



MASON NECK STATE PARK
7301 High Point Road
Lorton, VA 22079-4010

Mason Neck State Park

MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017 UPDATE

Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219



MASON NECK STATE PARK MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017 UPDATE

Presented for review at a public meeting on November 10, 2016, then recommended for adoption by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on January 27, 2017, and then reviewed for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly.

Adopted:

 /S/
Clyde E. Cristman, Director
Department of Conservation
and Recreation

July 21, 2017
Date



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Park Purpose Statement

The purpose of Mason Neck State Park located on the Potomac River, in heavily populated Northern Virginia, is to conserve and interpret the natural and cultural resources and the rich history of the land, while providing low impact recreational opportunities and environmental education experiences, within the framework of the cooperatively managed Mason Neck Peninsula.

Introduction

The original master plan for Mason Neck State Park was completed in 1974, by Meade Palmer, Landscape Architect, Warrenton, Virginia. A revised Mason Neck State Park Master Plan was adopted on February 19, 2004, by Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Director Joseph H. Maroon. A master plan update was approved on June 15, 2010, by DCR Director David A. Johnson. This 2017 executive summary represents the most recent ten-year review described in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. It outlines the desired future condition for Mason Neck State Park when it is fully developed.

Mason Neck State Park is located in the southwest corner of Fairfax County, approximately 20 miles south of Washington, D.C. The park is situated on a peninsula and fronts on three picturesque embayments of the Potomac River. With its close proximity to the nation's capital, Mason Neck State Park often represents Virginia to members of Congress, and the tens of thousands of tourists who visit Washington D.C. from across the country and the globe.

In 1965, the Mason Neck Conservation Committee was formed after two bald eagle nests were spotted at Mason Neck. The committee, concerned about impending development on the peninsula, recommended part of the area to be used as a site for a state park. In August 1967 the Commonwealth of Virginia, with the assistance of matching federal grants, began purchasing land parcels from the Nature Conservancy. Mason Neck State Park opened to the public on April 21, 1985. The park currently consists of 1824.98 acres.

This master plan executive summary includes information from the park's resource management plan and pending visitor experience plan, as well as information on park revenues and economic activity. This information guides the future of the park's development and management.

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. 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.

Mason Neck State Park is located in the Coastal Plain physiographic province. The park is comprised of hardwood forest and wetland ecosystems. The predominant ecosystem is Oak, Beech, Hickory Forest with smaller areas of Oak Beech / Heath Forest. The most sensitive ecosystem is the Coastal Depression Wetland. There are also areas of Freshwater Forested Shrub Wetland, Tidewater Fresh Marsh and Acidic Seepage Swamp. These natural communities support a broad range of wildlife and migratory birds. While the bald eagle is no longer a listed species, the park and surrounding area continue to provide critical habitat to support the resident eagle population.

The park has cultural significance with 2 sites on the state and national register of historic places as well as approximately 30 other identified archaeological sites. The Taft archaeological site was listed in 2004 on the national register. The site is a prehistoric and possibly proto-historic Native American camp dating between ca. 2000 B.C. and 1560 A.D. The Lexington site was listed on the state register in June 2009 and the national register in May 2013. The Lexington Plantation was built in 1775 and survived until it burned in 1879. It was originally the home of George Mason V built for him by his father George Mason IV of Gunston Hall.

Park Visitor Experience Plan

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; and organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans.

The visitor experience plan for Mason Neck State Park has not been developed as of the 2017 master plan update. Once developed, both primary and secondary themes will be identified. A primary theme encompasses the overall park story. It is the single most important message all park guests should receive and remember. Secondary themes are important messages related to the primary theme that should be presented to park guests. Any other sub-themes and topics that may be interpreted at the park should be linked to these secondary themes.

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*. 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. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park over a 30-year planning horizon.

While preparing the original 2004 Mason Neck State Park Master Plan, meetings were held with DCR staff and an advisory committee comprised of area citizens, local government officials, and representatives of stakeholder 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. DCR staff conducted two public meetings to solicit input from the general public. 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 2017 master plan process, the original 2004 master plan and 2010 park master plan 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 November 10, 2016 to share the draft plan and receive public input.

Following the public meeting, the phased development plan and estimated costs were revised, as were the staffing and operational costs for the park for each phase of development. The final draft of the executive summary and map were developed.

