

OXON RUN PARKWAY

Park History and Ecology

By Teddy Jorgensen

Research Intern, Ward 8 Woods Conservancy

August 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Oxon Run Parkway is a very large public park, yet despite its size and history, it's been much less written and researched than parks in other areas of DC such as Rock Creek. The Ward 8 Woods Conservancy would love to see this parkland recognized as the gem it truly is. This paper's goal is to educate about the history of the Oxon Run Parkway and the lands surrounding it and inform future education, advocacy, planning, and restoration about and for the park.

PART 1: GEOGRAPHY

Oxon Run is the only river in Washington, DC that empties into the Potomac River below the confluence of the Anacostia. It runs for roughly eight miles from its headwaters in Prince George's County to Oxon Cove on the Potomac River.¹ The Oxon Run watershed



Figs. 1 and 2: Photos taken of Oxon Run Parkway by Teddy Jorgensen on June 14, 2023. The river itself can be seen at the bottom of the right image.

covers approximately 12.4 square miles, most of it suburban in land use, but with significant forested areas. The river has been prone to floods

throughout its history, leading to construction of a concrete-lined trapezoidal channel along a 2 miles stretch in the mid-20th century. While this channel has protected nearby

¹ District Department of the Environment (2020). *Oxon Run Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP)*.

residences from flooding, it also ruined the Oxon Run's biological integrity by preventing many species of native fish and aquatic plants from thriving in the river.

The very name of this parkland is key to understanding something unique about its history: The term "parkway" usually designates a planned road through protected land that attempts to balance expedient transportation with beautiful greenery (for example, DC's own Suitland and Baltimore-Washington Parkways). The original plan for Oxon Run was to construct a road that followed the river into Prince George's County, providing another option for entering DC from the east. While the name of the park stuck, no such road was ever constructed; the main focus of park expansion would be recreation and flood control.

Oxon Run Parkway a 126 acres unit of the National Park Service, bounded by Mississippi Avenue, Southern Avenue, 13th Street. Downstream to the west and south, an additional 128 acres of the stream valley comprise Oxon Run Park, the largest in the DC Parks and Recreation inventory.

PART 2: ECOLOGY

The lands within the Oxon Run Parkway contain a precious and localized ecosystem: the magnolia bog. First described by ecologist W. L. McAtee in 1918, these bogs are only found sporadically where the Atlantic Coastal Plain meets the Piedmont Plateau in between Laurel, Maryland, and Fredericksburg, Virginia. Magnolia bogs form when a spring or slow-moving water source permeates acidic, gravelly soil on top of a thick layer of clay that prevents the water from flowing any deeper. Characteristic flora of magnolia bogs include the namesake sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) and various *Sphagnum* mosses, as

well as certain types of orchids and pitcher plants.² Due to extensive human development, few of these bogs still exist. Oxon Run Parkway is believed to contain one of the largest remaining tracts of the magnolia bog ecosystem.

When the author of this paper visited Oxon Run Parkway in June 14 2023, we identified various notable flora species including swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), wild raisin (*Viburnum nudum*), eastern skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), and New York fern (*Amauropelta noveboracensis*). No magnolia were identified, but our survey was far from comprehensive, and many of the plants identified are characteristic of swamp/bog habitats in general. DC's prolonged dry spell in mid-2023 may have additionally suppressed the visibility and prevalence of bog-dependent plant life at that time.

PART 3: INDIGENOUS, COLONIAL AND EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY (1600-1900)

Before the arrival of Europeans, a variety of Native American tribes lived in what is now the Washington, DC area: the Piscataway, Pamunkey, and Nacotchtank/Anacostank are only a few of the communities.³ Of these, the Nacotchtank are the most notable, as they lived in a thriving village right along the eastern bank of the Anacostia River. Crops were grown and items traded with other tribes at the Nacotchtank settlement for centuries- no doubt its denizens knew of the Oxon Run and its floodplain as well. Unfortunately, ongoing pressure, warfare, and diseases from encroaching Europeans caused Nacotchtank's

² Simmons, R, & Strong, M. (October 2002). *Fall Line Magnolia Bogs of the Mid-Atlantic Region*. Audubon Naturalist (74).

