



**A Publication of the County of Fairfax, Virginia
Department of Planning & Zoning**

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STAFF REPORT 2008-2009 NORTH COUNTY AREA PLANS REVIEW

SUPERVISOR DISTRICTS: DRANESVILLE
HUNTER MILL
SULLY

APR ITEM(S): 08-III-20UP

NOMINATOR(S): Stella Koch

ACREAGE: N/A

TAX MAP I.D.: N/A

GENERAL LOCATION: The Upper Potomac Planning District is the area generally bounded by the Potomac River to the north; Walney Road and Lee Jackson Memorial Highway to the south; Vale Road and portions of Difficult Run and Towlston Road to the east; Loudoun County to the west.

PLANNING AREA: III
District: Upper Potomac
Sector: Riverfront (UP1), Springvale (UP2), Hickory (UP3), Greater Herndon (UP4), Reston (UP5), Sully (UP6), West Ox (UP7), Lee-Jackson (UP8)

Special Areas: Reston Herndon Suburban Center, portion Dulles Suburban Center, and portion Fairfax Center Area

ADOPTED PLAN MAP: N/A

ADOPTED PLAN TEXT: See Attachment I for current adopted Environment section of the Overview for the Upper Potomac Planning District.

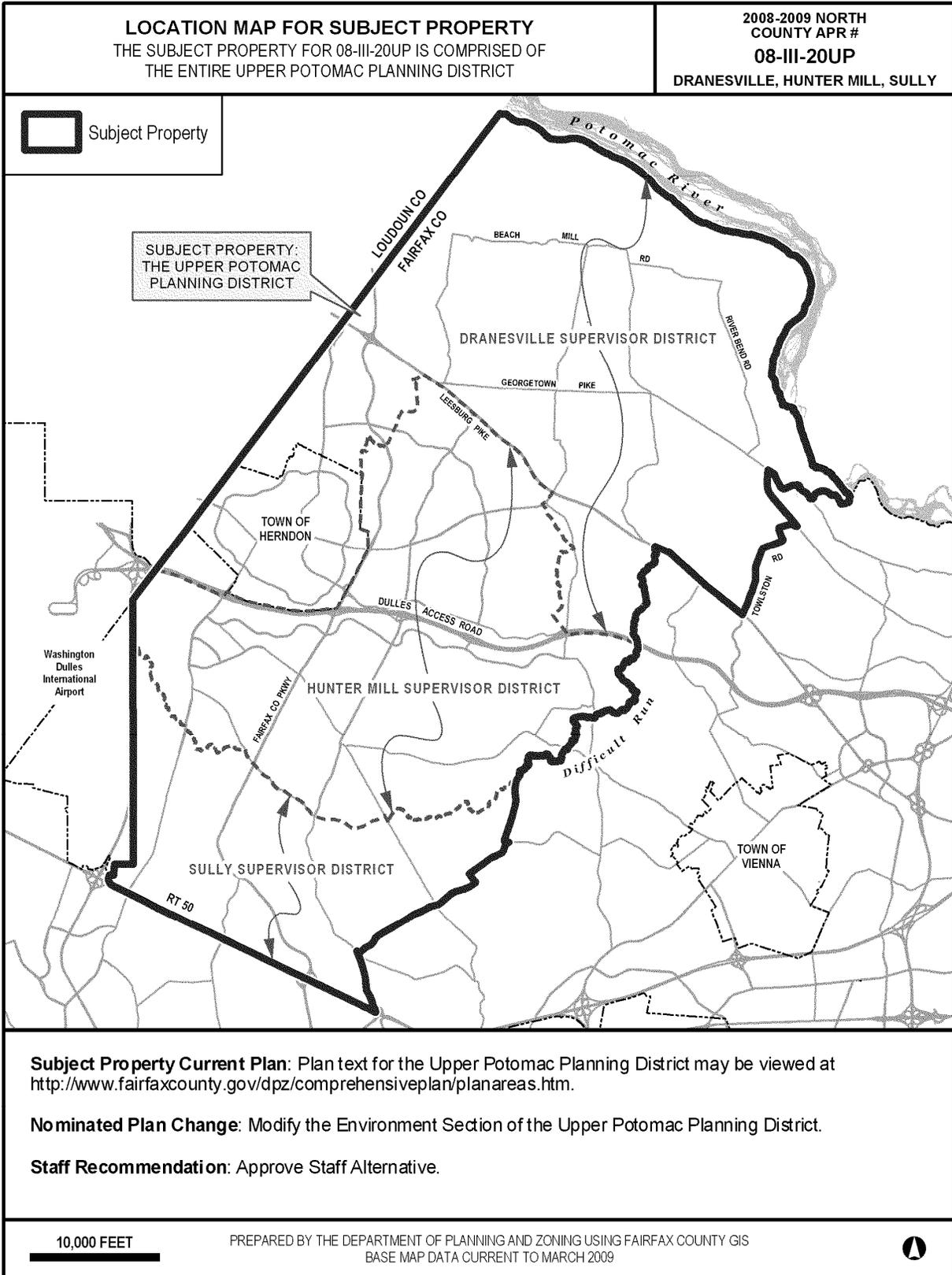
For complete Plan text see: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/area3/upperpotomac.pdf>

PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT: Update the Environment section of the Overview for the Upper Potomac Planning District and incorporate current Policy Plan guidance.

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- Approve Nomination As Submitted
 Approve Staff Alternative
 Retain Adopted Plan
-

Staff supports the intent of the nomination and provides an alternative to update the Plan text, improve the characterization of the area and to reflect more current Environmental Policy. The staff alternative provides a more complete description of watersheds that make up the Upper Potomac District, reflects more current County approaches to environmental protection and incorporates many of the concepts raised by the nominator's proposal.



CONTEXT

General Location:

The proposed nomination concerns the Hickory Planning Sector (UP3), Springvale Planning Sector (UP2), Riverfront Planning Sector (UP1) Greater Herndon (UP4), Reston (UP5), Sully (UP6), West Ox (UP7), Lee-Jackson (UP8) all within the Upper Potomac Planning District.

ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TEXT

See Attachment I

NOMINATED PLAN AMENDMENT

Insert the following text in the Environment Section of the Upper Potomac Planning District Overview:

Environment

“The Upper Potomac Planning District contains a portion of the Occoquan Reservoir watershed, Difficult Run mainstem and some tributary streams, most of the Sugarland Run watershed and all of Pond Branch and Nichols Run. The northern boundary of the Planning District is the shoreline of the Potomac River, which is mostly park or preserved lands.

The northern and southeastern parts of the Planning District have a rural character, with a large number of stream valley habitats protected as either Fairfax County Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC’s) and/or Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Areas (RPA’s). This area is vital to the preservation of what remains of Fairfax’s untouched natural resources. Reston and Herndon’s natural resources, in the central portion of the planning district, on the other hand, have been developed for some time.

