

Interpretive Elements

The Rachel Carson Greenway will be an interpretive trail its entire length. The major interpretive themes relate to the natural world and the cultural and industrial history of the county.

In terms of the natural world interpretive concept, the greenway will interpret eight different themes from the writings of Rachel Carson relying primarily on her book, *“The Sense of Wonder”*. Each theme has been associated with a different segment of the greenway. The themes are:

Segment 1: Sounds of Water

Segment 2: Teaching Children

Segment 3: World of Little Things

Segment 4: Changing Seasons

Segment 5: Night Sky/Underground Railroad/Quaker Heritage

Segment 6: Contemplating Nature

Segment 7: A Sense of Wonder

Segment 8: Watershed Protection/Agricultural Heritage

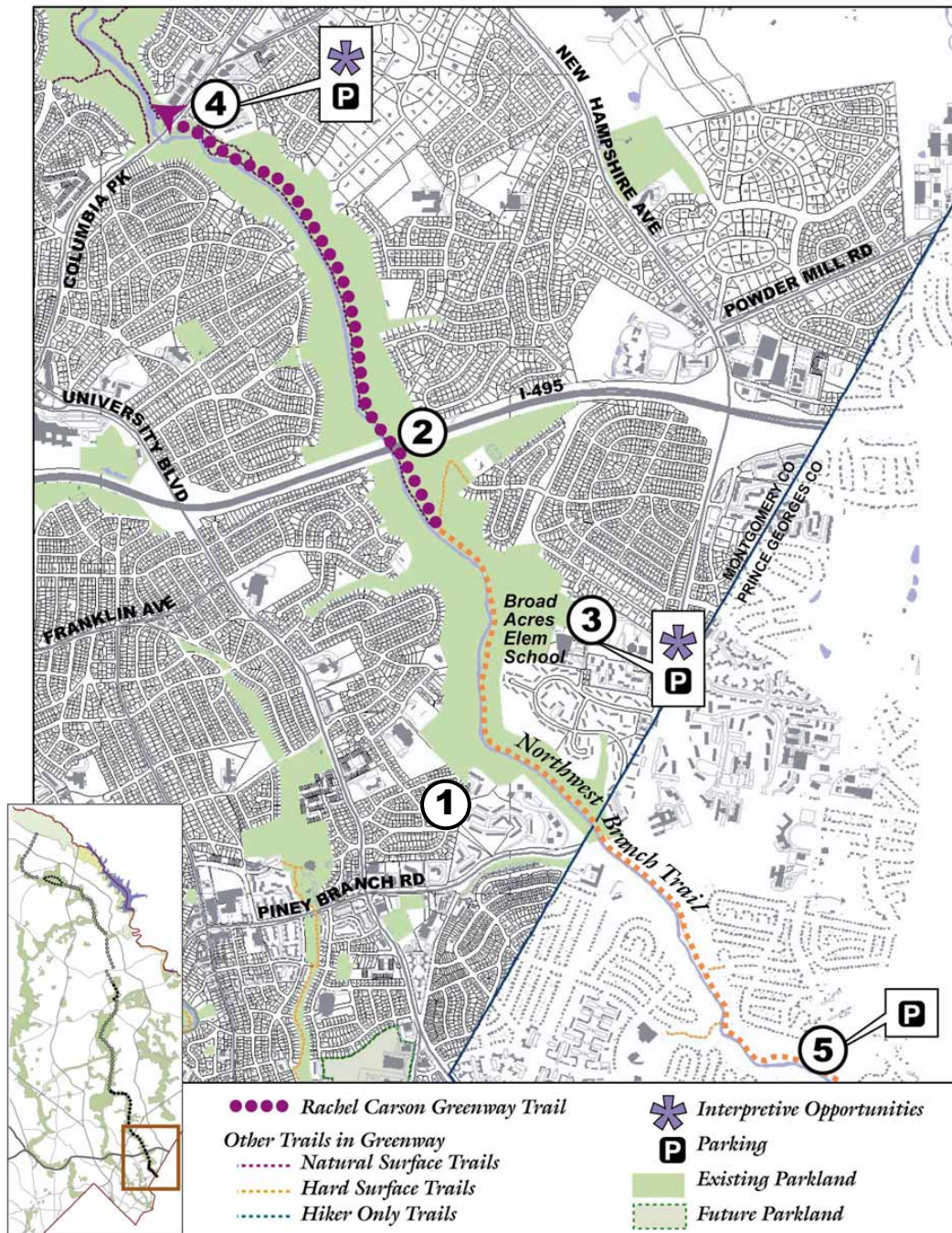
Cultural and industrial themes will also be part of the greenway. In Segment 5, a major interpretive focus will be the County’s involvement in the Underground Railroad and Quaker traditions in Sandy Spring. The Rural Legacy Trail has recently been included in the National Network to Freedom Trail system and this Plan recommends extending it further north. Rachel Carson’s writings about the Night Sky as a natural element are a perfect complement to the historic use of the night sky by escaping slaves seeking the North Star as a guide to freedom.