³ Steinhauer, J. (2015, March 27). *The Indians' capital city: Native Histories of Washington, D.C.: Insights*. The Library of Congress.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/kluge/2015/03/the-indians-capital-city-native-histories-of-washington-d-c/>

numbers to dwindle, and in 1668 all remaining members retreated to what is now Theodore Roosevelt Island. By the mid-1700s, they had vanished and had likely merged with other tribes in the region.⁴

European settlement near the Oxon Run began in the late 1600s, when a royal patent was granted to English nobleman John Addison. Addison's claim stretched from Piscataway Creek (in what is now Fort Washington, Maryland) in the south to the "East Branch of the Potomac" (nowadays the Anacostia) in the north. In 1705, Addison built a manor on a hilltop overlooking the Anacostia River and named it Oxon Hill in honor of his being an Oxford University graduate.⁵ The name was later lent to the river that flowed by Oxon Hill as well.⁶ Where Addison's house once stood, a replica farmsite depicting early colonial life has been constructed in Oxon Cove Park, at the mouth of Oxon Run.⁷

In 1790, development of Washington, DC, as the nation's new capital began, spearheaded by French engineer Pierre L'Enfant. His namesake L'Enfant Plan established mainstays of the DC landscape such as the Capitol building and Pennsylvania Avenue, but no plans for lands east of the Anacostia were included.⁸ That area was not considered part of the urban core, and it would remain rural for a long period of time.

⁴ Smithsonian Institution. (n.d.). *Early Indian life on Analostan Island*. National Postal Museum. <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/indians-at-the-post-office-murals-indian-lifeways-and-the-non-native-artist/early-indian>

⁵ Roberts, J. (2017, November 3). *The Addison family on Oxon Hill: the end of a 300-year-old story*. Jaybird's Jottings. https://jay.typepad.com/william_jay/2017/11/the-addison-family-on-oxon-hill-the-end-of-a-300-year-old-story.html

⁶ Shannon, J. (1914, January 11). With the rambler: in odd nooks and crannies about the city. *Evening Star*, pp. 9–9.

⁷ While this property is also managed by the National Park Service as part of the National Capital Parks East division, it bears no other connection to the Oxon Run Parkway park.

⁸ LeeDecker, C. (n.d.). *The l'enfant plan (U.S. National Park Service)*. National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/dc-monumental-core-the-lenfant-plan.htm>

A local post road stretching from New England down to settlements in southern Maryland once ran across Oxon Run. No bridge was ever constructed; horses and their buggies were expected to ford the stream instead. Over time, the floodplain took back most of the road until it became impassable. During the Civil War, a bridge for a new road higher up the valley was constructed, and the old road was forgotten. Postal service through Oxon Run stopped altogether by 1863, when mail to southern Maryland started to be delivered by steamboat instead.⁹

Around 1845, a large property encompassing most of the Oxon Run valley was acquired by Thomas Jenkins, but. In 1861, the government tore down the Jenkins homestead to provide lumber for Forts Snyder, Wagner, and Baker as part of DC's Civil War Defense Plan.¹⁰ Nevertheless, members of the Jenkins family continued to live in the valley in other houses for many years. One of Jenkins' daughters, Annie Hoyle, still lived on the property as late as 1913.¹¹

Little changed in the Oxon Run Valley over the course of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era. As late as 1875, esteemed DC-based conservationist and nature essayist John Burroughs described the area as a "broad, sunlit, fertile-looking valley" containing "many good-looking farms, with old picturesque houses, and loose rambling barns, such as artists love to put into pictures."¹² This bucolic landscape would finally change as American industry swung into full force and city populations boomed.

⁹ (1912, July 28). A famous highway of colonial days. *Evening Star*, pp. 7-7.

¹⁰ During the Civil War, a series of fortifications strategically placed on high grounds throughout the capital were constructed, in order to prevent the Confederate army from taking this crucial land. 68 forts had been constructed by 1865, and 17 of them are now managed by the National Park Service.

¹¹ Shannon, J. (1913, July 13). With the rambler: in odd nooks and crannies about the city. *Evening Star*, pp. 6-6.

¹² Burroughs, J. (1875). *Winter sunshine*. Project Gutenberg.

