

# **INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS**

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**Prince William Forest Park  
Virginia**

**1989**

**INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS**

**PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK  
VIRGINIA**

**PREPARED BY  
DIVISION OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING  
HARPERS FERRY CENTER**

**APRIL 1989**

**(Approved by Acting Regional  
Director, Ronald N. Wrye,  
National Capital Region, by  
memorandum of March 24, 1989)**

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## INTRODUCTION

Every unit of the National Park System is a creation of its time, a product of Hugo's concept that "Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come." The idea for Prince William Forest Park had three sources--political, economic, and geographic.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first election to the presidency occurred in 1932, during the depths of our nation's greatest depression. Roosevelt's campaign evolved out of his promise for a "New Deal," a program designed to promote economic recovery and social reform. High on his New Deal agenda was the creation of jobs to ease the nation's widespread unemployment problem, which was especially severe among America's youth.

The Emergency Work Conservation program (EWC), which later became the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), was established with two goals in mind--to provide employment for America's youth, and to reclaim degraded, unproductive land. Implementation of the program was linked to the identification of land considered unsuitable for farming and located near congested urban populations. A nationwide total of 46 Recreation Demonstration Areas were established under this program, including the Chopawamsic RDA, which eventually became Prince William Forest Park. All of these RDAs were administered by the National Park Service.

All but two of the RDAs were eventually transferred to the states in which they were located. The exceptions are Prince William Forest Park and Catoctin Mountain Park, which were retained within the National Park System because of their geographic proximity to Washington, D.C. Thus in the 1930s the forces of politics, economics and geography converged at a place near Dumfries, Virginia to create what would become Prince William Forest Park.

The park's early human history is a great deal older and much less certain, extending perhaps beyond 8,000 B.C. Because scant evidence has been found in the park, the prehistoric record

is sketchy. To further complicate matters, post-contact human activity in the Quantico Creek/Chopowamsic Creek drainages has greatly obscured evidence that probably did exist.

Nevertheless, archeologists have offered some valuable insights. It is estimated that in 10,000 B.C. the Atlantic shoreline extended about 47 miles east of its present location, and Chesapeake Bay did not exist. This places the park area much farther inland than is now the case, and, in terms of human activity, far from prehistoric population centers, which would have been located near the shore where shellfish and waterfowl resources were abundant.

These conditions prevailed until about 1,000 B.C. when the slowly rising sea formed Chesapeake Bay and brought the shoreline to its approximate present location. In the process of rising, the sea would have inundated earlier shoreline sites of human activity. It is believed that Native American activity in the park area increased as the shoreline gradually moved westward.

European exploration of the park area began in the early seventeenth century, but there are no known records that describe the Anglo-Indian contact during that period. It is believed that Captain John Smith and Giles Brent were two of the earliest explorers.

By the second decade of the eighteenth century much of the Piedmont and most of the tidewater were cleared for tobacco cultivation, creating a tobacco plantation society that persisted until the close of the century.

During the early plantation years the soil yielded large profits for wealthy, nonresident landowners. But their tenant farmers, concentrating on tobacco and cotton cultivation, rapidly mined the soil's nutrients. As tobacco profits shrank, resident farmers turned to other pursuits such as logging and growing vegetable crops, further reducing the land's protective forest cover. Cleared of trees and depleted of nutrients, the soil could not resist northern Virginia's occasional torrential rains. It simply washed

away, ruining not only the farms, but also silting in the Port of Dumfries on which the market depended. This activity would also have disturbed archeological remains, deflating upland sites and burying sites along watercourses and in marshy areas.

By the early 1900s only a few farmers remained, and even they could not make a living solely off the impoverished land. To survive, most of them sought work in mining or other local industries. Closing of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine in 1920 was perhaps the final economic blow. The majority of people moved away, leaving behind abandoned farms and infertile soil.

It must be noted that the government's view of the remaining farmers as "bound to the merest existence level" and unable to "maintain themselves as self-sustaining citizens" was in sharp contrast to the farmers' self-image. Although they had few luxuries, these people did not view themselves as being impoverished. Growing most of their own food and working for cash when opportunities arose, these remaining farmers considered themselves to be productive, self-sufficient citizens. Indeed, their sparse but self-subsistent lifestyle undoubtedly provided a more fulfilling life than many urban dwellers of the period experienced.

It should also be noted that there were some deplorable results from the government's land purchasing program. Many families, including some who had lived on the land for generations, did not possess a clear title to their property. These people were simply dispossessed, usually with little or no compensation. In other instances it appears that compensation was not fairly distributed.

In any event, by the early 1930s the park lands were cut over and eroded, clearly showing the cumulative effects of three centuries of exploitation.

