

# GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR MANASSAS GAP PARK

## I. **INTRODUCTION**

### A. **Purpose and Description of the Plan**

The purpose of this General Management Plan (GMP) is to serve as a guide for all future planning and programming. This document should be referred to before future planning and design projects are started.

This GMP describes the existing natural and cultural resources of the park, as well as other existing conditions. Management zones have been established, with accompanying lists of potential uses for each zone. The uses are described in general terms, so that as visitor needs change, the uses provided can change.

General Management Plans are meant to be flexible, to change with the changing needs of park visitors. Every GMP should be updated periodically, to reflect changes that have occurred both on and off-site.

### B. **Park Description**

Manassas Gap Park is an 11.94 acre neighborhood park. It is located off Royce Court in the Mason Supervisory District. (See Location Map, page 2). The site is mostly wooded and its most significant feature is a portion of the old Manassas Gap Railroad bed that runs east/west across the site.

The FCPA Comprehensive Plan identifies the Manassas Gap Railroad bed as a significant cultural resource. It is proposed herein, in view of its special significance in the history of Fairfax County, that the park be designated by the FCPA Board as Manassas Gap Railroad Historic Site and reclassified as a Special Purpose Area.

### C. **Administrative History**

Manassas Gap Park was created by five separate acquisitions dating from early 1975 through mid 1981. The following information relates the acquisition sequence for the creation of this park:

<u>Date of Acquisition</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>	<u>Acres</u>
June 12, 1981	Dedication	1.1049
January 30, 1979	\$58,253.40	2.6138
March 5, 1975	\$76,209.68	3.5776
April 1, 1975	Dedication	.9838
<u>February 10, 1975</u>	<u>\$96,777.50</u>	<u>3.6640</u>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$231,240.58</b>	<b>11.9441</b>

All of the parcels have various utility easements associated with them, but only the first property purchased in February 1975 had existing framed structures on site. The one story stucco finished house and outbuildings were demolished in the early 1980's. The asphalt/gravel roadway (with culvert and headwalls) to the house is still somewhat in place and appears to function as a trail. Access and stream flow restrictions are referenced in the various deeds and should not hinder any proposed minor development such as trails or interpretive uses.

In June of 1991 a request for abandonment of a portion of Royce Street was filed with the Office of Transportation (OT), but the Park Authority did not support the request as presented. Instead, the Park Authority desired the roadway be added to the Manassas Gap Park as one parcel with the railroad bed retained within the right of way. The applicant was directed by OT to work with the Park Authority but apparently the applicant did not pursue the matter any further. The Royce Street right-of-way remains undeveloped with no evidence that it will be fully constructed as a secondary roadway.

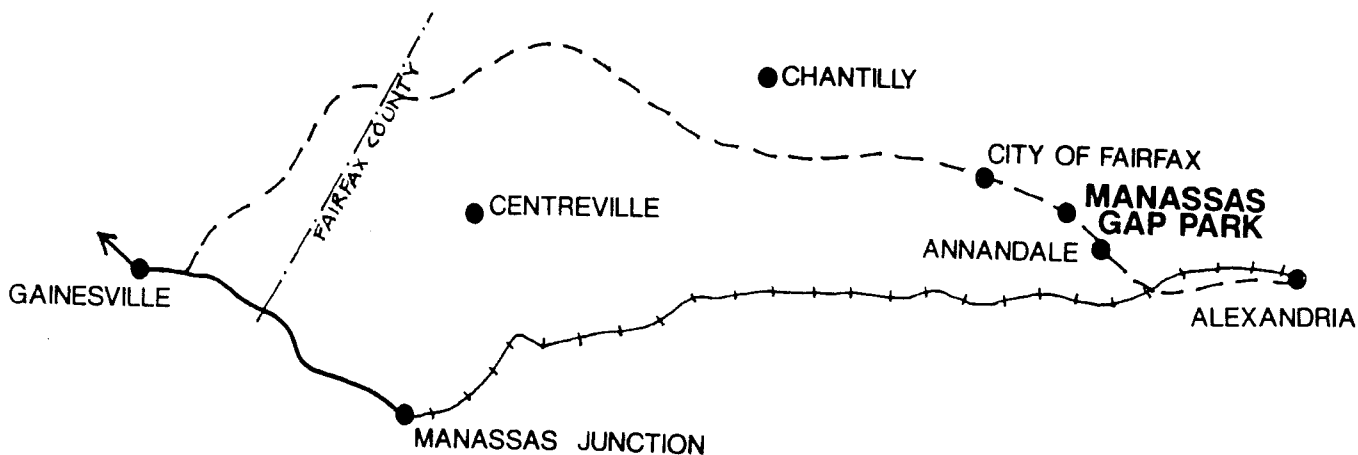
The Board of Supervisors acquired a small portion (.59 ac) of the eastern edge of the railroad bed on October 8, 1969. Any plans to develop a trail along the FCPA portion of the railroad bed should be coordinated with the BOS in an effort to retain this additional length of the old railway which is adjacent to Medford Drive.