PART 4: THE MCMILLAN PLAN, PARK CREATION, AND EXPANSION (1900-1945)

During the Industrial Revolution, cities became central to American life. Countless people from rural areas found jobs in booming factories and warehouses.

Washington lacked the industrial base to attract large-scale immigration, and did not experience the late 19th century population explosion seen in many American cities. Still, the general trend toward urbanization and the growth of the federal government began to

affect land use in the Oxon Run area, at first largely in the form of more farms, timber operations, and greenhouses.¹³ The steady growth across the city sparked a renewed interest in L'Enfant's original plans and a desire to transform DC into the ornate, neoclassical city he had originally envisioned. In 1902,



Fig. 3: A 1918 postcard taken on the Oxon Run. A group of people are out on a hike, walking over a fallen log. (Image courtesy of the D.C. Public Library Willard R. Ross Postcard Collection.)

the Senate Park Commission

delivered the McMillan Plan, named for the Michigan senator who chaired it. This report advocated for a series of aesthetic and recreation-driven improvements to DC.¹⁴ In the face

¹³ Shannon, J. (1913, July 13). With the rambler: in odd nooks and crannies about the city. *Evening Star*, pp. 6–6.

¹⁴ TCLF. (n.d.). *Washington D.C.'s Landscape Legacy*. The Cultural Landscape Foundation. <https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/mcmillan-plan>

of rapid urbanization across the region, for the first time lawmakers made preserving green space across *all* regions of the city a priority, with an urgency expressed in the McMillan Plan's declaration that "whatever park spaces are still to be acquired must be provided for during the next few years or it will be forever too late."¹⁵

In 1903 Major General George H. Harries began to rent land in the area for use as a firing range for the DC National Guard. The property was officially purchased by the Guard in 1917, and was colloquially known as "the target range" until 1920, when it was christened Camp Simms in memory of former Guard member Brig. Gen. Douglas S. Simms.¹⁶ Camp Simms would ultimately come to encompass an irregularly-shaped "half trapezoid" of land running from Southern Avenue on the DC border and narrowing inward to Alabama Avenue. Most of the camp's permanent buildings were constructed in 1935, after Maryland's prohibition on the DC National Guard practicing shooting in the state prompted a reinvestment in the grounds.¹⁷

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), established in 1924, brought together representatives from various government agencies to plan for the protection of green space and smart development of the city.¹⁸ Residents of the Oxon Run area soon began petitioning the NCPC to purchase lands surrounding the stream in order to prohibit future development and preserve sufficient green space for the residents' enjoyment.¹⁹

¹⁵ U.S. Senate. Park Commission. *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*. (S. Rpt. 57-166). https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/mcmillan/plan.pdf

¹⁶ (1953, November 23). Encroaching Housing Silences Rifle Fire at Camp Simms. *Evening Star*, pp. B*.

¹⁷ (1935, August 21). DC Guard Plans Permanent Training Site at Camp Simms. *Evening Star*, pp. A-4.

¹⁸ It has also been known as the "National Capital Park Commission" and "National Capital Capital Park and Planning Commission" over the years. I will be using the modern name only, for the sake of clarity.

¹⁹ (1925, June 4). Anacostia Asks Purchase of Park Site. *The Washington Times*, pp. 17.

Their calls were heeded in the 1930s after the Capper-Cramton Act granted the NCPC funds to acquire land for city beautification projects and flood mitigation..²⁰ Keeping in mind both the residents' desire for a park and the river's wide floodplain, the NCPC began purchasing narrow, unused strips of land flanking either side of the Oxon Run. Creation of the Oxon Run Parkway had begun.

Unfortunately, the initial parkland would do little to stop flooding of nearby infrastructure and housing, as DC residents soon found out. Over the rainy summer of 1937, new development near Oxon Run was frequently inundated, leaving pools of sewage and refuse in front of homes on Xenia Street SE, Yuma Street SE, and Atlantic Street SE.²¹ Distraught officials declared the situation a "menace to community health."²² To alleviate the problem, District engineers proposed the execution of an underground sanitary sewer plan, dubbed the "Oxon Run Interceptor," in early 1938, breaking ground in June of that year. The entire system cost four million dollars, and was completed in 400 days as per terms of the contract.²³ With the Interceptor in place, runoff would be siphoned underground away from houses, reducing the chance for property damage.