But given an opportunity, the natural world has tremendous powers to heal itself. President Roosevelt's establishment of the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area in

1933 provided just such an opportunity. Within three years the Civilian Conservation Corps had constructed five large cabin camps, built three dams, established hiking trails, and completed other work to reclaim the land for recreational use. In 1940 the area was transferred to the National Park Service. By that time a vigorous new forest was emerging from the land.

For more than fifty years the park has provided high quality park experiences to its visitor clientele. In contrast to household name parks such as nearby Shenandoah, Prince William has never attracted large national and international interest. Nevertheless, it has drawn an extremely broad spectrum of use from the northern Virginia/Washington, D.C. region. Its visitors have come from virtually every segment of that society.

In that respect, Prince William Forest Park is a forerunner of today's great urban areas such as Gateway and Santa Monica Mountains.

Although the area will continue its role of serving regional park needs, it is not adequately equipped to offer comprehensive interpretation of its outstanding natural and cultural resources. The value of these resources will surely increase as the Washington metropolitan area continues its southward sprawl.

The purpose of this Interpretive Prospectus is to formulate the interpretive media developments needed to assist the park staff in informing the visiting public of Prince William Forest Park's major natural and cultural resources--what these resources are, their significance, and how to non-consumptively use them.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### The Resources:

Prince William Forest Park encompasses some 16,000 acres of deciduous hardwood forest. It is a remnant of the vast woodland that formerly extended from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. Today these woods constitute the largest area of Piedmont forest within the National Park System.

Additionally, almost all of the Quantico Creek watershed is preserved in federal ownership. This watershed is highly significant within and beyond park boundaries. Quantico Creek is a tributary of the Potomac River which, in turn, flows into the Chesapeake Bay, the preservation of which is a high priority initiative of the federal government and the Bay's bordering states. Thus, with its rich flora and fauna, and its associated hydrological and geological features, Prince William's Piedmont forest represents the park's most important natural resource.

From a cultural perspective these woodlands offer much more. Instead of a homogeneous mixture of hardwoods, the park woodlands are a mosaic that reflect not only ecological boundaries, but centuries of human use as well. Pure stands of pine, representing the initial invasion of tree species onto formerly clear land, sharply mark the boundaries of old farm fields. In some localities the ground beneath such pine stands still retain long rows of plow furrows. Other areas feature mixed pine/hardwood stands, representing a later stage of plant succession on abandoned farm fields.

Other, smaller elements in this biocultural mosaic include areas that are regularly mowed, expanses of open water (manmade and beaver dams), and at least one virtually barren area (the result of mining pyrite). These kinds of areas offer much to interpret in terms of the land's cultural heritage. Additionally, archeological surveys have confirmed that evidence of prehistoric Native Americans exists within the park.



Visitor use resources and facilities are varied and abundant, although some improvements are needed. Park visitors can choose from a full menu of activities, including camping (cabin camp, campground, and recreational vehicle), picnicking, hiking, bicycling, fishing, jogging, and a wide range of interpretive program options.

#### **The Visitors:**

Diversity is the key element for describing Prince William's visitor population--diversity in age, in socio-economic levels, in interests, and in geographic origin. From its beginning the park was designed for and has traditionally served an extraordinarily broad spectrum of visitors.

Many come as part of special permit groups from organizations as diverse as the Salvation Army, Boy and Girl Scouts of America, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Campfire, Inc., and various civic, business and church groups. Others are more typical park users, such as families, peer groups, and singles. Nearby Quantico Marine Base, with its constantly changing, highly mobile resident population, also contributes much to the park's visitor diversity.

About one-half million visitors annually come to Prince William. Seasonal distribution is typical of many NPS areas, with the heaviest use occurring from April through October.

#### **Summary of Media Problems and Needs:**

The most critical interpretive facility need at Prince William is for a well equipped visitor center, located near the main park entrance. This prospectus, in concert with the park's Draft General Management Plan, outlines media and space needs for the visitor center.

The park staff frequently obtains requests for loan materials on Prince William from area educational institutions, as well as for the park's participation in various community functions. In terms of interpretive media, the park is not prepared to meet these demands. This plan recommends a variety of outreach media for that purpose.

Although the park has a well developed trail system, visitors are not provided with adequate trail orientation. This plan proposes a system of trailhead orientation exhibits.

The cabin camps need a better means of providing information and media interpretation to organized groups.

Although some information is posted on bulletin boards, campgrounds and picnic areas throughout the park do not offer sufficient park information/orientation to users of those facilities.