D. **Historic Background**

The construction of the Manassas Gap Railroad began in 1850 shortly after the Virginia State Legislature approved a charter creating the Manassas Gap Railroad Company. The route was designated to start at Manassas Junction where it joined the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and proceed west through the Blue Ridge Mountains at Manassas Gap and end in Harrisonburg. The rail line, once completed, would effectively open the last major section of farm land within the Shenandoah Valley to the markets in Alexandria and points north. (See map, top of page 4.)

Late in 1854 the Manassas Gap Railroad reached Strasburg located on the western side of Manassas Gap, a distance of 60 miles - a lofty accomplishment for the railroad and an event which delighted investors. Yet, while growth in the first four years was rapid, only 25 more miles were added before the Civil War disrupted construction plans.

The slowed construction pace of the railroad is most often blamed on the more rugged terrain and the rumblings of civil unrest prior to the Civil War but it is likely that management simply overextended itself as it was caught up in the speculative frenzy of the market. By the late 1840s and early 1850s the railroad movement became a mania in northern Virginia, with every locality wanting

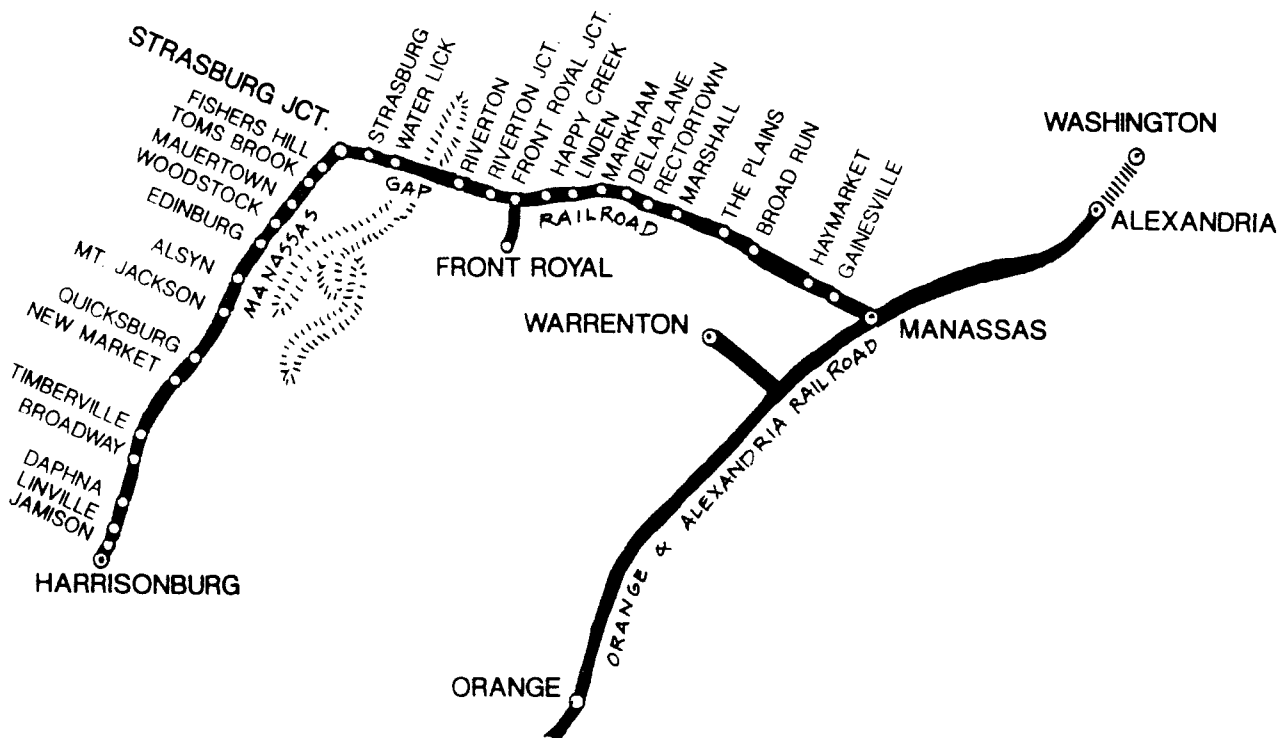


### LEGEND

- COMPLETED MANASSAS GAP RAILWAY TO HARRISONBURG, VA
- - - - UNCOMPLETED MANASSAS GAP RAILWAY
- + + + + SOUTHERN RAILWAY  
(FORMERLY ORANGE & ALEXANDRIA RAILROAD)



## PROPOSED EXTENSION OF THE MANASSAS GAP RAILROAD FROM GAINESVILLE TO ALEXANDRIA, VA 1853



## THE 1873 MANASSAS GAP RAILROAD SYSTEM

railroad service. Responding almost entirely to speculation, a second line was proposed early in 1853 for the sole purpose of avoiding the annual rental of \$33,000 for the use of the Orange and Alexandria's 27 miles of track from Manassas Junction to Alexandria. The Manassas Gap Railroad Company petitioned the General Assembly for authorization to build an independent line into Alexandria. In March 1853 the Virginia legislature authorized the extension of the Manassas Gap Railroad from Gainesville, by way of the Town of Fairfax, to the City of Alexandria. A concurrent act also authorized construction of another branch into Loudoun County eventually to end in Leesburg. It is this latter branch that passes through the northern edge of Sully Historic Site.

