

*Draft*

**ENVIRONMENTAL  
ASSESSMENT**

to

**Relocate a Hiking Trail  
Catoctin Mountain Park**



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
CATOCTIN MOUNTAIN PARK  
THURMONT, MARYLAND**

## Summary

This Environmental Assessment (EA) meets the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation and provides decision-makers with information and analysis of alternatives and potential impacts of reconfiguring the hiking trail network at Catoctin Mountain Park, including the addition of a new trail.

Three alternatives were evaluated for this project.

Alternative A – No Action Alternative. Under this alternative no changes would be made to the existing trail system.

Alternative B – Rerouting the existing hiking trail parallel to Maryland State Route 77 to connect the trailhead adjacent to Park Headquarters to the Visitor Center (Preferred Alternative).

Alternative C – Rerouting the existing hiking to eliminate a confusing intersection and provide a more direct route between Park Headquarters and the Visitor Center.

Environmental impacts associated with this project will be negligible, and it does not disturb any known historical resources. The proposed route for the trail identified in the preferred alternative will be placed in a way that is sensitive to the natural terrain and will require the least maintenance. The trail width will be less than three feet. Openings will be cut through downed trees that cross this trail. There will be minimal live vegetation removed. This trail crosses two intermittent stream channels. These crossings, less than four feet in width, will be made using wooden bridges which will be laid down on the surface with no impact to the stream channels.

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## **1.0 Purpose and Need for Action**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Catoctin Mountain Park is administered by the National Park Service (NPS), United States Department of the Interior and is located near Thurmont, Maryland, approximately 75 miles north of Washington, D.C and 15 miles east of Hagerstown, Maryland. The area is mountainous, heavily forested, and supports a variety of plant and wildlife typical of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The NPS is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code (USC) 4321 et seq.), which requires an environmental analysis for major federal actions having the potential to impact the quality of the environment, Council of Environmental Quality Regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508, which implement the requirements of NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA), the National Park Service Director's Order (DO) 12 and Reference Manual (RM) 12, Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) will provide decision-makers with information and analysis on alternatives and their potential impacts of actions proposed to modify and expand the system of hiking trails at Catoctin Mountain Park in order to provide for the safety and enjoyment of Park visitors. In particular, this EA will examine the impacts of establishing a new trail connecting the Park Headquarters and Visitor Center.

### **1.2 Park Purpose and Significance**

The mission of the National Park Service at Catoctin Mountain Park is to serve as a public park for education, recreation and conservation. The Park is able to welcome visitors to a mountain environment with recreational and educational opportunities. Park visitors may experience cabin camping in an original Recreational Demonstration Area developed by the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps, fly-fishing in one of Maryland's premier trout streams and diversity of flora and fauna not found in nearby metropolitan areas. Throughout its history, Catoctin has provided, at Camp Greentop, an opportunity for disabled youth and adults to experience the relaxation of outdoor camping in one of the earliest such camps in the nation.

Catoctin Mountain Park's diverse cultural resources provide several vignettes of our nation's history in one small location. Native Americans quarried rhyolite for the production of lithic tools. A charcoal and iron industry is still visible today as demonstrated by Catoctin Furnace (maintained by the Maryland Forest and Park Service), along with smaller industries including farms, sawmills, and an old moonshine still. Historic structures and products of the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, along with the site of our nation's first Job Corps Center, are tangible reminders of the capability of vigorous public works programs to strengthen the nation's economic and social fabric. The totality of resources found in Catoctin Mountain Park reflects much of the early fabric of our country.

### 1.3 Purpose and Need for the Project

The Wolf Rock / Chimney Rock Trail (Figure 1) is one of the most popular hikes at Catoctin Mountain Park. These trails lead to two very interesting geologic features for which the trail is named. Wolf Rock, part of the Weverton geologic formation, projects prominently from the surrounding landscape and is a destination for rock climbers. Chimney Rock, another highly erosion resistant member of the Weverton formation, offers spectacular views of the Frederick Valley. These trails offer a year round recreational opportunity for visitors to the Park.

The steep, narrow and often times slippery Wolf Rock / Chimney Rock Trail loop is the most strenuous in the Park. The majority of visitors will begin their hike at the Park Visitor Center, as the trailhead is near the information center and offers the largest parking area in the Park. Park staff have found that once visitors enjoy the vista at Chimney Rock, they descend the trail and often mistakenly follow the trail that leads to the small trailhead parking area at Park Headquarters. Frequently visitors choose to follow the road back to the Visitor Center, in lieu of hiking back uphill to return via the trail system. Rangers often see people hiking along Maryland State Route 77 returning to the Visitor Center from the Park Headquarters. Rangers interviewing these visitors are told that since they know the road is flat, they choose to follow it rather than hiking the long loop back to the Visitor Center (Stanley, Personal communication, 2009).

This Environmental Assessment examines the need to modify the existing trail system to provide for a safe and enjoyable hiking experience for park visitors, that has minimal impacts on the environment. Park staff regularly see hikers circumventing the Park trail system and walking along the narrow road shoulder of Route 77. This road is winding and motor vehicle operators have limited visibility, creating very dangerous conditions for pedestrians. The NPS has increased their efforts to educate visitors about the strenuous nature of the Wolf Rock / Chimney Rock Trail. Despite warnings about the dangers of traveling on Route 77, visitors still regularly choose this route. In order to encourage the use of the Park trail system to safely convey visitors to their destinations, the Park is proposing the relocation of a portion of the trail.

### 1.4 Relationship to Other Plans

In 2007, the Park updated the Trails Management Plan to provide a structured guideline for the maintenance and construction of trails and walks within Catoctin Mountain Park. The Trails Management Plan did not call for the construction of any additional trails. However, any new trail construction, and future trail maintenance, will follow the guidelines established in this plan.

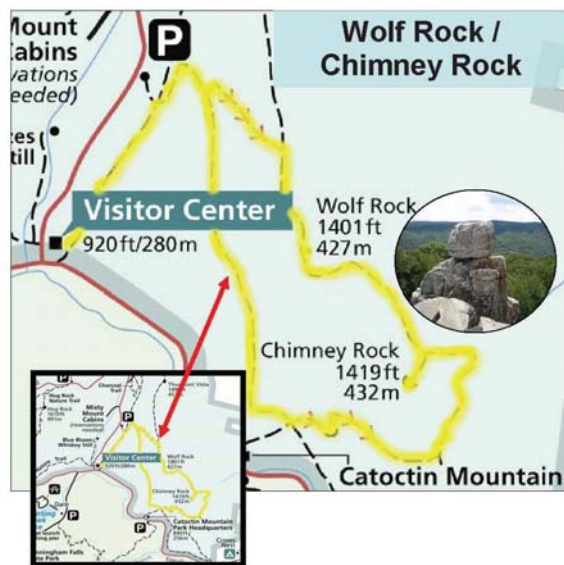


Figure 1

The Park would support a trail connection to the Town of Thurmont. The trail connection proposed in this plan may eventually be part of the trail system connecting the Park Visitor Center with town. While this is a speculative future use, it is mentioned here so that the potential cumulative impacts of establishing a new trail will be considered.

## **2.0 Public Involvement**

Catoctin Mountain Park emphasizes an ongoing communication with public and private organizations and agencies, public officials and individuals.

The Environmental Assessment for a Hiking Trail Relocation at Catoctin Mountain Park will be made available for public review and comment beginning April 3, 2009. Press releases with information regarding the draft EA will be sent to the local media such as the Frederick News Post, Frederick Gazette and Thurmont Times (Appendix C). The document will be made available for review at park headquarters and visitor center, at local public libraries and online at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> and the park's website [www.nps.gov/cato](http://www.nps.gov/cato). Public comments will be accepted until May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

During the review period a public meeting will be held to gather comments on the proposed actions. The meeting will be open to the public and invitations will be extended to hiking clubs and other local organizations involved in the maintenance and building of trails.

## **3.0 Alternatives Considered, Including Proposed Action**

The alternatives presented in this document were developed according to requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The best available science and information was applied to describe the effects of the alternatives. As part of the environmental assessment process, federal agencies explore a range of reasonable alternatives. The alternatives under consideration include the "no-action" alternative as well as the proposed alternative.

The alternatives selected for full analysis in this environmental assessment fall within park management objectives and constraints as well as meet the purpose and need for action. Alternatives developed were based on a consideration of both resource needs and visitor safety and satisfaction.

### **3.1 Alternative A: No Action.**

Under this alternative the NPS will make no changes to the existing configuration of Park hiking trails.

**3.2 Alternative B: Develop a new trail that runs parallel to Maryland Route 77 (Preferred Alternative).**

Alternative B calls for the construction of a new hiking trail that runs parallel from the Park Headquarters to the Park Visitor Center (figure 2). The length of this trail is approximately .8 miles and a small portion near the visitor center will follow an existing abandoned roadway. The trail width will be less than three feet. Openings will be cut through downed trees that cross this trail. There will be minimal live vegetation removed. Trail construction will follow guidelines set forth in the Catoctin Mountain Park Trail Plan.