The draft 2017 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their January 27, 2017 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

Attendance at the park during the past ten years is shown in the following chart:\

Park Visitation – Mason Neck (Calendar Year¹)

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
86,240	73,288	94,938	88,996	93,012	87,536	108,620	117,148	115,280	118,075

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

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 2015:

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
\$ 3,020,135	32.2	\$ 1,668,796	\$ 911,094	\$ -	\$ 177,399

This park generates virtually all economic activity from day use visitation. A majority of the 32.2 jobs that are created by the park's economic activity are local jobs that benefit the local nearby community. It is also notable that this park generates substantial state and local taxes to support the portion of the park budget that is not derived from visitor revenues. 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

Park Revenues - Mason Neck

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
\$76,204	\$70,756	\$70,006	\$73,196	\$88,341	\$92,396	\$119,045	\$119,041	\$118,989

In FY 2016, Virginia State Parks generated \$21,233,340 in total revenue, \$11,138,230 from overnight facilities, and \$10,095,110 from other sources. Mason Neck State Park contributed \$118,989 to the revenue total, \$594 in overnight revenue and \$118,395 from other sources. Revenue generated by Virginia State Parks is reinvested in the state park system to maintain and operate the parks. In FY 2016, 48% of the state park budget came from revenues generated in the parks.

Existing Facilities

Visitor center and administrative complex
Contact station
Environmental education/multipurpose center with support structures (to be renovated)
Picnic area, comfort station and parking
Playground
Canoe launch
Boat storage
10 Trails (including 3 mile multi-use trail) (9.5 miles total)
Staff Residences (2)
Lexington historic site
Maintenance area (pole shed, fuel shed and shop)
Park infrastructure: roads, water system, waste water system, utilities and erosion control measures.

Connectivity

This 2017 update focuses on connecting Mason Neck to other resources in the community. Nearby public lands include the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Gunston Hall Museum Estate, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area, Mason Neck West Park and Old Colchester Park and Preserve. A short drive leads to George Washington's Mount Vernon, Woodlawn Plantation, Millhouse Museum, Workhouse Arts Center, Pohick Episcopal Church, Gum Springs Historical Society and Museum or the Collingwood Library and Museum on Americanism. The Potomac Heritage Trail passes through the park and connects to nearby managed lands; other trails in close proximity to the park include the Mount Vernon Trail, Fairfax Cross County Trail, Ox Road side-path, Bull Run/Occoquan Trail and extensive trail systems at Prince William Forest Park and the Burke Center Conservancy. Mason Neck State Park is listed as a site on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Birding and Wildlife Trail, the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. The Occoquan River, which empties into Belmont Bay beside the park, is both a state scenic river and a water trail. Route 611 is a scenic road in close proximity to the park. The Mason Neck State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

The Virginia Outdoor Plan (VOP) identifies land conservation and outdoor recreation resources. The VOP Mapper <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/vopmapper> identifies these resources both within and around state parks to encourage cross promotion, physical links and other collaborative efforts. The mapper is updated on an annual basis.

Cooperative Relationships on the Mason Neck Peninsula

The Mason Neck State Park shares its location on the Mason Neck peninsula with five other governmental organizations that own and manage land on the Mason Neck Peninsula.

- The Commonwealth of Virginia's historic Gunston Hall
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge

- The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Eastern States Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area
- Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority's Pohick Bay Regional Park
- Fairfax County's Mason Neck West Park

Mason Neck State Park and these five other facilities collectively offer visitors an exceptionally wide array of recreation and open lands enjoyment including:

- Historic buildings and American history
- Powered and non-powered boating
- Hiking and horseback riding
- Paved bicycle and non-paved mountain bike trails
- Swimming, golf and miniature golf
- Picnic areas and playgrounds
- Tennis courts and ballfields
- Camping and overnight cabins, and RV accommodations
- Close viewing of hundreds of species of birds including Bald Eagles and thousands of migrating shore birds.

The Mason Neck State Park managers established many years ago, and to this day maintain, a unique cooperative arrangement with their federal State and regional management counterparts meeting on a routine basis to ensure their efforts are directed at cooperative rather than competitive programs. All participate in the park's annual Eagle Festival and they share chairs, tables and other resources to assist each other with public events.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Mason Neck State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1966 for acquisition and in 1979 for the Nature Center Complex. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards.

Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection

Parcels of private land along the boundary of the park may be available for acquisition in the future. However, any additional land acquisition is recommended to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development or protect valued viewsheds. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property 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 2017 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 design and layout of facilities. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views in the park and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies to the greatest extent possible. 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.

There are potential challenges of overuse and crowded conditions, which 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.

Special Issue: Impacts from Storm Surge and Sea Level Rise

Recurrent flooding is a threat to state parks in low lying coastal areas including the Chesapeake Bay, Albemarle-Pamlico Sound and their tidal tributaries. Some low-lying areas will have more frequent flooding, and very low-lying land could be submerged completely. Recurrent flooding can also harm important coastal ecosystems and cause additional shoreline erosion. Sea level rise and storm surge are important factors to consider when designing, locating and constructing new facilities, and in the decision to renovate existing facilities. The data used for mapping is based on information provided by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and assumes a 1.5 foot rise in sea level and a 4.5 foot storm surge in the next 30 to 50 years. Based on these projections, the master plan map indicates flooded areas within the park boundaries.