Within a year, construction on the independent line was well under way in a number of places between Jones Point in Alexandria and the crossing of Bull Run near Sudley. During the next several years construction pressed forward past the Towns of Fairfax and Chantilly where it turned southwest and across Bull Run at Sudley Springs to Gainesville where it connected to the main line of the Manassas Gap Railroad. With the Civil War looming ominously over the construction of the railroad, mounting debts precipitated a major slow down. By 1858 about half the grading was complete on both branches. However, to finish the project the company needed to raise \$900,000 - a sum that was far out of its reach, especially in the sagging economy of a typical "bust boom" American financial cycle. The outbreak of the Civil War caused cessation of work without a single track ever being laid.

After the war, the Manassas Gap railroad was acquired by the Orange and Alexandria and the need for an independent branch to Alexandria was obviously unwarranted. Two years later in 1868 the first train arrived in Harrisonburg but it wasn't until 1873 that the completed line was fully functioning as originally planned in 1850 (see map page 4).

Today the Manassas Gap and Orange and Alexandria Railroad are owned by Southern Railway Corporation.

## II. ***PARK PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE***

### A. **Park Purpose: What is the purpose of the park?**

Park Purpose statements are intended to provide an umbrella for planning and decision making. If a proposed use conflicts with any one of the purposes listed, it will be considered an incompatible use. By establishing park purposes, future plans can remain flexible, as legislative requirements and visitor preferences change.

*The purpose of Manassas Gap Park is to:*

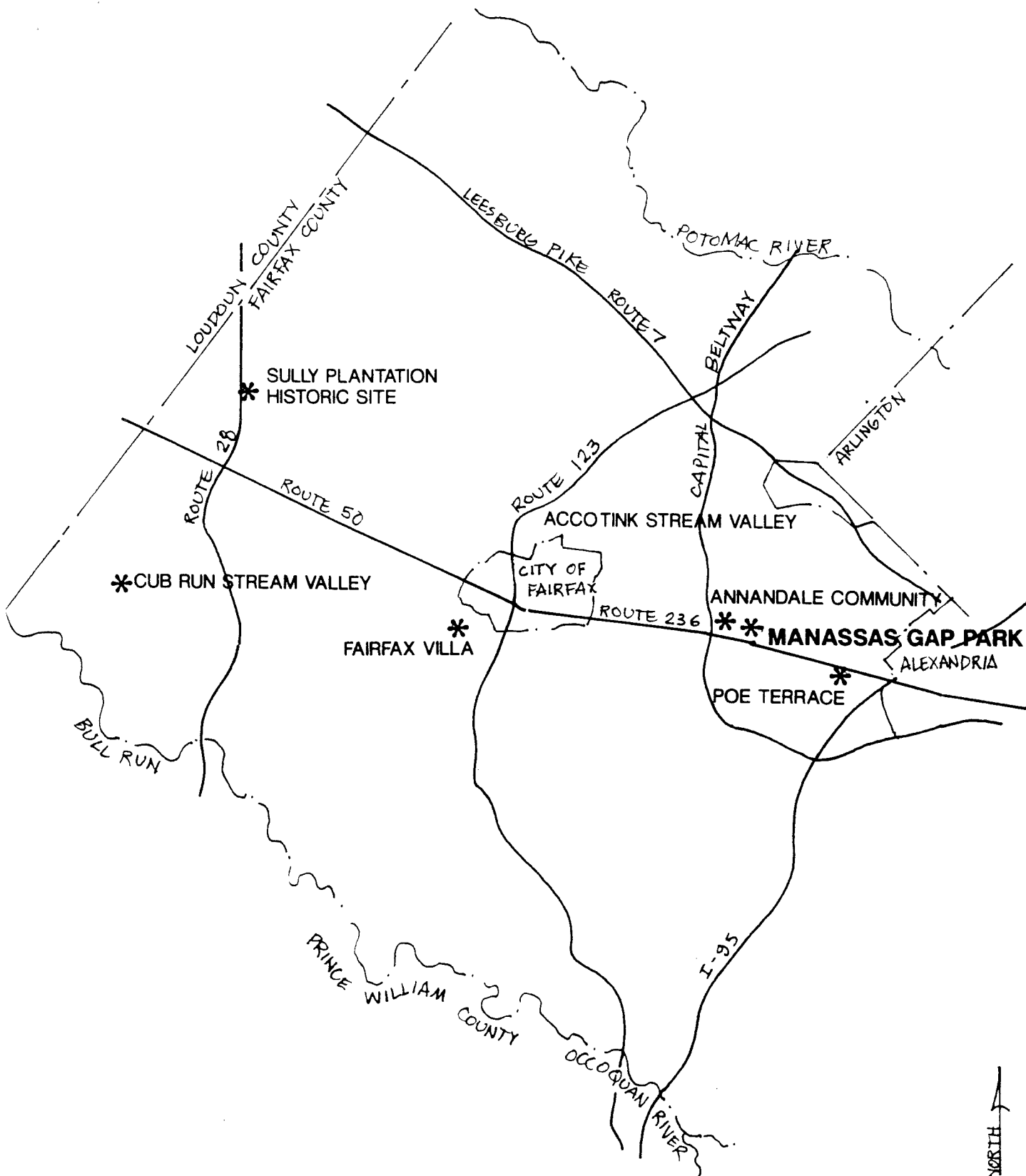
- ▶ preserve, protect, and restore cultural resources
- ▶ preserve, protect, and restore natural resources
- ▶ provide a variety of short term recreation activities

