Plan Refinement divides Montgomery County into four geographic components: the Urban Ring, the Corridor, the Suburban Communities, and the Wedge. Each area is defined in terms of appropriate land uses, scale, intensity, and function. The geographic components provide a vision for the future, while acknowledging the modifications to the Wedges and Corridors concept that have evolved during the past three decades. In particular, they confirm two distinct sub-areas of the Wedge—an Agricultural Wedge and a Residential Wedge. They also recognize the transitional areas of generally moderate density and suburban character that have evolved between the Wedge, Corridor, and Urban Ring as Suburban Communities. Emphasis remains on intensification of the Corridor, particularly along the main stem.

In addition to defining geographic components, the General Plan Refinement provides seven goals and associated objectives and strategies that give guidance to development within those geographic components. The goals, objectives, and strategies provide a future vision for

Montgomery County and establish a frame of reference for decision-making to make that vision become a reality. The seven goals relate to Land Use, Housing, Economic Activity, Transportation, Environment, Community Identity and Design, and Regionalism.

**c. Conformance with the Maryland Planning Act of 1992 and General Plan for Montgomery County**

The land area covered by this Master Plan Amendment is within the boundaries of the Agricultural Wedge, Residential Wedge, and the Corridor. The vision for the Agricultural and Residential Wedge is characterized by "agricultural use; low density residential development; large areas for open space; small rural centers; and targeted public and private investment."

The vision for the Corridor, as described in the General Plan Refinement, is characterized by a "mixed intensity, mixed-use, transit serviceable land uses; greatest intensity in centers along the main stem, decreasing densities toward the outer edges; flexible design standards in residential area; relatively intense development; varied transportation options; active public and private investment; and commercial revitalization."

This Functional Master Plan Amendment specifically supports the fulfillment of the transportation goal by providing a transportation system with varied roadway options that serves the environmental, economic, social, and land use needs of the area and the County and supports the framework for development as specified in the *Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space* in Montgomery County. By proposing a roadway network that serves and encourages the envisioned development patterns, this Plan will help maintain the agricultural past and future of the Wedge area. This Plan proposes the development of new standards for access to subdivisions in the Agricultural and Residential Wedge areas that would not have a detrimental effect on the rustic roads and would maintain the community identi-

ty of the wedge areas. Some of the roads are located in environmentally-sensitive areas. If these roads are neither widened nor realigned but left in their present configuration, then the impact to the environment is significantly reduced.

This Functional Master Plan also fulfills the regionalism goal of the General Plan to promote regional cooperation. Frederick and Howard Counties have evaluated some of their roads to determine the rustic/scenic character of the road. The roads recommended in this Functional Master Plan do not conflict with any recommendations or plans the adjacent counties have for their roads.

## 6. Summary of Affected Master Plans

The geographic area surrounds but does not include the Clarksburg and Damascus Master Plans. The roads on the County Council Interim List in the Clarksburg Planning Area are addressed by the *Clarksburg Master Plan* adopted in 1994.

All roads in the Study Area which are on the County Council Interim List are addressed by this Master Plan. Several of the roads on the County Council Interim List are located within the Study Area and cross into other planning areas. The intent of this Master Plan is to address those roads (such as White Ground Road that traverses both the Agricultural Reserve and the Boyds Master Plan areas). For this reason, amendments to the master plans of adjacent planning areas are necessary.

This Rustic Roads Functional Master Plan will amend the *Master Plan of Highways*, the *Master Plan of Bikeways*, the *Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space*, the *Boyds Master Plan*, the *Damascus Master Plan*, the *Master Plan for the Potomac Subregion*, and the *Olney Master Plan*.

The Potomac Subregion is included only for the purpose of addressing four dead-end roads between River Road and the Potomac River. The County Council and the Planning Board deter-

mined that the classification of these four roads has no land use implications and therefore can be reviewed ahead of a comprehensive review of the sub-region. Black Rock Road is partly in the Potomac Subregion and is also included. Other roads in the Potomac Subregion will be addressed during the upcoming comprehensive master plan effort for that planning area.

The Olney Master Plan is included because a large portion of that planning area - from Reddy Branch northward - is also in the Agricultural Reserve and includes several roads on the Council Interim List. Roads in the developing portion of the Olney Master Plan area will be addressed during the next master plan effort for that planning area.

The 1980 *Functional Master Plan for the Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space* focused on the preservation of farmland and established a policy framework to contribute to the continuation of farming in the County. The plan was developed in the context of a County-wide growth management system for Montgomery County allowing for development in the down-county and corridor cities areas and reserving the Agricultural Reserve Area for agricultural and rural open space uses.

## **B. Regional and Interjurisdictional Context-Areas Adjacent to the Master Plan Study Area**

The Study Area encompasses three municipalities and is adjacent to the Clarksburg and Germantown planning areas, three counties, and the State of Virginia. Discussion of the regional context will include: 1) the roadway links between the Study Area and adjacent areas, and 2) the impact of this Master Plan's recommendations on those areas.

### **1. Corridor City of Germantown**

This developing corridor city is on either side of I-270 and is served by three interchanges along I-270. The Master Plan intent is that this city be completely surrounded by parkland. It is, therefore, set apart from the Agricultural Reserve with only a few roads connecting into the Agricultural Reserve Area. Germantown Road (MD 118) extends southwestward from Germantown and crosses a small segment of the Agricultural Reserve Area on its way to MD 28 in Potomac. Black Rock Road enters the Agricultural Reserve Area from MD 118 and connects with Burdette Lane, which leads to Schaeffer Road. Schaeffer Road is a subdivision arterial in the Germantown Master Plan area and is the primary access route to the South Germantown Recreational Park to be developed on the edge of Germantown. Hoyles Mill Road, which previously connected Schaeffer Road in Germantown with Boyds, will become a subdivision street in the Germantown Planning Area, severing the road from that portion of Hoyles Mill Road in the Rustic Roads Master Plan area. Hoyles Mill Road has a deep ford across Little Seneca Creek as it goes through the park. This Plan supports an abandonment of the portion of Hoyles Mill Road in the park with the possibility of a trail connection someday being made in the park. Clopper Road (MD 117) goes through the parkland to Boyds to connect with MD 121 and from there to Barnesville Road. The roadway connections from Germantown to the north and east lead to Clarksburg, Gaithersburg, and the MD 27 corridor towards Damascus. No rustic road connections extend across this portion of the surrounding parkland.

### **2. Corridor Town of Clarksburg**

This master-planned, developing area lies north of Germantown and is surrounded by Agricultural Reserve Area. A number of roadway connections extend from Clarksburg into the Agricultural Reserve Area. The western boundary between Clarksburg and the Agricultural

Reserve Area is Slidell Road. West Old Baltimore Road, which runs east-west, is designated as an exceptional rustic road from MD 121 to Slidell Road in the Clarksburg Master Plan. That designation is continued to Barnesville Road in this Master Plan. Comus Road, which extends between Frederick Road (MD 355) and the Sugarloaf Mountain area, is an arterial road in Clarksburg and is recommended as a rustic road from Peach Tree Road west. On the east side of I-270, Burnt Hill Road and Stringtown Road extend from the Clarksburg Planning Area into the Agricultural Reserve Area and are recommended as rustic roads. Clarksburg Road, to the northeast of Clarksburg, extends between Clarksburg and Frederick County. This road was considered as a rustic road but is not recommended as such. The Clarksburg Master Plan designated several roads within that plan boundary as rustic roads.

### 3. Town of Poolesville

Poolesville is a municipality, having its own planning and zoning powers as well as annexation procedures. It is served by MD 107, MD 109, Whites Ferry Road, West Willard Road, Hughes Road and, to the east, Partnership Road, which intersects MD 107. Whites Ferry Road west of Wasche Road is recommended as rustic. Beallsville Road north of MD 28 is recommended as rustic. Westerly Road, which extends west from Poolesville to Edwards Ferry Road is also recommended as rustic. This is a lightly traveled road. West Willard Road, Hughes Road, Budd Road, Cattail Road, Cattail Lane, Jonesville Road, and Jerusalem Road all serve the Town of Poolesville and most are designated as rustic roads.