The quotes in italics are from Rachel Carson’s book, *“The Sense of Wonder”*. Each Greenway segment is discussed in more detail in the following pages.

Hearing can be a source of ...exquisite pleasure...Take time to listen and talk about the voices of the earth and what they mean—the majestic voice of thunder, the winds, the sound of surf or flowing streams.

Segment 1: Sounds of Water

This relatively straight stretch of Northwest Branch is characterized by very steep slopes. The torrent and gorge section is especially dramatic with large boulders and turbulent water rills. Slopes are heavily wooded with mixed deciduous forest stands.



There is a feeling of deep enclosure. In 1904, President Teddy Roosevelt wrote to his son about this section:

Mother and I had a most lovely ride the other day...to what is called Northwest Branch, at Burnt Mills, where there is a beautiful gorge, deep and narrow, with great boulders and even cliffs.... We were gone four hours, half an hour being occupied with the scrambling in the gorge.

The sound of water as it crashes through the gorge is a sharp contrast to the gentler sounds heard elsewhere as the water flows over rocky sections of the stream bed.

Description

This segment of the greenway features a hard surface and a natural surface trail. In the southern end of this segment, the Northwest Branch hard surface hiker biker trail connects to the Anacostia Tributary trail network in Prince George's County. There is no official "trail head" in Montgomery County for the hard surface trail; access is limited to a gravel road that extends into the park from Oakview Drive. The road, used for maintenance access to the park trail and sewer line, is very steep.

The natural surface trail extends north from the hard surface trail and continues under the Capital Beltway to Columbia Pike. The existing trail is located on the east side of the stream and there are no bridges to provide trail access from communities to the west. This was raised as an issue at the community meetings.

A major obstacle to trail connectivity from this segment to the next is Columbia Pike which trail users must cross. This 4-lane road is heavily traveled and separates the Northwest Branch Trail loop from the southern portion of the trail corridor. A traffic light will soon be installed nearby and this will allow trail users to cross the road safely.

Trail Planning Recommendations

1. The one-mile, hard surface, hiker-biker trail portion of the Rachel Carson Greenway at the southern terminus of the Northwest Branch Stream Valley, originates in Prince George's County at the Adelphi Mill and extends north into Montgomery County. The trail then terminates at a maintenance access road from Oakview Avenue. The hard surface portion of the trail is recommended for renovation through the capital program. This will include a comprehensive study of improvements to the trail to address the need to make a portion of the trail accessible, as well as signage, resurfacing sections, drainage, and in particular, possible provision for a bridge where the trail passes through a stream tributary.

2. Improve trail crossing under the Beltway and explore way to prevent erosion and runoff damage to trail from run-off from the beltway.

3. Allow trailhead parking at Broadacres Park, which will have a nature trail that connects to the existing trail in this segment of Rachel Carson Greenway; parking and trail access from Brookview park/school is another option.

4. Evaluate safety of vehicular access from Colesville Road to Burnt Mills parking lot and provide safe pedestrian connectivity across Colesville Road.

5. Extend the Greenway to Adelphi Mill in Prince George's County. The Mill is a significant historical feature and Public parking is available there.