Since under this alternative a new connection will be provided to the Park Visitor Center, the existing loop trail will be modified. A .9 mile section of trail will be permanently closed. The new trail configuration will shorten the circuit hike by approximately .7 miles. A round trip loop hike from the visitor center under Alternative A is currently 4.2 miles. Under Alternative B, the loop would be approximately 3.5 miles.

**3.3 Alternative C: Develop a new trail that creates a shorter loop back to the Park Visitor Center.**

Under Alternative C, the existing trail would be rerouted to eliminate a confusing trail intersection and provide a more direct route back to the Park Visitor Center. This trail will encourage visitors who arrive at the Park Headquarters Trailhead after completing the Wolf Rock / Chimney Rock Circuit to return to the Visitor Center via the trail, as it begins with a gentler initial grade (figure 3).

The length of newly constructed trail under this alternative is approximately .8 miles and a small portion near the visitor center will follow an existing roadway. The trail width will be less than three feet. Openings will be cut through downed trees that cross this trail. There will be minimal live vegetation removed other than Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), an exotic shrub. Trail construction will follow guidelines set forth in the Catoctin Mountain Park Trail Plan.

The new trail configuration will shorten the circuit hike by approximately .2 miles. Under this alternative .4 miles of existing trail will be permanently closed. A round trip loop hike from the visitor center under Alternative A is currently 4.2 miles. Under Alternative C, the loop would be approximately 4 miles.



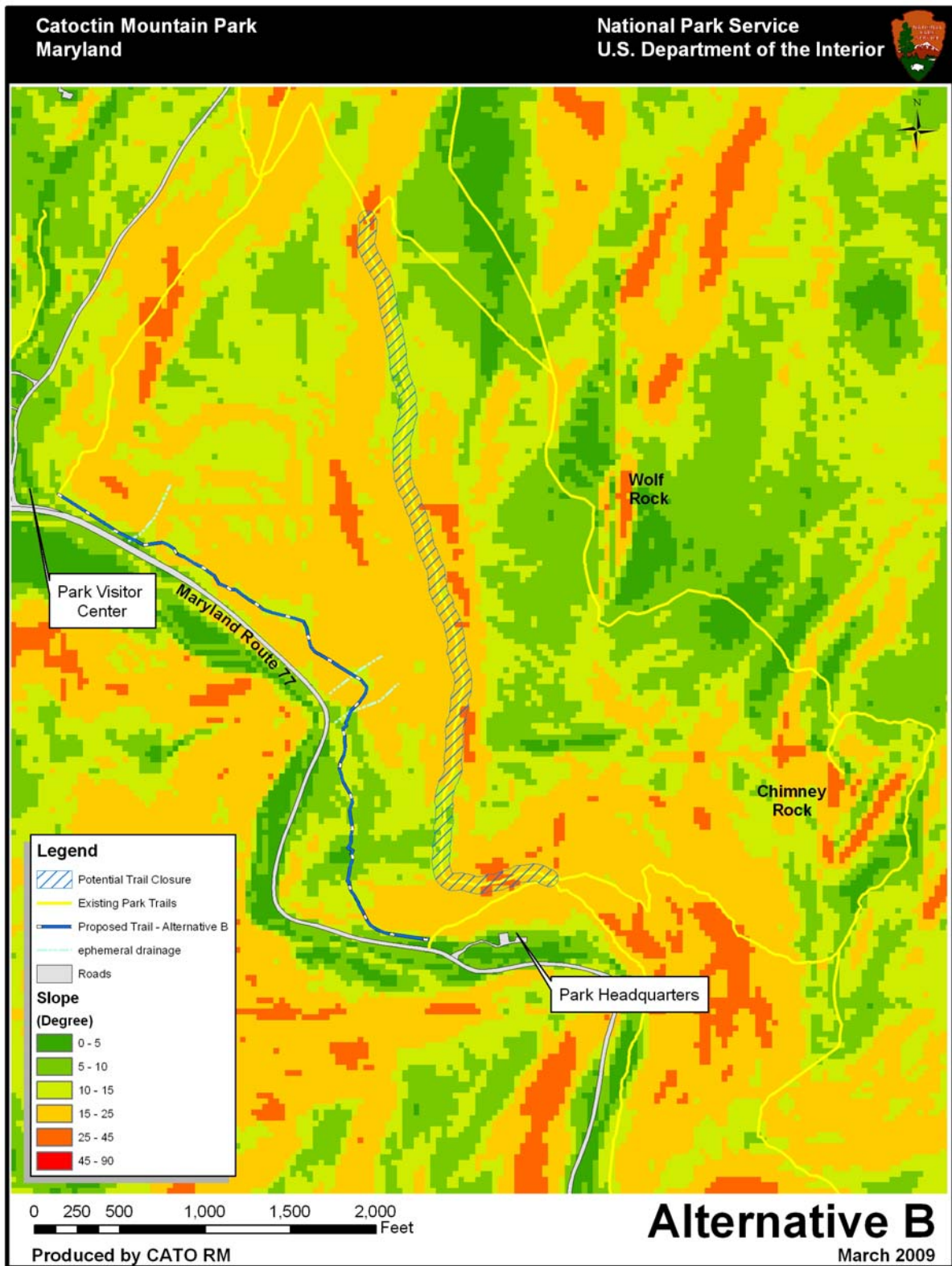


Figure 2

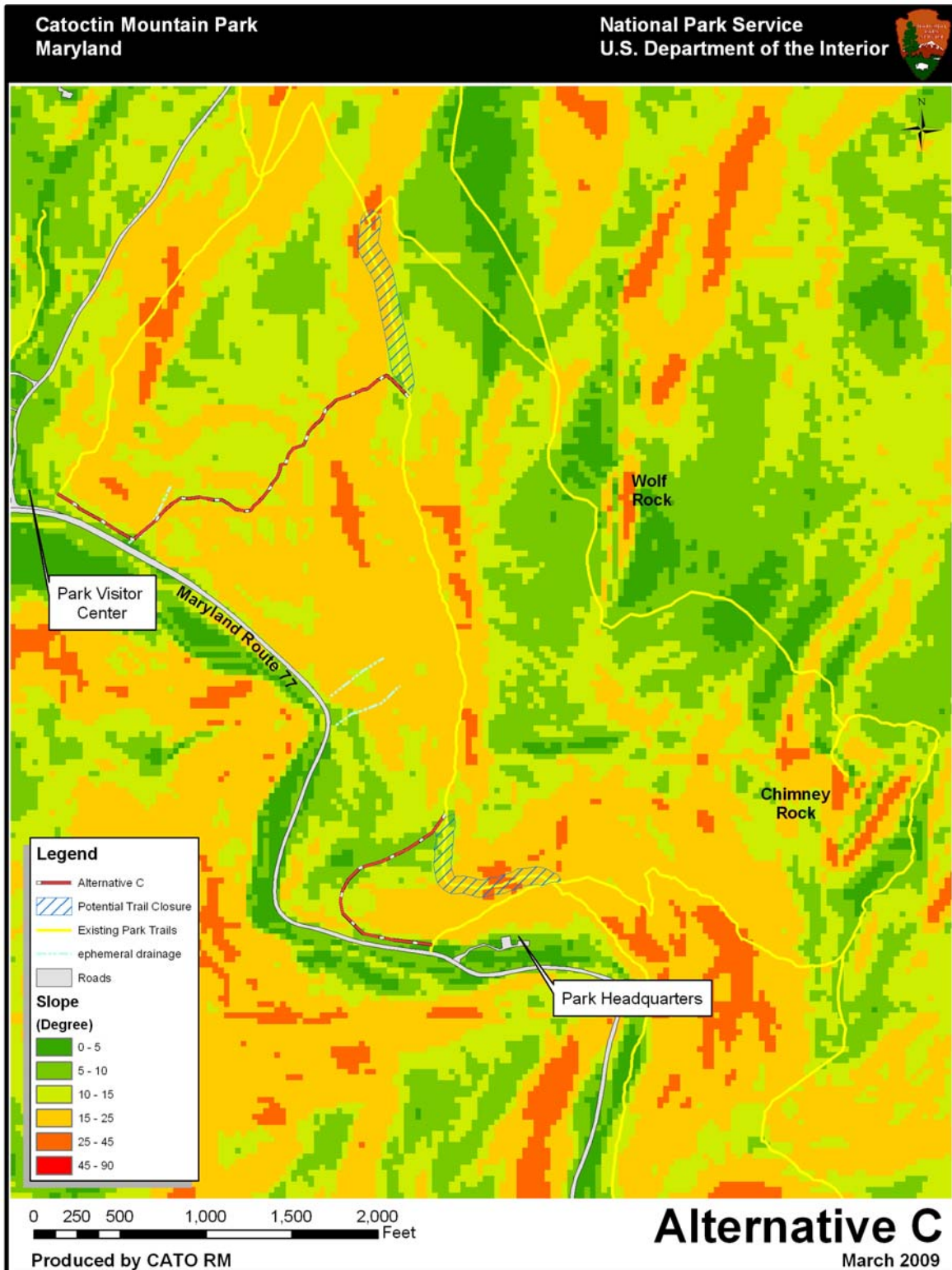


Figure 3



### 3.4 Alternatives Considered but rejected.

#### Mid-slope trails

Trail options were considered that ran mid-slope from the existing trail system above Park Headquarters to the Visitor Center (figure 4). This routing was rejected due the steep slopes (figure 5), active drainages and boulder fields along the route. This location was originally considered in order to move the trail away from sight of the roadway, in order to provide a more natural experience for the visitor. Trails in this area, however, would be difficult to build, maintain, and have the greatest potential for soil erosion. For these reasons trails in these areas are removed from further consideration.