To provide a right-of-way for the Interceptor's construction and prevent the building of houses in the most flood-prone areas, the NCPC drafted a new plan for Oxon Run Parkway land acquisition. Revising the taking lines for the park past the highest possible flooding levels, the commission published the new plan on October 21, 1938.²⁴ The NCPC

²⁰ Capper-Cramton Act of May 29, 1930 (46 Stat. 482).

²¹ (1937, 3 December). Protests Press on Flooded Yards. *Evening Star*, pp. C-4.

²² (1938, 4 February). Highlands Plan Congress Plea for Sewerage. *Evening Star*, pp. 24

²³ (1938, June 14). Sewer Start is Celebrated. *Evening Star*, pp. 23.

²⁴ Arno B. Cammerer, National Capital Park and Planning Commission Executive Officer, to Frank Murphy, Attorney General, January 31, 1939; Land Acquisition Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

acquired new parkland via condemnation, compensating each property owner after a government-commissioned appraisal. As with the previous Oxon Run acquisitions, the National Park Service was given jurisdiction of the land, labeling it Reservation 501.²⁵

Acquisition took place over two main phases. The first started immediately after the new plan was published and lasted through early January 1939.²⁶ The majority of properties acquired in this phase lay in the square between Valley Avenue SE, Mississippi Avenue SE, 4th Street SE, and 13th Street SE (corresponding to DC real estate squares 5963, 6121, 6121-East, and 6127), as well as a handful of areas further downstream. Some of these properties were unimproved, but many contained one-family houses, all of which were razed.²⁷ The second phase of acquisition was finished in November of 1940 and consisted of 64 acres, mostly land between Camp Simms and the upstream District boundary.^{28 29}

Responses to the creation of the park were mixed, but largely positive. Many property owners were enthusiastic about receiving money for land they were not using. One Basil C. Zickafoose even offered to sell off his Yuma Street property despite its location *outside* the taking lines, and had to be respectfully turned down by the NCPC.³⁰

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2009, July). Reservation List- The Parks of the National Park System, Washington DC.

²⁶ Noyes, T. (1939, January 29). Oxon Run Parkway. *Evening Star*, pp. C-2.

²⁷ Land Acquisition Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

²⁸ (1940, November 14). Land Purchase Completed for Oxon Run Park. *Evening Star*, pp. B.

²⁹ M.C. Hazen, President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, to Frederic A. Delano, National Capital Park and Planning Commission Chairman, September 17, 1940; General Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

³⁰ John Nolen, Jr., National Capital Park and Planning Commission Director of Planning, to Senator M.M. Neely, US Senator, March 3, 1939; Land Acquisition Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

But others were concerned about losing their housing or fearful of changes to the neighborhood that a large park would create. Maryland landowner C.D. Holden griped to the NCPC about the “tremendous traffic” he would face if the Parkway’s blocked the path to his property.³¹

DC newspaper *Washington Star* had nothing but praise for the Parkway: “It is another proof that adequate, organized city planning... is a practical necessity as well as a cultural desirability.”³²

In July of 1942, the NCPC authorized the creation of an “Oxon Run Recreation Center” at the corner of 4th Street and Valley Avenue SE.³³ This was the first time that Oxon Run parkland was removed from National Park Service management, but it would not be the last.

PART 5: THE POSTWAR ERA (1945-Present)

Following U.S. entry in the Second World War, rifle practice was put on hold at Camp Simms, and the grounds were used as barracks for the Women’s Army Corps. These barracks were eventually removed, but housing development that had encroached on the property over the years led to concerns that stray munitions could endanger residents. Officials ultimately decided that it was too dangerous a site to reopen after the war, and the shuttering of Camp Simms was made official in 1953.³⁴ In May of 1956, the NCPC wrote to the Corps formally requesting 49.5 acres of former camp land for incorporation into the Parkway. At this time the Commission still had not completely discarded the idea of using

³¹ C.D. Holden, to National Capital Park and Planning Commission; Land Acquisition Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

³² Noyes, T. (1939, January 29). Oxon Run Parkway. *Evening Star*, pp. C-2.

³³ (1942, July 17). Capital Gets 14 More Areas for Recreation. *Evening Star*, pp. B-2.