Prince William Forest Park has a variety of natural and cultural features that deserve a share of interpretive emphasis. A modest list of interpretive wayside exhibits is included in the plan to meet those needs.

The Travel Trailer Village has no facility for presenting personal services programs. It should be noted that the park's General Management Plan proposes a study of this facility to evaluate the need for it.

The park staff has produced several site bulletins on natural and cultural history themes. Additional site bulletin needs are discussed in the plan.

**MANAGEMENT      OBJECTIVES      INFLUENCING  
INTERPRETATION**

The following management objectives, from the park's current Statement for Management, provide sound guidelines for Prince William's interpretive operations.

- To strive through all available means to preserve and protect the entire watershed of the Quantico Creek to ensure the protection of water quality and native flora and fauna.
- To make available appropriate opportunities for public recreation at a high level of safety to meet needs of a diverse visitor population in locations and at levels which ensure the long-term preservation and protection of park resources. Special emphasis for recreation will be placed on the young, handicapped, aged, and minority populations.
- To promote public awareness and understanding of the land use history of the Quantico Creek watershed, and to encourage the protection and management of the watershed through an understanding of the effects of the misuse of resources.
- To survey, identify and evaluate the prehistoric and historic cultural resources of the park in order to insure their proper management in accordance with public legislation, executive orders, and the Service's administrative policies.
- To develop a multifaceted interpretive program to tell the natural and historic stories of the park with special emphasis on programs for special populations.
- To actively identify, preserve and protect the habitat of all endangered or threatened species that occur in or utilize the park for feeding or nesting.

## **INTERPRETIVE THEMES**

The following known and potential interpretive themes have been identified for the park.

### **Cultural History:**

- Native Americans
- Colonial settlement/early land uses
- The Civil War  
No major Civil War activities are known to have occurred within the existing park boundary, but the war had various effects on the park and the local population.
- Subsistence farming/lumbering/mining
- Development of interracial communities  
This theme requires additional research.
- The Civilian Conservation Corps  
Reclamation of a depleted land.
- Military  
The U.S. Army Office of Strategic Service "occupied" the park from 1942 through 1945. Possibly due to its sensitive nature, the park has very little information on this activity.
- Early park years

### **Natural History:**

- The Piedmont forest  
Its flora, fauna and protection of its watershed
- Geology  
Physical features/the fall line

### **Other:**

- The identity of Prince William Forest Park as a unit of the National Park System

## THE PLAN

### Visitor Center:

The park staff has started the process of converting the former headquarters into a full-service visitor center. Alterations will continue to be made as funding becomes available.

Visitor Center functions include park orientation/information, interpretation of major themes, Parks and History Association sales, and permit distribution for group camping. Optimal space requirements include the following.

- Lobby  
Large enough to accommodate 100 visitors.
- Association sales area  
Located to one side of the main exhibit area.
- Exhibit room  
Approximately 1,000 square feet
- Theater  
Seating for 100-150 is needed. The theater should be equipped to handle the full range of program formats including sound/slide and motion picture presentations, plus live programs. This will require installation of a projection booth.
- Group activities room  
A substantial space for accommodating large groups is needed, with a capacity of up to 175. This space should be designed for motion picture and slide presentations.
- Office space for
  - . fee collection
  - . the Interpretive Specialist
  - . the permanent interpretive staff
  - . seasonal/VIP staff

- Library/archives  
Need approximately 300-400 square feet.
- Sales inventory storage  
This should be a windowless room with one interior access door, located near the sales area.  
About 200 square feet are needed.
- Curatorial storage area  
Need approximately 750 square feet.

Visitor Center media proposals are as follows.

### Audiovisuals

Two new audiovisual programs are recommended.

- Plan/produce a 10-12 minute sound/slide presentation that offers a comprehensive orientation to the park's cultural and natural resources, and to its visitor opportunities. This program should offer visitors the information needed for trip planning purposes.
- Plan/produce a 15-18 minute film. This presentation should interpret the park area's evolution from a virgin forest into an eroded, cut over land, and culminate with its reforestation into a healthy Piedmont forest. Key periods during this evolutionary process include the pre-seventeenth century when prehistoric Native Americans probably used the area for hunting and food gathering, the post-contact period of European exploration and settlement, the development of a tobacco plantation society, the emergence of a more diversified agriculture when the land reached its maximum degradation, establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area (including their reclamation efforts), and the establishment of the park, including present day resources management activities. Essentially, this film is to be the story of a major conservation success.

### Museum Exhibits

Museum exhibits will be used to provide interpretation of the park's major natural and cultural history resources, and to sensitize and inform visitors about how to non-consumptively use them. Suggested exhibit themes include the following.

