



Foundation Document Overview

Oxon Cove Park

District of Columbia / Maryland



Contact Information

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Purpose



OXON COVE PARK preserves and interprets historic, agrarian, and natural landscapes along the Potomac River shoreline. It preserves forests, contributes to the protection of the water quality of the Potomac River, and provides recreational opportunities as part of the comprehensive system of parks, parkways, and recreational areas in and around the nation's capital.



Significance

Significance statements express why Oxon Cove Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The historic agrarian landscape of Oxon Hill Farm reflects traditional agricultural use of the site throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and provides an opportunity to educate visitors and residents about this period in Maryland history, including the practices of slavery and the lives of enslaved individuals.
- Within an intensively developed urban area, the park preserves several distinct natural habitats, a diverse array of wildlife, and scenic views along the Potomac River, while also connecting a number of recreational and natural corridors in and around the nation's capital.
- From the Mount Welby farmhouse, the DeButts family witnessed the burning of Washington, DC, during the War of 1812; Mary DeButts' first-hand account of the event provides an important perspective from a female civilian on the effects of the war on families.
- From the 1890s through the 1960s, the central historic core of the site was managed by St. Elizabeth's Hospital as one of the first agricultural complexes to be used for the therapeutic treatment of the mentally ill.



Fundamental Resources and Values

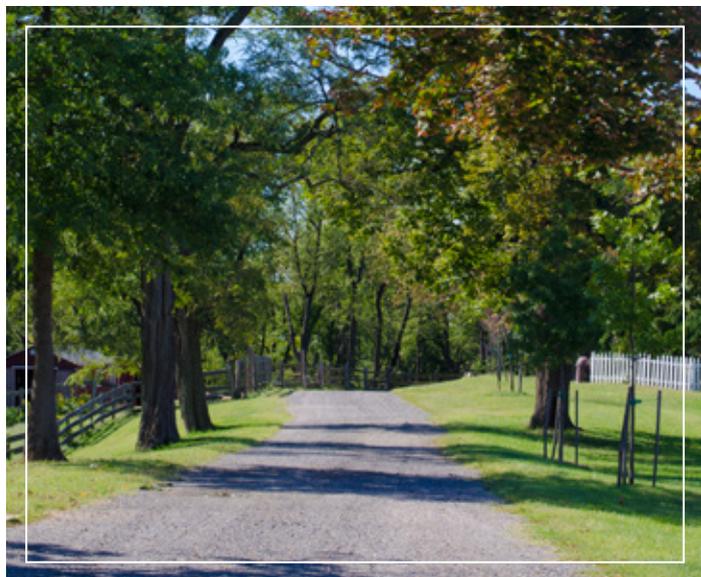
Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Farmstead Landscape**
- **Potomac River Viewshed**
- **Natural Communities**
- **Historic Roads**
- **Recreational Opportunities**



Oxon Cove Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Archeological Resources**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Oxon Cove Park was established as a corridor of forest and natural scenery as part of a comprehensive system of parks for recreation, preservation of substantial tracts of forests, and protection of source water in and around the nation's capital.
- The landscape of Oxon Hill Farm provides visitors with an opportunity to understand the evolution of farming at the site—from its connection to early plantation farming, to its use as therapeutic treatment for the mentally ill, to the local food production and sustainability movements.
- From the front porch of the farmhouse at Oxon Hill Farm, visitors can experience the same sweeping views of Washington, DC, as Mary DeButts when she witnessed the destruction of the nation's capital during the War of 1812.
- On a bluff overlooking the nation's capital, Oxon Cove Park protects a varied natural landscape along the Potomac River, supporting a diverse ecology and offering opportunities for peaceful relaxation and outdoor recreation in an expanding urban area.



Description

Oxon Cove Park opened in 1967 under the authority of Public Law 71-284, the Capper-Cramton Act of 1930. The park occupies approximately 485 contiguous acres that include sections in Prince George's County, Maryland, and Washington, DC. Many areas of the Oxon Cove Park landscape have been manipulated over time, and have become naturalized, wild urban spaces along the riverfront. Oxon Hill Farm, a historic farmstead, lies within park boundaries. An additional 126-acre natural area, Oxon Run Parkway, is located upstream on Oxon Run, but is separated from Oxon Cove Park by a section of District of Columbia-managed parkland.

Oxon Hill Farm today serves as a working farm that teaches an understanding of agriculture and animals, of independence, and of hard work. Much of the landscape of Oxon Hill Farm reflects the historic rural character of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Major roads that cut through the property and define some of its borders follow historic routes. In general, the landscape retains the historic relation of open field or pasture to woodland. Some fields remain in agricultural cultivation, reflecting continuity of use.

In 1811, Dr. Samuel DeButts purchased 250 acres of the property, which he named Mount Welby. At Mount Welby, Dr. DeButts oversaw the cultivation of a diversified farm through the practice of slavery, and enslaved individuals labored and lived on the farm. The War of 1812 began only one year after he purchased the property, during which the DeButts farm was perilously close to the scene of battle. From the still-present Mount Welby house on the hilltop overlooking the east bank of the Potomac River, the DeButts family had a clear view of the nation's capital as it was burned by British troops in the War of 1812.

The Mount Welby property passed through a series of owners between 1843, when the DeButts heirs sold it, and 1891, when it was purchased by the federal government. The land became part of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The hospital had been established during the mid-19th-century reform movement to provide "humane and enlightened" care for the mentally ill. Central to the philosophy of care was the concept that a peaceful, pastoral setting, removed from harmful urban influences, would promote healing. St. Elizabeth's used the land around Oxon Cove as a "farm colony" where patients worked in the fresh air. Formerly known as Godding Croft, Oxon Hill Farm operated as a hospital farm for nearly 70 years. In 1967, the National Park Service opened the Children's Animal Farm at Oxon Hill, the first NPS unit to incorporate living agricultural interpretation for visitors.

