

**Department of Parks
Director's Report
Thursday, June 19, 2008**

Office of the Parks Director

- During the first two weeks of June, the Enterprise facilities processed seven applications for fee reductions for 25 patrons. Fee reduction coupons may be used at many of our Enterprise facilities for 50 percent off the admission price.
- Park staff, with WSSC, has been dealing with a massive water main break in Rock Creek Regional Park this week. The break occurred in a wooded area just steps from the Meadowside Nature Center, resulting in water restrictions, closed restaurants, and widespread media coverage. Heavy equipment to repair the break is using Meadowside parking lot as staging area. Trees and soil have been lost. Park staff continues to monitor Lake Frank water levels (up by several feet) and the potential of discharged chlorinated water affecting fish populations. Several parks implemented water restrictions, including Brookside Gardens, and drinking water was brought into Shady Grove and several park staff locations.
- County Council voted 5-4 to demolish the house acquired recently in the Hillmead Neighborhood Park addition.

Events

- JUNE 24—Summer Concert Series at Brookside Gardens, Gude Garden, from 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm with Los Angeles-based Latin guitar world fusion music by Incendio.
- JUNE 28—“Meeting Josiah Henson” event, 12:00 noon – 4:00 pm, a special viewing of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and panel discussion led by Dr. Cheryl LaRoche and Dr. Dianne Swann-Wright at the Francis Scott Key Middle School, 6300 Tilden Lane in Rockville from 12:00 noon – 1:15 pm followed by tours of the house and cabin from 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm. For more visit www.JosiahHensonSite.org.
- JUNE 28 & 29—The 11th annual Heritage Days weekend, from 12:00 noon – 4:00 pm. Six parks sites will be open for the celebration: Civil War Blockhouse and Outpost Camp, Bussard Farm at Agricultural History Farm Park, Underground Railroad Experience Trail, Woodlawn Manor House, Josiah Henson Site/”Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and Oakley Cabin. See www.HeritageMontgomery.org for more.

Capital Improvements

- Parks staff held a pre-bid meeting June 2 for the design of Germantown Town Center Urban Park.
- Parks staff is evaluating 32 proposals for on-call design consultants for architectural, landscape architectural and engineering services.
- Parks staff held a pre-bid meeting June 18 to replace five pedestrian bridges.

Management/Administration

- Park Manager Jeff Devlin has been temporarily transferred to Wheaton Regional Park. He will return to Cabin John Regional Park the second week in August.

Partnerships

- A Tai Chi court is planned for Cabin John Regional Park.
- The Partnerships office has begun developing a policy and parameters for corporate sponsorships.

Property Management

- Below is an update of our recent management improvements for agricultural lease agreements with local farmers. Essential to our stewardship of land, beginning with acquisition and until development, these partnerships also further the goals of the Agricultural Reserve. Managed by the parks property management office, leases are negotiated at market rates and customarily are comprised of a 5-year agreement with option to renew for 3 additional 5-year terms. Among other provisions, lessees are required to respect stream buffers, limit pesticide use, and observe other environmental standards.
- The Department's Agricultural Leases:
 - 13 crop leases
 - 935 acres are currently being leased and cropped
 - 1 lease is baling high quality hay (all others are farming corn, soybeans, wheat, etc)
 - All are located in the Northern Region, about 1/3 of the acreage is at Woodstock Equestrian Park in Beallsville
- Our Grazing Leases (horses or cattle):
 - 4 Grazing leases
 - 42 acres are currently being grazed
- Hay Permits:
 - 11 Hay (mow) permits
 - 81.14+ acres are currently being baled for junk hay (sold to mushroom farmers)
- Revenue:
 - Approximately \$35,000 is collected annually in lease payments
 - More than \$35,000 saved in not having to perform maintenance, others care for land
 - Total savings plus revenue: \$70,000 annually.

3rd Party Support (including pools)

- The Countywide Recreation Advisory Board held a meeting and picnic at Lake Needwood in Rock Creek Regional Park.
- On May 30, a local Boy Scout troop held a volunteer clean-up at North West Branch Stream Valley #3.
- The Strawberry Festival was held at Colesville Local Park on May 31.
- Community Bridges held a volunteer clean up at Martin Luther King Jr. Recreational Park.
- Park Police responded to a number of thefts at pool facilities operated by the Recreation Department.
- Park staff has worked out an agreement with County agencies regarding roles and responsibilities for the upcoming July 4th festivities at South Germantown Recreational Park.