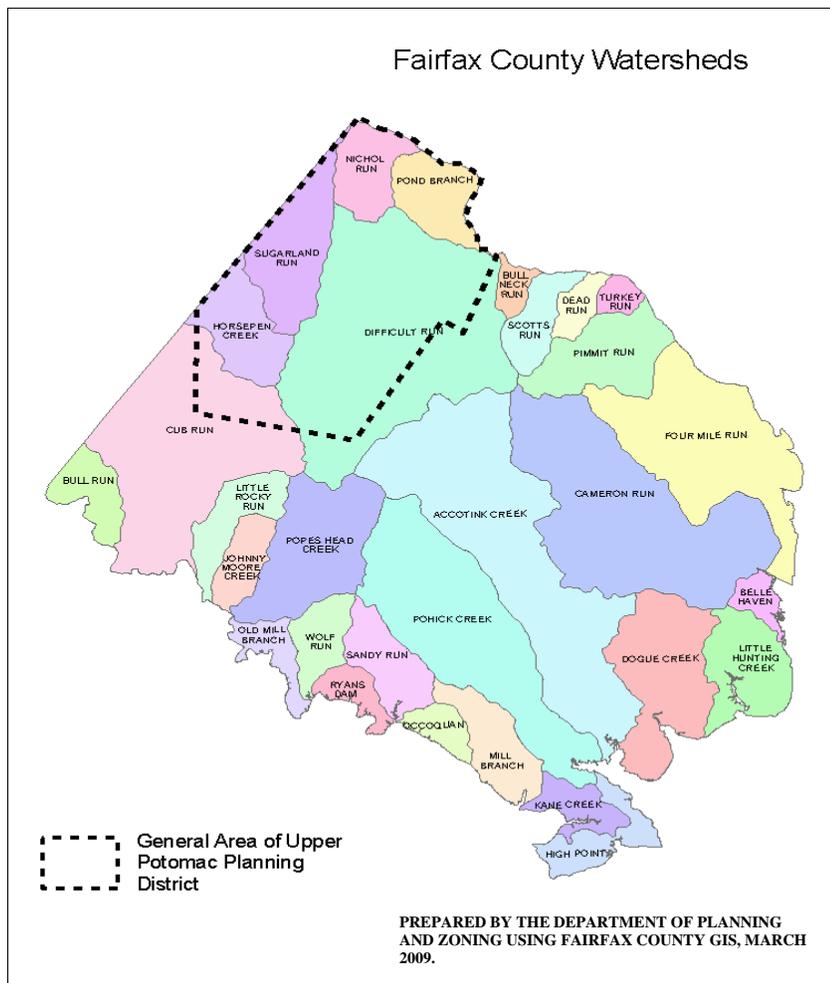
The major goal of environmental stewardship in the Upper Potomac Planning District is the protection and restoration of streams. The County shall fully implement the newly created watershed plans for all streams in this planning district. The watersheds located in semi-rural areas, such as Nichols Run, Pond Branch and some tributaries of Difficult Run, shall be vigilantly protected as they are some of the few remaining watersheds in Fairfax County that remain in good condition.

Riverfront (UP1), Springvale (UP2), and Hickory (UP3) north of Route 7 constitute the community of Great Falls, a highly committed, environmentally-aware community which has been recognized by the National Wildlife Federation as the 23rd Community Wildlife Habitat in the United States, and which has been recognized by the State of Virginia and Fairfax County as the home of some of the largest and oldest heritage trees in the state.

Protection for watersheds shall include:

- Maintaining planned low-density development in the Piney Run and Captain Hickory Run tributaries of Difficult Run, Nichols Run and Pond Branch;
- Implementing Environmental Quality Corridor (EQC) policy to extend stream buffer protection to intermittent portions of the streams above Resource Protection Areas (RPA's);
- Using Low Impact Development (LID) and infiltration techniques for stormwater management;
- Planting vegetative buffers in stream valley corridors;
- Minimizing impervious surfaces;
- Minimizing tree loss during the development process;
- Reforesting;
- Enforcing erosion and sediment protection laws.

Fairfax County's most important goal in this Planning District is to identify and target all remaining large, undeveloped lands for acquisition and protection as public parks, especially those lands adjacent to already existing preserved lands, so as to protect and sustain the vitality of the watershed."



ANALYSIS

The justification provided in the nomination suggests that the Environment section for the Upper Potomac Planning District is out of date and that the Policy Plan contains more current County approaches to environmental protection. Staff agrees and feels that there is merit to the nominator's intent; however staff has concerns with the specific approaches that the nominator has pursued in the proposed revision to this section, particularly as these approaches relate to existing Policy Plan guidance, the policy orientation of Plan guidance (as opposed to regulatory or programmatic approaches), guidance and approaches in the current Plan text that remain appropriate for retention or augmentation, a reference to intermittent portions of streams (which is not a limitation of Policy Plan guidance addressing Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs) or areas upstream of Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) in general) and factual issues. Although staff does not support the nomination as submitted, staff feels that there is merit to the nominator's intent and has drafted an alternative that it feels captures the intent of the nomination, along with the intent of the existing text that staff feels should be retained in concept, in a more appropriate manner. In relation to the existing Plan text, the staff alternative provides a more complete description of watersheds that make up the Upper Potomac District, reflects more current County approaches to environmental protection and incorporates many of the concepts raised by the nominator's proposal.

