Plan unveiled for new waterfront state park

Posted by Dick Myers  On 12/17/2015

Compton, MD -- The master plan for development of Newtown Neck State Park in St. Mary’s County was released this week. Representatives from the Maryland Park Service gave a presentation on the plan Dec. 14 to the planning commission and Dec. 15 to the county commissioners. The plan is anticipated to be presented to the Maryland secretary of the Department of Natural Resources later this month with final approval expected early next year.

The 776-acre peninsula at the end of Route 243 in Compton was purchased by the state in 2009. The land includes seven miles of waterfront along Breton Bay, the Potomac River and St. Clement’s Bay.

After purchase, the new Newtown Neck State Park was opened for passive recreation but was subsequently closed after munitions were discovered on the site in January 2012. That caused a halt to the planning for the property. After the munitions were determined to be inert the park was reopened and in the spring of 2014 and the planning resumed.

Maryland Park Service planner Mary Owens and Park Ranger Christy Bright made the presentations to the planning commission and county commissioners. Owens said the master plan was developed through an advisory committee established in 2014. The process included the committee meeting 11 times, two open houses, a design charrette, two community meetings at St. Francis Xavier Parish Hall and two on-line surveys.

According to the plan, the primary planning considerations were:

• Conserve and protect natural; resources;
• Provide cultural resources;
• Provide natural resource based recreation;
• Accommodate a variety of types of public access, especially water access; and
• Facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources in Southern Maryland.

The plan includes a resource assessment that concludes: portions of the property are within the 100-year flood plain; there are extensive areas of tidal and non-tidal wetlands; sixty-five percent of the property is in the Critical Area; and the forested portion of the site are Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) habitat which is protected. There are no known rare, threatened or endangered species.

The concept plan calls for:

• Modest road improvements;
• Conservation buffer around St. Francis Xavier Church;
• Ten miles of trails;
• Two comfort stations;
• Two kayak launches;
• Two paddle-in campsites
• Beach access;
• Fishing areas;
• Natural Resources Police and transient pier; and
• Parking for 80-100 spaces in seven lots.

Owens explained that $700,000 in state monies is available for the first phase of the planned Improvements over the next five years. In response to a question from the commissioners, she said it wasn't clear at this point when those monies would be released.

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