Baseball and Softball

- The Big Train ball season is underway, and plays through August 2 at Povich Field in Cabin John Regional Park.

- Power outages after last week's storm required parks staff to cancel evening games on Cabin John Regional Park ball fields until Pepco restored power.
- The Thunderbolts season has started at Blair field, and their proposal to install a new scoreboard at the Blair field has been approved.

Field Sports

- British Soccer Camp was held this week, June 16 – 20, at Ray's Meadow Local Park and Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreational Park.
- On June 2, the parks staff at Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreational Park aerated the Bermuda football field as recommended.

Camping

- Girl Scout Camp, Camp Tuckerman, begins June 26 at Cabin John Regional Park. Campers are dropped off at the front of the Cabin John campsites off of Tuckerman Road, which creates increased traffic congestion along Tuckerman.

Ice Skating

- Cabin John Ice Rink is in the process of installing new dasher boards. The old boards are being transported to the Wheaton Outdoor Rink to replace the boards there. While the dasher boards are off, we are completing much needed maintenance on the refrigeration package. Also, new ice will be laid on the rink with new logos painted into the ice.
- Wireless Internet access is being installed at the ice rinks, indoor tennis facilities and Rockwood Manor for patrons. It is being tested this week and should be up and running soon.

Trains, Carousels

- The Cabin John Train has had a few issues lately with one derailment, which was fixed within one hour. The Cabin John Train has also experienced problems with a spring in the switch, but this was also fixed quickly.
- Train derailments due to aged rails and shifting soil have temporarily disrupted service on the Wheaton Miniature Train as well.

Maintained Open Space

- The spillway parking lot was renovated at Rock Creek Regional Park.
- The annual dam inspection with the Maryland Department of the Environment was conducted at Lake Needwood and Lake Frank.

Picnic Shelters

- Heavy use of picnic shelters in Wheaton Regional Park has resulted in occasional disputes among park patrons. Wheaton Regional Park managers are working to improve signage indicating reserved facilities.

Playgrounds

- Construction has begun on playgrounds at Veirs Mill Local Park and Cabin John group picnic area.
- Parks staff met Monday to discuss CIP replacements and equipment needs for playgrounds.
- The wooden play structure at Lynnbrook Local Park is scheduled for removal.

- Parks staff continues work on the Wheaton Regional Park playground to extend the life of various sections of the play equipment until the entire playground is replaced later this fall/winter.
- The new playground installation at Parklawn Group Picnic Area is complete.

Dog Parks

- Wheaton Regional Park managers continue to work with the group interested in becoming a sanctioned friends group for the dog park.
- Parks staff is working internally on design requests and site amenities for dog parks.

Trails - Paved Surface

- Parks staff has completed Capital Crescent Trail striping (new yellow line down center), rumble strips, 15 MPH signs and crosswalks.
- Construction continues on Park Loop Road at Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreational Park.

Arboriculture

- Parks staff is cleaning up numerous trees, branches and debris in many parks from recent storms. June 4 storm damage as of Friday, June 13 included:
 - 32 parks total with damage
 - 107 total trees removed
 - 113 total service request generated
 Staff will continue clean up from the June 4 storm for approximately 6 to 8 more weeks.

Horticulture

- Parks staff inspected seed bed at Clarksburg Neighborhood Park that contractors prepared, cleaned the trash rack at the Olney Family Pond, and started aftercare on second year trees (de-staking, pruning and watering.)
- On Thursday, June 12, horticultural services staff provided landscape and tree maintenance training to 20 Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) site managers at the Seneca Ridge Community in Germantown.
- Countywide horticulturist met at the Matthew Henson Trail to discuss invasive plants and native shrub planting and met with a developer at Arora Hills Local Park to discuss issues of incorrectly installed plant material and corrective measures required for project acceptance.