- The Piedmont Forest  
What exactly is a Piedmont forest/how does it differ from other kinds of woodlands?
- Overview of park wildlife  
Birds/mammals/reptiles/amphibians/  
microfauna  
Ecological relationships
- Park flora  
Distribution of vegetation in relation to habitats/rare and endangered species
- The park as a reservoir of biological diversity
- Human activity in the park area
  - . Native Americans
  - . Early settlement/the development of agriculture
  - . Mining/lumbering/subsistence farming
  - . The Civilian Conservation Corps/land reclamation
  - . Establishment of the park as a unit of the National Park System
- Geology of the park/the fall line

### **Wayside Exhibits:**

Two categories of wayside exhibits are needed at Prince William. Orientation waysides will be used at selected locations to provide parkwide and site specific information/orientation. Interpretive waysides will be used to interpret various themes related to the park's natural and cultural history. Specific recommendations for both types are as follows.

### Orientation Wayside Exhibits

Orientation wayside shelters or kiosks are proposed for the five cabin camps, the Travel Trailer Village, Turkey Run group campground, Oak Ridge Campground, the entrance road to the Chopawamsic Backcountry Area, the park's three picnic areas (Pine Grove, Telegraph Road, and Carters Day Camp), and the visitor center (to provide after hours orientation). Content of all these would be similar, and include the following.

- Parkwide map containing the same information that is featured on the park brochure map
- A large scale, site specific map of the immediate area served by the wayside shelter. Content of these maps will vary according to the area in which they are placed.
- A panel featuring safety information and selected park rules and regulations
- A bulletin board for posting information of a changeable nature

Additionally, trailhead orientation waysides are proposed for all major trailheads throughout the park. The planning team endorses replacing the present numbered trail identifiers with names that are based on related historic or natural resources. Content of the trailhead waysides is as follows.

- A detailed trail map, including any connecting routes
- Information on each trail's level of difficulty, length and hiking time, special features (ecological/historical) along the trail routes, safety concerns, and applicable rules and regulations



## Interpretive Wayside Exhibits

Locations and themes of interpretive waysides are as follows.

<u>Location/s</u>	<u>Content</u>
Taylor farm	Interpretation of extant cultural remains related to early 20th century farming
To be selected (a site offering a view of the fall line)	Explanation of the "fall line", a major geologic boundary between the Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Piedmont
Pyrite mine	Interpretation of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine and its ecological effects on the site
Cemetery near Oak Ridge Campground	Relationship of the cemetery to early residents in the western region of the park
Telegraph Road	Significance of this 18th century transportation route, one of the park's oldest cultural remains
Various (to be selected)	General information on the wildlife of Prince William Forest Park
Cabin Camp 3	Interpretation of Civilian Conservation Corps construction
Wooden bridge near lot "A"	Interpretation of Civilian Conservation Corps construction

<u>Location/s</u>	<u>Content</u>
Carter Pond (a handicapped-accessible area)	Aquatic fauna and flora
Davis farm (lot "E")	Early farming
Various	Beaver ecology. These waysides are to be designed for portability, enabling them to be located at existing and future dam sites.

#### **Outreach Media:**

Because of heavy involvement with organized groups, both within and outside the park, there are needs for outreach media and some supporting hardware. The following projects, some to be accomplished by the local staff, are recommended:

- Produce pre-visit kits for distribution to organized groups prior to their arrival in the park. Examples of items to include are park orientation materials, outlines of in-park activities appropriate for organized groups, suggestions on park improvement projects for groups (e.g., removing litter along a lake front or on a trail), information on minimum impact camping, etc. It would be beneficial to design different kits for various age levels. This project would be accomplished by the park staff.
- Produce, in videotape format, copies of all Prince William Forest Park audiovisual presentations, especially the two new programs (ref. p. 11). Make these videotapes available for loan to interested groups.

- Equip each of the five cabin camps with a videotape player and monitor, for use in a variety of interpretive activities. These should be securely installed in each cabin camp's dining hall.
- Equip the park staff with a VCR and video camera. This will enable the staff to create audiovisual presentations tailored to specific groups.

**Publications:**

The local agency of the Parks and History Association offers a nice selection of general publications such as natural history field guides, the The Story Behind the Scenery series of other NPS areas, and several items principally for children. The best publication written specifically about the park is a small "workbook" titled Discovering Prince William Forest. It is now out of print, and should be reprinted. As in most NPS areas Prince William's visitors would gain benefits from an official park handbook.

The planning team recommends that the following list of site bulletins, based on the unigrid system, be produced by the staff.