³⁴ (1953, November 23). Encroaching Housing Silences Rifle Fire at Camp Simms. *Evening Star*, pp. B*.

the land for a road; the letter bills the transfer as a way to help build “a suitable southeast approach to the District of Columbia.”³⁵ A short section of the road had already been built in Maryland, with the intent of adding it to the Parkway: Oxon Run Drive in Hillcrest Heights remains in place today. Why an Oxon Run Parkway road was never built in DC remains unclear. By 1958, a total of 94 acres of the former Camp Simms had been incorporated into the Parkway, including most of the area east of 13th Street SE, a large and unbroken swath of forest that the National Park Service still owns and manages as the formal “Oxon Run Parkway.”³⁶

While Camp Simms faded into memory, the rest of DC flourished like never before. During the postwar boom of the 1950s and early 1960s, many residential buildings were constructed in the Southeast neighborhoods of the District. Oxon Run Parkway was the site of many recreational activities during this time period, such as birding tours. Longtime Ward 8 resident Fred Craig recounts that in the '50s and early '60s, the northern stretch of the Parkway was a very popular spot for the local youth to fish and explore. The woods on the Mississippi Avenue side of the park were less overgrown than they are today, offering a view straight across the stream to the ruins of Camp Simms. Mississippi Avenue itself was not fully completed at the time; an unimproved dirt path instead ran between Stanton Road and 15th Street SE. Adventurous kids took advantage of dirt and gravel roads leading into the park left over from the Camp Simms era, which would be forgotten in coming years.

³⁵ Ray M. Schenck, National Capital Parks and Planning Commission Chief of Projects and Design, to John Nolen, Jr., National Capital Parks and Planning Commission Director, May 28, 1956; General Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Record Group 328; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

³⁶ Merida, K. (2002, Oct 13). A telling detail; the secret behind the warning on the sign across from the school: [FINAL edition]. *The Washington Post* Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/telling-detail-secret-behind-warning-on-sign/docview/409440702/se-2>

In the late 60s the Park Service created a small campground on the south side of the stream as part of their “Summer in the Parks” program, providing recreation for inner-city kids. Funding for Summer in the Parks was slashed by the late 1970s, but the remains of a mess hall, bathhouse, and grilling pits can still be found, abandoned deep in the woods.³⁷

In 1974 the District of Columbia gained “Home Rule”- an elected mayor, a

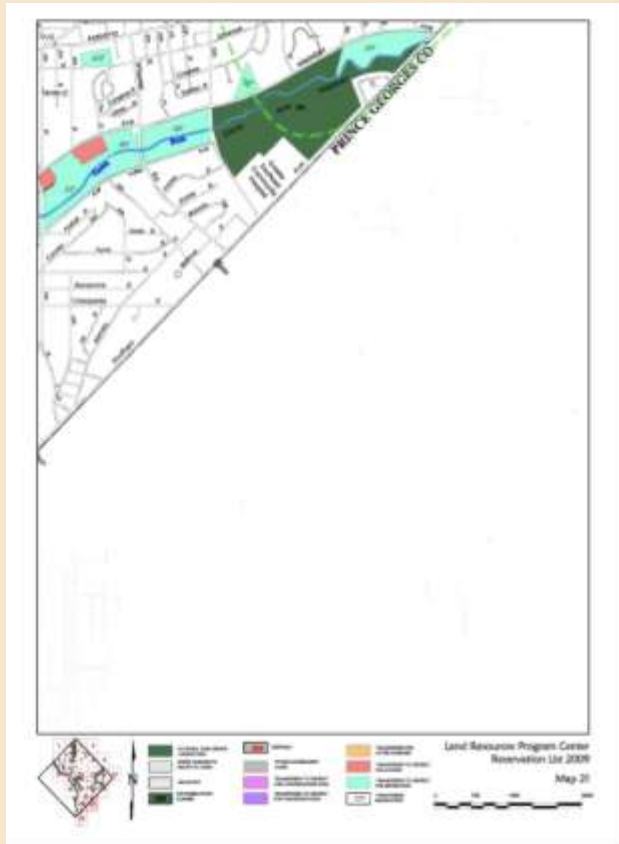


Fig. 4: A slice of a map of National Park Service property; the dark green indicates the section of Oxon Run Parkway that is still managed by the NPS and the mint green is land that was transferred to DCDPR. The small triangle just north of the dark green region is Congress Park Woods.

