



Foundation Document Overview

George Washington Memorial Parkway

District of Columbia | Maryland | Virginia



Contact Information

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Purpose



GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY is a scenic roadway honoring the nation's first president, that protects and preserves cultural and natural resources along the Potomac River below Great Falls to Mount Vernon, and is part of a comprehensive system of parks, parkways, and recreational areas surrounding the nation's capital.



Significance

Significance statements express why George Washington Memorial Parkway resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Mount Vernon Memorial Highway was the first comprehensively designed modern motorway built by the federal government. It is based on the idea of a landscaped, park-like roadway corridor that protected riverfront lands and today includes an extension north to the capital beltway, as well as Spout Run Parkway and Clara Barton Parkway.
- At the time of its construction between 1929 and 1932, Mount Vernon Memorial Highway pioneered many principles of roadway design that influenced federal roadway projects throughout the nation, such as limited access construction, grade-separated intersections, cloverleaf interchanges, and landscape design, many of which are still in use today.
- The 15-mile-long Potomac Gorge, a large portion of which is managed by the George Washington Memorial Parkway, is one of the most biologically diverse natural areas in the national park system.
- By protecting the natural shoreline of the Potomac River, the George Washington Memorial Parkway protects a defining feature of the nation's capital and provides opportunities to experience iconic scenic vistas of and from Washington, D.C., and the Potomac Gorge.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- The Parkway Driving Experience
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Vistas and Views
- Memorialization and Celebration of American Ideals
- Recreational Opportunities
- Potomac River Shoreline and Gorge
- Great Falls Park, including the Patowmack Canal
- Arlington Memorial Bridge / Memorial Avenue Corridor

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Cultural Resources
- Diverse Recreation Opportunities in an Urban Setting
- George Washington
- George Washington Memorial Parkway
- Natural Resources
- Scenic Values
- Research, Public Education, and Stewardship

Other Important Resources and Values

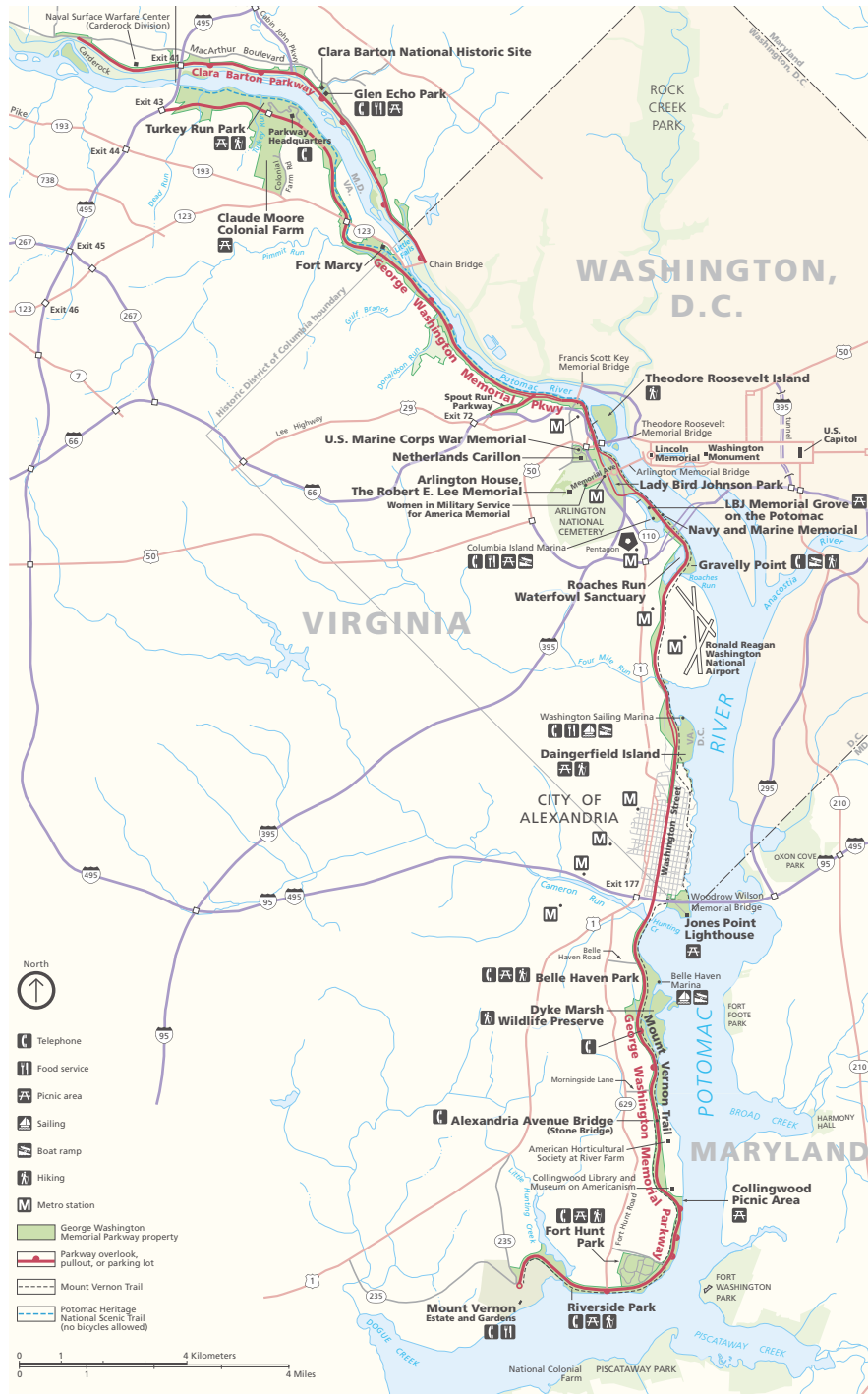
George Washington Memorial Parkway contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

George Washington Memorial Parkway has the following other important resources and values:

- U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial.
- Netherlands Carillon.
- Jones Point Lighthouse and Yard.
- Fort Marcy.
- Fort Hunt Park.
- Glen Echo Park Historic District.
- Biodiversity of Natural Communities.
- Museum Collections.
- Archeological Resources.
- Education.
- Navy and Marine Memorial.
- Cultural Landscapes.
- Historic Structures.



Description



George Washington Memorial Parkway was established by Congress on May 29, 1930, through Public Law 71-284, the Capper-Cramton Act. The parkway runs along the Potomac River through two states—Virginia and Maryland—as well as the District of Columbia, protecting the landscape and natural shoreline of the river while offering magnificent scenic vistas of Washington, D.C., and

the Great Falls of the Potomac. Along its route, the parkway also connects several important historic sites, memorials, and scenic and recreation areas in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

The Capper-Cramton Act prescribed the construction of two parkway segments along the Potomac River. The Maryland section would be built from Fort Washington to the Great Falls and, on the Virginia side, from George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate to the Great Falls. Already under construction in Virginia, as part of an earlier planning effort for the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration in 1932, was the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, running from Arlington Memorial Bridge in Washington, D.C., to Mount Vernon. The Capper-Cramton Act included this roadway, begun in 1928, under the authorization for the George Washington Memorial Parkway. This initial southern section, opened in 1932, pioneered many principles of roadway design including limited access construction, grade-separated intersections, cloverleaf interchanges, and landscape design.

The northern section of the parkway, from Arlington Memorial Bridge to I-495, was built in stages starting in the 1940s and reaching completion in 1962. This northern section displayed the latest in road engineering methods for its time—a wide, gently curving roadway with a grassy median, low stone guide walls, and soaring steel-and-concrete arched bridges. In 1989, the George Washington Memorial Parkway running along the Maryland side of the Potomac River was renamed Clara Barton Parkway. Construction on the northern portion of this roadway, from MacArthur Boulevard to Glen Echo was completed in 1965 and the southern portion, from the Maryland/District of Columbia line to Chain Bridge was completed in 1970.