

Georgetown Current
August 31, 2005

Our Gorgeous Potomac Gorge

Thank you for the good news that the Maryland Congressional delegation has secured \$500,000 of federal funds for the restoration and protection of the Potomac Gorge ("Congressional funds flow to Potomac Gorge" of 8/17). As described in your article, the Gorge is the area from Theodore Island to Great Falls, encompassing the DC-section of undeveloped C&O Canal National Historical Park shoreline between Key Bridge and Chain Bridge. Your article failed to mention, however, that while \$500,000 of public funding has been set aside to protect the Gorge, more than \$10 million of private money is being raised to destroy a section of the Gorge, with the proposed construction of an enormous private Georgetown University boathouse in the C&O Canal Park.

The private facility would be the length of a football field, rise above the level of the Towpath and be constructed on a floodplain (and on top of an 84-inch diameter corroding sewer line). To access the site for the construction and maintenance of the facility, as well as the delivery of boats on 60-ft long trailers, a road would be built along a historic, busy, narrow recreational corridor parallel to the Capital Crescent Trail and the fragile Canal embankment. A 70-ft. private dock would extend out into the river, blocking the route of shoreline boaters. The project would destroy wetlands and modify the hydrology at the site as well as at points downstream. One acre of precious green urban public shoreline would be replaced with a huge private cement building, changing the viewshed of the area forever. Without an engineering or traffic analysis, the project would be the first private development in the Park since it was established in 1971, setting a precedent for future development there.

Fortunately, an Environmental Assessment on the proposal is underway and is expected to be released for public comment this fall. Opponents of the location and size of the facility believe a better boathouse plan outside the boundary of the undeveloped shoreline of the C&O Canal Park and Potomac Gorge is in the public interest. To reach that goal, the National Park Service should require a full Environmental Impact Statement of the Georgetown waterfront area, including consideration of alternative sites, sizes and uses for public and private boathouses on degraded and more accessible land downstream.

To request a copy of the Environmental Assessment on the proposal when it becomes available, contact NCR_Georgetownboathouse@nps.gov and ask to be added to the mailing list.

Sally Strain
Palisades resident and Member
Defenders of Potomac River Parkland
www.savethecanal.org