14-member Council, and other local control of most municipal functions.³⁸ According to John Parsons, former planning director of the National Park Service’s National Capital region, the NCPC wanted to give the District jurisdiction over more of its own parkland in preparation

for Home Rule.³⁹ In 1971, the NPS transferred jurisdiction over nearly 700 acres of its DC

³⁷ Robinson & Associates, Inc. (2008, June 6). *National Park Service National Capital Region Administrative History, 1952-2005*. Retrieved from <http://npshistory.com/publications/ncr/adhi.pdf>

³⁸ WI Guest Author. (2021, December 22). *The district’s Home Rule History and statehood goal*. The Washington Informer.

<https://www.washingtoninformer.com/the-districts-home-rule-history-and-statehood-goal/>

³⁹ Robinson & Associates, Inc. (2008, June 6). *National Park Service National Capital Region Administrative History, 1952-2005*. Retrieved from <http://npshistory.com/publications/ncr/adhi.pdf>

land to the District government for the purposes of recreation, transportation, and education.⁴⁰

Most of these transfers took place under a “transfer of jurisdiction” agreement:

While the National Park Service retained technical ownership of the land, all administration and decision-making now fell to the District government. A large percentage of NPS Reservation 501 (Oxon Run Parkway and surrounding areas) was transferred at this time. The only Parkway land over which the NPS retained full jurisdiction was the section east of 13th Street SE (most of it former Camp Simms land), and a small sliver further south between South Capitol Street and First Street SE (adjoining the NPS property of Bald Eagle Hill).^{41 42} Some of the transferred Parkway land was set aside for education and would ultimately be used to construct Simon Elementary School, Hart Middle School, and the P.R. Harris Educational Center. The remainder of the land was given to the DC Department of Public Works for recreational use. The DPW would use this new land to create another public park, known as Oxon Run *Park*, separate from the Oxon Run *Parkway* still managed by the federal government. A 1988 reorganization of District government gave control of all city parks to the Department of Parks and Recreation.⁴³

In contrast to the preservationist approach often employed by the National Park Service, District officials sought to fill Oxon Run Park with recreational services. Plans were

⁴⁰ (1971, November 5). G St. Shops Lose Plea for Buildings on Stilts. *Evening Star*, pp. B-2.

⁴¹ This is also the section that contains the majority of DC’s rare magnolia bog ecosystem- most likely the NPS’ impetus for wanting to hold onto and protect this section of the parkway.

⁴² U.S. Department of the Interior. (2009, July). Reservation List- The Parks of the National Park System, Washington DC.

⁴³ "Legislative History of Laws." Division I. Government of District. Title 10. Parks, Public Buildings, Grounds, and Space. Subtitle I. Parks and Playgrounds. Chapter 1. General Provisions. Section§ 10-166. Division of Park Services. (Mar. 16, 1989, D.C. Law 7-209, § 2, 36 DCR 476.)

drafted in 1975, but were not acted on until 1984, when a plethora of amenities were built: bike trails, picnic areas, tennis courts, and an amphitheater.⁴⁴

The channelized section of the stream corresponds with the District-managed Oxon Run Park, while the portions flowing through federal land were left in a mostly natural state. Due to the aforementioned ecological downsides, the DC Department of the Environment is currently looking into removing the channel and naturalizing the stream to allow for the reintroduction of native stream plants and animals.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the NPS-administered sections of the stream valley continued to be managed by the Park Service through a “hands-off” approach, and practically no development took place, with just one exception: A series of townhomes known as “Valley Terrace” were built between 1981 and 1987 off Southern Avenue, using a triangle of land on the DC-Maryland border taken from the Oxon Run Parkway. Unfortunately, we could find no record of the sale of these lands to Valley Terrace’s developers.

In 1994, while digging wells in preparation for the DC Metro’s Green Line underneath the Parkway, six unexploded Stokes mortar rounds were located in the Park, left over from the Camp Simms era. The firm contracted by the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct the site’s cleanup met with yet another unpleasant surprise, finding over 30 pieces of live ammunition within the year. As a result, construction of the Green Line was delayed.⁴⁶ Work was finally finished in 1997, and after the Corps moved out in mid-1998, the NPS performed an ecological restoration, stabilizing soil with coconut and jute matting

⁴⁴ Kirk, Jackson (7 November 1984). "Groundbreaking Ceremony Held For Improvements To Oxon Run". *The Washington Informer*.