Interpretive Opportunities

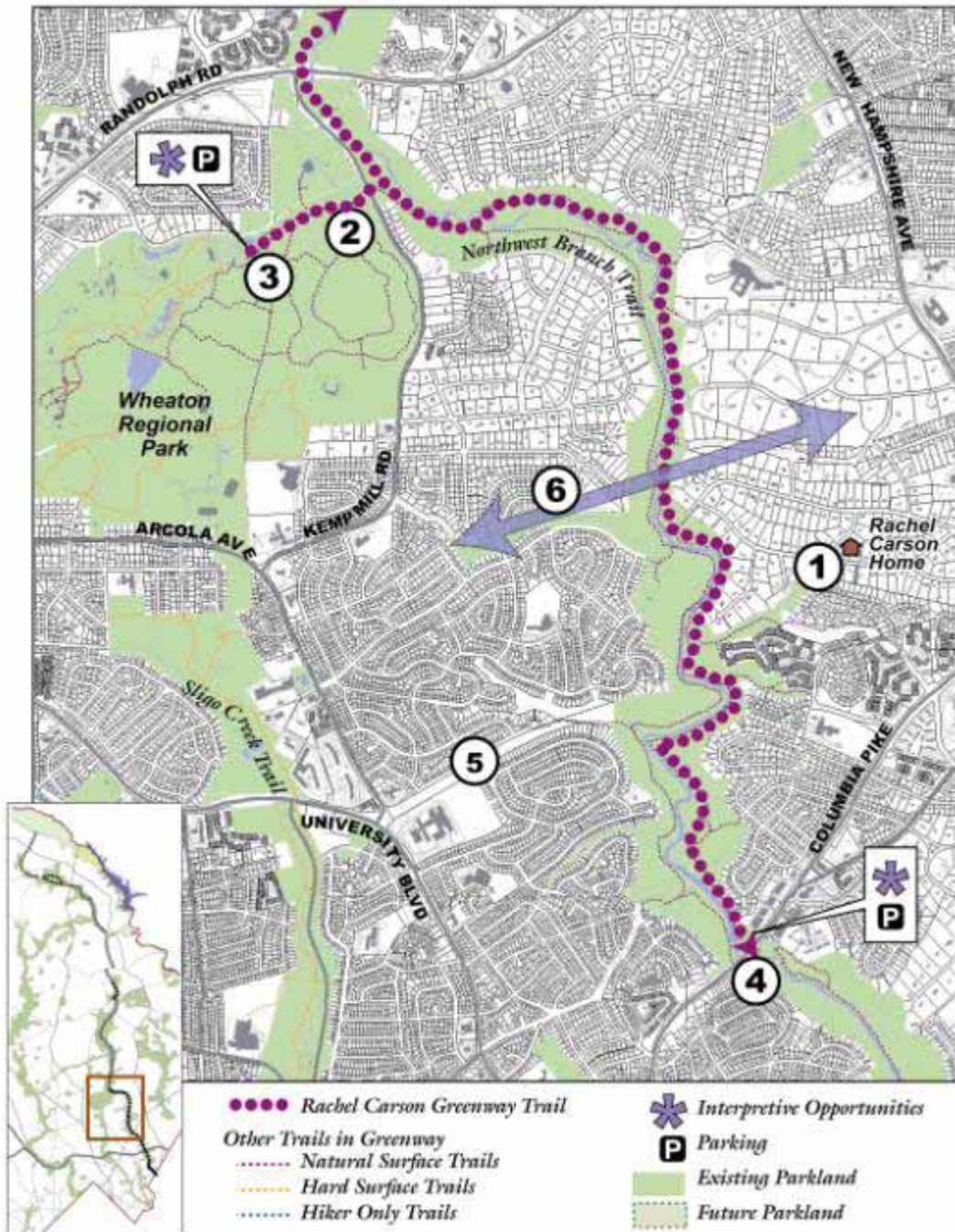
Hearing the different sounds of the stream at different locations; enjoying the abundant native Rhododendrons; the positive effects of stream restoration projects; learning about Teddy Roosevelt's visit to this section of the greenway.

... If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in....

Segment 2: Teaching Children

Description

Rachel Carson lived near this segment of the greenway when she wrote *Silent Spring* in 1962, a book that altered the way Americans thought about the natural environment. Carson's home in Quaint Acres, now the office of the Rachel Carson Council, was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1994. The existing trailhead at Columbia Pike features an historic



building (now vacant) that could one day potentially house displays related to the life of Rachel Carson.

A hiking only trail follows the east side of the Northwest Branch stream. This Plan recommends continuing this trail to the nature center at Brookside Gardens where displays and exhibits about Rachel Carson could be provided.

There is also a shared use trail (for hikers and equestrians) on the west side of the stream. The east and west side trails form a 6-mile loop that provides a wonderful interpretive opportunity in terms of highlighting natural elements and identifying the contributions of Rachel Carson to the modern environmental movement.

Currently both trails are called the Northwest Branch Trail (a trail map may be downloaded from www.montgomerytrails.org). This Plan recommends renaming this segment east of the stream as the Rachel Carson Greenway Trail.

Trail Planning Recommendations:

1. Add public right of way being reserved for road to the park system; this right of way will provide trail access to Rachel Carson house.
2. Designate one trail in Wheaton Regional Park as Rachel Carson interpretive trail and make the Brookside Nature Center the trail destination.
3. Provide interpretive programs and exhibits related to the trail and the life of Rachel Carson at Brookside Nature Center. The Nature center is accessible to people with disabilities.
4. Use portion of historic building at trail head north of Columbia Pike as interpretive center related to Rachel Carson.
5. Provide trail connection if greenway concept in Kemp Mill Master Plan is implemented.

Interpretive Opportunities:

This section of trail features an Exemplary Natural Area and County Biodiversity Area. General interpretive opportunities include:

Explaining the structure of the forest (i.e., canopy, understory, ground layer), how to identify common trees, how succession contributes to the health of the forest, identifying wildlife species. The trail goes along high ground and allows good views down into the stream valley for interpretation.

6. Fall Line between Piedmont Province and Coastal Plain: Explain what a fall line is and what it means; explain why the valley is so deep and how it was formed. Discuss the water cycles and impacts of development (such as incised stream banks and flashy stream hydrology)

Watersheds: provide information about watershed at various scales (tributaries to Northwest Branch, the Northwest Branch itself, the Anacostia River and the Potomac, the Chesapeake Bay), explain how our actions upstream affect conditions downstream; highlight efforts of Commission and citizens to clean-up Anacostia River.

Rock Outcrops: Explain about plants that grow on the rocks; talk about use of rock shelters by prehistoric people.