

Mountain Biking Task Force

Comments on
Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts, Inc. Recreational Trail Use Plan Proposal

Submitted by

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Baltimore County is opposed to any activity that harms or has the potential to harm the reservoir or its protective forest buffer. The County has supported the City in its efforts to restore the Loch Raven forest through technical assistance, deer management and regulation of development.

Baltimore County is responsible for a pro-rata share of the cost of delivering potable water to County residents. To the extent treatment costs rise due to degradation of the supply water, County residents would have to pay more. As custodians of the public water supply, the County and City are obligated to do their utmost to protect this resource and keep treatment costs as low as possible. One could argue that provision of safe affordable water is one of the most important functions of local government.

Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts, Inc., (nor any other group for that matter) should not assume that the Loch Raven reservoir forest buffer is available for or was created for public recreation.

Baltimore County has extensive laws and regulations designed to protect sensitive habitat and waterways. A proposal to install mountain biking trails in the Loch Raven forest buffer would probably not be approvable under the County's environmental regulations without some sort of variance which would include the submission of an alternatives analysis. Such analysis would involve a determination of the importance of having mountain biking opportunities locally and whether mountain biking opportunities were available elsewhere (such as in federal, state or county parks or on private property). It is unlikely that the County would grant a variance to allow mountain biking in this particular forest buffer, especially given the extremely sensitive nature of this forest buffer, the stress it is already under, and the body of water it helps to protect. Regulators would weigh the importance of protecting the drinking water supply of nearly two million people against the desire of mountain bikers to ride there.

The City should consider the following as it decides on this issue:

- Approving the trail plan as submitted will increase the number of mountain bikers and therefore increase the potential for unauthorized trails and the concomitant enforcement and maintenance issues
- Approving the trail plan as submitted will decrease the ability of the City to deny other groups access to the forest buffer for recreational purposes.
- Approving the trail plan as submitted will cause the need for more enforcement, thereby increasing cost to rate payers.

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- Mountain biking today is different than it was 15 years ago, this is why MORE says that the existing plan is obsolete. In their view, staying on the fire roads would make for a very mild and boring mountain biking experience. There are certainly many venues in the region where one can have a vigorous and challenging mountain biking experience besides the Loch Raven Reservoir forest buffer.
- Endangering this resource for any reason, let alone for a recreational purpose for one specific group, is unwise and an abrogation of our public trust to protect the resource. Frankly, debating whether this trail plan should be adopted begs the question of whether this activity should be allowed at all.
- Approving the trail plan as submitted is another incremental step towards destruction of the Loch Raven forest buffer. The City has long recognized that the Loch Raven forest buffer was degraded and getting worse and that more action was needed to protect the forest buffer and to reverse the damage. Through deer management, forest planting and thinning, invasive removal and proactive oversight, the City and the County are making strides towards restoring the forest. Approving the trail plan as submitted would represent a step backward in that effort.
- There has long been a lack of will on the part of elected officials to take on the important issues facing the forest buffer. Recently, decisions regarding the ranger program, deer management and forest restoration, indicate that this situation was recognized and was being reversed. This trend should continue.