### 3.5 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures to prevent or mitigate any adverse environmental impact(s) that may be created by trail construction and use.

- 1) The trail width will be three feet or less.
- 2) Trail work will be performed by hand without use of any heavy equipment (except gasoline motor assisted wheelbarrows and ATV's to move larger materials).
- 3) There will be no construction in or disturbance of the streams. They will be spanned by wooden (or a plastic / wood composite) boardwalks which will be laid on the surface.
- 4) The trail will be inspected for potential archeological sites. If any sites are found the trail will be routed to avoid these locations.
- 5) Individuals and organizations experienced in techniques that minimize the environmental impacts associated with trail building will be consulted before the selected alternative is designed and constructed.

### 4.0 Affected Environments.

This section of the document describes existing environmental conditions in the park generally, and, as appropriate, in the areas potentially affected by the proposed alternative.

#### 4.1 Visitor Use and Experience

Catoctin Mountain Park has approximately 750,000 visitors to the park for a total of 2,145,000 visitor hours per year. Visitors at Catoctin identified and rated specific activities in a survey conducted in 2002. According to the survey, the most common activities included viewing

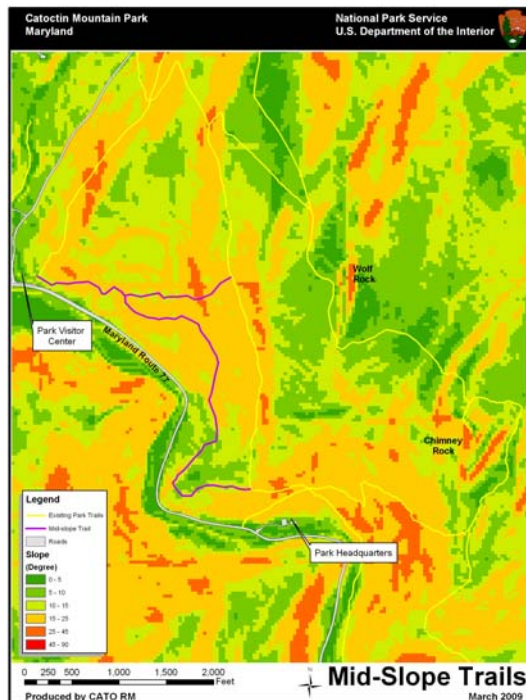


Figure 4

wildlife and scenery (82%), driving through the park (61%), and hiking for one hour or more hours (46%). Repeat visitors also identified these activities as the most common they engaged in during past visits. Other popular activities include taking shorter hikes, photographing scenery, camping, and rock climbing. About 12% of visitors go to cultural or historic sites, 1% come to ride horses, 1% come to gather berries and mushrooms, and 12% come for “other” activities, such as attending the maple syrup festival, seeing slide shows and exhibits, checking cabins to rent, and enjoying the quiet of nature (NPS 2002).

## **4.2 Cultural Resources within the Park**

Prior to settlement of the area by Europeans in the early 1600s, there is very little evidence of permanent prehistoric or historic Native American settlement in the Catoctin Mountain Park area. All indications and previous studies have shown that Native Americans used the Catoctin area for hunting and the collection of rhyolite and only set up temporary camps that were frequently revisited for these purposes. Permanent settlements may have been rare partially because the area was within territories under dispute by the tribes of Pennsylvania, Maryland, the Iroquois Confederation, and the coastal and Chesapeake Bay tribes.

Located within the developed areas of the park are three cabin camps used primarily for youth and family outdoor education and recreation. These camps are Greentop, Misty Mount and Round Meadow. Two of the camps, Misty Mount and Greentop, are included on the National Register of Historic Places because the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built them in the 1930s. The WPA also built structures in Round Meadow. Several of these buildings still exist today and two, the Blacksmith Shop and the Resource Management Building, are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The historic landscape (including tree cover and vistas) is also an important element of the cultural resources, particularly in the camp areas because of the historic district status. Other cultural resources in the park are the Blue Blazes Whiskey Still site and numerous charcoal hearth sites throughout Catoctin Mountain Park. The Blue Blazes site interprets a local historical event related to the area. The charcoal sites interpret the collier’s charcoal making for the Catoctin Furnace that still exists as a historic site in Thurmont. Also within the park are sites representing historic logging, sawmill and earlier farming (Brown’s Farm) operations.

## **4.3 Surface Water (Streams and Wetlands)**

Big Hunting Creek and Owens Creek are the two permanent streams that flow through or adjacent to Catoctin Mountain Park. The project area drains into Big Hunting Creek. Both creeks are high gradient streams of excellent water quality. These creeks also drain the two principal watersheds located in the park. Both watersheds are part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, originate from springs and contribute their flow to the Monocacy River and the Potomac River.

Big Hunting and Owen Creeks are classified as Class III-P “natural trout waters”, and are managed as such by the Maryland Department of the Environment. Catoctin Mountain Park and

the State of Maryland share management of the creeks with Catoctin Mountain Park having federal authority over water within the park boundary.

Catoctin Mountain Park contains numerous small wetland habitats that are associated with stream systems. The types of wetlands identified in the park are; emergent, scrub-shrub, forested, and riverine wetlands. At this time, 18 wetland areas covering approximately 143 acres have been identified within the park boundaries.

The largest wetland in the park is known as Lantz Marsh and is located in the northeast area of the park adjacent to the intersection of Maryland Route 550 and Foxville-Deerfield Road. This area is divided into an emergent and forested wetland. All intermittent and permanent streams have been classified as riverine wetland systems.

#### **4.4 Air Quality**

The Federal 1970 Clean Air Act stipulates that Federal agencies have an affirmative responsibility to protect a park's air quality from adverse air pollution impacts. All types of fires generate smoke and particulate matter, which can impact air quality within the park and surrounding region.

There are six air pollutants that are commonly found throughout the United States. The six pollutants are ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and lead. These pollutants can injure human health, harm the environment, and damage property. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calls these air pollutants "criteria pollutants". The EPA has regulated these six pollutants by first developing health-based standards (primary standards) intended to protect our health. The EPA has also established welfare standards (secondary standards) that are designed to prevent environmental and property damage. The primary and secondary standards are referred to as National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). A geographic area that meets or does better than the primary standard is called an attainment area; areas that do not meet the primary standard are called nonattainment areas.

The EPA designates the Washington, DC metropolitan region as a serious ground level ozone nonattainment area. The Washington metropolitan region includes the Maryland counties of Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's. The District of Columbia and several Northern Virginia counties also comprise this nonattainment area. Catoctin Mountain Park lies in the northernmost and rural section of Frederick County, Maryland and because of the elevation and the mountains have less frequent days of ozone alerts than the actual metropolitan areas.

Another factor of air quality is visual impairment caused by haze. Haze is caused when sunlight encounters tiny pollution particles in the air. Some light is absorbed by particles. Other light is scattered away before it reaches an observer. More pollutants mean more absorption and scattering of light, which reduce the clarity and color of what we see. Some types of particles such as sulfates scatter more light, particularly during humid conditions.

Natural sources of haze can include windblown dust, and soot from wildfires. Manmade sources can include motor vehicles, electric utility and industrial fuel burning, and manufacturing operations. Some haze-causing particles are directly emitted to the air. Others are formed when

gases emitted to the air form particles as they are carried many miles from the source of the pollutants.

#### 4.5 Soils

The soils of Catoctin have been characterized in the Soil Survey of Frederick County as primarily rough, stony land. In general, they are well drained, poorly developed soils containing numerous stones and boulders throughout their profile. The soils in the eastern portion of the park are thin, sandy loams formed from the erosion of the Weverton quartzite. They are highly permeable and well drained. The soils of the western side of the park were derived from metavolcanic rock and are deeper, moister, and contain more nutrients.

