

## The Corridor Today

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### *Existing Trails*

**Natural Surface.** Although the majority of the Rachel Carson Greenway is in public ownership, there are only three areas featuring “sanctioned” natural surface trails. Sanctioned trails are those park trails that are named, signed, mapped and regularly maintained. There are many, many more informal or “people’s choice” trails in parks. These trails have been made by hikers and walkers and sometimes equestrians but they have not been evaluated by park trail planning staff as to whether they meet the Department’s sustainable trail guidelines.

The sanctioned natural surface trails in the Rachel Carson Greenway are shown on the next page and listed below. Detailed maps of these trails may be downloaded from the Department’s trail map site: [www.montgomerytrails.org](http://www.montgomerytrails.org).

1. The Northwest Branch natural surface trail loop.
2. The Rural Legacy Trail
3. Trails at Rachel Carson Conservation Park

The challenge facing this planning process is how to connect these trails into a larger greenway trail network.

**Hard Surface.** Hard surface trails are traditionally referred to as “hiker-biker” trails and usually have asphalt or macadam surfaces. The only hard surface trail in the Rachel Carson Greenway is located at the extreme southern end of the greenway and connects to Anacostia Tributary Trail System in Prince George’s County (more information is available at the following website: <http://www.pgparcs.com/places/parks/anacostia.html>).

### *Current Park Use*

The southern portion of the greenway features some of the most popular trails in the park system.

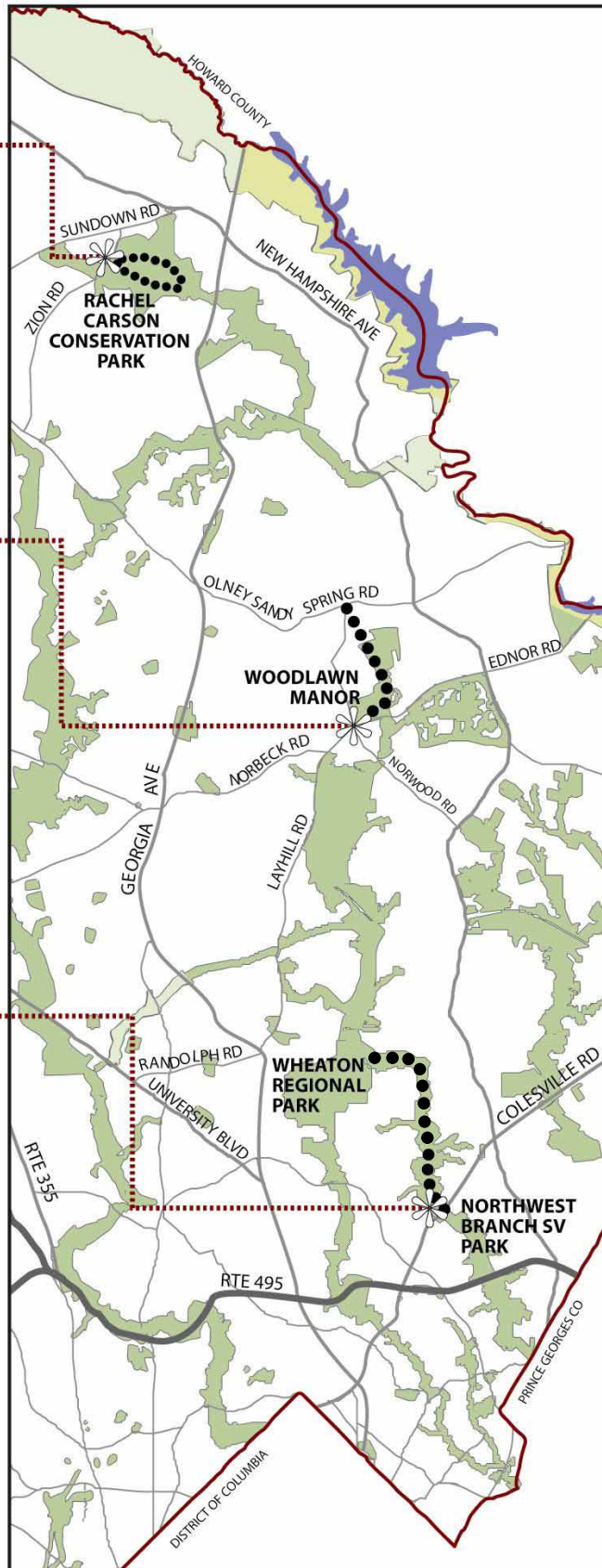
The most northern portion of the greenway includes the Rachel Carson Conservation Park and the Hawlings River stream valley park.

In the Hawlings River stream valley park, hikers and occasional equestrians have created informal trails. Hawlings River is a “use 4” stream meaning trout will likely survive when introduced into the habitat. The stream is not currently stocked, mainly due to limited parking, which in turn limits public access. Stocking the stream may be considered when parking areas are provided.