Natural Resources Management

- Work has begun on controlling invasive Canadian Thistle in areas near Sligo Creek.
- Deloitte & Touche celebrated their annual IMPACT Day on June 6, when their staff volunteered throughout the DC area. The group had over 40 volunteers working around the Armstrong House and Barn at Wheaton Regional Park under our park managers' supervision, removing invasives and old vines from the historic structure and around the home. The group also transplanted beautiful old azalea bushes and boxwoods, painted ceilings and sanded window frames inside the house—all in 90 degree weather and without air conditioning.
- Parks volunteers assisted staff at Lake Frank with cleanup efforts.
- A Bald Eagle was killed during a recent storm at Black Hill Regional Park. It's suspected that the eagle was electrocuted. He was found under power lines. Parks staff notified appropriate authorities and the eagle will be shipped to Colorado where an autopsy will be performed.

Archaeological and Historic Site Management

- Storm damage downed two trees at the Josiah Henson Site/”Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The tree crew and Cabin John area park managers planned to begin work on the trees this week. Parks staff provided comments to the consultant on the final draft “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” Historic Structure Report
- Staff is conducting research and preparing historical signage for Wims Baseball field event at Little Bennett Regional Park, June 22.
- Parks staff is continuing preparation for Heritage Days.
- Parks staff met with the roofer on site to repair the porch roof at Brainard Warner House.
- Parks staff participated in the kick-off meeting at Woodstock Equestrian Park about the Seneca Stone Barn.
- Parks staff is developing an RFP for the Woodlawn Barn.
- Parks staff is coordinating grant-funded plantings at Oakley Cabin.

Trails – Natural Surface

- There is a sinkhole off Willard Avenue, located near Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park. Parks staff is working with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and WSSC on this issue. The sinkhole is not on park property, but it does impact the nearby trail. Park staff secured and taped off the area.

Agricultural Support (see also “Property Management” section regarding our lease program)

- The new stone work has been completed on corn crib at the Agricultural History Farm Park.

Nature Centers

- Parks landscape crews are working on a dedication garden at Locust Grove Nature Center.
- Brookside Nature Center updates:
 - New laminate floor in the auditorium using “green friendly” products. The nature center will also get new kid friendly rugs in next few weeks in auditorium that are made from recycled plastic.
 - New animal cam exhibit to be installed next month.
 - New interpretive plaques to be installed on our woodland wood ramp leading to the building in the next month. Accompanying booklets of the plaque text in Chinese, Hebrew and Spanish to be completed by mid-summer.
 - Summer camps are in full swing and most are filled to capacity. The nature center is providing camp experiences for ages 2 to 17 years.
 - Evening campfires and night hikes have begun, at least one per week throughout the summer.
 - High school volunteers from both the Bullis and Barrie schools have put in lots of hours in the past month putting in a new trail, removing invasives, doing trail maintenance and helping prepare for camps.
- Park nature center managers are preparing for their presentation to the Board on July 17 outlining operational guidelines and information regarding all four of the nature facilities.

Public Gardens

- While the powerful storms that passed through the area recently did little damage to Brookside Gardens, the high temperatures and resultant heat advisories caused the “Wings of Fancy” live butterfly exhibit to close on four afternoons, June 7-10. Temperatures in the exhibit run 10-15 degrees higher than outdoor temperatures, making an unsafe working environment for the staff and 120 volunteers who maintain the exhibit.
- Brookside Gardens staff participated in the Rockville Town Square Flower and Garden Festival June 7 to promote the gardens, gift shop, butterfly exhibit and volunteer program.
- Brookside Gardens staff helped plan the annual Garden Party for the Maryland Public Gardens Consortium, held each year at a different garden. This year the event was hosted by the Howard Peter Rawlings Conservatory and Botanic Garden in Baltimore.
- The horticulture staff has been working hard to finish planting the summer displays at Brookside and McCrillis gardens, which enhance the beauty of the permanent plant collections, including the ever-popular “Smell Me” plants in the Fragrance Garden, which encourages visitors to rub and sniff aromatic plants.

Park Police

- Senior Park Ranger Michael Tchou began working June 2.
- Park Police officers began assisting with the Capital Crescent Trail enhancements.
- Park Police command staff attended the IMPACT Silver Spring Summer picnic June 7.
- Park Police officers and command staff presented awards at the Special Olympics Summer Games at Towson University June 7 and 8.
- Our Park Police division conducted a flag raising ceremony at Saddlebrook June 11 to mark the one year anniversary of Detective Brent LaMere’s death.

Mary R. Bradford

Director

Montgomery County Department of Parks