



Friends of Great Falls

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March 3, 2008

David Vela
Superintendent
George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Dear Mr Vela,

I am writing on behalf of Friends of Great Falls, which as you may know is a climbing advocacy group that was formed after the release of the draft Great Falls Management Plan/EIS in September 2005. We have written to you several times since then concerning various aspects of recreational climbing at Great Falls.

Firstly, we would like to thank the NPS for the opportunities we have had to work with NPS staff, particularly Deborah Feldman and a number of the Great Falls staff, during the two years that have elapsed from the publication of the draft management plan to the recently released final plan.

In reviewing the final version, we are pleased to see that the NPS has clearly taken into consideration many of the suggestions made by Friends of Great Falls and other local climbers and climbing groups during the public comment process. We also recognize the considerable effort the NPS has made to reach out to the climbing community in terms of distributing the revised management plan as widely as possible.

We have read carefully the revised plan. Generally, we think that the discussion of the potential environmental impacts from recreational climbing is reasonable. Similarly, the discussion of the potential actions that might be proposed in relation to mitigating possible environmental impacts, or to assist in meeting NPS management objectives, seems fair and neutral. Overall, we consider that the revised plan is a significant improvement over the original draft as regards the sections affecting recreational climbing.

We do recognize however that the revised plan contains very little in terms of detailed proposals and that the NPS has indicated the possible preparation of a specific Climbing Management Plan. While FOGF is not convinced of the need for a Climbing Management Plan, we – along with other local climbing groups – would expect to be actively involved in the preparation of any Climbing Management Plan should this be developed. We note that the NPS has identified in the final plan the benefit of such involvement [page 2.8, Section 2.1.2]. Also, access to climbing areas may be affected by the proposed Trail Management Plan, so we would expect local climbing groups to be involved in the development of that plan as well.

In the spirit of continuing the dialogue that we have had with the NPS during the last two years, we would like to suggest that there would be some benefit in the NPS meeting with FOGF in the next month or two, before the start of the spring/summer climbing season. We would be particularly interested in understanding how [and if] the NPS intends to proceed with the proposals in the revised plan that relate to access to the Gorky Park, the Microdome, the Flat Iron and the Sand Box. We would also like to understand how the NPS would publicize and implement these procedures, and how we and other climbing groups might assist in this communication with the climbing community.

We look forward to working with the NPS in continuing the long tradition of climbing as a recreational activity at Great Falls National Park.

Simon Carr
Chairman
Friends of Great Falls

Cc

Deborah Feldman, NPS
Walter McDowney, NPS
The Access Fund
Potomac Mountaineering Club
American Alpine Club