#### 4.6 Biological Resources

There is a healthy complement of the common native animal and plant species present at Catoctin Mountain Park. Representative species of the area include turkey, white-tailed deer, spicebush, red maple, timber rattlesnake and brook trout. Over 700 species of vascular plants are recorded in Catoctin Mountain Park including over 33 species of ferns, 60 species of trees, and numerous species of flowering plants and shrubs.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Catoctin Mountain Park is approximately 95% forested. The park has 60 species of trees including chestnut oak (*Quercus prinus*), which is the most dominant tree throughout the park; however, it is more common on the eastern side of the park than on the western side. Other tree species found in the park include white oak (*Q. alba*), red oak (*Q. rubra*), black oak (*Q. velutina*), scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), various hickories (*Carya spp.*), maples (*Acer spp.*), and eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). Shrubs are generally found in the forest understory or along the forest edge. The most common shrubs include mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*), and viburnum (*Viburnum spp.*).

**Fish:** Big Hunting Creek and Owens Creek and their tributaries support 16 known species of fish. Documentation of park staff and Maryland Department of Natural Resources has identified fish species. Darters, dace, sculpins, shiners, minnows, and trout are commonly found, whereas elusive species like the American eel often escape even the most careful observer. Of the fish species some of the most important are the trout. Trout fishing is a major recreational activity in the streams bordering Catoctin Mountain Park. Big Hunting Creek contains populations of non-native brown (*Salmo trutta*), rainbow (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and some native brook (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) trout. Owens Creek contains populations of brown and brook trout.

**Birds:** The hardwood forest and stream environment provides excellent habitat for many varied species of birds. Over 200 species of birds are present in the park during some part of the year including various species of warblers, woodpeckers, hawks, and waterfowl. The wild turkey is also a resident of the park.

Many migrating species have been identified and documented in the park through observations and documentation. Examples of those species identified in 2001-2002 are: Blackpoll Warbler, Black-

throated Blue Warbler, Blue headed Vireo, Fox Sparrow, Magnolia Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Palm Warbler, and the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Others have been documented in previous years.

**Mammals:** Mammals found in the park are fairly typical for the Middle Atlantic Region and include skunk, groundhog, squirrel, several varieties of voles and moles, eastern cottontail rabbit, opossum, raccoon, bats and red fox. Recent sightings of bobcat, beaver, mink, and black bear indicate that populations of these mammals may be slowly returning to the area. In 2001, the Smithsonian Institute of Washington, D.C completed a small mammal survey. The survey confirmed the presence of 12 small mammals including red squirrel, eastern fox squirrel, southern flying squirrel, smokey shrew, pygmy shrew, shorttail shrew, white-footed mouse, and the boreal redback vole. The survey also revealed a coyote (*Canis latrans*).

The most predominant large mammal in the park is the white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer populations have escalated in recent years to the point that their browsing is impacting forest regeneration. White-tailed deer can be seen almost anytime of the year and frequently during daylight hours.

**Reptiles:** Reptiles that inhabit Catoctin Mountain Park are snakes, turtles, lizards, and skinks. Of the 14 species of snakes found in the park only two of them, the copperhead and timber rattlesnake, are venomous. Turtles common to the park are the eastern box turtle, wood turtle, snapping turtle and the painted turtle. Even though lizards make up the largest group of reptiles worldwide, only two species inhabit Catoctin Mountain Park, the five-lined skink and the northern fence lizard. The presence of the broadhead skink has not been confirmed.

**Amphibians:** The group Amphibia includes frogs, toads, and salamanders. There are three different types of salamanders at Catoctin Mountain Park: mole salamanders, newts, and lungless salamanders. Toads and frogs belong to the largest order of amphibians with over 4,000 species. Frogs and toads can be found on all continents except Antarctica, and on most islands of the world. The frog and toad species that can be heard, and sometimes seen, at Catoctin Mountain Park include the wood frog, spring peeper, pickerel frog, green frog, bullfrog, northern leopard frog, gray tree frog, American toad, and the fowler's toad.

#### 4.7 Species of Concern

No species on the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Species have been identified in Catoctin Mountain Park per the Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. A few State of Maryland listed species do exist within the park boundaries per the Maryland State Heritage Program consultation (See Appendix A).

#### 4.8 Environmental Justice

Executive Order No. 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, federal agencies shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low income populations.

In Frederick County minorities make up approximately 8.1% of the total population according to the US Census Bureau 2000 census. The largest concentrations of minorities in Frederick County are in the areas around the City of Frederick. In Frederick County households below the poverty level were approximately 4.5% of the total population according to the US Census Bureau 2000 census. Based on what the NPS knows and has researched about the surrounding area, adverse effects on low income or minority populations do not appear to be an issue in the implementation of the proposed trail.

## **5.0 Environmental Consequences**

This section of the document analyzes the potential effects of the alternatives on the natural and cultural resources identified in the previous “Affected Environment Section.”

For purposes of describing the impacts within this document the following terms are defined:

*Short-term impacts* - Those impacts resulting from trail development and use (less than one year).

*Long-term impacts* - Those impacts resulting from trail development and use (greater than 1 year).

*Direct impacts* – Those impacts occurring as a result of the trail development and use.

*Indirect impacts* – Those impacts occurring subsequent to the trail development and use.

The thresholds for determining the levels of impact for natural resources are defined as follows:

Negligible – The impact is at the lowest levels of measurable detection.

Minor – The impact is slight but detectable.

Moderate-- The impact is readily apparent.

Major – The impact is a severe or adverse impact or of exceptional benefit.

### **5.1 Impairment of Park Resources.**

The National Park Service is prohibited from impairing park resources and values by the National Park Service Organic Act (16 USC 1). The National Park Service Management Policies 2006 (Section 1.4.5) states an impairment “is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible National Park Service manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values.” In addition, the Management Policies state “whether an impact meets this definition depends on the particular resources and values that would be affected: the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other impacts.” Based on this guidance this section will also identify whether the levels of impacts could be considered to constitute potential impairments to park resources.



## 5.2 Cumulative Impacts.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defines cumulative impacts as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action (federal) when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7)

Cumulative impacts for this EA are those impacts occurring from modifying and expanding the system of hiking trails at Catoctin Mountain Park in order to provide for the safety and enjoyment of Park visitors. The Park supports efforts to provide a trail connection to the Town of Thurmont. The trail connection proposed in this plan may eventually be part of the trail system connecting the Park Visitor Center with town. This is a speculative future use as there is no immediate plan to develop this connection.

The Park also seeks to provide a connection the Appalachian Trail (AT). The AT is located approximately one mile from the current Park boundary. This connection would most likely consist of easements across private land for a trail corridor. Only a small section of new trail would be built within the park.

As the Thurmont and AT connector trails are the only future projects anticipated at this time, any cumulative impacts to Park resources from future trail development are expected to be minor. These future impacts are likely the same as those presented in this EA. The cumulative impacts to visitor use and experience are expected to be moderate and positive.

## 5.3 Visitor Use and Experiences

The vast majority (97%) of Catoctin Mountain Park’s 5,810 acres is forested. The Park is able to welcome visitors (664,987 in 2008) to a mountain environment with recreational and educational opportunities. Contained in the park boundaries are multiuse trails, many with interpretive displays (charcoal industry, local lumber industry and a whiskey still site). The park also facilitates recreational opportunities such as camping, hiking, picnicking, and cross-country skiing. Park visitors may experience cabin camping in an original Recreational Demonstration Area developed by the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps, fly-fishing in one of Maryland's premier trout streams, and diversity of flora and fauna not found in nearby metropolitan areas. Throughout its history, Catoctin has provided, at Camp Greentop, an opportunity for disabled youth and adults to experience the relaxation of outdoor camping in one of the earliest such camps in the nation.

### Conclusions of Visitor Use and Experiences Impacts

**Alternative A (No Action):** There would be moderate long-term direct effects to park visitors caused by leaving the existing trail system unchanged. Visitors will continue to exit the trail system near Park headquarters and walk along Maryland Route 77. This alternative would not enhance the visitor experience and could put the visitor at risk of injury from motor vehicles.

**Alternative B:** Moderate long-term impacts are expected from the relocation of an existing trail to parallel Route 77. This route would provide a shorter return to the Park visitor center after hiking to Wolf Rock and Chimney Rock. The more direct route and gradual terrain of this new trail would prevent fatigued hikers from walking along the road. This new trail would create a better loop hike from the Park visitor center, as the visitors would not have to return along a section of trail previously hiked. This alternative will increase the length of a loop hike from Thurmont Vista and the parking lot near Camp Misty Mount, however, lower numbers of visitors use this route and a loop hike will still be possible.

The trail would be located close to Maryland Route 77. Due to deer browse, there is little forest undergrowth, and the busy road will be visible from most of the proposed new trail. The proximity to the road will result in increased traffic noise, detracting from the visitor experience. However, given that many visitors prefer to return to the visitor center via a more direct route, this alternative is most likely to meet the objective of improving the hiking experience and safety of Park visitors.

**Alternative C:** Minor long-term impacts are expected from providing a more direct route back to the Park Visitor Center and rerouting the trail so that the east end originates at the Park Headquarters trailhead. The new trail routing would close a section of trail that is highly erodible and would relocate it to a less steep slope. This new trail would also create a better loop hike from the Park visitor center, as the visitors would not have to return along a section of trail previously hiked. The new section of trail would be routed closer to Route 77. The visitor would encounter an increase in traffic noise while hiking, though the road would not be as visible as in Alternative B. This alternative will increase the length of a loop hike from Thurmont Vista and the parking lot near Camp Misty Mount, however, lower numbers of visitors use this route and a loop hike will still be possible.

This new trail routing may encourage some visitors to choose to stay on the existing trail system rather than following the road back to the visitor center. Therefore, this alternative would partially meet the objective of improving the hiking experience for Park visitors.

## 5.4 Cultural Resources

Significant historic cultural resources exist at Catoctin Mountain Park. Two cabin camps, Misty Mount and Greentop, are included on the National Register of Historic Places because the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built them in the 1930s. The WPA also built structures in Round Meadow. Several of these buildings still exist today and two, the Blacksmith Shop and the Resource Management Building, are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The cultural landscape (including tree cover and vistas) is also an important element of the cultural resources, particularly in the camp areas because of the historic district status. Other cultural resources in the park are the Blue Blazes Whiskey Still site and numerous charcoal hearth sites throughout Catoctin Mountain Park. The Blue Blazes site interprets a local historical event related to the area. The charcoal sites interpret the collier's charcoal making for the Catoctin Furnace that still exists as a historic site in Thurmont. Also within the park are sites representing historic logging, sawmill and farming operations

A park wide archeological assessment is currently underway at Catoctin Mountain Park. As of March 16, 2009, there are 115 known archeological sites within Catoctin Mountain Park. No known sites exist in the area of the new trails proposed in this EA. Detailed surveys have not been conducted in this area, therefore the extent of subsurface cultural resources is presently not fully known. The mitigations listed in Section 3.5 will be used to minimize or eliminate impacts to cultural resources. The potential exists for archeological resources to be uncovered during activities that disturb mineral soils. Therefore, every effort will be made to ensure that the minimal soil disruption takes place during development of this trail.

### **Conclusion of Cultural Resource Impacts**

**Alternative A (No Action):** There are no impacts to cultural resources from maintaining the existing configuration of Park hiking trails.

**Alternative B:** There are only negligible impacts to cultural resources expected by rerouting the existing trail to parallel Route 77. Portions of the existing trail are shown on early maps dating back to when the Park was a Recreation Demonstration Area. The system was not designed with modern environmental principles in consideration, but using present travelways, roads and existing paths as a base. The trail is steep, in need of repair and often avoided by hikers seeking a shorter return to the Park Visitor Center. To protect this area from further disturbance, a portion of this trail would be permanently closed. The closed section will not be obliterated but be retained and protected. Natural materials such as logs and leaves will be used to obstruct the abandoned trail from view. The new trail route will be clearly marked to avoid confusion.

The relocated trail is not expected to detract from the Park's cultural landscape and would provide a recreational opportunity that is consistent with the historic use of the Park. The trail would be routed to avoid any areas that contain cultural resources that may potentially be disturbed by the construction of a trail. The only recorded cultural resource is a trail trace that is shown on the United States Geological Survey Blue Ridge Summit Topographic Map (Figure 5). This trace coincides with the present location of one of the ephemeral drainages the trail will cross (figure 2). This trace will be spanned by a wooden bridge to protect the underlying resource. An archeologist will visit the site either before or during trail building, to ensure no unknown cultural resources are disturbed.

**Alternative C:** The general impacts to cultural resources are expected to be the same as under Alternative B. However, it is noted that a smaller portion of the existing trail will be closed under this alternative. The trail trace crossed in Alternative B will not be affected by the trail relocation in this alternative.

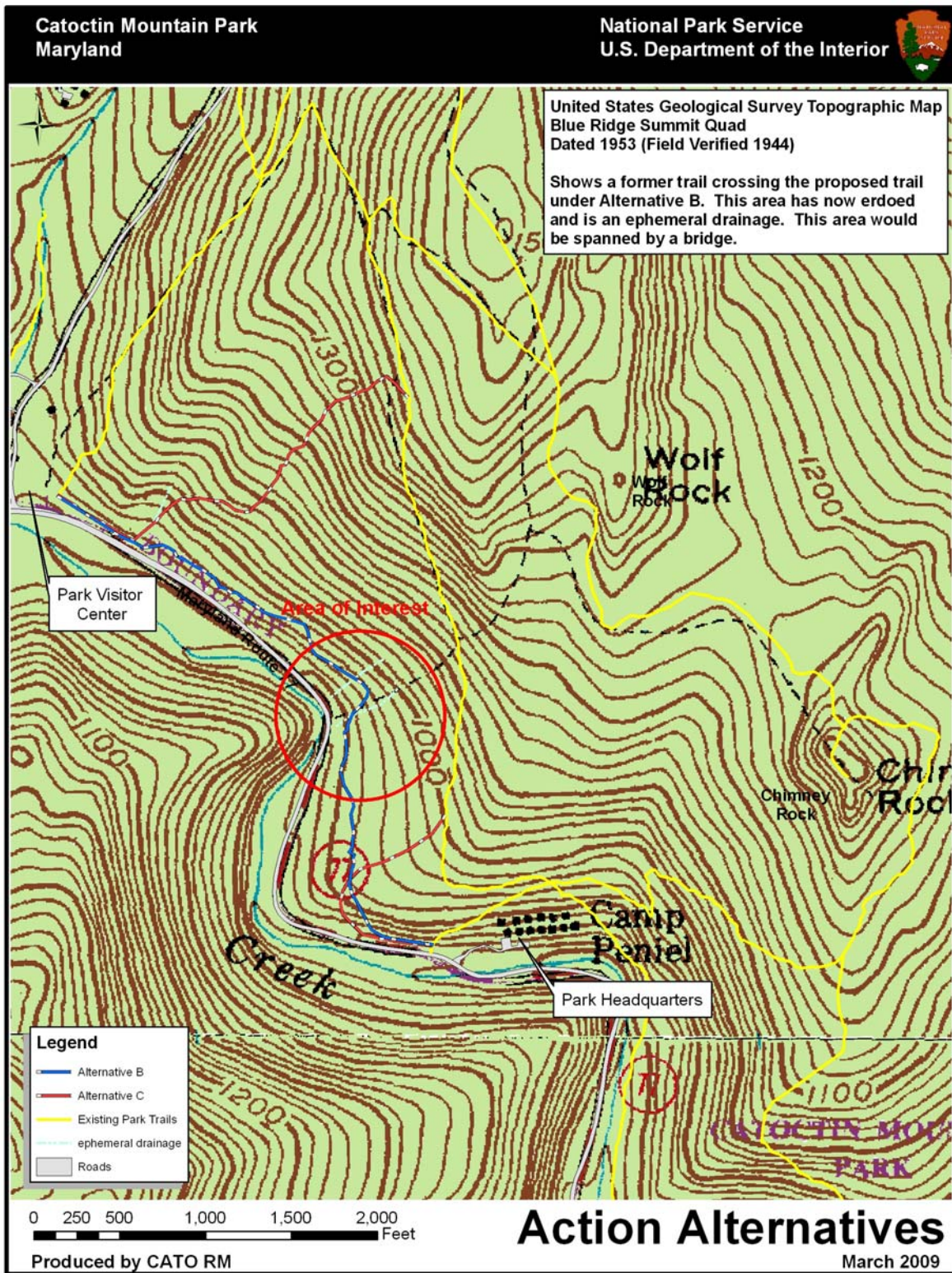


Figure 5



## 5.5 Surface Waters (Streams and Wetlands)

The principal impacts to water quality resulting from trail development and use are sedimentation and turbidity due to erosion. Hiking trails built through intermittent stream channels during wet times may increase soil erosion. Increased erosion could lead to increases of turbidity and sedimentation into surface water, streams and wetlands. Turbidity and sedimentation can alter and adversely impact aquatic habitats, invertebrates and fish, particularly trout in Big Hunting Creek and Owens Creek.

### Conclusions of Surface Water Impacts

**Alternative A (No Action):** There would be no impact on surface water quality from maintaining the existing configuration of Park hiking trails.

