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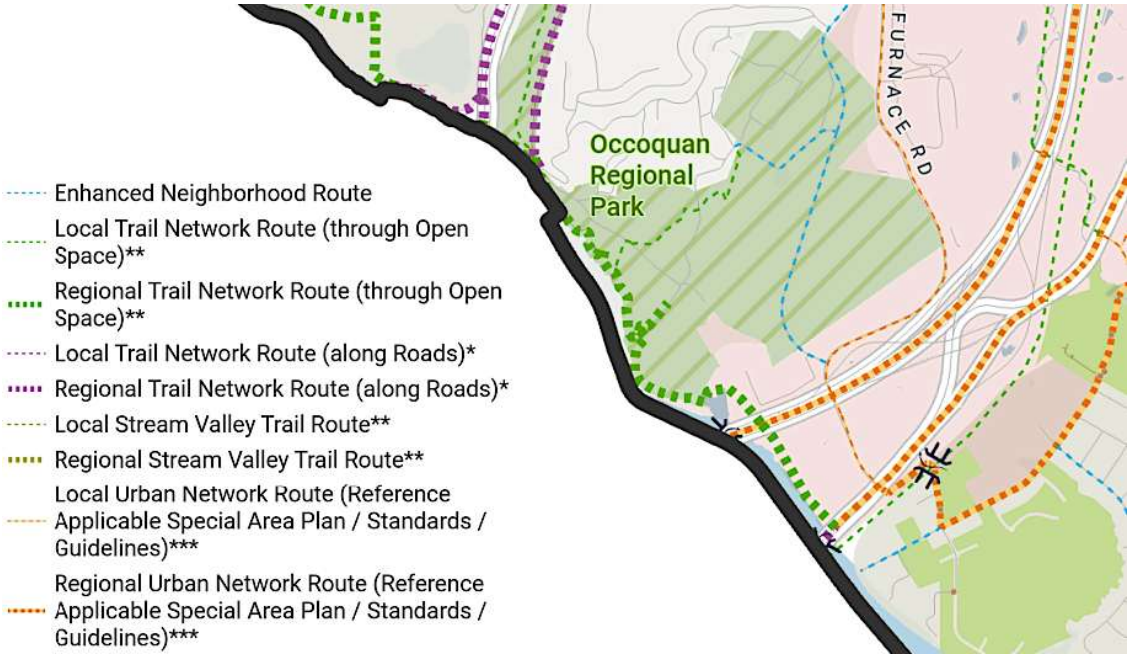
Greater Prince William TRAILS COALITION

Agenda for October 24 Quarterly Meeting

The Quarterly Meeting for the Greater Prince William Trails Coalition will be October 24, 10:00-11:00am (30 minutes shorter than most recent meetings). **Please register** to attend in-person or via Zoom.

Weather permitting, we will also have a field trip after the meeting to explore the southern end of the **Neabsco Creek Boardwalk**. Improvements are planned at that end, but that trail segment is not fully accessible yet. We'll drive/carpool 20 minutes south to the parking spot. Field trip should finish by 12:30pm, but we might linger longer to see the view.

Agenda:
- Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST) updates:
  Featherstone Ribbon Cutting!
  Gap Analysis Updates
  National Park Service and Prince William Forest Park Update
  Powell's Creek Crossing
- Aspirational Trails Map kickoff (planning for update to Prince William County's Trails Map)
- Discussion on FY2026 Budget Advocacy (Prince William County added $1,000,000 in FY25 but our Trails Plan needs a lot more!)
- Member Updates
- Field Trip to the south side of Neabsco Boardwalk (bring a lunch!)



Active Fairfax Seeks Public Input

Fairfax County is combining its Bicycle Master Plan and Countywide Trails Plan to create one **ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan**. In addition to a dozen in-person open houses in September, there will be four virtual meetings between November 12-20.

As described in FFX NOW:
"*The plan aims to make it safer and easier for people to get around by constructing dedicated bike paths separate from road traffic and improving the connectivity of walking trails that link neighborhoods with schools, parks and commercial areas…*"
Fairfax County now has a 600-mile network of trails. In contrast to Prince William County, the supervisors in Fairfax have invested significantly in building bike/pedestrian infrastructure since the1970's.

