



June 25, 2019

Mr. Dan Smith  
Acting Director  
U.S. National Park Service  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Dan,

On behalf of Friends of Dyke Marsh (FODM), a partner of the National Park Service, I am writing to share our concerns about media reports addressing the future of Oxon Hill Cove National Park and Oxon Hill Farm.

The Friends of Dyke Marsh is dedicated to preserving, protecting and restoring the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, in cooperation with the National Park Service, as a vital wildlife habitat, through education, science and stewardship. Our vision is that Dyke Marsh, along the banks of the Potomac River in Alexandria, Virginia, is once again a healthy, vital, self-sustaining, biodiverse ecosystem.

The Oxon Hill Park is directly east of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve in Prince George's County, Maryland. Our understanding is that talks are underway to trade the land for other land in western Maryland and to develop the Oxon Hill land into a high-density, multi-use site known as "Gateway Maryland."

Oxon Hill Cove National Park is home to Oxon Hill Farm, founded over two hundred years ago and the only remaining farm inside the Capital Beltway. The plantation survived an attack during the War of 1812 and is home to the War of 1812 Willow Oak Witness Tree. Over 300,000 visitors each year enjoy farm activities, such as wagon rides and milking cows, as well as experiencing time in nature.

The 512-acre park is home to a variety of flora and fauna, including bald eagles, eastern meadowlarks, red-shouldered hawks and at least 58 species of waterfowl, who use the park for nesting or foraging habitat. In addition, there are foxes, spotted salamanders, queen snakes, about 10 species of bats and green tree frogs. In the densely-developed Washington, D.C.,

metropolitan area, the park provides visitors an opportunity to learn about natural resources like these, opportunities that are not always readily available to many people.

Developing this land away would be a tragedy, both for wildlife, for plant life and for people. This is a natural treasure that can never be recreated once developed. It provides a magnificent view-scape from Alexandria, Virginia, enhancing the quality of life for both residents and tourists. The marshes, meadows and woods of the park are critical to the ecosystem not just for Maryland but for the entire Potomac River watershed. Developing the property would further marginalize an already degraded Potomac River and likely send more polluted stormwater and trash into the river and into the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. Significantly increased traffic to a developed area would further pollute the area's air and water and bring more noise pollution.

The farm provides an outdoor farming experience that Washington-area youngsters rarely have, bringing them in touch with farm animals and giving them opportunities to learn about a way of life that is different from the typical urban-suburban way of living in the area.

The May 2019 United Nations' report on an ominous decline in biodiversity (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>) should be a wake-up call to all levels of government and especially to the National Park Service. The assessment found that biodiversity is "declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history," that "the rate of species extinctions is accelerating" and that that "the health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever." We believe that NPS and other federal agencies should help reverse these alarming trends and strengthen efforts to preserve, expand and restore the nation's biodiversity, not further degrade it by trading away parks and developing public lands.

Please support efforts to continue to keep this land a national park and fund enhancements to its infrastructure and cultural and natural resources so that future generations can continue to enjoy Oxon Hill Cove and Oxon Hill Farm Park.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Glenda C. Booth  
President  
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