



LEESYLVANIA STATE PARK
2001 Daniel K. Ludwig Drive
Woodbridge, VA 22191-4504

Leesylvania State Park

MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2019 UPDATE



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Master Plan
Executive Summary
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Park Purpose Statement

“The purpose of Leesylvania State Park, located near our Nation’s Capital, is to conserve and interpret the park’s natural and cultural resources, including the rich history of the area, while providing opportunity for recreational enjoyment on and along the Potomac River in Northern Virginia.”

Introduction

The Leesylvania State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the master plan document adopted on September 9, 2005, by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Director Joseph H. Maroon. An updated master plan was approved on June 16, 2010, by DCR Director David A. Johnson. This 2019 update was presented at a public meeting on April 19, 2019, then reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on October 7, 2019, and then adopted by DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman on March 9, 2021. The master plan outlines the desired future condition for Leesylvania State Park when it is fully developed. The purpose of this master plan is to meet the requirements of §10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia that requires each state park to have an adopted master plan that is updated every ten years.

Nestled along the shores of the Potomac River, Leesylvania offers many land and water related activities including hiking, picnicking, fishing, and boating. An accessible fishing pier, children’s playground, boat launching facilities, boat storage area, concessions area, and a Visitor Center and Environmental Education Center are available. Leesylvania is an ancestral home of Virginia’s legendary Lee and Fairfax families and is listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

The park is located in the southeastern corner of Prince William County, approximately 25 miles south of Washington, D.C. The park covers 542.5 acres on a peninsula bordered by the Potomac River on the east, Neabsco Creek on the north, and Powells Creek on the south. An area referred to as the Neabsco Community also borders the park on the north. The western boundary of the park consists of land that is currently residential or planned for new homes. The park is cut almost exactly in half by property owned by the CSX railroad, which operates an active railway through the area. Leesylvania has evolved as one of the most popular destinations for water access in Northern Virginia in one of the fastest growing counties in the state.

On March 30, 1978, the Commonwealth of Virginia, through a donation by Daniel K. Ludwig, acquired the Leesylvania tract from the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company. Although there were several state, regional, and local parks in the area, the rapidly increasing population of Northern Virginia, the historical significance of the site, and its access to the Potomac River made Leesylvania State Park an important addition to the State Park system.

The original plan for the park was written in 1982. Leesylvania State Park opened with infrastructure improvements, a boat ramp, picnic area, some trails, and support facilities including the maintenance compound and staff housing. The original plan called for the park to become an intensively developed facility, including a beach and pool, to attract thousands of

visitors from Northern Virginia and the Richmond area as well as throughout the Piedmont region. The developments have, so far, been in accord with the original plan, but at a lower density than was projected in that document. In the late 1990s, several new facilities were added. A large accessible fishing pier was added at Freestone Point and primitive group camps were established at Bushey Point. A boat storage facility with 94 spaces was also built to the west of the boat launch area.

Park Resource Management Plan

The resource management plan consolidates all known resource information for a park and provides management direction for maintaining and enhancing those resources. The plans identify the physical, abiotic, and biotic characteristics of the park, and historic and archaeological resources, as well as a description of the legal constraints and limitations of the property. The park is delineated into undeveloped areas based on the ecosystems found in these areas; unique management areas which are undeveloped areas with a specific purpose or function such as a historic battlefield or open field; and developed areas where park facilities are located yet have natural and cultural resources requiring specific management. The plan has defined management objectives and action recommendations that guide resource management and allow for continuity over time.

Leesylvania is located in the Coastal Plain Physiographic Province. The northeast portion of the park is dominated by the sandstone cliffs of Freestone Point, sloping to the flat southern portion of the park comprised of bottom land hardwoods and tidal wetlands. The land to the west of the railroad is predominantly an oak hickory forest and the least developed. The natural resources of the park have not yet been delineated by ecosystem type. Since the park shoreline is highly susceptible to erosion, a living shoreline was established to the east of the visitor center. This was a county / state collaborative project with plans to expand as funding becomes available.

The cultural resources of the park are quite diverse. There are 12 identified archaeological sites, including prehistoric Native American sites, the historic Lee and Fairfax home sites, and the Freestone Point Confederate Battery site. The former home site of Henry Lee II, father of “Lighthorse Harry Lee”, is on the National Register of Historic Places, as is the Freestone Point Battery.