More than token new funding will be required to enhance the ActiveFairfax trails network:
"In 2021, the Board of Supervisors set a goal of dedicating around $100 million to active transportation improvements over the next six years. However, that funding is intended for smaller-scale, spot improvements, rather than the larger, more costly projects outlined in the new comprehensive plan."

One "opportunity" is to align where Fairfax and Prince William counties plan for future bike/pedestrian crossings over Bull Run and the Occoquan River. Eileen Sheridan, Chair of Greater Prince William Trails Coalition, has sent suggestions to county staff identifying seven specific places. Linking trails into a more comprehensive regional network could be done at places from Manassas National Battlefield Park to the future new railroad bridge downstream of Route 1.

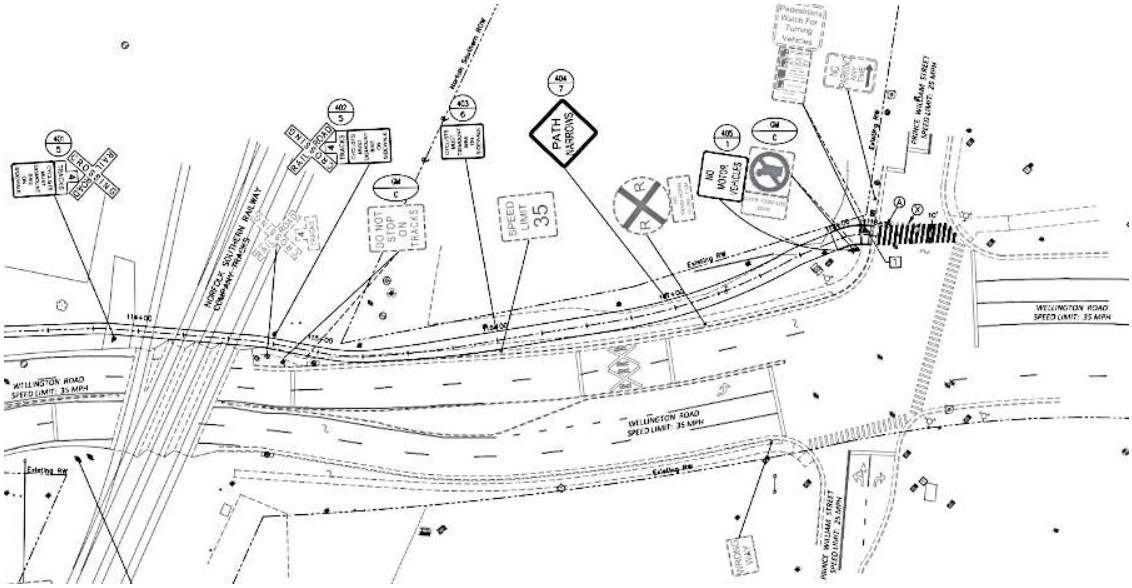
Mayhew Trail “Opportunity”

Mayhew Sports Complex is next to I-66. A trail along Bull Run passes through it and Ben Lomond Park, connecting Splashdown WaterPark and Manassas National Battlefield Park.

After two ballfields were constructed there, stormwater runoff carved deep ditches into the bank of Bull Run. The Service Authority, now Prince William Water, installed two structures (see above) to protect the sewer line coming from the I-66 rest stops.

At the time, there was no coordination between the county agencies. The pipeline protection structures were not designed as bridges to allow hikers to cross the ditch. Walking on the trail along Bull Run now requires taking two diversionary side trips into the woods, in order to cross the ditches upstream of the pipeline.

It is possible that the county could correct the stormwater problem by a stream restoration project. The pipeline protection structures could also be upgraded, but no funding has been identified for such projects - yet.



Wellington Trail: Look for Construction Soon

City of Manassas has received final approval from Norfolk Southern to start construction to close the **Wellington Road Shared Use Path Gap**. That project will connect Prince William Street with Nokesville Road, crossing over the railroad tracks.

The **Grant Avenue Streetscape Project** is nearing completion as well. That road diet added a new shared use path along one side of Grant Avenue.

