

Soapstone Branch Stream Investigation (Saturday, August 26, 2006)

(Stream Watch Committee Team: Kit Valentine, Steve Schreiner & Betsy McMillion)

On Saturday, August 26, the FPVHG stream team made a recon of the Soapstone Branch. We began this recon at the parking lot along Route 166 (Rolling Road) in Catonsville, across the street from the Park and Ride located at Routes 166 and Route I-195 (ADC Map 41 G8). The head waters begin near this area and flow mainly through the Glen Artney Section of Patapsco State Park. This stream ends inside the Glen Artney Recreation area of the park, where it meets with Bull Run (ADC Map 41 E-10). Over 50 digital photos were taken to document this area and any special concerns.

There is easy accessibility to most of the stream due to the park's "Soapstone Trail" which runs almost parallel to the stream, often only a few feet away and often crossing the path of the stream through culverts or at fords.

Overall, the Soapstone Branch could be used as a model for the ideal stream and stream bank conditions. Along the ridge line there was lush vegetation. This is due to the preserved parkland that the stream runs through, with no close development nearby. This stream is surrounded by many hills, a few pools, and the stream has a significant amount of natural bends. However, there was some erosion on the trail near the streams caused by mountain biking and hikers. We found minimal trash along the trail, except for a few heavy bulk items, which need to be removed. The majority of the trash found was located at the beginning of the Soapstone Trail off Route I-166 and at the very end of the trail, which ended in the Glen Artney Recreation Area of Patapsco State Park.

The headwaters is located near the intersection of Route 166 and Route I-195 and are easily accessible. It is an ideal location to see an actual watershed from one spot. The head waters area is a relatively open area (a field showing the beginning succession stages of reverting back to forest cover). There is also an existing forested area. The area also demonstrates the concept of intermittent streams since we have had several months of drought and some of the streams are presently dry. In this area, we observed a bathtub and stove that was dumped on the hillside.

There is some evidence of erosion on the trail. During the weekend day of the recon, we observed several hikers and mountain bikers who used this trail. It is our understanding that this is also a popular horse-riding path."

Just beyond the first confluence point, going downstream, we observed a metal drum barrel in the stream bed. There is also a makeshift bridge that goes across the stream, presumably for the benefit of mountain bikers. There was some active erosion and several small trees that have fallen into the streambed. Further down stream, around an oxbow bend, we noticed a significant amount of erosion on the outside of the streambed. We observed a chimney flu tile dumped in the stream and a tire located further downstream.

While on the trail, we met many mountain bikers. Four bikers who gave us contact information said they were interested in learning more about our stream watch program. We understand that there are mountain bike groups that clean up the trail occasionally, which reduces the amount of trash flowing into the stream and stream banks.

We also observed a blocked culvert. According to Steve Schreiner's GPS coordinates, this is located at approximately longitude west 76 degrees, 43 minutes, 16.3 seconds; longitude north was 39 degrees, 14 minutes and 32.35 seconds.

Recommendations:

Baltimore County: contact Patapsco State Park to clear blocked culvert.

Baltimore County: work with Patapsco State Park to repair eroded trail areas near the stream.

FPVHG: schedule a trash clean up at both entrances of Soapstone Trail.

FPVHG: schedule a trash clean up to pick up the heavy bulk items that appear along the trail.