B. **Significance Statement: Why is this park important?**

The unfinished branch of the Manassas Gap Railroad is a significant cultural resource under both the Public Significance and the National Register of Historic Places criteria as defined by the Fairfax County Park Authority Comprehensive Plan and the United States Department of the Interior. Further research should be conducted within the following categories or "Study Units" as outlined in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan to complete the historic context.

*Historic Context*

- ▶ **Transportation:** The Manassas Gap Railroad was an important link in the early transportation system of northern Virginia by linking farm production to the eastern markets and opening up the Shenandoah Valley to more intensive farming and industrial growth.
- ▶ **Economics:** The failure to finish the Manassas to Alexandria branch was a result of speculative fervor that involved state chartered companies and their intent on constructing internal capital improvement projects. In Fairfax County the unfinished railroad branch represents the typical "bust" following a typical American "boom".
- ▶ **Military:** The Manassas Gap was one of several railroads involved in the first tactical employment of railroads to move troops and artillery. It was the first railroad to carry troops directly into battle which occurred during the First Battle of Bull Run. It was General Jackson's Shenandoah Valley forces that used the railroad to bring the Confederate reinforcement directly onto the Union's right in a move that most believe tilted the battle in favor of the South.
- ▶ The unfinished branch was used throughout Fairfax and Prince William Counties as an interior route for both sides and frequent skirmishes occurred up and down the line in various places.
- ▶ At the Second Battle of Manassas, Jackson concealed almost 20,000 men behind the cuts and fills of the railroad. At "Deep Cut" the battle reached a climax as Union Soldiers were turned away at the slope in front of the cut.



TRACES OF THE MANASSAS GAP RAILROAD BED  
IN FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY PARKS

- ▶ **Miscellaneous:** The unfinished branch provides an excellent opportunity to study various construction techniques of early railroad fabrication. Additionally, the railroad bed and adjacent areas are rare examples of the original 1850s landscapes.
- C. **Visitor Experiences: What will the visitor experience at this park?**
  - ▶ Visitors will be able to enjoy the natural beauty and cultural resources and be provided the opportunity for solitude and relaxation
  - ▶ Visitors will learn of the history of the Manassas Gap Railroad through interpretative signage and brochures (available at Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Annandale Community Park)

### III. *EXISTING CONDITIONS*

#### A. **Slopes**

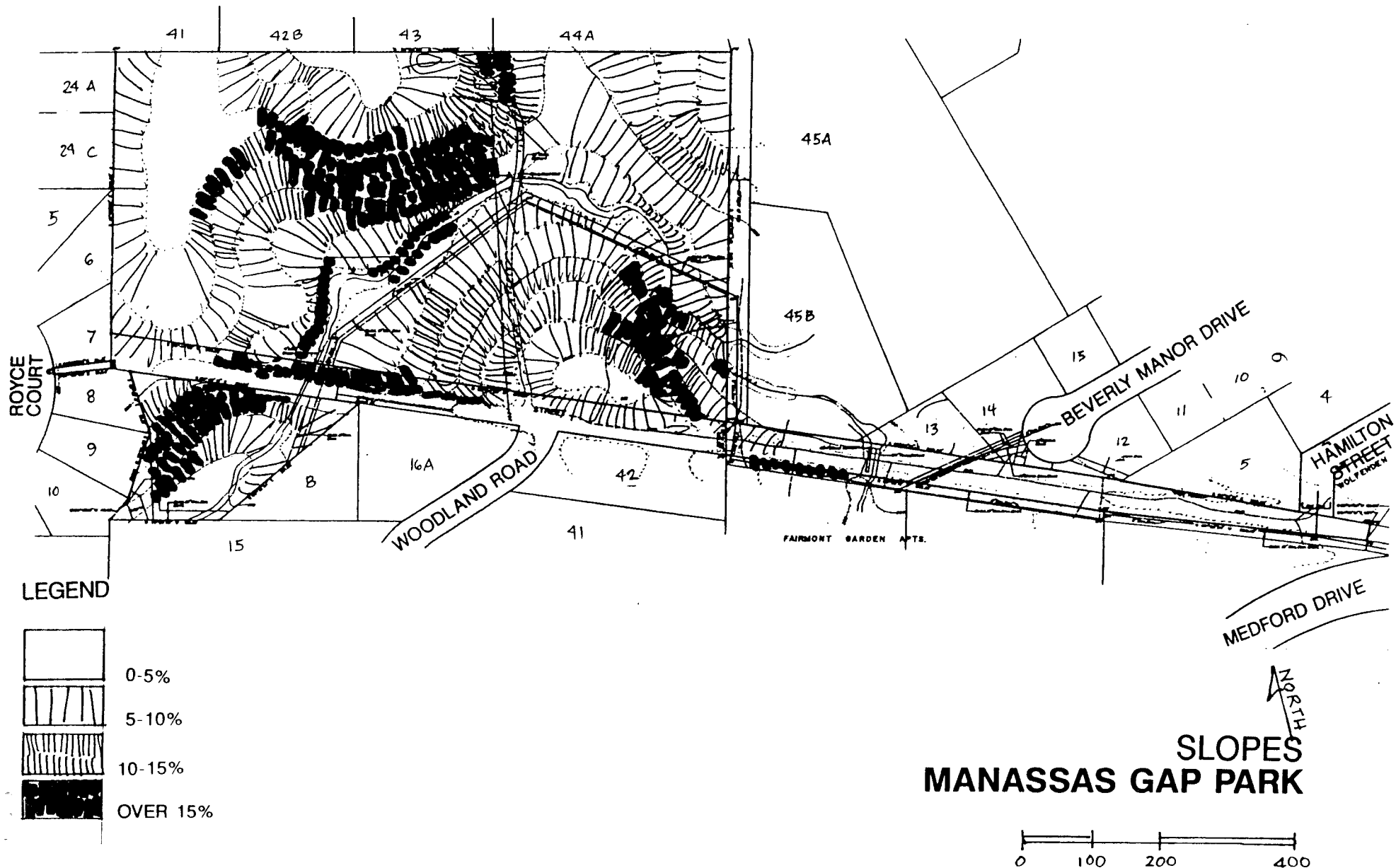
The site is greatly varied, topographically. The old Manassas Gap railroad bed is elevated above the stream valley of the park and is fairly level. Extremely steep slopes lead down from the railroad bed to the western portion of the park. There are also steep slopes in the center of the park north of Coon Branch. Scattered areas of slopes greater than 15% are located throughout the park, but most of the land is less than 15%. (See map, page 9.)

#### B. **Soils**

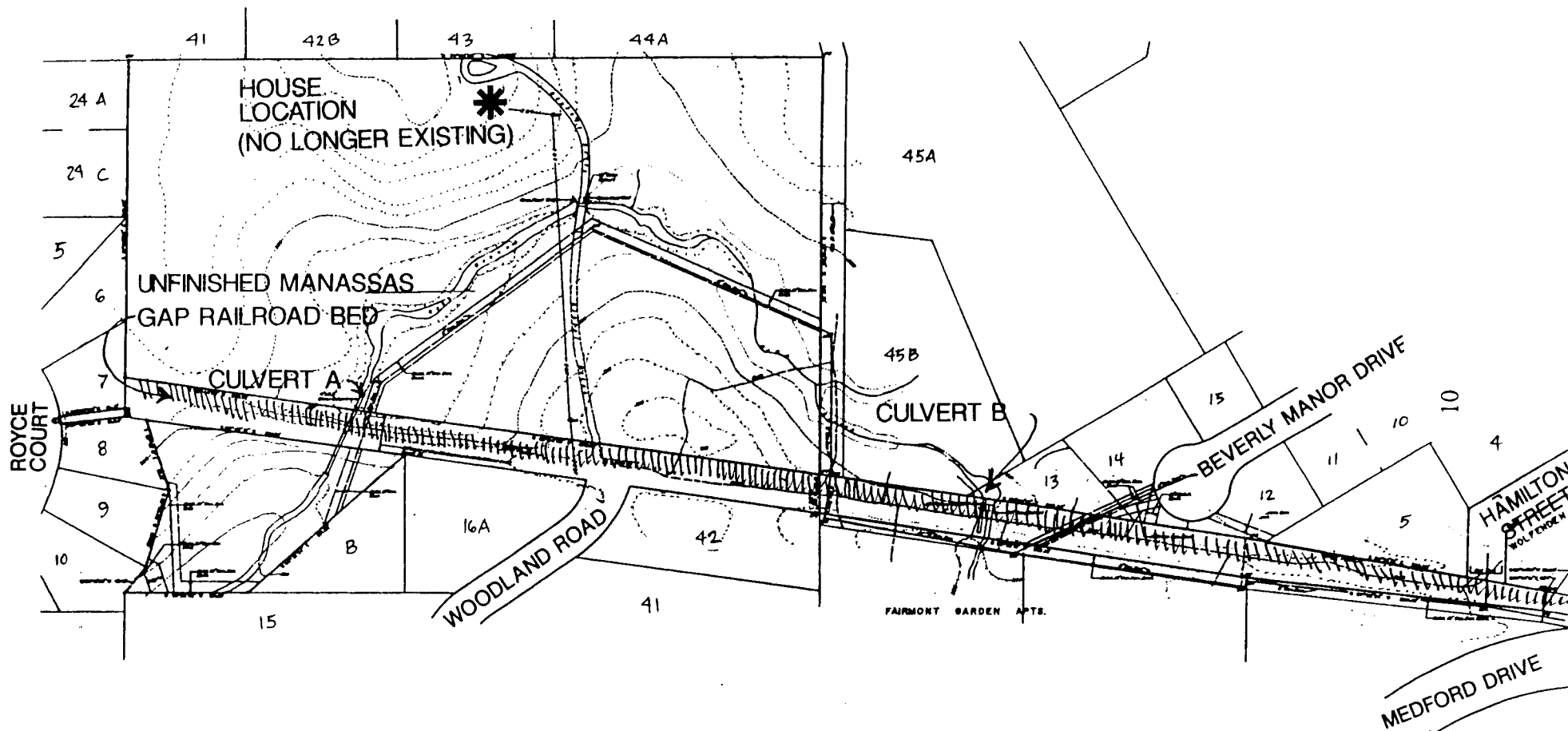
Only the eastern third of the site has been mapped for soils. Four soils occur on this portion of the site; it is reasonable to assume similar soils exist on the other sections. The stream area (approximately one half of the mapped area) is Mixed Alluvial Soil, characterized by poorly or somewhat poorly drained soils and mixed materials including sandy areas and gravelly bars. The area between the stream and the railroad bed is Manor Silt Loam which is porous and excessively drained, but suitable for development. In the northeast corner is Fairfax Silt Loam, moderately well-drained, usually occupying ridge tops, with a clay base. Two small pockets of Glenville Silt Loam are located to the north of the stream along the northern boundary of the park. This soil is moderately well to somewhat poorly drained with poor development capacity.

#### C. **Cultural Resources**

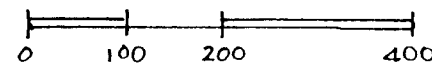
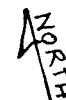
Manassas Gap Park takes its name from the unfinished branch of the Manassas Gap Railroad. The proposed branch, or independent line as it was called in 1854, was intended to bypass the Orange and Alexandria Railroad's costly right of way from Manassas Junction to the markets of Alexandria (see map, page 4). The remnants of the partially completed railroad bed (deep cuts and high fill areas), culverts, and bridge abutments are seen throughout the County but are steadily passing from the cultural landscape due to development pressures







**HISTORIC FEATURES  
MANASSAS GAP PARK**



and natural erosion. Manassas Gap Park protects one of the longest uninterrupted stretches of the unfinished Manassas Gap Railroad in Fairfax County (1800 feet).

The railroad bed has substantial integrity and is generally in good condition, suffering mostly from natural erosion and one known breach caused by the construction of an adjacent water line by the Fairfax County Water Authority. The establishment of an annual erosion control program consisting of spot restoration and re-vegetation is required to preserve the integrity of the railroad bed. There are presently two specific areas with more critical problems that require immediate reconstruction and restoration.

- The west stone culvert A (see map, page 10) has diminished function due to logs and trash that are obstructing about three quarters of the opening. This event has created ponding of water adjacent to the railroad bed, which in turn is causing the railroad bed to erode to the point of eminent collapse. The outer portion of the north side of the west stone culvert or bulkhead has suffered some degree of collapse. The extent of this collapse cannot be known until the logs and trash are removed from the opening.

The interior of the south face of the west culvert is defaced by recent graffiti but is otherwise in good condition and requires minor but necessary stone stabilization repairs. The south face measures 5½ feet at the highest point of the arch and is 3½ feet wide. The culvert is approximately 100 feet long. The south face bulkhead is 20 feet wide by 10½ feet high.

- The second or east culvert B is in better structural condition except for the bulkheads which are severely deteriorated and require 50 to 60 percent rebuilding. The south culvert is 5 ½ feet high and 3 ½ feet wide and runs for approximately 50 feet under the railroad bed. Adjacent slopes of the railroad bed are eroding badly and require revegetation.

#### *No Longer Existing House and Outbuildings*

In the early 1980s the Park Authority removed a house and several outbuildings from the Manassas Gap Park (see page 10). The construction date of the house complex is unknown, although a partial title search was conducted. Historic maps indicate that the house was built some time prior to 1947 but after 1894. The exotic flora found adjacent to the property, and added for landscaping, also suggests a 20th century construction date. A complete review of the archival data is necessary to determine a more accurate date range for construction of the complex, particularly if disturbances are planned within the park.

During the field survey a respondent pointed to an area just northeast of the house where she believed an unmarked cemetery was located. The survey team was unable to identify this, or any other location in the park as a cemetery.

#### *Prehistoric*

There was no evidence of prehistoric occupation in the park. However, a complete phase I survey was not conducted and it is possible that a prehistoric site may be found under those survey conditions.

#### **D. Natural Resources**

The site can be characterized as Upland Hardwood Forest under the county's Ecological Resource Inventory Committee (ERIC) classification scheme, though the forest has not yet reached a climax condition. (In the original ERIC interpretation of aerial photographs, completed in 1986, the southeastern portion of the park was typed as Upland Softwood Forest. In the intervening 10 years, succession has transformed this area into a hardwood forest.) The pre-climax condition is illustrated by the predominance of relatively young (30-60 years) Tulip Poplars, and the persistence of senescent Virginia Pines, in the canopy. However, there are numerous oak and hickory seedlings and saplings throughout the site, which point to the eventual composition of the climax forest (in 50-100 years). Other indications of the maturation of the site include the presence of American Holly, Flowering Dogwood, Pinxterbloom Azalea, Spicebush, Southern Arrowwood, Early Low Blueberry, and New York and Christmas Ferns. A very large Tulip Poplar, possibly a county champion, is growing in the side of the slope of the railroad bed. It likely started growing shortly after construction of the bed and reflects the landscape of the 1860s.