Trails and Blueways Council Earns Award

The **Potomac Heritage Trail Association** (PHTA) will honor the Prince William County Trails and Blueways Council on September 27 The award will be given at the land managers conference hosted by the National Park Service at Williamsport, MD.

The PHTA has been pressing for extending the **Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail** (PHNST) through Loudoun County to Harpers Ferry. Though the PHNST is a unit in the National Park Service system, getting approval of specific routes from park superintendents (and avoiding segments along highways) has been a challenge.

Representatives Gerry Connolly and Jenifer Wexton sent a letter on August 6 to the superintendent of the PHNST highlighting their interest in having a route worthy of the name “Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.”

In **Prince William Forest Park**, there is a significantly different challenge. That park has endorsed using the **Washington-Rochambeau route** followed by the American and French armies in 1781 on the way to Yorktown. However, funding is needed for an archeological survey (about $50,000) and a Cultural Landscape Report (about $125,000), plus a Threatened and Endangered Species survey (especially for the small whorled pogonia plant), before any construction can occur.

Also at the September 11 meeting of the PHTA, there was discussion of:
- how to close site-specific gaps in Fairfax County, and some site visits to explore potential routes
- maintenance needs of various PHNST braids
- how to get CSX and Virginia Passenger Rail Authority approval to build trails beneath railroad overpasses
- upcoming meetings of the PHNST subcommittee of the Prince William County Trails and Blueways Council on September 18 regarding Gap 1 (between the Town of Occoquan and Rt. 1/Belmont Bay) and on September 25 regarding PHNST Gaps 2 & 3 (between the Town of Dumfries and Prince William Forest Park, and along Joplin Road between Prince William Forest Park and Rt. 1/Locust Shade Park).
- updates regarding Dalhgren Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail in King George County
- how to get state support for funding completion of the PHNST, perhaps after designationas as a sixth **General Assembly-identified trail**

NVRC Recreational Trails Summit

The now-annual regional gathering organized by the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) was split this year into a virtual and an in-person day. A **Spring 2024 survey** identified maintenance and regional connections as the highest trail priorities (see above).

NVRC presented the current status of the Walking and Biking Trails of Northern Virginia - Data Warehouse. In **her presentation**, Cassi Patterson described how the State Trails Office of the Virginia Department of Transportation is also compiling a trails map intended to include “anything named and publicly accessible.” You can **see all the slides** from both days.

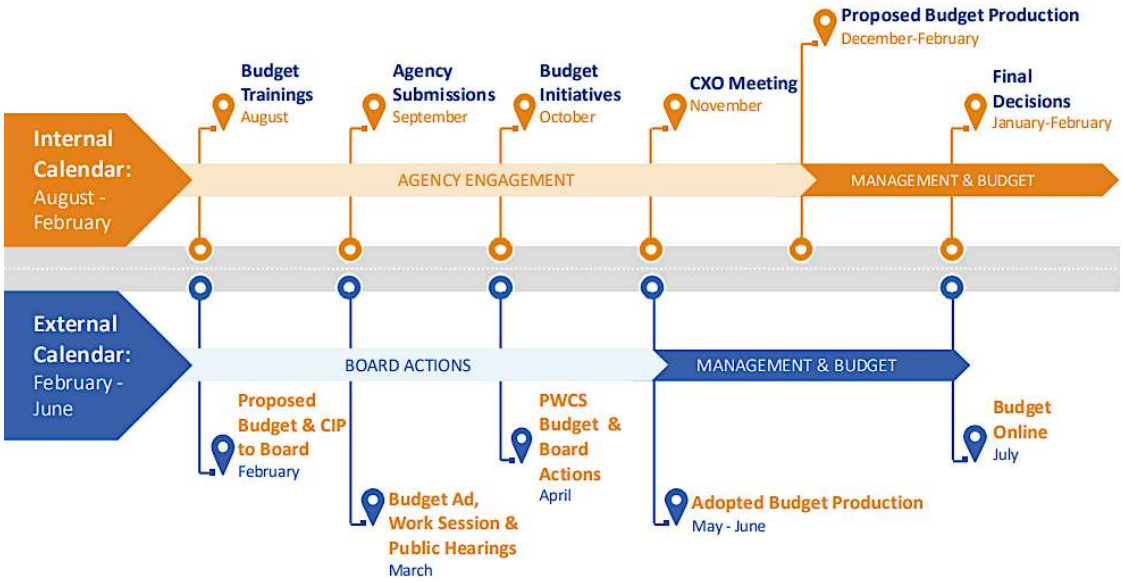
Coming next: virtual 1-hour presentation11:00am-noon on October 21 about NVRC’s **Wayfinding, Amenities, and Interpretation Study Results**, including next steps for a PHNST wayfinding and amenities implementation plan.

Cancelling Plans For a Pedestrian Bridge Over Route 15

As reported in Prince William Times, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors is preparing to cancel plans to construct a pedestrian bridge across Route 15 between Dominion Valley to Battlefield High.

The proposed bridge received initial funding after a student was killed crossing the highway in 2021. Since then, projected costs escalated to $25 million. In addition, traffic surveys at Unity Reed, Woodbridge, Gar-Field and Colgan high schools revealed that they had more pedestrian traffic than Battlefield.

Alternatives to a Route 15 pedestrian bridge included an already-implemented lowering of the speed limit near Battlefield High School and installation of red light cameras for enforcement. In addition, a new parking lot near the school would eliminate the incentive for students to park at a shopping center across Route 15 and then cross that highway on foot.



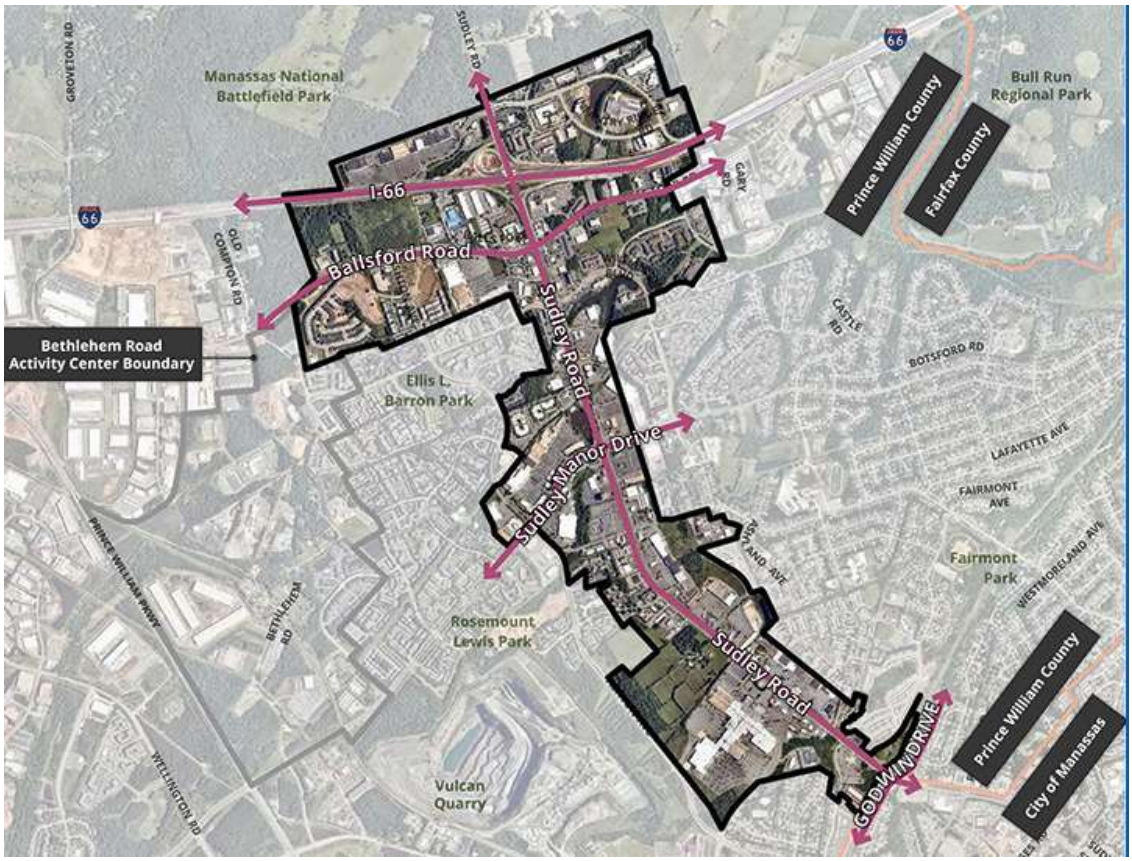
Want Trails to Be Funded? Then It Is Time to Start Asking…

Prince William County staff are preparing FY26 budget proposals now for consideration by County Executive Chris Shorter. Inevitably, some requests will not appear in the FY26 budget that he will release for public review starting in January, 2025.

If one or more of the members of the Board of County Supervisors tell the County Executive now that their voters consider trails funding to be a priority, there is a higher probability that funding will be included in the draft budget.

Now is the first time in the FY26 process to send an e-mail to elected officials requesting funding for a specific project, or for a general increase in support of trails development in order to implement the county's new strategic plan. Second opportunity will be in February/March 2025, but it is harder to get significant funding added then compared to now.

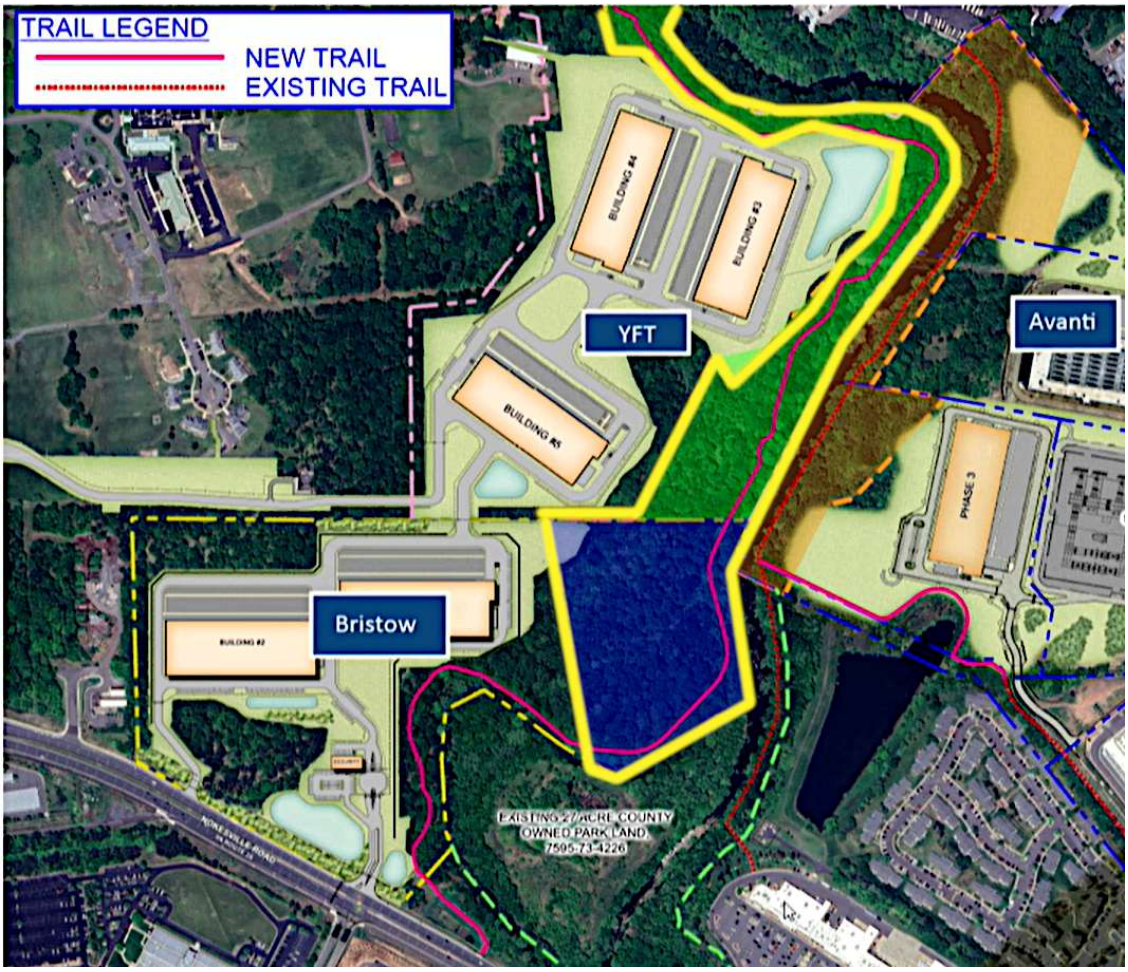
The FY26 budget will be driven by the new 2025-2028 Strategic Plan. The **draft plan** currently includes:
Goal 2: Environment *Preserve the County's natural beauty and resources where residents can enjoy nature and open spaces are created and maintained*
- Enhance and expand public parks, trails, and green spaces while helping to ensure accessibility for all residents and visitors



Sudley Road Corridor Study Funded

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) has approved a **Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) study** of the Sudley Road corridor between Godwin Drive and Manassas National Battlefield Park. The study will assess land use, economic development, housing, equity and transportation issues in the nearly 3-mile corridor.
The Urban Land Institute will produce a report by the end of June 2025. It is expected to become the foundation for a Small Area Plan that guides redevelopment of 1,326 acres.

The final result will include plans for better bike/pedestrian connectivity. Currently pedestrians or bikers can not safely cross underneath I-66 in order to access the national park or the Manassas campus of Northern Virginia Community College. In addition, there is a gap in sidewalk next to Ambassador Square, requiring people to get out into a lane of traffic to cross over a small stream.



New Proffered Trail at Broad Run Linear Park

On September 11 the Prince William County Planning Commission approved the **Bristow Campus rezoning and Special Use Permit** to allow for construction of two data centers.

In order to bring electricity to the site, the proposal included burying a distribution line underneath Broad Run rather than expanding the width of the existing powerline that now crosses the stream and the existing trail on the east side of Broad Run. A previous proposal for building an electrical substation on the site was not in the version approved by the Planning Commission, but a proffer revision could be requested for that and an overhead transmission line.

The developer agreed to donate the eastern portion of several parcels along Broad Run (bounded in yellow, above) to the county for public parkland. The applicant also proffered a trail easement from Route 28 into the new parkland, and agreed to build a natural surface trail.

Planning ahead matters. The proffered land had been designated in 2022 as Parks and Open Space (POS) on the **Land Use Map** in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