**Alternative B:** There are only negligible short-term impacts on surface water quality expected by the addition of a new trail paralleling Route 77. This trail would cross at least two intermittent drainage channels (figure 2). In order to avoid any impacts to water quality, there will be no construction in or disturbance within the channels. They will be spanned by wooden boardwalks which will be laid on the surface.

There is a seasonally wet area at the end of the old road bed near the visitor center. Under this alternative, the trail will follow the old road bed to a new trailhead at the Visitor Center Parking Lot. This disturbed area collects run off from the adjacent hillside, where it pools before continuing to drain downhill. A drainage control device will be installed to drain this area.

**Alternative C:** There are only negligible short-term impacts on surface water quality expected from rerouting the trail back to the Park visitor center. These impacts would primarily be experienced during trail construction, but will be mitigated by careful placement of erosion controls. This trail is located in the upper reaches of the local drainage channels and would be less likely to cause surface water issues. The trail will follow a drainage down-slope and the trail will be constructed in a way that minimizes erosion.

There is a seasonally wet area at the end of the old road bed near the visitor center. Under this alternative, the trail will follow the old road bed to a new trailhead at the Visitor Center Parking Lot. This disturbed area collects run off from the adjacent hillside, where it pools before continuing to drain downhill. A drainage control device will be installed to drain this area.

## 5.6 Air Quality

The designation of the Washington, DC metropolitan area, which includes the area around Catoctin Mountain Park, as a serious non-attainment area for several critical pollutants including ozone and particulate matter are public health and safety concerns, though ozone in particular is also a pollutant with significant ecological consequences.

## **Ozone**

Ozone is a colorless, odorless gas formed when nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds react in the presence of sunlight. The formation of ozone is dependent on the volume of air available for dilution, air temperature and the amount of sunlight.

Ozone can irritate the respiratory system, causing coughing, throat irritation, and chest pains. Ozone can reduce lung function and make it more difficult to breathe deeply and vigorously. At levels that are designated as a code orange or red ozone action days, people with respiratory problems would have the greatest likelihood of effects from ozone.

Ozone injury to vegetation develops initially at the tips of younger leaves and becomes more widespread as the leaves mature. The most common ozone symptoms on broad-leaved plants are small flecks visible on the upper leaf surface. Some of the agricultural and garden vegetation affected by ozone include tobacco, corn, soybeans, tomatoes, melons, onions and grapes. Trees and flowers may also be affected by ozone. Gladiolus, azaleas, white pine trees, locust trees, white oak and poplar trees are all sensitive to this gas. Air currents will dissipate ozone in a relatively short period of time.

## **Particulate Matter**

The term “particulate matter” (PM) includes both solid particles and liquid droplets found in air. Many manmade and natural sources emit PM directly or emit other pollutants that react in the atmosphere to form PM. These solid and liquid particles come in a wide range of sizes. Particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter tend to pose the greatest health concern because they can be inhaled into and accumulate in the respiratory system. Particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter are referred to as “fine” particles. Sources of fine particles include all types of combustion (motor vehicles, power plants, wood burning, etc.) and some industrial processes. Particles with diameters between 2.5 and 10 micrometers are referred to as “coarse.” Sources of coarse particles include crushing or grinding operations, and dust from paved or unpaved roads.

Both fine and coarse particles can accumulate in the respiratory system and are associated with numerous health effects. Coarse particles can aggravate respiratory conditions such as asthma. Exposure to fine particles is associated with several serious health effects, including premature death. Adverse health effects have been associated with exposures to PM over both short periods (such as a day) and longer periods (a year or more).

When exposed to PM, people with existing heart or lung diseases—such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart disease, or ischemic heart disease—are at increased risk. The elderly also are sensitive to PM exposure. When exposed to PM, children and people with existing lung disease may not be able to breathe as deeply or vigorously as they normally would, and they may experience symptoms such as coughing and shortness of breath. PM can increase susceptibility to respiratory infections and can aggravate existing respiratory diseases, such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, causing more use of medication and more doctor visits.

Particulate matter can form a film on plant leaves reducing sunlight and subsequently interfering with photosynthesis and plant growth. Other effects of particles include soiling and degradation

of property, which can be costly in terms of cleaning and maintaining surfaces. Reduction of visibility occurs when small particles absorb or scatter visible light. Visibility is a national and statewide concern, particularly in recreational settings such as national parks, historical sites and other scenic attractions.

**Conclusion of Impacts to Air Quality**

**Alternative A (No Action):** There would be no air quality impacts caused by maintaining the existing configuration of Park hiking trails.

**Alternative B and C:** There would be negligible short-term air quality impacts caused by trail development and use at Catoctin Mountain Park. A minimum amount of dust/particulate matter might be generated during dry conditions. No impairments to park related resources or values would result.

**5.7 Soils**

Potential impacts to soils include compaction and erosion from the use of hiking trails. In order to assess the potential for erosion, the slope and erosion potential of the soils were analyzed. A slope map was used to examine the terrain throughout the project area (figure 6). This map served as the starting point for the development of trail alternatives. The action alternatives that involve the rerouting or construction of trails were developed to fit the natural terrain and avoid extreme slopes. For these proposed trails, an analysis was then completed to determine where soil types (figure 7) were present that experience a high hazard of erosion based on the USDA Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland (USDA. 2009).

**Alternative A (No Action):** Under this alternative, there would be no additional impact to soils as the existing trail system would remain unchanged.

**Alternative B:** The impacts of this alternative would be long term and minor. The new trail would be in an area of gentler slope than the portion of trail that would be closed under this alternative. The rerouting of trails under this alternative would reduce the length of Park trails by .7 miles, reducing the overall potential for compaction and erosion. Additionally, based on the USDA Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland rating, 50% of the soil types affected have a slight to moderate erosion hazard, and 50% a severe hazard (table 1). Care would be taken to mitigate the erosion potential of the trail in areas of steep slope or high erosion potential.

**Table 1**

<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Percent of Trail</u>	<u>Erosion Hazard</u>
BaB	3	Slight
BaD	31	Moderate
BbE	50	Severe
FxA	4	Slight
FoB	12	Slight

**Alternative C:** The impacts of this alternative would be long term and minor. The rerouted trail will have similar impacts of erosion and compaction as the existing trail. Based on the USDA Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland rating, 40% of the soil types affected have a slight to moderate erosion hazard, while the remaining 60% could propose a moderate to severe hazard (table 2). Care would be taken to mitigate the erosion potential of the trail in areas of steep slope or high erosion potential.

**Table 2**

<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Percent of Trail</u>	<u>Erosion Hazard</u>
BaB	3	Slight
BaC	4	Slight
BaD	5	Moderate
BbE	36	Severe
FoB	11	Slight
FxA	3	Slight
StD	14	Moderate to Severe
SuF	24	Severe