⁴⁵ DC Department of Energy & Environment. *Oxon Run Stream Restoration Project*.

⁴⁶ Jones, Kathy (23 August 1996). "[Bombs Away](#)." *Washington City Paper*.

spread tightly over the terrain. Native grasses were also planted to promote endemic species and keep invasive ones out.⁴⁷

Congress passed the “Oxon Run Parkway Land Transfer and Restoration Act” in October 1997, granting the District of Columbia full ownership of a small parcel of Oxon Run Parkway land bordered by South Capitol Street and the DC-Maryland border. The act was passed with the intention of using the land to house “low and moderate income individuals;” however, this would never come to pass, and the area became a brownfield. Today, this property is the site of the Oxon Run Community Solar Energy site.⁴⁸ The solar farm is managed by the DC Department of the Environment and was completed in early 2021. Over 750 local households receive low-cost energy from the farm, and it was the largest clean energy project in DC at the time of its opening.⁴⁹

The most recent change to Oxon Run Parkway land management took place in 2001, when the National Park Service leased land along Mississippi Avenue from Stanton Road to Southern Avenue to the nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River (BBAR) to build a community social services center, the Town Hall Education Arts Recreation Campus (THEARC), which opened in 2005 and has since been expanded with a second building. While the land still belongs to the Park Service, BBAR has authority over management, similar to how the DC Department of Parks and Recreation has authority over other swaths of Oxon Run Parkway land.

⁴⁷ “Interagency Cleanup of a Former Army Camp at Oxon Run.” *Park Science*. Vol. 19, no. 1. February 1999

⁴⁸ Text - H.R.2700 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): Oxon Run Parkway Land Transfer and Restoration Act. (1997, October 24). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/2700/text>

⁴⁹ DC Department of Energy & Environment. *Community Solar at Oxon Run*.

Several nonprofit organizations are active in the Oxon Run valley. Since 2018 the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy has removed over 50 tons of trash from Oxon Run Parkway and forest patches within Oxon Run Park. Friends of Oxon Run (FOR) is considered the “keeper” of the entire city park, and has worked with DPR on improvements in the area of the James Bunn Amphitheater, where they hold community events.

A major community garden, The Well at Oxon Run, opened in 2022 in the area east of the stream between 4th and Atlantic Streets. The gardens host field trips for the local youth and distribute vegetables to residents.

PART 6: VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Oxon Run Parkway is a gem hidden in plain sight, with unique ecology and surprisingly complex history. These 126 acres have not been actively managed; National Capital Parks-East has simply left it alone, for better and for worse.

Although thousands of people live within a short walk of the parkway, and hundreds of thousands within a short drive, it receives virtually no visitors. There are no signs marking it as federal parkland, no trails to make its interior accessible, nor other amenities of any kind.

This strange reality bears more of a whiff of environmental racism. It is unimaginable that a comparable piece of federal land in one of DC’s wealthy, white neighborhoods should be neglected so completely. Soapstone Valley and Battery Kemble Park, in DC’s Ward 3, draw hundreds of hikers, runners, and dog-walkers to their well-maintained trails each day.

Giving Ward 8 residents the same ease of access to their public lands is a matter of justice and public health.

Protecting Oxon Run Parkway's natural and historical treasures does not require- or justify- keeping people out. Preservation and recreation must be balanced, but there's no reason why residents and visitors shouldn't be able to marvel at the beauty and history there as they do at other National Parks.

Ward 8 Woods calls on National Capital Parks-East to initiate a planning process in which residents and advocates share their dreams for Oxon Run Parkway. We envision a network of narrow, natural surface trails that traverse the varied landscapes of the parkway and connect communities and institutions that surround it. Wooden bridges would cross the stream, and simple signs list distances and destinations.