Park Visitor Experience Plan

The park visitor experience management plan (VEP) is a companion document to the park resource management plan. Together they describe how the Division of State Parks will achieve its dual mission: “To conserve the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources of the Commonwealth (resource management plan) and provide recreational and educational opportunities (visitor experience management plan) consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters, and facilities that leaves them unimpaired for future generations.”

The visitor experience management plan provides a park-wide vision for the future of interpretation, education, recreation and other visitor experience opportunities. The plan addresses all elements of a park that affect visitor experiences, including personal services, media, facilities, and landscapes. It is a conceptual document that lays a foundation for subsequent phases of comprehensive interpretive planning: facility and media planning, design and production; organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans.

The plan consists of three parts; the foundation, the experience areas, and the desired future. The foundation presents information needed to make decisions concerning how visitor experience opportunities will be planned, developed and managed. Each element of this foundation describes an essential criteria that must be considered to create appropriate actions for inclusion in the desired future section of the plan. It identifies essential stories and experiences of the site, specific audience types and their wants, needs, and expectations, interpretive themes (essential messages), issues and influences, goals and objectives as well as park purpose and mission of the agency. Experience areas are drafted as part of the foundation workshop as well. This component of the plan will delineate, map and name geographic visitor experience areas based on distinct resource character and interpretive opportunities. Experience areas may be categorized by resource type or condition, social environment, type and extent of park development, level of management, or kind and density of visitor use. The desired future section of the visitor experience management plan describes the mix of personal service, media, facility, and landscape conditions that can effectively communicate park significance to guests and facilitate established visitor experience objectives. All desired future proposals will be tested against criteria presented in the Foundation section of the visitor experience management plan; future plan recommendations should support most (preferably all) of the foundation criteria.

Planning sessions for Leesylvania State Park were part of the first generation of workshops held. A plan was never drafted. A recent review of the Visitor Center along with visitor feedback show that exhibits need to be refreshed to better speak to a changing demographic of park users. This, combined with new park staff, conservation features, and trails and facilities make a future planning workshop necessary to update action items in the Visitor Experience Plan.

Master Plan

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Planners and State Park Staff conducted this master plan update in accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park during a 30-year planning horizon. As required by the *Code of Virginia*, it must be revisited every ten years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and conservation needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

While preparing the initial 2005 Leesylvania State Park Master Plan, meetings were held with DCR staff and an advisory committee comprised of area citizens, local government officials, and representatives of interested organizations to assist with the development of the plan. The committee helped formulate a park purpose statement as well as park goals and objectives, which will guide future park operations and development. Public input was solicited at the beginning and at the end of the process to ensure that plan recommendations were understood and accepted by the community. Following the development of the master plan, it was recommended for approval by the Board of Conservation and Recreation and then adopted by the DCR Director.

As a part of the 2019 master plan process, the initial 2005 master plan, as well as the 2010 update were reviewed. Planning staff met with park staff and conducted a site visit to the park to gather information for this plan update. A public meeting was held on April 11, 2019. As a part of the process, the park's phased development plan and estimated costs were revised, as were the staffing and operational costs for the park for each phase of development. An updated master plan map and executive summary were also developed for the park.

The draft 2019 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their October 7, 2019 meeting and were recommended for adoption. The documents were then placed on the DCR website for a 30-day review by the Virginia General Assembly. Following that review, the updated plan was presented to the DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman for adoption. Following adoption, the updated executive summary and map were placed online <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/masterplans> for the public to access.

Attendance, Economic Impact and Park Revenues

The following table depicts park attendance during the period 2009 to 2018.

Park Visitation – Leesylvania State Park (Calendar Year¹)

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
401,601	471,478	503,260	535,729	534,028	542,064	594,818	620,977	624,748	510,242

¹Note that the calendar year ends 6 months after the fiscal year.

Leesylvania State Park continues to realize high attendance numbers and the park reaches capacity on many weekends during the prime season. The park provides the only public access to the Potomac River in Prince William County and is a key feature for local and regional outdoor recreation in the area. There was a significant drop in attendance from 2017 to 2018. This may have been weather related, as it was an unusually rainy year, or due to the soft opening of Widewater State Park in Stafford County.