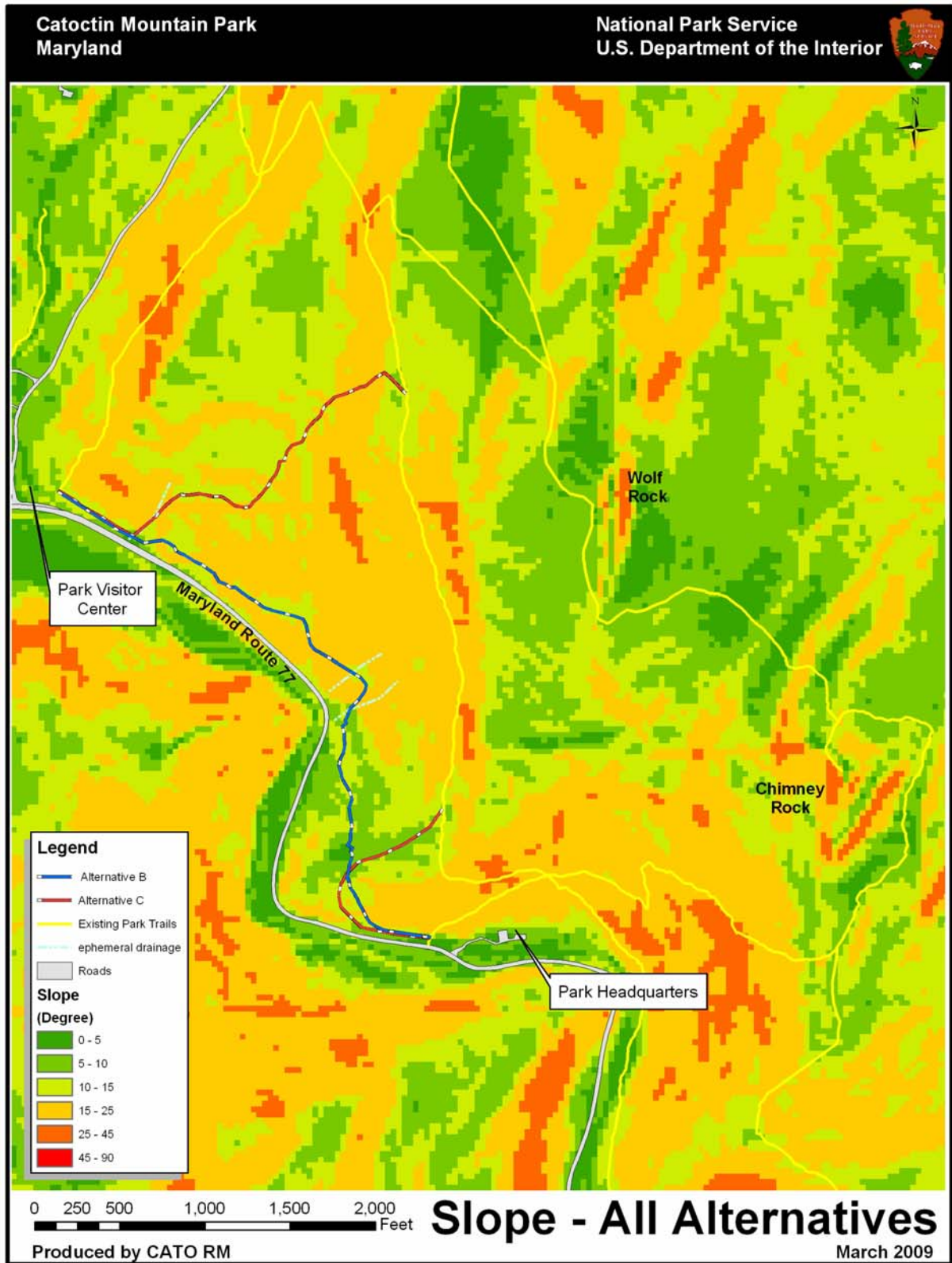


Figure 6

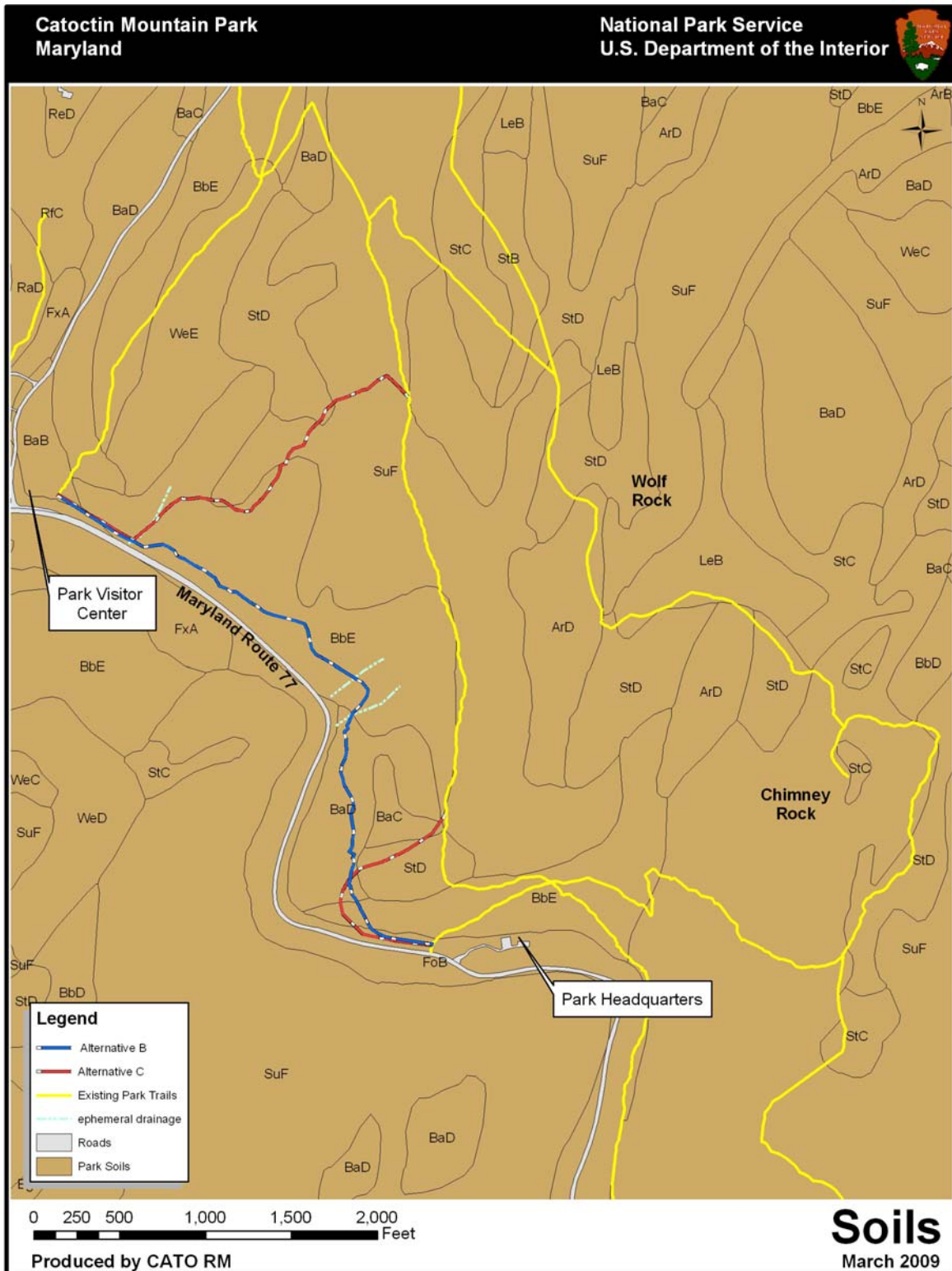


Figure 7

## 5.8 Biological Resources

There is a healthy complement of the common native animal and plant species present at Catoctin Mountain Park. Representative species of the area include turkey, white-tailed deer, spicebush, red maple, timber rattlesnake and brook trout. Over 700 species of vascular plants are recorded in Catoctin Mountain Park including over 33 species of ferns, 60 species of trees, and numerous species of flowering plants and shrubs.

### Conclusion of Impacts to Plants and Animals

**Alternative A (No Action):** Under this alternative, there would be no additional impact to plants and animals as hiking would remain limited to the existing Park trail system.

**Alternative B:** There is little ground vegetation in this area. A few, low growing tree branches would be pruned back but the health of the trees would not be affected. There would be minimal ground level disturbance as the trail will be no more than three feet. No impairments to park related resources or values would result.

It is expected that there would be a temporary movement of animal species (e.g. deer, turkey, birds, some insects, etc) from the area during development and during use. Since the frequency of use is low, animal species would return to the area. No impairments to park related resources or values would result.

There are no fish or macro-invertebrates in the project area as these streams dry up in the summer. Any seasonal drainage will be spanned by wooden bridges to protect these areas during wet periods.

### Alternative C:

There is little ground vegetation in this area. A few, low growing tree branches would be pruned back but the health of the trees would not be affected. There would be minimal ground level disturbance as the trail will be no more than three feet. No impairments to park related resources or values would result.

It is expected that there would be a temporary movement of animal species (e.g. deer, turkey, birds, some insects, etc) from the area during development and during use. Since the frequency of use is low, animal species would return to the area. No impairments to park related resources or values would result.

There are no fish or macro-invertebrates in the project area as these streams dry up in the summer

## 5.9 Species of Concern

The National Park System's 2006 Management Policies state if any federally or state listed species were to be documented within the park boundaries, active management programs would be undertaken to inventory, monitor, restore, and maintain the listed species' habitats, control detrimental non-native species, control detrimental visitor access, and re-establish extirpated populations as necessary to maintain the species and habitats upon which they depend.

There are no documented occurrences of any federally listed threatened or endangered species occurring within Catoctin Mountain Park. Federally listed species would not be adversely affected or impacted in any way. Several Maryland state listed species occur within the park boundaries (Appendix A) but none are known to be present within the project area.

**Alternative A and C:** No impairments to park related resources or values would result from any of the alternatives presented in this EA.

**Alternative B:** Under Alternative B, a section of existing trail will be permanently closed. This trail is located near a known area of preferred habitat for a Park species of management concern. By routing visitors away from this area, there is the potential for a minor positive impact on this species.

## 5.10 Environmental Justice

Executive Order No. 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, federal agencies shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low income populations.

**All Alternatives:** There will be no impacts or impairments to human health or environmental effects on minority populations or low income populations.

