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# Opinions split on opening Featherstone Wildlife Refuge to public

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Posted: Thursday, February 3, 2011 3:47 pm | Updated: 4:03 pm, Fri Nov 16, 2012.

Amanda Stewart | 0 comments

A new 15-year conservation plan proposed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service lead to the Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge in Woodbridge opening to the public for the first time.

But area residents are split on whether or not that should happen.

The 325-acre piece of land, surrounded on two sides by the Occoquan Bay and Neasco Creek, was acquired by the FWS in 1979 and has been closed to the public ever since.

In a new Comprehensive Conservation Plan proposed by that agency, officials are recommending opening the refuge to the public if "safe and legal access" can be secured.

The FWS held two public meetings about the proposed plan, which sets goals for both Featherstone and Mason Neck wildlife refuges, at Potomac Library in Woodbridge Wednesday.

At the afternoon session, county resident Al Alborn spoke against opening the refuge to the public.

Alborn said that not enough is known about the natural environment at Featherstone, and so no one knows what will happen to it if the refuge is opened.

"Doing nothing right now is a really good option," Alborn said. "Let's let nature take its course."

Kevin Parker, who is a member of several area conservation groups and has led tours at Featherstone, also spoke at the afternoon meeting and said he favored opening the refuge to the public.

"I would like to see it be open and I would like to see it become a place beloved by the people," he said.

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Clear Humidity: 34%  
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 Feels Like: 50°

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<b>Thursday</b> High 49°/Low 24° Sunny	<b>Tomorrow</b> High 50°/Low 27° Sunny
<b>Saturday</b> High 51°/Low 27° Partly Cloudy	<b>Sunday</b> High 59°/Low 43° Light Rain

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For Mason Neck, the conservation plan calls for, among other things, two new trails to be developed on the refuge.

Public comments on the proposed plan will be accepted through Feb. 22 and can be submitted via letters, faxes, phone calls and e-mails, with "Mason Neck/Featherstone Refuges CCP" in the subject line.

To submit comments, e-mail [northeastplanning@fws.gov](mailto:northeastplanning@fws.gov), send letters to Nancy McGarigal, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, MA 01035, call 413-253-8562 or fax 413-253-8468.

FWS staff will evaluate all public comments and revise their plan as needed during March and April. In May, a recommendation will be submitted to the regional director, who will make the final decision for the refuges.

Staff writer Amanda Stewart can be reached at 703-530-3908.

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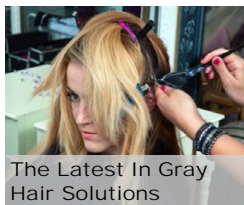
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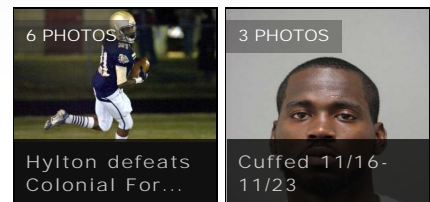
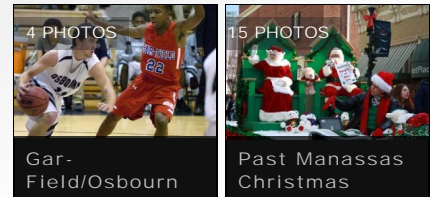
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