

Fact Finder

The Natural Way to Enjoy Open Space

Recognizing the open space resources are a vital part of our ecosystem, Howard County strives to protect and maintain the ecological, natural and environmental values of these properties and to discourage any use which may destroy the land's existing ecological value.

What is Open Space?

Open Space is county parkland which is set aside, during the subdivision development process, for a variety of public purposes. Most often it provides conservation, scenic or recreational opportunities.

Who owns Open Space?

The Howard County Government owns hundreds of acres of open space and administers it through the Natural Resource Division of the Department of Recreation and Parks.

In Columbia, virtually all the open space is owned and managed by the Columbia Association. Occasionally, incorporate community associations own the open space or common areas in their subdivisions.

How does Open Space benefit the environment?

By preserving trees, shrubs and other native vegetation, Open Space protects the quality of both our surface and ground water supplies. This prevents flood damage, soil erosion and pollution of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Critically needed wildlife habitat is provided and protected. Open Space vegetation significantly improves microclimates, helps improve air quality and reduces noise pollution.



How does Open Space meet recreational needs?

Open Space provides accessible land, close to home, for a wide variety of "passive" and "semi passive" recreational uses. These may include hiking, bird and nature study, photography, fishing, etc. Anyone who has marveled at a wren's nest or a litter of young foxes can testify that there is truly recreation to be found on Open Space. These lands can also serve as a resource for nature education and ecological investigation. Other areas are perfect for playing catch, flying a kite or just taking a quiet walk.

(over for more info...)



This fact sheet is primarily concerned with County government owned Open Space

Is Open Space maintained?

Yes, but not in the same way as other parks. Given a mandate to provide environmental protection and wildlife habitat, Howard County maintains a "No Mow" policy for open space. When possible, trees and shrubs are planted to protect streams, feed wildlife and to reforest disturbed areas. In most cases, mother nature is left in charge of the reforestation through natural succession. This practice helps the County to conserve its resources. Pathways and nature trails are provided on some parcels. Other areas offer research opportunities such as stream quality monitoring and wildlife management. Open Space is also used to conduct nature education programs. If a safety hazard should develop on a County owned property it is dealt with as promptly as possible.



Can I plant on Open Space?

Yes, naturalized planting of native species are generally allowed with written approval by the Bureau of Parks.

However....

- NO gardening
- NO formal landscaping
- NO backyard extension

These uses are considered to be private use of public land and are prohibited.



OPEN SPACE
is for our use and enjoyment, but for it to achieve its greatest value our impact must be managed

What else is prohibited on Open Space?

As parkland, all County rules and regulations apply

- NO hunting
- NO dumping or disposal of ANY material.
- NO wood piles
- NO placement of storage sheds, playground equipment, swimming pools, decks, etc.
- NO cutting of grass, shrubs, trees or other vegetation.

For more information...

Volunteers are always needed to help with reforestation, education, site inventory and other programs. If you would like to help us retrieve nature by becoming involved in an Open Space program

Call

The Department of Recreation and Parks,
Natural Resource Division
at 410-313-1679.