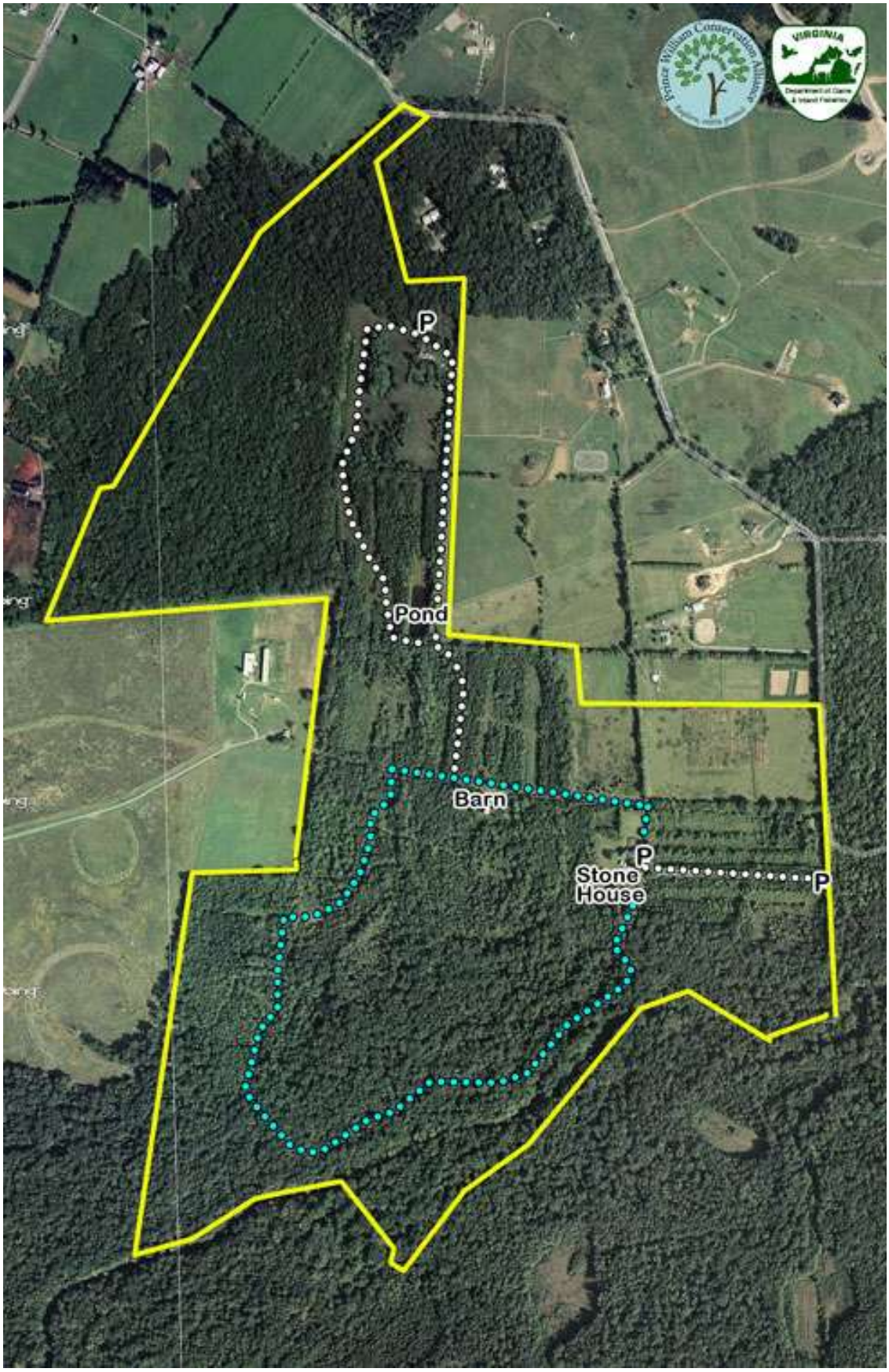
The Bristow Campus proposal will now go forward to the Board of County Supervisors (BOCS). The Planning Commission is an advisory body for rezonings and Special Use Permits. The BOCS has authority to make final decisions.

Second Sunday Hike on October 13

There were pawpaws, wayfinding challenges, and scenic vistas on the September 9 Second Sunday hike at Doves Landing Park (see above). On October 13, we will hike 3.6 miles at **Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area** between 1:00-3:00pm.

Please register to get details and potential cancellation notices if weather does not cooperate.

Many have seen it during the **Bluebell Festival** each April, sponsored by the Prince William Conservation Alliance - but as the leaves begin to turn, it's a different place.



In Other News…

- The September 19 meeting of the **Woodbridge Potomac Communities Civic Association** (WPCCA) at the GMU Potomac Science Center will include a presentation on the Destination Place rezoning proposal (Plan Number **REZ2024-00033**). Meeting **details are online**.
- **Car Free Day 2024** is September 23.
- Check out the **August newsletter** and the **Bike Bus Starter Guide** from the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA).
- The Rails to Trails Conservancy offers multiple webinars, including **Learn How to Advocate for Trails Where You Live**.
- The **Fauquier Trails Coalition** is holding the 2024 Great Pumpkin Ride. **Get more details** and register online.
- The Dahlgren Trail in King George County is holding its first ever bike event - the 8-mile round trip Trailblazer - on October 19. Ride is a a fundraiser (sign up for $5) for the purchase and installation of public bike maintenance stands along the trail. **Get more details** and register online.
- Learn about the history and funding of the East Coast Greenway by listening to Elliot Caldwell on the **"Mechanics of Transportation" podcast**.

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