- Disability guide to park facilities and programs
- Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine
- Chopawamsic Backcountry Area
- Beavers
- The Civilian Conservation Corps in Prince William
- Farming history
- Fishing regulations
- Travel Trailer Village

### **New Interpretive Facilities:**

Recommendations on space requirements for the new Prince William Forest Park visitor center are contained in an earlier section of this prospectus (ref. pp. 10-11). Two additional interpretive facility needs were identified during the planning process.

The park staff has no place to offer campfire programs to users of the Travel Trailer Village (TTV). Because of its isolation from the park's primary activity centers, many TTV campers depart without realizing that they have been in a National Park Service area. To help remedy that unfortunate situation, it is recommended that the TTV concessioner develop an informal campfire circle nearby. The planning team located a site on the western perimeter of the TTV that would perhaps be suitable. This should be done only if the TTV is retained in the park.

A related problem involves the lack of any hiking trail connection between the TTV and the park's extensive trail system, further isolating TTV campers. It is recommended that such a trail route be developed, perhaps connecting with the existing "T-7" trail. Another alternative is to extend a trail along the North Branch of Quantico Creek, with connectors to the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine and the Farms to Forest Nature Trail.

### **Special Populations:**

Prince William Forest Park's management objectives (ref. p. 8) place special emphasis on special populations accessibility to park facilities and programs. Perhaps because of its long association with a wide range of special populations, the park is better equipped for accessibility than most other areas.

Virtually all cabin camp use has served various segments of special populations, including children, minorities, the mentally disabled, and the economically disadvantaged. The Travel Trailer Village has sites and restrooms that are accessible to the mobility

impaired. The Pine Grove Forest Trail is paved for wheelchair or stroller access, and its six wayside exhibits feature audio narrations that serve both sighted and sight impaired visitors.

In continuation of that policy, the majority of interpretive media developments proposed in this prospectus will be designed for full accessibility. Specific actions will include, but not be limited to the following.

- The sound tracks of all regularly offered audiovisual presentations will be made available in printed form for use by the hearing impaired.
- The two new audiovisual programs will include closed captioning capability.
- All public use spaces in the new visitor center will be accessible to the mobility impaired, including wheelchair slots in the theater.
- Audio descriptions of exhibit elements will be included where appropriate.
- Videotape versions of films and slide programs will be provided for loan purposes.

**OUTLINE OF MEDIA AND GROSS COST ESTIMATES**

(A = audiovisuals, E = museum exhibits, W = wayside exhibits)

<u>Media Proposal</u>	<u>Plan</u>	<u>Produce</u>	<u>Equipment</u>
(E) Plan/produce museum exhibits (ref. pp. 10-12)	(51) 68,000	(52) 225,000	
(E) Design lobby space and plan/produce decor and furnishings (ref. p. 10)	(51) 40,000	(52) 150,000	
(E) Prepare exhibit artifacts		(53) 24,000	
(A) Plan/produce sound/slide program (ref. p. 11)	(61) 8,000	(62) 45,000	
(A) Plan/produce 15-18 min. film (ref. p. 11)	(61) 15,000	(62) 120,000	
(A) Install and equip projection booth (ref. p. 10)			(63) 57,000
(A) Install VCRs and monitors in 5 cabin camps (ref. p. 16)			(63) 12,400
(A) provide 1/2 inch camcorder (ref. p. 16)			(63) 1,300
(W) Plan/produce	(55)	(55)	
* 13 3-paneled orientation waysides	30,000	150,000	
* ca. 13 1-paneled trailhead orientation waysides			
* ca. 16 interpretive waysides (ref. pp. 12-15)			
<b>Totals:</b>			
Planning (51-55-61).....		\$161,000	
Production (52-53-55-62).....		714,000	
Equipment (63).....		70,700	
<b>Grand Total, all media.....</b>		<u>\$945,700</u>	

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## THE PLANNING TEAM

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# United States Department of the Interior



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NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION  
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MAR 28

24 MAR 1989

Memorandum

To: *Smy*  
Manager, Harpers Ferry Center

From: *Acting*  
Regional Director, National Capital Region

Subject: First Draft Interpretive Prospectus, Prince William Forest Park

We have completed the review of the subject document and are most pleased with its content. Mr. Larry Tillman of your staff has done an outstanding job of capturing the spirit of interpretation needed at Prince William Forest Park. The introduction is particularly powerful and enlightening.

Aside from a few revisions identified in the enclosed text we are approving this draft plan.

Again, we are very pleased with the effort used in preparing this comprehensive draft Interpretive Prospectus. If you have any questions, please contact me, or Interpretive Planner Winnie Frost, at 426-6770.

*Ronald M. White*

Enclosure