Because the park is part of a larger hardwood forest, it contains a number of bird species that serve as indicators of good ecological function in hardwood forests. These include Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers, Great-crested Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Pewee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and American Redstart.

Nonetheless, the park's vegetation shows signs of degenerating ecological function, as evidenced by the presence of many invasive exotic plants - Multiflora Rose (very dense in some places), Japanese Honeysuckle, Morrow Honeysuckle, English Ivy, Mimosa, Japanese Holly, Asiatic Bittersweet, Japanese Barberry, Chinese Wisteria, Common Privet, and Rose-of-Sharon. This is the result of steady encroachment of residential development into the forest surrounding the park, which has enabled these plants to colonize the site. Eventually, the exotics may become sufficiently abundant to largely crowd out native species of herbaceous plants and shrubs, and even to inhibit reproduction of the canopy trees.

Further fragmenting the forest that encompasses the park will likely occur, since private property in the area is planned and zoned for a density of 2-3 units/acre, but is currently developed at only 0.3-1 units/acre. This fragmentation will inevitably cause the disappearance of most of the indicator birds listed above, as the amount of intact forest falls below the minimum required for their survival.

E. **Access**

Existing pedestrian access is the asphalt trail from Royce Court. An old asphalt and gravel driveway leads from the railway path at Woodland Road to the old home site within the park. Pedestrian access can also be gained off Medford Drive and Hamilton Street.

F. **Utilities**

A sanitary sewer easement runs through the park and remains of the electric and telephone lines that once ran to the house still exist in some locations.

G. **Existing and Planned Land Use**

The park and the area surrounding it is zoned R-2. The park is surrounded by single family homes except for the apartments at Wadsworth Court to the southeast of the main portion of the park. There are several large lots adjacent to the park currently proposed for redevelopment as smaller lots.

*The Comprehensive Plan for Fairfax County, Virginia* for Area I, Annandale Planning District, states "since little undeveloped land remains, environmental goals for the Annandale Planning District should focus on preserving and improving the ecological resources that already exist."

The text for the Masonville Community Planning Sector states the sector is characterized by "stable single-family residential uses." It also recognizes that "remnants of the historic Manassas Gap Railroad line which was intended to link Alexandria with the Shenandoah Valley are located along the north side of Medford and Royce Streets in the southern part of the sector."

Recommendations for development of the L.C. Wood subdivision along Woodland Road north of Rt. 236 include locating new development primarily near higher density apartments and "away from Manassas Gap Park", and dedicating property to the FCPA for expansion of the park with provision of access to the park via the general alignment of the existing Woodland Road.

H. **Countywide Trail**

The County Comprehensive Plan requires a countywide trail along Hummer Road and straight down Royce Street and Medford Drive to Annandale Road.

I. **Existing Facilities**

Within the park no significant facilities other than trails exist. There is an asphalt trail from Royce Court to the main part of the park. A dirt footpath exists along the old railroad bed; an old asphalt/gravel driveway extends from the end of Woodland Road to the home site at the northern edge of the park. Present day trash is scattered through the park, but especially along the stream.

IV. **MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The management framework integrates research, site analysis, and basic data presented in this document. Management zones have been defined to provide a framework for decision making. Existing uses, existing conditions, and recommendations from Park Authority staff were considered in the development of the management zones. The framework provides broad flexibility within a range of potential uses for each management zone. (See map, page 15.)

The "Potential Uses" stated for the zone describe what uses are acceptable for each zone. If a use is not listed for a zone, by its omission it is considered an incompatible use for that zone. The potential uses are intentionally general to allow flexibility when making decisions.

A. **Resource Protection Zone**

The entire study site with the exception of the Entrance Zone will be included as areas of valuable cultural and natural resources and be protected by a Resource Protection Zone (RPZ). Human impact in this zone will be kept to a minimum. Management of the cultural and natural resources will be allowed, but degradation of this zone shall be prohibited.

POTENTIAL USES:

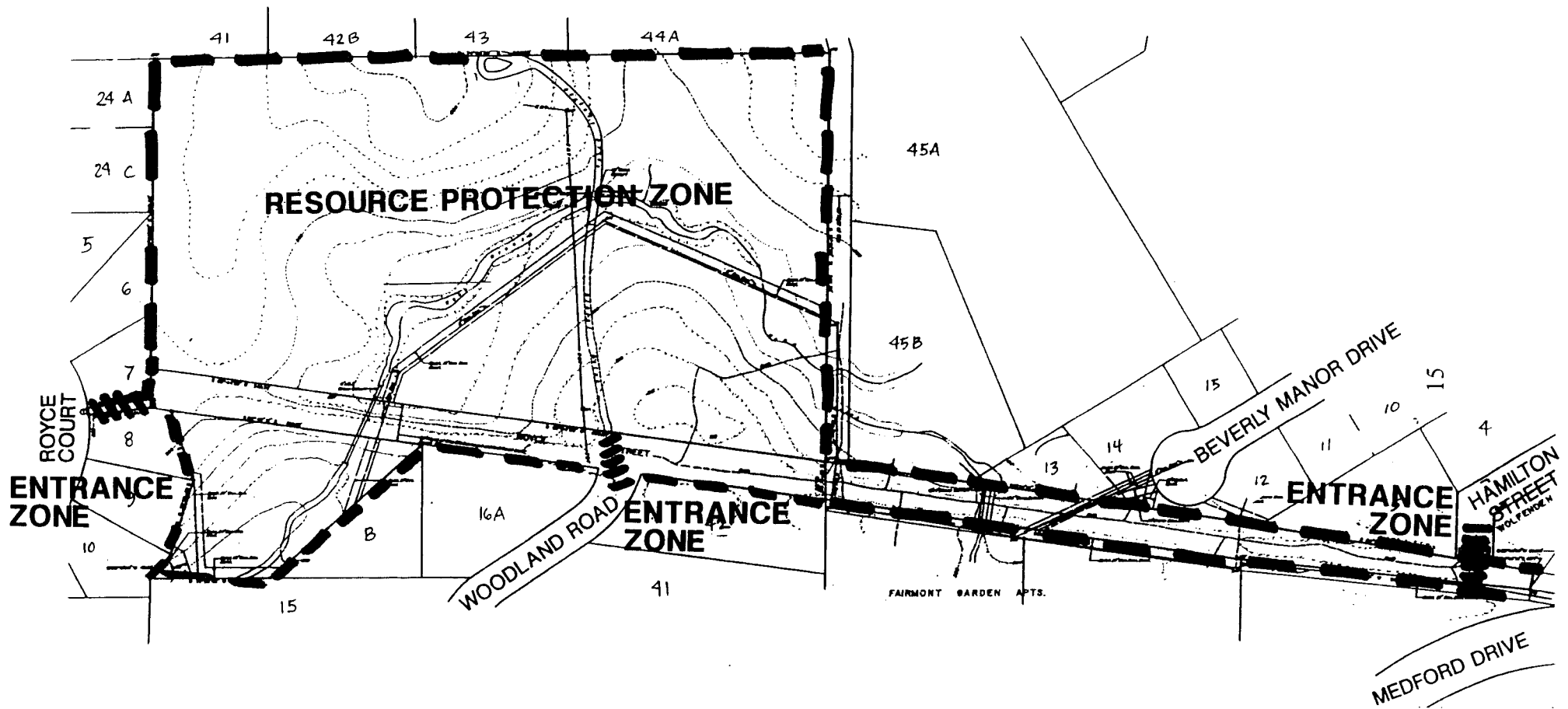
Trails and Trail Support Facilities  
Wildlife and Habitat Management  
Research, Interpretation, and Education  
Short Term Recreation

B. **Entrance Zones**

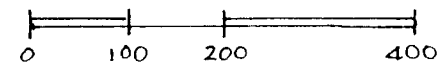
The existing pedestrian entrances to the park, at Royce Court and at Woodland Road will be maintained, and possibly improved. An additional entrance will be provided at Hamilton Street. These entrances will be used as pedestrian access and for maintenance vehicles as required.

POTENTIAL USES:

Trails  
Roads and Road Improvements (at end of Woodland)  
Utilities



## GENERAL MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK MANASSAS GAP PARK



## V. *LAND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS*

Until the creation of a Conceptual Development Plan or Project Implementation Plan, the following recommendations will be used to provide guidance for land management matters.

As discussed on page 3 in the Administrative History section, the Park Authority desires to add the Royce Street right-of-way, which contains additional footage of the Manassas Gap Railroad bed to the Manassas Gap Park for preservation purposes. It is our understanding that the BOS is the current property owner of Royce Street since it was not developed or accepted into the county's secondary system of highways in conjunction with the development of Russel C. Wood subdivision.

In June 1991, the Park Authority did not support a request for abandonment of this right-of-way because, through the abandonment process, the integrity of the railroad corridor would have been lost. According to current zoning regulations, property owners on either side of an abandoned property are given equal amounts of land. This process would place the Manassas Gap Railroad corridor partially or totally on private land and without preservation protection. The ability to develop a portion of the countywide trail along this corridor would likewise have been eliminated. The applicant apparently chose not to pursue the abandonment after learning of our concerns. Recent conversations with the adjacent landowners indicate they are still not receptive to quit claiming their rights to any lands they would receive during the abandonment process to the Park Authority.

In an effort to preserve this historical railroad corridor for county citizens, and possibly use a portion of this undeveloped street as a countywide trail, the Park Authority will pursue an agreement (conservation easement, restrictive covenant, etc.) with the BOS to prevent this corridor from being destroyed or subdivided. We would like this agreement to be for as long a duration as possible and "restrictive" in use, such that only preservation, restoration, trail development, and interpretive signage would be possible.