The map on the previous page showing Fairfax County watersheds illustrates that there are six watersheds within the Upper Potomac Planning District, most of which drain north and/or east to the Potomac River and one of which (Cub Run) drains south to the Occoquan River. The staff alternative identifies all six of these watersheds and attempts to accurately characterize the low density character found in portions of this planning district.

Among the ideas in the nomination that have been incorporated into the staff recommendation are:

- reference to the County's development of watershed management plans and the importance of watershed management plan implementation to stream protection and restoration;
- the connection between low density development and high stream quality;
- the certification by the National Wildlife Federation of "Community Wildlife Habitats" for the Great Falls area (recognizing that Reston has been similarly designated);
- recognition that many stream valleys in the planning district have been protected as RPAs; and
- implementation of the EQC policy in areas above RPAs (although the staff alternative would not limit such implementation to intermittent streams).

In addition, the staff alternative maintains, and builds upon Policy Plan guidance to augment ideas found in the current adopted Environment Section for the Upper Potomac District, such as the retention of a low density character within portions of the planning district and the "extended EQC system" concept addressing ecologically significant habitat areas, steep slopes, problem soils, wetlands, and upper reaches of streams (with the staff alternative not limiting the latter to specific portions of the planning district).

In conclusion, staff supports the intent of the nomination and provides an alternative to update the Plan text, improve the characterization of the area and to reflect more current adopted environmental policy.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends deleting the Environment section of the Upper Potomac Planning District Overview as shown in Attachment I and replacing it with the underlined text below.

REPLACE: Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area III, Upper Potomac Planning District as Amended Through 6-30-2008; Overview, Environment section, pages 10-11:

“Environment

The Upper Potomac Planning District contains a portion of the Occoquan Reservoir watershed, the northern and western portions of the Difficult Run watershed, the entirety of Fairfax County’s portion of the Sugarland Run watershed, most of Fairfax County’s portion of the Horsepen Creek watershed and all of the Pond Branch and Nichols Run watersheds. The northern boundary of the planning district is the shoreline of the Potomac River, which is mostly park or preserved lands. The area near the eastern edge of Dulles International Airport contains a small amount of land impacted by aircraft noise.

The northern and southeastern parts of the planning district have a semi-rural character, with a large number of stream valleys and other high quality plant and animal habitat areas meriting preservation. All such stream valleys and high quality habitat areas would qualify for designation as Environmental Quality Corridors; many, but not all, of the stream valleys have been protected as Resource Protection Areas pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. Like portions of the Pohick, Lower Potomac, Vienna and Bull Run Planning Districts, this area is vital to the preservation of Fairfax County's remaining natural resources. Reston and Herndon, in the central portion of the planning district, as well as other portions of the planning district, have largely been developed and are characterized by higher development densities; natural resources in these areas are not as extensive as they are in the semi-rural areas. In these more densely developed areas, a focus on pollution control and reclamation is appropriate.

A major environmental stewardship objective in the Upper Potomac Planning District is the protection and restoration of streams. Watershed management plans have been, or are being, developed for all watersheds in the County; implementation of the watershed management plan recommendations for streams in this planning district is critical to the protection and restoration of these streams. Streams located in semi-rural areas, such as the Nichols Run watershed,

the Pond Branch watershed and portions of the Difficult Run watershed, are some of the relatively few streams in the County that remain in good condition. The high quality of these streams should be supported through the maintenance of the low density character of these semi-rural areas and the pursuit of development designs that will minimize impervious cover and maximize the replication of natural hydrologic conditions.

Within this planning district, two areas have been certified by the National Wildlife Federation as “Community Wildlife Habitats.” These areas are Reston Planning Sector - UP5 and Great Falls the Riverfront Community Planning Sector - UP1, Springvale Community Planning Sector (UP2) and Hickory Community Planning Sector (UP3) north of Leesburg Pike and west of Difficult Run). Great Falls has many large and old trees.

