

What does the Green Infrastructure Network Mean to You?

What is Green Infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure is an interconnected network of: waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats and other natural areas; greenways, parks, open space and other conservation lands; and working farms and forests, that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources, and contribute to the health and quality of life for communities and people.



Slaty Skimmer Dragonfly
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller

The purpose of Howard County's Green Infrastructure Network Plan (GI Plan) is to define, protect and enhance a green infrastructure network that includes and links the most ecologically significant natural areas in Howard County.

Why Does Howard County need a GI Plan?

The GI Plan will enable planners to consider important natural resources, and the associated cost savings and quality of life benefits they provide to humans, such as flood mitigation, water and air purification, and reduced urban heat island effect. The GI Plan will be used when preparing the General

Plan, the Land Preservation, Recreation and Parks Plan, transportation plans, watershed plans and community plans; making decisions about zoning and development proposals; acquiring land for parks and public facilities; and obtaining agricultural, environmental and other land preservation easements.

The GI Plan will also be a useful tool for residents and other property owners. The GI Plan will provide a greater understanding of our direct relationship with natural resources and will guide residents and other property owners interested in enhancing the natural features of their property and helping to fill gaps in the interconnected network.

What's in the draft Green Infrastructure Network?

The draft Green Infrastructure Network is a map of the County comprised of:

- **Hubs:** large, ecologically significant natural areas that are capable of providing habitat (food, water, shelter) to a variety of plant and animal species.
- **Corridors:** linear natural areas that tie hubs together and allow for species migration and movement. Typically corridors follow stream valleys and narrow forested areas.



Green Heron
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller

Natural areas included in the mapping are: interior forests, adjacent forests, wetlands, 100-year floodplains, streams, and habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species. Some natural areas within hubs and corridors are already protected as parks, open space, or through easements. Other areas include private forests and farms that are currently undeveloped but may face future alterations to their current natural state. Hubs and corridors exclude developed areas such as buildings (homes, businesses, schools, etc.) and parking lots, and minimize road crossings.

How Does the GI Plan Affect Me or My Property?

With a goal of protecting, enhancing, and linking the most ecologically significant natural areas in Howard County, the Green Infrastructure Network Plan (GI Plan) calls upon everyone to serve as good stewards on their property, no matter how large or small the area. You can help us fill gaps in the network and help enhance and protect areas that may fall within your property by planting trees, obtaining a conservation easement, or voluntarily reducing how close you mow to a stream. Even small steps can help native species return to healthy population sizes and help control non-native species. By supporting the Green Infrastructure Network, you can directly improve our quality of life, air, and water.



Monarch Butterfly
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller

There are a variety of options under consideration for implementing the GI Plan, described below. Some or all of these options may be chosen for the final GI Plan, based on public input. Please review the list below and consider how you may be able to connect with the Green Infrastructure Network.

Stewardship:

Taking steps to provide habitat and best management techniques on your property to best suit the needs of wildlife, can greatly benefit the network. Stewardship is applicable to all properties throughout the County especially those within, adjoining, and near the network, including schools, community centers, businesses, farms, and residences. This tool is voluntary and non-regulatory; however some government programs may be able to assist you with your efforts. A large variety of stewardship actions can benefit our natural areas. Examples include: planting trees, increasing wooded stream buffers, reducing lawn mowing and fertilizing, planting native species, installing rain gardens or pollinator gardens, removing invasive and exotic plants, and installing bird and bat houses.



Long-tailed Salamander
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller

Financial Incentives:

The County may consider instituting property tax credits for the implementation of best management practices that improve water quality and habitat on private land within the network. These incentives would assist those installing stewardship projects, especially large-scale projects that may otherwise be cost-prohibitive, such as extensive tree plantings or wetland restoration.

Regulatory Protection:

The County may consider strengthening existing resource protections, such as increasing stream and wetland buffers, when properties located within the network are developed or redeveloped. Another example of this tool may be mandating forest conservation requirements be met through on-site retention and planting.



Monarch Caterpillar
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller

Easements:

Easements are another voluntary protection tool. These legal agreements provide a way to protect sensitive resources while keeping properties in private ownership. Each agreement is negotiated with the landowner and tailored to the needs of the landowner and the resources of the parcel. The details of the easement explain how the land would be protected by restricting development on the property. The landowner can either donate an easement or may be paid for the permanent development restriction based on an appraisal of the value of the development rights forfeited. The landowner remains the full owner of the property and the easement stays with the land so all future owners are bound by the terms of the agreement. The County already has a few easement programs which could be directed to help protect resources within the network. The County may also consider instituting a new easement acquisition program for the network.

Public Ownership:

Public ownership is another voluntary protection tool that offers permanent protection and public management of the resource. Property within the network that has development potential, but is currently undeveloped (i.e. “uncommitted parcels”) may be considered for future acquisition as funds become available. Less than 10% of the network is uncommitted land, but some of these parcels may contain important resources and fill key protection gaps in the network. The natural resources on each parcel and the location within the network would be carefully considered and used to establish acquisition priorities. After acquisition these parcels would be preserved in a natural state and enhanced to provide increased species habitat.



Young Groundhog
Photo Courtesy of Sue Muller