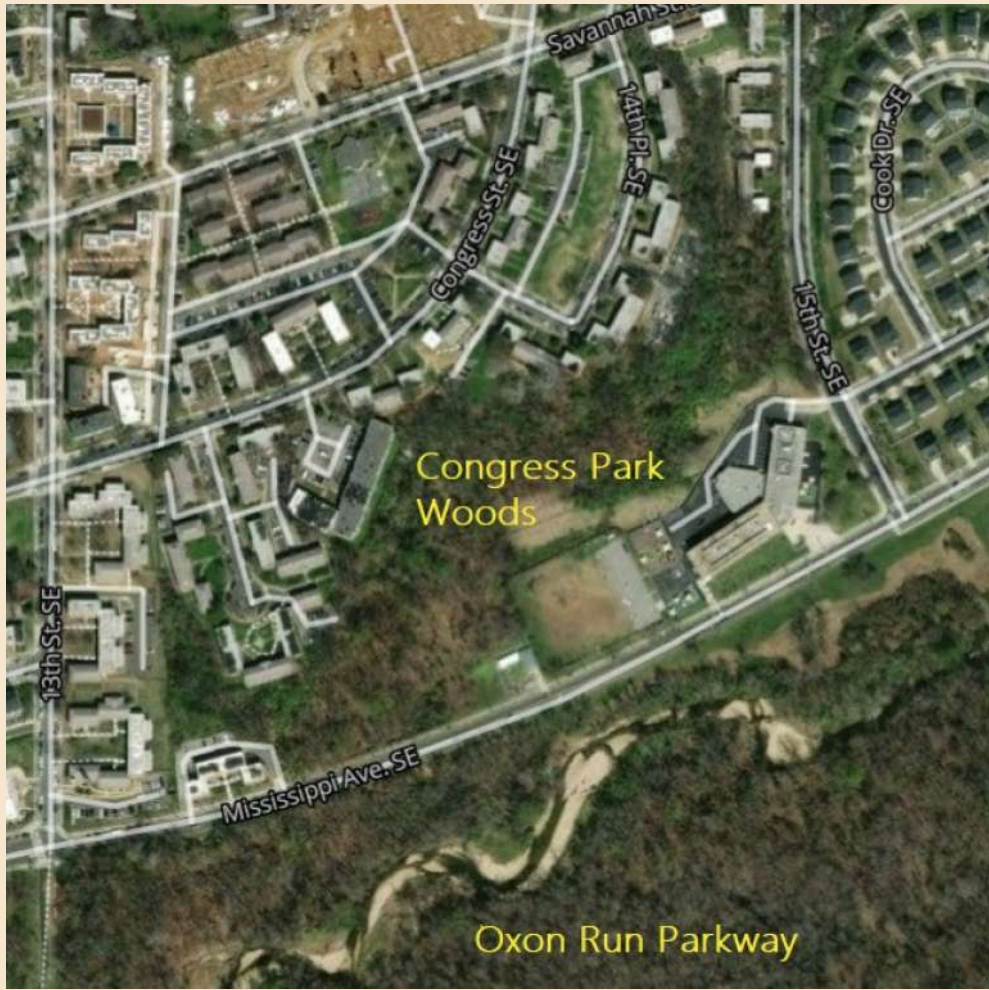


Fig. 6: A satellite map showing the delineation between the Oxon Run Parkway and Congress Park Woods. (Image courtesy of the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy)

APPENDIX IV: AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While the author of this paper did his best to uncover as much as possible about Oxon Run Parkway and Congress Park Woods, there are some things that could not be uncovered in this timer period or with the resources available, and are ripe for further research:

First and foremost, the author of this paper did not have a background in property law and the various terminology used in it, rendering aspects of some land transfer documents incomprehensible and not as useful for research as they could have been. It may be interesting for someone with more background in this area to look into the NCPC's archives and see what they can deduce- they may also know of additional places to start researching land holdings and transfers as well.

Another topic of interest is the construction of the Green Line. It is believed that WMATA chose to run the Green Line underground due to the NPS' insistence that the Parkway land not be disturbed- however, no sources for this information could be found. All and any information on planning and construction of Metro lines through this area would be much appreciated.

Finally, while it is obvious that the Park Service ultimately scrapped their plans to build a road through Oxon Run Parkway, no direct evidence could be found for the cancellation, nor could the reasoning behind the decision be found. Discovering exactly when and why the park was chosen to be used solely for nature preservation and recreation would go a long way in the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy's holistic understanding of this land's history.