Draft Phased Development Plan

Proposed developments for the Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the master plan), and covers a 30-year timeframe. Estimates are based on 2017 cost figures.

Phase I

Enhance picnic area, construct two large shelters with comfort station
Connect to county water system
Protect and interpret Lexington historic site
Develop an environmental education center/ multi-purpose with existing structures
Improve environmental education/multipurpose center access road (using pull-outs)
Canoe-in campsites (4)
Construct structure for concessions and bike/boat rental at boat storage building site
Demo greenhouse
Improve and expand park trail system including on-road bike facilities
Shoreline erosion control measures (living shoreline)
Place utility wires underground

The estimated cost to complete Phase I is: \$34,462,165 \$

Phase II

Picnic area parking lot expansion and resurfacing
Improve and expand park trail system including renovation of Bay View Trail boardwalks
Contact Station
Staff residence
Redesign entrance to park visitor center with courtyard and improvements to building interior.
Add pole shed and additional bay at maintenance area
Shoreline erosion control measures (living shoreline)
Place utility wires underground

The estimated cost to complete Phase II is \$3,129, 835

The total cost to bring Mason Neck State Park to its desired future condition is \$37,592,000.

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Mason Neck State Park are presently budgeted at \$612,000 annually, including salaries for 5 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 6 additional positions and \$377,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 2 phases of development, 2 additional staff will be needed and an additional \$258,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park will require the projected staffing and operating cost identified as “existing additional needs” and the costs for the 2 development phases. The total budget for Mason Neck at full build out is projected to be \$1,247,000 with 13 staff positions.

MASON NECK OPERATING AND STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

EXISTING (FY 17)	EXISTING ADDITIONAL NEEDS**	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	FULL BUILD OUT
STAFFING				STAFFING
Park Manager				Park Manager
Asst. Park Mgr.				Asst. Park Mgr.
Chief Ranger				Chief Ranger
	Educ. Specialist (3)	Ed Specialist		Educ. Specialist (4)
Park Ranger	Park Ranger (3)	Park Ranger		Park Ranger (5)
Program Support Tech.				Program Support Tech.
SALARY TOTAL*				SALARY TOTAL
\$333,000	\$344,000	\$115,000		\$792,000
WAGE TOTAL				WAGE TOTAL
\$145,000	\$33,000	\$34,000	\$17,000	\$229,000
OTPS TOTAL				OTPS TOTAL
\$134,000		\$76,000	\$16,000	\$226,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY17 dollars)				TOTAL BUDGET (FY17 dollars)
\$612,000	\$377,000	\$225,000	\$33,000	\$1,247,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY17 budget projections.

* Salary estimates include associated personnel costs.

** Existing additional needs represents staff positions and operating costs not fully funded due to prior state wide budget reductions.

LEGEND

- PROPOSED FACILITIES
- EXISTING FACILITIES
- PARK PROPERTY
- PARK BOUNDARY
- WATER
- ~ TREE LINE
- EXISTING ROAD
- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- HIKING TRAILS
- 100' RPA SETBACK
- SEA LEVEL RISE (1.5 FEET)
- STORM SURGE (4.5 FEET)



MASTER PLAN FOR MASON NECK STATE PARK

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
 DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
 DIVISION OF PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES
 PREPARED BY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

