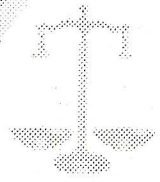




Winner of Excellence in Local Journalism awards from the National Society of Professional Journalists and the Maryland, Delaware and DC Press Association

Home	Conservation leads county to purchase land near Patuxent
Shopping Tools	By Andy Ziemiński
View and Buy Photos	Special to The Sentinel
Montgomery County Sentinel	For a contrast, drive south on state Route 301 from the immaculate condominiums and crowded strip malls of the Bowie Town Center to Swanson Road, seven miles away in Upper Marlboro.
Subscribe	This narrow country lane is lined by tall beech trees and elms, and it winds through rolling farmland, passed weathered barns and modest brick houses where horses peer at you from behind rail fences in the front yard.
Legals	Though it has a timeless quality, signs of rapid growth in Prince George's county can be found as far as the end of Swanson Road. They are the lot markers indicating ownership by Chesapeake Custom Homes, a residential developer intent on building a community there called Swanson Estates.
NIE	But that's as far as housing development can go, because the half-mile of land between the end of Swanson Road and the western bank of the Patuxent River was recently acquired by the county's parks and recreation department from the City of Bowie, its previous owner.
Calendar	It will become protected land that the parks and recreation department expects to incorporate into the Patuxent River Greenway, an envisioned 60-mile trail system running the length of the county's eastern border, said Anita Pesses, a spokesperson for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.
Classifieds	"The idea is to protect the river before it becomes a complete basket case and we have to rescue it," Pesses said.
Submit a Classified Ad	Since 1990, Prince George's county has made room for more than 100,000 new residents by adding an estimated 59,600 new housing structures, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
Archive	Conservationists hope that such growth does not go unchecked.
Prince George's Sentinel	"The importance of purchasing Swanson is far more than connecting the Greenway. It's about protecting open spaces in a county where open space is dwindling," said Fred Tutman, who is known officially as the Patuxent Riverkeeper.
Subscribe	Tutman heads a local environmental group that advocates for the protection of the Patuxent River watershed, which supplies drinking water to more than 500,000 in Prince George's and Montgomery counties.
Legals	"Usually when people think of water advocacy, they think of saving the river and the wildlife within it," Tutman said. "But you're also protecting the investment of the civilization around it. A lot of people take that for granted."
NIE	Unbridled human development leads to a number of problems that reverberate up and down the 110-mile length of the river and its tributaries, Tutman said.
Calendar	Bank erosion upstream causes sediment to choke the river downstream, which impacts the normal habits of fish and makes flooding more likely during intense storms. Pollution flows into the river from the 36 wastewater facilities along its banks and from the runoff of chemicals such as common fertilizers. It ends up in the Chesapeake Bay.
Classifieds	A few small parcels of farmland and a meadow have been carved out of the Swanson land's 318 acres, but the majority of it is forested with sycamores, elms, firs and maples, and will remain undeveloped.
Submit a Classified Ad	The Swanson purchase was negotiated primarily by The Trust for Public Land, a national conservation group, with the help of local interest groups, such as Tutman's organization.
Archive	Funding for the \$3.2 million sale came from the state's Program Open Spaces, a major conservation initiative that gets money from a portion of the transfer tax on Maryland real estate sales.
Contact Us	When Bowie bought this land in 1988, its original intention was to dump sludge on it. However, local opposition prevented the city from getting the necessary permit, said John Fitzwater, the Bowie assistant city manager.
	Until recently, Bowie had the land under contract with Winchester Homes. But the regional housing developer withdrew in the summer of 2005 in part after deciding its due diligence obligation to widen Route 301 would have been financially impractical, Fitzwater said.
	"It's a relief," said Charlie Gettier, a board member of the Prince George's Radio Control Club, a group of remote-controlled airplane hobbyists who have been using the Swanson land since the mid '90s.
	Over the years, his club has invested its own time and money into transforming nine acres of corn into a wide-open meadow with a short airstrip in the middle. It's a perfect site for flying model airplanes because of the abundance of space and the isolation, Gettier said.
	"It's quite a bucolic setting. Sometimes we come out here just to see the deer and the wild turkeys," he added.
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