## 6.0 Preparers and Consultants

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## APPENDIX A – Catoctin Mountain Park State Listed Species

SPECIES	COMMON NAME	STATUS
<b>Coeloglossum viride</b>	<b>Long Bracted Orchid</b>	<b>MD Endangered</b>
<b>Dirca palustris</b>	<b>Leatherwood</b>	<b>MD Threatened</b>
<b>Juglans cinerea</b>	<b>Butternut</b>	<b>MD Rare</b>
<b>Castanea dentata</b>	<b>Chestnut (w/fruit)</b>	<b>MD Watchlist</b>
<b>Corydalis sempervirens</b>	<b>Pale Corydalis</b>	<b>MD Watchlist</b>
<b>Panax quinquefolius</b>	<b>American Ginseng</b>	<b>MD Watchlist</b>
<b>Trichostema brachiatum</b>	<b>False Pennyroyal</b>	<b>MD Watchlist</b>
<b>Trillium cernuum</b>	<b>Nodding Trillium</b>	<b>MD Watchlist</b>

## **APPENDIX B - Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland**

# Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland

Frederick County, Maryland

[Onsite investigation may be needed to validate the interpretations in this table and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given site. The numbers in the value columns range from 0.01 to 1.00. The larger the value, the greater the potential limitation. The table shows only the top five limitations for any given soil. The soil may have additional limitations]

Map symbol and soil name	Pct. of map unit	Hazard of off-road or off-trail erosion		Hazard of erosion on roads and trails		Suitability for roads (natural surface)	
		Rating class and limiting features	Value	Rating class and limiting features	Value	Rating class and limiting features	Value
<b>BaB:</b>							
Bagtown	85	Slight		Slight		Moderately suited	
						Rock fragments	0.50
						Slope	0.50
<b>BaC:</b>							
Bagtown	85	Slight		Slight		Moderately suited	
						Rock fragments	0.50
						Slope	0.50
<b>BaD:</b>							
Bagtown	85	Moderate		Moderate		Poorly suited	
		Slope/erodibility	0.50	Slope/erodibility	0.50	Slope	1.00
						Rock fragments	0.50
						Low strength	0.50
<b>BbE:</b>							
Bagtown	85	Moderate		Severe		Poorly suited	
		Slope/erodibility	0.50	Slope/erodibility	0.95	Rock fragments	1.00
						Slope	1.00
<b>FoB:</b>							
Foxville	90	Slight		Slight		Poorly suited	
						Flooding	1.00
						Rock fragments	0.50
						Low strength	0.50
						Wetness	0.50
<b>FxA:</b>							
Foxville	50	Slight		Slight		Poorly suited	
						Flooding	1.00
						Rock fragments	0.50
						Low strength	0.50
						Wetness	0.50
Hatboro	45	Slight		Slight		Poorly suited	
						Ponding	1.00
						Flooding	1.00
						Wetness	1.00
						Low strength	0.50

# Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland

Frederick County, Maryland

Map symbol and soil name	Pct. of map unit	Hazard of off-road or off-trail erosion		Hazard of erosion on roads and trails		Suitability for roads (natural surface)	
		Rating class and limiting features	Value	Rating class and limiting features	Value	Rating class and limiting features	Value
<b>StD:</b>							
Stumptown	55	Moderate Slope/erodibility	0.50	Moderate Slope/erodibility	0.50	Poorly suited Slope Low strength	1.00 0.50
Rock outcrop	40	Moderate Slope/erodibility Slope/erodibility	0.50 0.50	Severe Slope/erodibility Slope/erodibility	0.95 0.95	Poorly suited Slope	1.00
<b>SuF:</b>							
Stumptown	50	Severe Slope/erodibility	0.75	Severe Slope/erodibility	0.95	Poorly suited Slope Low strength	1.00 0.50
Bagtown	40	Very severe Slope/erodibility	0.95	Severe Slope/erodibility	0.95	Poorly suited Slope Rock fragments Low strength	1.00 0.50 0.50
Rock outcrop	10	Very severe Slope/erodibility Slope/erodibility	0.95 0.75	Severe Slope/erodibility Slope/erodibility	0.95 0.95	Poorly suited Slope	1.00

## Hazard of Erosion and Suitability for Roads on Forestland

This table can help forestland owners or managers plan the use of soils for wood crops. Interpretive ratings are given for the soils according to the limitations that affect various aspects of forestland management. The ratings are both verbal and numerical.

Numerical ratings in the table indicate the severity of individual limitations. The ratings are shown as decimal fractions ranging from 0.01 to 1.00. They indicate gradations between the point at which a soil feature has the greatest negative impact on the specified aspect of forestland management (1.00) and the point at which the soil feature is not a limitation (0.00).

The paragraphs that follow indicate the soil properties considered in rating the soils. More detailed information about the criteria used in the ratings is available in the "National Forestry Manual," which is available in local offices of the Natural Resources Conservation Service or on the Internet.

Ratings in the column "hazard of off-road or off-trail erosion" are based on slope and on soil erosion factor K. The soil loss is caused by sheet or rill erosion in off-road or off-trail areas where 50 to 75 percent of the surface has been exposed by logging, grazing, mining, or other kinds of disturbance. The hazard is described as slight, moderate, severe, or very severe. A rating of "slight" indicates that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions; "moderate" indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed; "severe" indicates that erosion is very likely and that erosion-control measures, including revegetation of bare areas, are advised; and "very severe" indicates that significant erosion is expected, loss of soil productivity and off-site damage are likely, and erosion-control measures are costly and generally impractical.

Ratings in the column "hazard of erosion on roads and trails" are based on the soil erosion factor K, slope, and content of rock fragments. The ratings apply to unsurfaced roads and trails. The hazard is described as slight, moderate, or severe. A rating of "slight" indicates that little or no erosion is likely; "moderate" indicates that some erosion is likely, that the roads or trails may require occasional maintenance; and that simple erosion-control measures are needed; and "severe" indicates that significant erosion is expected, that the roads or trails require frequent maintenance, and that costly erosion-control measures are needed.

Ratings in the column "suitability for roads (natural surface)" are based on slope, rock fragments on the surface, plasticity index, content of sand, the Unified classification, depth to a water table, ponding, flooding, and the hazard of soil slippage. The ratings indicate the suitability for using the natural surface of the soil for roads. The soils are described as well suited, moderately suited, or poorly suited to this use. "Well suited" indicates that the soil has features that are favorable for the specified kind of roads and has no limitations. Good performance can be expected, and little or no maintenance is needed. "Moderately suited" indicates that the soil has features that are moderately favorable for the specified kind of roads. One or more soil properties are less than desirable, and fair performance can be expected. Some maintenance is needed. "Poorly suited" indicates that the soil has one or more properties that are unfavorable for the specified kind of roads. Overcoming the unfavorable properties requires special design, extra maintenance, and costly alteration.

### Reference:

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## **APPENDIX C – Trail Relocation Press Release**



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Catoctin Mountain Park

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## Catoctin Mountain Park News Release

For Release: April 3, 2009  
Contact: Mel Poole, Superintendent

### **Catoctin Mountain Park Announces the Availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment to Relocate a Hiking Trail for Review and Comment**

The Draft Environmental Assessment for relocating a hiking trail in Catoctin Mountain Park is available for public review on-line at the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cato> and on the Catoctin Mountain Park web site at [www.nps.gov/cato](http://www.nps.gov/cato). Bound copies are also available for review at the Park Visitor Center located at the intersection of Maryland Route 77 and Park Central Road, at Park Headquarters located approximately 2 miles west of Thurmont on Maryland Route 77, and at the public libraries in Frederick, Thurmont, Smithsburg, and Hagerstown.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) will provide decision-makers with information and analysis of alternatives and potential impacts of reconfiguring the hiking trails at Catoctin Mountain Park in order to provide for the safety and enjoyment of Park visitors. The proposed alternatives include a no-action alternative (Alternative A) and two action alternatives (Alternatives B and C). Alternative B (the preferred alternative) calls for rerouting of an existing trail to parallel Maryland Route 77 from the Park Headquarters to the Park Visitor Center. Alternative C proposes an existing trail be rerouted to eliminate a confusing trail intersection and provide a more direct route back to the Park Visitor Center.

We encourage comments to be submitted on-line at the PEPC web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cato>. In the PEPC web site select Relocate Hiking Trail from the list of Park projects to download the document and submit on-line comments.

Written comments can also be submitted to: Superintendent, Catoctin Mountain Park, 6602 Foxville Road, Thurmont, Maryland 21788. Comments will be accepted until May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

For questions or further information, please contact Sean Denniston, Resources Manager, Catoctin Mountain Park at (301) 416-0536.

Catoctin Mountain Park is one of 391 units administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Park Visitor Center, located on State Route 77 three miles west of Thurmont, Maryland, is open daily from 10:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., and from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Superintendent, Catoctin Mountain Park, 6602 Foxville Road, Thurmont, MD 21788. Our website address is [www.nps.gov/cato](http://www.nps.gov/cato). General information can be obtained by calling the Visitor Center at (301) 663-9388.

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