### 4. Town of Barnesville

Barnesville is a small municipality with its own planning and zoning powers. Barnesville dates from 1747 and has high historic value. It is a crossroads location centered on Barnesville

Road and MD 109. At the request of the town via its mayor, the Honorable Elizabeth Tolbert, roads in Barnesville have been included in the classification network of this Master Plan. The above-mentioned roads are recommended as rustic and West Harris Road, which begins in Barnesville and extends northwestward to Mt. Ephraim Road, is recommended as an exceptional rustic road.

### 5. Town of Laytonsville

The town of Laytonsville is an incorporated area with its own planning and zoning powers. Although it extends into the Agricultural Reserve Area, no rustic roads extend from the town of Laytonsville. Sundown Road, which is east of Laytonsville, is recommended as a country arterial in keeping with the other roadway designations in the Agricultural Reserve Area.

### 6. Frederick County

The area of Frederick County which abuts the Montgomery County line is designated as the Urbana region. The land immediately north of Montgomery County is generally planned for conservation, agricultural/rural, low density residential (with well and septic). A small portion between MD 355 and Lewisdale Road is designated as rural community.

Frederick County officials considered a rustic roads program. Such a program was developed by their planning staff but was not approved by the elected officials. The roads recommended in this Rustic Roads Master Plan do not conflict with any recommendations or plans which Frederick County has for its roads. The roads designated which touch Frederick County are Mt. Ephraim Road and Comus Road. MD 109 just touches the edge of Frederick County as it curves to the north before coming into I-270. Haines Road and Prices Distillery Road are dirt roads in Frederick County. The county has no plans to improve those roads. Both Dickerson Road (MD 28) and Clarksburg



Road carry commuter traffic between Frederick and Montgomery Counties. Neither road is recommended as rustic. However, Dickerson Road (MD 28) is designated as a scenic route on the Maryland Scenic Routes Map.

## 7. Howard County

Howard County lies to the northeast of the Agricultural Reserve Area of Montgomery County. This section of Howard County is master planned for low density. In 1994, Howard County created a scenic roads program with the approval of a bill to provide for the protection of scenic roads. The scenic roads act is established to "protect the character of certain roads or road segments in the county which have outstanding scenic or historic value and pass through areas of the county where forest, agriculture or historic features are predominant." The county also approved two resolutions: one which adopted an inventory of scenic roads and one which approved amendments to the design manual regarding standards for improvements to scenic roads. The only road on the scenic roads program which crosses the Patuxent River to enter the Agricultural Reserve Area of Montgomery County is Hipsley Mill Road. This Master Plan recommends the designation of Hipsley Mill Road as a rustic road.

## 8. Virginia

Loudoun County, Virginia lies to the west of the Agricultural Reserve Area of Montgomery County, separated by the Potomac River. The only connection between Loudoun County and Montgomery County is Whites Ferry at the end of Whites Ferry Road. No roadway connections are planned by Montgomery County or the State of Maryland to connect this part of the County with Virginia. A western bypass is being studied by Virginia. Maryland's position, as stated by the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Montgomery County Planning Board, and the Montgomery County Council, is that a western bypass should follow the route of MD 15 and enter Virginia in Frederick County. Such a connection would be consistent with master plans in Maryland. Any new roadway through Montgomery County would be inconsistent with state and County plans.

The ferry takes approximately seven minutes to make the crossing and can carry 15 cars at one time. This necessarily limits the volume of traffic that can pass between Virginia and the Agricultural Reserve Area. This route is a very popular recreational route used by cyclists as well as people in automobiles. Whites Ferry Road between the Potomac River and Wasche Road (west of Poolesville) is recommended as a rustic road. However, if an expansion of the ferry service allows a material increase in traffic volume, the rustic road designation will be subject to reevaluation by the County Council.