Economic Impact – Leesylvania State Park

Economic activity is created by the park from three sources: Park visitation, the park operating budget (but only to the extent that it was not funded by park visitor revenues in order to avoid double counting), and park construction projects. The following table summarizes this economic activity for 2018:

Total Economic Activity including Visitation, Park Budget, and Construction (Adjusted to local economy)		Visitor Spending	Spending on Park Budget (excluding portion derived from visitation)*	Spending on Park Construction	State and Local Taxes Created
Dollars	Jobs	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
\$ 14.7 million	165.5	\$ 11.3 million	\$ 458 thousand	\$ 15 thousand	\$ 1.0 million

In most parks overnight visitors create the largest amount of economic activity but this park does not have typical park cabins so day visitation accounts for the majority of economic activity. The park is highly visible and accessible in Prince William County. A majority of the 165.5 jobs that are created by the park’s economic activity are local jobs that benefit the local community. It is also notable that this park generates state and local taxes of around \$1.0 million. Master plan recommendations designed to increase visitation and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the region’s economic vitality.

The following table depicts park revenue in fiscal years 2013 to 2019:

Park Revenues - Leesylvania

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
\$510,756	\$551,073	\$587,299	\$603,044	\$636,516	\$612,459	\$552,787

In FY 2019, Virginia State Parks generated \$24,678,607 in total revenue. Leesylvania State Park contributed \$552,787 to the revenue total from parking admission, educational program fees, merchandise sales, building rental, and other sources. Revenue generated by Virginia State Parks is reinvested in the state park system to maintain and operate the parks. In FY 2019, 58 percent of the state park budget came from revenues generated in the parks.

Existing Facilities

Park Office

Visitor Center

Contact Station

Staff Residences (3)

Maintenance Area

Trails 6.5 miles (hiking only – 4 miles; hiking/biking - 2.5 miles)

Amphitheater (100 seats)

Boat Storage Area (93 spaces)

Sailboat Parking - (with 2 cranes)

Motor Boat Parking - (188 spaces)

Playground

Picnic Shelters (4)

Picnic Area

Comfort Stations (2)

Concession Building (attached bathhouse with 2 showers and comfort station)

Group Camp (Large)

Water Trail Group Camp (with 4 individual sites)

Car top boat launch

Canoe Shed

Fishing Pier

Boat Launch (2)

Underground Gas Storage Tank (2)

Archaeological Sites (several)

Cemetery (with no graves)

Connectivity

This 2019 update places value on connecting Leesylvania State Park to other resources in the community. Aside from the Julie J. Metz Neabsco Creek Wetlands Preserve and boardwalk adjacent to the park, the Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge just north of the park, and historic Rippon Lodge and Rippon Landing Park across the wetlands, there are many opportunities to explore Prince William County along the East Coast Greenway and the Potomac Heritage Trail, which connects to the north side of the park at the Neabsco Creek Boardwalk and to the south side of the park at Powell's Creek. The Occoquan River is a designated Virginia Scenic River and also a water trail, supported by boat rentals and access at Occoquan Regional Park. A water trail along the Potomac River, part of four national trails (Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail), is supported by other Potomac state parks that offer canoe-in campgrounds. Other conservation areas with hiking trails located close by include

Prince William Forest Park, Locust Shade Park, and Powell's Landing Park. Leesylvania is listed as a site on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Birding and Wildlife Trail, and can be reached by public transit on weekdays using the Virginia Railway Express Rippon Station. Nearby attractions include the Weems-Botts Museum in the historic Town of Dumfries and the National Museum of the Marine Corp. Leesylvania State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Leesylvania State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1985 and again in 1990 to develop facilities within the park. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain this park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

Americans with Disabilities Act

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection

Additional land acquisition is recommended to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development and/or protect valued viewsheds. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property are encouraged to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes, and scenic resources in close proximity to the park will be encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time.

Environmental Design Guidance

This 2019 master plan update describes both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the original park design and layout of facilities. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views within and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies. Consideration will be given to eliminate excessive, misdirected or obtrusive artificial light in the park in order to maximize the dark sky effect and encourage astronomy and night-sky viewing.

Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Environmental Quality's best management practices for erosion, sediment control and stormwater management in order to protect water quality. A setback guideline of 100 feet from the shoreline has been established by DCR, and trails and water dependent facilities such as fishing stations, piers and other water access facilities will be the only developments permitted within the 100-foot setback.

Special Issue: Carrying Capacity

The park is within a 25-mile radius of Washington, D.C., and in the heart of populous Northern Virginia, which means that concerns about overuse and crowded conditions are likely to increase over time. Maximum acceptable capacities will need to be defined and people turned away, as necessary, to protect the resources and the quality of experience at the park. Several huge housing developments built nearby, also contribute to increased park visitation and heavier local traffic.

The challenges associated with overuse and crowded conditions, may require management actions to protect the resources and the quality of the park experience. Issues related to resource carrying capacity and social carrying capacity should be evaluated prior to developing new facilities.

Phased Development Plan

Proposed developments for the Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list represent total build-out (completion of the master plan), over a 30-year timeframe. The phasing costs are based on 2019 cost estimates.

Phase I:

Reconfigure contact station/park entrance (use technology to control traffic/collect revenue)

Create/extend turning lane on Neabsco Road into park (no estimate provided)

Trailhead parking lot (30 spaces) and comfort station near Powell's Creek Boardwalk

Upgrade trail access parking along main access road and at group camp (24 spaces total)

Upgrade comfort stations (2) in picnic area, add shower stations

Renovate comfort station at concession building

Add storage/office building and 10 parking spaces in maintenance area

Construct elevated observation platform at Freestone Point

Replace large playgrounds (2 to 5 year old and 5 to 12 year old component structures)

Dredge marina

Upgrade pier and dock at Powell's Creek paddle launch

Relocate canoe rental facility, add storage and electric/water

Reconfigure picnic area with expanded picnic pads, 5 covered shelters; gravel road/parking

Improve landscaping to restore the natural appearance of the park

Expand trail system within the park and connect to exterior trail systems

Total Cost of Phase I: \$7,791,764

Phase II:

Staff Residence

Construct comfort station with a single shower station at group camp

Expand park office

Create a discovery play area near visitor center

Improve landscaping to restore the natural appearance of the park

Expand trail system within the park and connect to exterior trail systems

Total Cost of Phase II: \$2,242,654

Phase III:

Construct small amphitheater behind visitor center (100 seats)

Add fish weigh-in station with small office, electricity, holding tank and chute

Develop disc golf course with 10 parking spaces

Expand existing fishing pier

Improve landscaping to restore the natural appearance of the park

Expand trail system within the park and connect to exterior trail systems

Total Cost of Phase III: \$1,823,905

The total cost to bring Leesylvania State Park to its desired future condition is \$11,858,323

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Leesylvania State Park are presently budgeted at \$1,127,000 annually, including salaries and benefits for 7 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 1 additional position and \$90,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 1 additional staff will be needed and an additional \$135,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the existing staffing and operating costs and the projected costs for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Leesylvania at full build out is projected to be \$1,352,000 with 9 staff positions.

LEESYLVANIA OPERATING AND STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

EXISTING (FY 20)	STAFFING MATRIX*	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	FULL BUILD OUT
STAFFING					PARK STAFFING
Park Manager					Park Manager
Asst. Park Manager					Asst. Park Manager
Chief Ranger					Chief Ranger
Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper					Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper
Park Ranger (2)	Park Ranger		Park Ranger		Park Ranger (4)
Office Manager					Office Manager
SALARY TOTAL					SALARY TOTAL
\$658,000	\$90,000		\$90,000		\$838,000
WAGE TOTAL					WAGE TOTAL
\$249,000		\$14,000	\$10,000	\$4,000	\$277,000
OTPS TOTAL					OTPS TOTAL
\$220,000		\$5,000	\$10,000	\$2,000	\$237,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)					TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)
\$1,127,000	\$90,000	\$19,000	\$110,000	\$6,000	\$1,352,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY20 budget projections.

* The state park staffing matrix identifies the staffing complement of a park based on size and resources, number and type of facilities, as well as types of programming and activities. The staffing complement would be re-evaluated with the addition of new facilities.