The protection and restoration of streams and other ecological resources should be a central consideration during the land development process. Toward that end, the following guidelines are suggested for the Upper Potomac Planning District:

- Retain a low density character in the Nichols Run and Pond Branch watersheds as well as in those portions of the Difficult Run and Sugarland Run watersheds that have such a character.

- Implement the Environmental Quality Corridor policy by:

- Preserving ecologically significant habitat areas;

- Protecting steep slopes, problem soil areas and wetlands.

Large undeveloped areas, particularly where adjacent to already protected areas, provide ecological and water quality benefits. Protection of these areas should be encouraged.”

NOTE: The Comprehensive Plan Map would not change.

ATTACHMENT I

Environment Section of the Upper Potomac Planning District Overview

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area III, Upper Potomac Planning District as amended through 6-30-2008; Overview, Environment section, pages 10-11:

“Environment

The Upper Potomac Planning District contains a portion of the drainage area for the Occoquan Reservoir, and a portion of the environmentally sensitive Difficult Run watershed, as well as most of the environmentally sensitive Sugarland Run watershed. The area near the eastern edge of Dulles International Airport contains a small amount of land impacted by aircraft noise.

The northern and southeastern parts of the planning district have a rural character with a large number of stream valley and habitat environmental quality corridors. Like portions of Pohick, Lower Potomac, Vienna and Bull Run, this area is important to the preservation of what remains of Fairfax County's natural resources. Reston and Herndon, in the central portion of the planning district, have been developing for some time. Environmental policies for the planning district must respond to both the semi-rural and developing areas. For the developed and developing areas, policies that focus on pollution control and reclamation should be followed. The semi-rural areas should benefit from attention to preservation.

The achievement of high water quality should continue to be implemented through the land use plan, as well as structural control techniques in the portion of the planning district that drains to the Sugarland Run, Difficult Run and the Occoquan Reservoir. The following guidelines are suggested to achieve this objective:

- Maintain very low density development in the portions of the district that are environmentally constrained and drain into the Difficult Run and the Occoquan Reservoir watersheds. Also, generally maintain planned low density development in the portions of the district that drain into the Sugarland Run watershed. In higher density areas that drain into the Sugarland Run watershed, including parts of Reston and Herndon, implement structural controls and/or non-structural best management practices to protect the watershed;
- Devise an extended EQC system to provide protection to areas that constitute the Sugarland Run and Difficult Run headwaters and Great Falls, and preserve ecologically significant habitat areas. The EQC system should prohibit encroachment on steep slopes, problem soils, and wetlands;
- Construct the regional stormwater management ponds according to the Regional Stormwater Management Plan. Discourage the use of on-site stormwater management techniques in lieu of a regional alternative. In headwaters areas with suitable soils, infiltration techniques may be appropriate; and

- Encourage and maintain planned low densities in the stream valley headwaters.

The Difficult Run stream valley watershed has been adopted by the Board of Supervisors under the County's Adopt-A-Stream Program. Many initiatives are underway to reclaim and preserve this watershed. The tributary stream valleys of the Difficult Run watershed in this district, as well as the associated forest lands, wetlands, and meadowlands, constitute a large part of the Difficult Run habitat. Low density zoning should be used to maintain this habitat, however; more controls may become necessary as the rest of the County continues to accommodate more people. Likewise, the semi-rural Great Falls area and the Upper Potomac valley provide significant habitat preservation opportunities. Additional guidance for the Difficult Run watershed is contained in the Area II and III Plan Overviews.

Many initiatives are underway to reclaim and preserve the Sugarland Run stream valley. The watershed has been adopted under the County's Adopt-A-Stream Program, by the Friends of Sugarland Run. The Sugarland Run stream valley is also a sensitive area of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The tributary stream valleys of the Sugarland Run watershed in this district, as well as the associated forest lands, wetlands, and meadowlands, constitute a large part of the Sugarland Run habitat. Innovative stormwater management practices may become necessary as the County continues to accommodate more people.”