

WASHINGTON CROSSING STATE PARK

(INCLUDES SUBUNIT: PRINCETON BATTLEFIELD STATE PARK)

PARK PURPOSE

Washington Crossing State Park was established to clearly project the historical significance of the site where the Continental Army under George Washington crossed the Delaware River. This goal is to maintain and/or develop for public access the authenticity of the site and related spaces.

A secondary purpose of the park has been to provide recreational uses compatible within the basic resources of the park.

VISITOR SERVICE AREA

The park is located in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, approximately seven miles north of Trenton. Approximately, 60% of the visitors to Washington Crossing State Park are from within a 25-mile radius, including the metropolitan areas of Trenton, Northeast Philadelphia and New Brunswick. 20% are from outside the 50-mile radius zone, including other states and several foreign countries. Administrative subunits of Washington Crossing include Trenton Battle Monument, Princeton Battle Monument, Rockingham, Wallace House, Old Dutch Parsonage, Old Airport Property, Rotary Island, and Marshall House. Princeton Battlefield State Park is also a sub-unit and is addressed separately in this package.

The park is 841 acres in size, including 100 acres of designated Natural Area. It is situated in a region characterized by rounded hills and broad valleys. Vegetative cover varies from mowed lawns and landscaped areas to a mature oak-hickory forest. Reforestation of farmland within the park has occurred, the primary species being red and white pine.

The Delaware River runs along the western boundary of the park for approximately 2,100 feet. The Delaware and Raritan Canal runs for approximately 2,800 feet between Route 29 and the Delaware River. There is a man-made pond of $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in size at the northern end of the park.

PREVIOUS PLANNING

This document is the first update of the original Park Planning Guide for Washington Crossing State Park, prepared for FY 85-94.

RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCES

@ The Washington Crossing Association operates the Open Air Theatre at the park.

@ Since a portion of the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park intersects with Washington Crossing State Park, there is an administrative relationship with the D & R Canal Commission.

@ Originally, the entire park was designated as a National Historic Landmark; however the NPS is proposing a change to include only the area along Continental Lane as the New National Historical Landmark boundary. The site is also listed on the State Registration for Historical Sites.

@ 100 acres of Washington Crossing State Park has been designated as a Natural Area under the National Areas Act of 1978. Eventually, a management plan for this area will be prepared by the Office of Natural Lands Management.

@ Amateur Astronomers Association: ground is leased on which an observatory has been built near the existing Nature Center. Consideration should be given to terminate this lease due to the Phillips farm project and new Nature Center construction.

@ Marshall House Lease: The Marshall House lease is presently leased to the Lambertville Historical Society. The lease should be revised so that the lessee has sole responsibility for the maintenance of the structure. The present lease agreement states that the lessor will be responsible for repairs over \$300. This revision will be a benefit to the state in reducing costs.

EXISTING ACTIVITIES/TRENDS AND DEMANDS

Washington Crossing State Park is presently providing opportunity for several of the S.C.O.R.P. projected deficit-recreational activities

for Mercer County: hiking, bicycling, baseball/softball, soccer/football, picnicking, and horseback riding. According to park use data, there is an increase in winter activities, especially cross-country skiing. Use of snowmobiles and horseback riding has decreased to a very low activity level.

The strongest demand is for additional field sports areas, specifically softball and soccer, and proposed development will address these needs.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT RATIONALE

Any improvements and/or development will belong to one of three categories:

- A. Recreational Development
- B. Renovation and Rehabilitation
- C. Historical Development

A. Recreational Development Projects:

1. A new nature center will be built in the area known as Cedar Bliss. This new structure, planned for several years, will replace the present structure which is in poor condition. A nature center at Washington Crossing has proven to be very popular in the past, particularly with school groups. This new location will allow use of parking facilities at the Open-Air Theatre (an evening operation), and will allow a tie-in with the existing trail system/Natural Area.
2. A new park office to be built in the vicinity of the park entrance/contact station. The present facility used as the park office is located outside of the park proper, across County Route 579.
3. A new maintenance complex is recommended. The present one is composed of seven scattered buildings. Security fencing

is lacking and would be difficult to install due to the building and roadway layout. The Blackwell house is situated in the middle of this area and is currently used as a D.E.P. conference center and employee housing. The Blackwell house and the maintenance operations are not in the best interests of each other from both an aesthetic and a safety aspect. The recommended location for this new complex would be East of the new park office. This would eliminate maintenance operations from the lower historical part of the park. Recommend all the maintenance buildings be demolished except the structures associated with the Blackwell house. **

B. Renovation and Rehabilitation Projects:

1. Landscaping of removed road sections and in peripheral areas to serve as visual/noise buffer.
2. Road Renovations - Various improvements to the park circulation system will be made: elimination of old entrance roads near Route 29; elimination of road intersection by the Visitor Center; construction of a loop connector and subsequent removal of confusing intersection.
3. Green Grove Improvements - Expansion of parking and picnicking facilities will be done as well as the construction of a road segment to "tie-in" area with park traffic flow.

** See page 6a. for item #4.

A. Recreational Development Projects-continued:

4. Establish three (3) group picnic sites in the area between the intersection of Brickyard Road and the old park entrance on Rte. 546. There is a demand for a group picnic site for up to 500 people. Recommended are 3 sites. One site for 500 people and two other sites for 300 people. Included in this recommendation would be restroom facilities and picnic shelters.

4. Phillips Farm Field Expansion - The Phillips Farm area would be further developed to support field sports. The existing soccer field is very popular; however, additional fields, an access road and parking facilities should be provided. Presently, the area is separated from other park activities and the entrance intersection is somewhat hazardous. A destination-type parking lot and road will tie in with the overall internal park circulation system, eliminating further fragmentation of the park. When both this project and the new nature center are completed, a major section of Brickyard Road will be closed.

C. Historical Development Projects:

1. Wallace House Historic Site

The proposed acquisition would act as a buffer zone and serve as the residence of employee at the site. It would also enable us to utilize Somerset Street as an access to the Wallace House and Old Dutch Parsonage. The existing employee's residence and garage would be demolished. The proposed acquisition is presently for sale.

2. Blackwell House

This building is currently being considered for a D.E.P. office. A conference center is presently located in 1/3 of this building. In the advent of a new maintenance complex recommendation being approved, this building and its associated out buildings should be restored to their

original exterior appearance. The area can be interpreted as a 19 century farm complex.

3. Trenton Battle Monument

The centennial anniversary of this Historic Monument will take place in 1993. Local and state wide interest is anticipated. The interior of this structure is very small and is lacking proper ventilation and an employee restroom. Recommended is a gazebo type contact station with an employee restroom only. It should be located in front of the Monument.

4. Washington Crossing State Park

Recommend that portions of the park's exterior boundary have 4 rail split fencing. This would give the park a more historical aspect and also add to its aesthetics and security. The areas would be along Bear Tavern Road (Rte. 579), portions of Route 546, portions of Route 29 near the Ferry House, and portions of River Drive.

5. Old Dutch Parsonage

The Old Dutch Parsonage is an administrative sub-unit of Washington Crossing. Repairs of both the interior and exterior of the building are recommended.