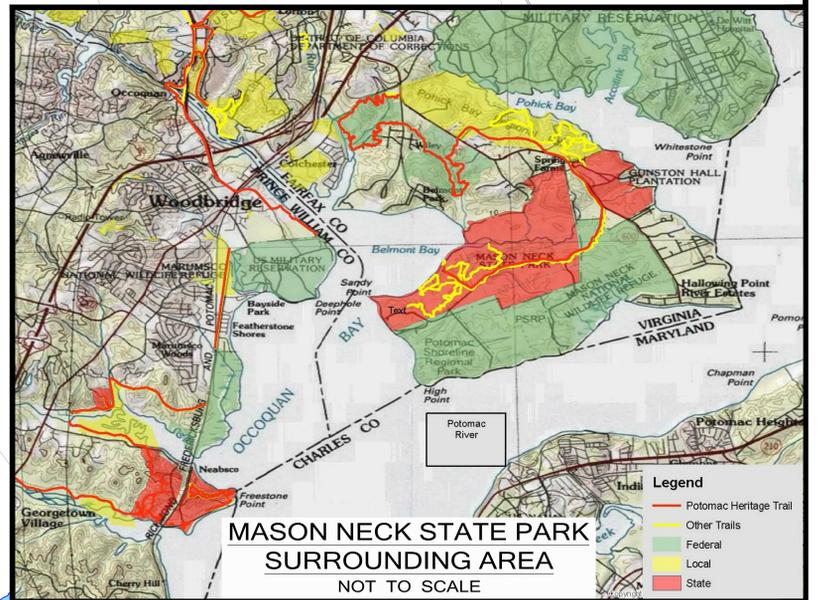
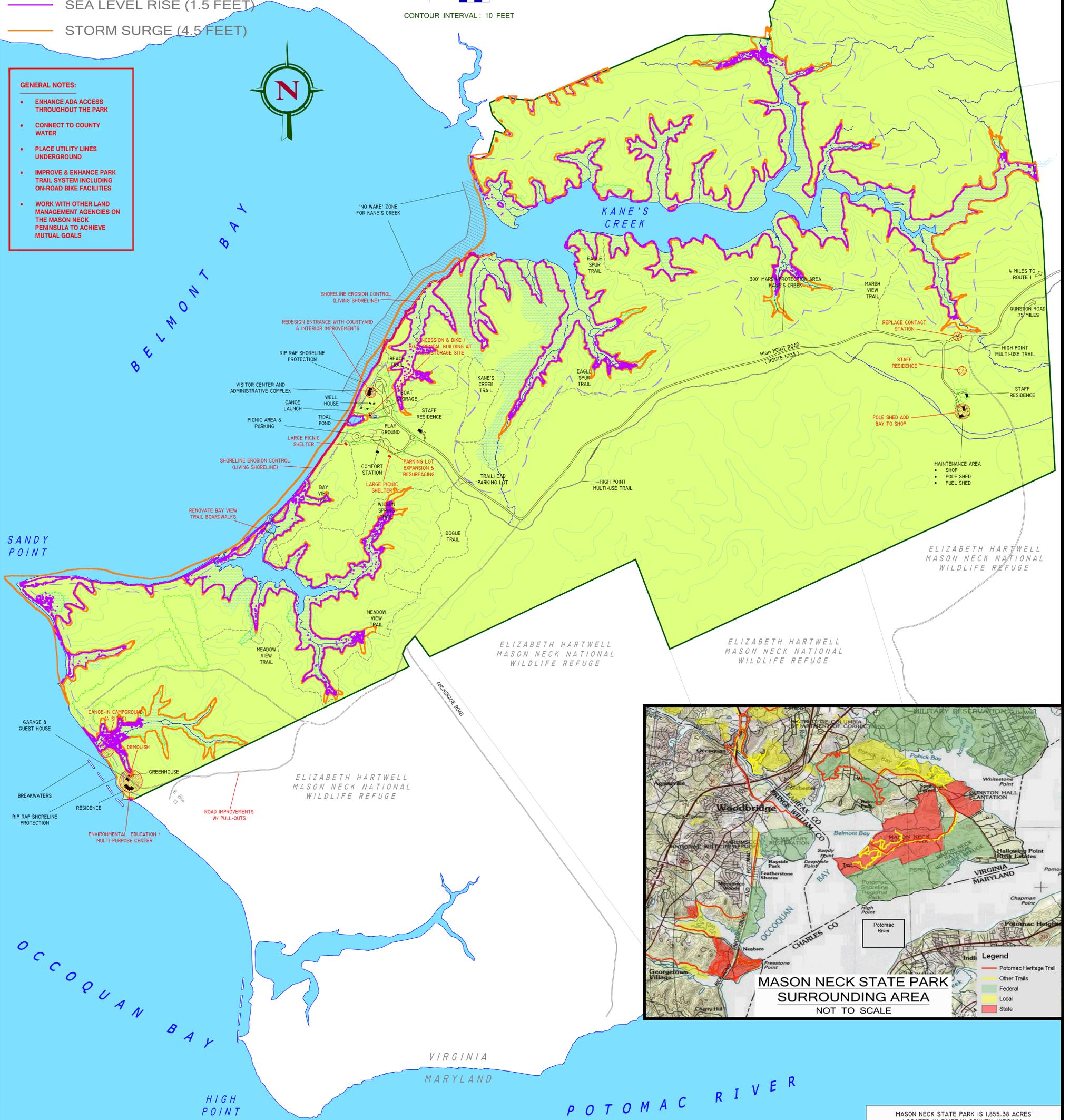
JULY 2017



CONTOUR INTERVAL: 10 FEET

GENERAL NOTES:

- ENHANCE ADA ACCESS THROUGHOUT THE PARK
- CONNECT TO COUNTY WATER
- PLACE UTILITY LINES UNDERGROUND
- IMPROVE & ENHANCE PARK TRAIL SYSTEM INCLUDING ON-ROAD BIKE FACILITIES
- WORK WITH OTHER LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES ON THE MASON NECK PENINSULA TO ACHIEVE MUTUAL GOALS



MASON NECK STATE PARK IS 1,855.38 ACRES LOCATED IN FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA.