

Background on the resource:

The 16,000-acre South River Greenway (SRG) contains four headwater streams and incredible natural resources that provide invaluable ecosystem functions ranging from wildlife habitat to stormwater protection and encompasses numerous cultural resources. The SRG represents millions of dollars of property value and is home to thousands of county residents. Over the past ten years, dozens of organizations and hundreds of individuals have contributed to the protection of the SRG.

The SRG is located in parts of the Annapolis, Crofton, Crownsville, Davidsonville, Gambrills, and Millersville zip codes. It is a triangle bounded by General's Highway on the east, Rt. 3 on the north, Davidsonville Road on the west, and Rt. 50 on the south. The SRG is just ten minutes from the State Capital in Annapolis and twenty minutes from Baltimore.

SRG natural resource attributes:

- Undeveloped forests covering over 6,000 acres including 2,400 acres of interior forest
- Two Green Infrastructure (GI) forest hubs and many GI corridors as identified by Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Greenprint Program
- 15 different wetland types covering 800 acres
- 100 miles of perennial and intermittent streams in the South River headwaters
- Historical spawning area for yellow perch and river herring and habitat for the American eel
- Four at-risk Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) are known to occur in the SRG: worm-eating warbler, Kentucky warbler, wood thrush, and Louisiana waterthrush
- 17 FIDS nest in the SRG, seven of high or highest priority for conservation (BCR 30)
- Eight other bird species nest in the SRG that are of high or highest priority, in particular the extensive shrub habitat attracts forest shrub nesters such as hooded and black and white warblers

The SRG is recognized as a preservation priority in the 2000 Crownsville Small Area Plan; 2002 Anne Arundel County Greenways Plan; the 2006 and 2013 Land Preservation, Park and Recreation Plans; and the West County Regional Park Plan. It is designated a Regional Conservation Priority by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance.

SRG History:

In 2005, Scenic Rivers Land Trust (SRLT) had the honor of convening a large consortium of partners to develop the SRG concept and released the first Conservation Plan. Leaders included Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks (AACORP), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), South River Federation (SRF) and the Biophilia Foundation.

Early research on the property led to a successful application to have the property designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. Over 120 bird species have been identified as using the SRG for nesting or migration.

Also in 2005, SRLT and AACORP held the first Walk for the Woods in the SRG to promote public access and encourage ongoing discussions about protection of the Crownsville Hospital property. Held every year since then, the Walk regularly attracts 400 participants and has been funded by private donations raised by SRLT.

Friends of the Crownsville Hospital Cemetery were early and ongoing supporters who have assisted with public outreach and encouraged sensitivity to the history of the property and the need for public access to the cemetery.

In 2008, SRLT secured the first round of funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for the partners to begin an analysis of properties within the SRG. Over the next five years, over \$200,000 in grant funding was obtained. All properties within the SRG over 25 acres were researched and run against a screen of Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ecological rankings. A prioritized list of properties for potential protection or enhancement was created and continues to be maintained and updated by SRLT. An ambitious outreach campaign was launched to inform area landowners.

After many years of discussion about the future of the state-owned Crownsville Hospital property, in 2010 the state donated a 546-acre portion to the County, valued at many millions of dollars, contingent on the property being protected for passive recreation use through a conservation easement co-held by the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) and SRLT. The easement was completed through a year of negotiations between state land managers, the Office of the Attorney General, the county, SRLT and MET. DNR retained the right to manage deer hunting on the property. This 546-acres was added to an adjacent 84-acres already owned by the county and the Bacon Ridge Natural Area (BRNA) became the official heart of the SRG.

In 2010, the Leopold administration appointed a Bacon Ridge Stewardship Committee made up of community leaders and nonprofit representatives. The committee was very active through 2012 and then committee members became more informally connected to various project components. In 2013, the committee assisted with a public meeting and has been somewhat dormant since then. Re-engaging and rebuilding this committee will be a priority for 2016.