**Rachel Carson Conservation Park**  
22201 Zion Road, Olney, one of the county's premier conservation areas.

**Rural Legacy Trail**  
The trail begins at Woodlawn Manor Park, 16501 Norwood Road, Sandy Spring, and continues nearly two miles to the Sandy Spring. This spring was a stop along the Underground Railroad

**Northwest Branch Loop Trail**  
This loop trail starts at the Burnt Mills Dam at 10700 Colesville Road (US 29), Silver Spring, and travels along the stream valley park



The Rachel Carson Conservation Park offers several miles of sanctioned natural surface trails for hiking and equestrian use. The park is densely populated by numerous species of wildlife, high quality forest and features spectacular rock out-cropping throughout the park. A newly installed parking lot enables easy parking for vehicles, as well as horse trailers. Attendance at the park is expected to increase as a result. The Hawlings River passes through the park, providing fish opportunities to park visitors.

### *Trends*

The 1994-95 National Recreation Survey showed that participation in outdoor recreation activities is increasing. The fastest growing activities were bird watching (155% increase in past decade), hiking (94% increase), and walking (43% increase). The Park, Recreation, and Open Space Survey for Montgomery County (May 1997) demonstrated clearly the importance of trails to citizens using the county park system. Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they had used unpaved park trails. Of these users, the majority used trails for walking and/or observing nature.

Other trends that will likely affect use of the Rachel Carson Greenway include:

- 1) County residents, since 1990, have been working longer hours and making less money. With less time and money for vacations, residents will likely be looking to parks to provide more of their weekday and weekend entertainment. Demand for local recreation will likely increase.
- 2) County population continues to grow and with it demands on park resources and park use.
- 3) The county's population is becoming older but also remaining more active.
- 4) The growing concern over obesity as a health risk and the importance of walking as a preventative measure.

### *Environmental Resources*

The Rachel Carson Greenway traverses several unique and interesting ecosystems that form a dynamic ecological experience for the hiker. These ecosystems are illustrated on page 7. The greenway path begins at the southern end of the county in the Northwest Branch stream valley park.

Various changes in the stream valley provide over half of the greenway experience, beginning with a small section near the Rachel Carson house. Known as the "fall line", this first section is a dramatic area of high topographic relief and rock outcropping where the Piedmont Province is in the process of becoming the Coastal Plain. The stream passes within a narrow valley of high steep slopes taking many sharp turns along its way.

North of the fall line is an area of significant wetlands in a riverine ecosystem. Wetlands saturate a broad flat floodplain of the widely meandering stream. Further north the Northwest Branch main stem is surrounded by young forest stands. As the greenway enters the headwaters of Northwest Branch, it departs from the main stem to connect points of historical significance such as Woodlawn and the original source of Sandy Spring.

The greenway crosses the watershed divide separating the Northwest Branch watershed and the Hawlings River watershed, at Olney/Sandy Spring Road (Route 108). On the north side of the watershed divide the trail enters Hawlings River stream valley. Hawlings River is broadly meandering with a substantially wide forested floodplain.

Finally, the greenway traverses the Rachel Carson Conservation Park where one finds a variety of flora and fauna that inspire a sense of wonder and awe.

### *Historic & Cultural Resources*

The Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park forms the southern portion of the greenway. Beginning in the mid-1700s, farms, mills, mines and stores located along and near the stream. Many buildings from the time of the earliest settlements through the early 20th century still remain. Rock shelters and flint mines are evidence of inhabitation along the waterway by Woodland Indians. The Village of Sandy Spring, founded by Quakers in the 1720s, retains its Quaker heritage. Remains of a mica mine and several mills tell of the early industry along this waterway that was essential to the agrarian society of the time. The buildings and dam for a large water filtration plant, built in the 1920s that supplied clean water for two counties for 30 years, are obvious features on the trail.

In the northern section of the greenway, farms and mills were established early in the history of the area. Quakers founded the Town of Brookeville in the late 1700s. This town was the Capital for two days when President James Madison fled Washington D.C. during the War of 1812 and was hosted by Caleb Bentley. The nearby town of Triadelphia, also founded in the late 1700s, was the site of the first industrial complex in the county. There was also a gold mine near the River in the 19th century. Greenwood (1807) was the home of Allen Bowie Davis, a state delegate and powerful political figure who is one of the founders of the Maryland Agricultural College (University of Maryland), and one of the largest slave holders in the County.

Although few records have been uncovered, it is known that the entire Greenway of the Anacostia River, the Northwest Branch and the Hawlings River served as a “road” for people escaping enslavement and trying to reach Pennsylvania and freedom. It is known that people who helped these fugitives from the early 1700s, later acting as Underground Railway conductors, lived in Sandy Spring. Settlements of Black people freed by the Quakers in the area of the Greenway also aided fugitives from slavery. Blue Mash, a swamp off the Hawlings River, served as a hiding place for fugitives.

All of these sites weave a story about the past of Montgomery County that people can see, touch and remember as they hike along the Greenway, taking with them an unexpected new knowledge about the place where they live and the people in whose steps they walk.