In 2010 and 2011, the County showed strong leadership by using over \$4 million in Program Open Space funds to acquire from willing-sellers six of the prioritized properties adjacent to BRNA - adding 235 acres. During the same time period, funding was secured to purchase the Poole property and an extended negotiation with a variety of partners began about contamination on the site. The purchase was not completed. Also during this time period, negotiations began on using Forest Conservation Act funds to purchase an easement on the 85-acre Conroy property. It is expected that this purchase will be completed by the County early in 2016.

Starting with tree plantings and trash clean-ups in 2011, numerous restoration projects were launched in BRNA. Restoration projects are important for improving and protecting the resource and they are extra important for off-setting any impacts realized by the desire for extensive public access. During this time frame, USFWS began investing tens of thousands of dollars in invasive non-native plant removal in BRNA. This effort is ongoing. A partnership was also launched with BGE to protect and restore wildlife habitat underneath the five miles of power line right-of-way in the SRG.

In 2012, SRLT and USFWF raised \$25,000 from AACORP and \$25,000 from NFWF and USFWS contributed many thousands of dollars in staff time to develop, design and construct a stream headcut restoration project in BRNA. The majority (75%) of the upland soils in the SRG are identified as highly erodible, indicating a high risk of further stream sedimentation. With help from volunteers from SRLT, SRF and the Watershed Stewards Academy the project was completed in 2014.

In 2013 AACORP and SRLT applied for an in-kind public access planning grant from the National Park Service (NPS). With two extensions to the original contract, a NPS landscape architect has provided guidance on public outreach, access planning and trail design. NPS funding was used to secure trail planning assistance from the International Mountain Biking Association.

From the early stages of planning for BRNA, volunteers from the Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts (MORE) mountain biking organization have participated in public access discussions.

In 2015 AACORP requested permission from easement holders MET and SRLT for a pilot hiker/biker trail in BRNA. Bike trails are not permitted by the conditions of the easement without review and approval by the easement holders and the Office of the Attorney General. The proposal was approved.

In 2015, MORE entered into a contract with AACORP to design, build and evaluate a pilot hiker/biker trail in the Hawkins Road portion of BRNA. Providing all of the volunteer labor and raising over \$8,000 in funds, MORE completed a 2.5 mile environmentally sensitive trail that has met with rave reviews by the public. While experience to date has been excellent, as this is a pilot project, it is expected that there will be ongoing "tweaks" to the trail to address erosion, trail maintenance and safety issues. This is an important learning opportunity for AACORP, as well as the volunteers involved, and is expected to inspire a growing network of future trails. AACORP is contracting with a certified trail designer for a formal evaluation of the trail and SRLT has agreed to pay for the contract so that MORE funds can remain directed to trail construction.

All parties involved will work together to secure additional resources for appropriate long-term Park Ranger and maintenance support. AACORP has agreed to address improvements to the parking area at the trail and modest trail signage and a trail map are under consideration. The trail cuts through a number of areas of heavy invasive plant infestation. Funds have not yet been secured to address these areas.

MORE is raising money and organizing volunteers for a desired extension of the trail in the Spring of 2016. AACORP is expected to submit a second proposal to MET and SRLT for approval.

In 2015, the Governor appointed a task force to develop a plan for the balance of the Crownsville Hospital Property. Anne Arundel County was not interested in taking on the burden of ownership, but the county executive was very aggressive in demanding increased access to BRNA through Farm Road, which runs through the hospital property. Access to Farm Road is critical to expanding public access to the entire BRNA. The task force had limited success and the property is going back into the State's surplus property inventory. The future of access is unclear, but remains a top priority for all.

In 2016, SRF and USFWS will work with area contractors to begin a \$600,000 stream restoration project in BRNA. This important restoration work will be an excellent complement to increased public access. Funding was secured through Maryland DNR's Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund.

In 2016, SRLT will continue to work with the County Executive's office to promote our proposal for the County to direct \$1 million in Forest Conservation Act fee in lieu funds toward the purchase of conservation easements on forested properties in the County. Funds would be targeted through a grant process managed by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. This proposal was drafted with particular attention to the many opportunities that exist to add protected properties, remaining in private ownership, as buffers surrounding the BRNA and the SRG.

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