

GREEN RIBBON TRAIL TRAIL ASSESSMENT

The Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) has over many years preserved and protected the stream buffer along the Wissahickon Creek, known as the Green Ribbon Preserve. The utility of stream buffers has been well proven elsewhere. In addition, WVWA has built and maintained the Green Ribbon Trail (GRT), a 12.6-mile trail, over the last 30 years. The trail follows the Wissahickon Creek from the trailhead in Upper Gwynedd Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, to the Philadelphia city line, where the Green Ribbon ends and Forbidden Drive in Fairmount Park begins.

The GRT is a grassed floodplain trail that closely follows the Wissahickon Creek, a highly urbanized stream subject to regular intense flooding. Because of this, WVWA has always insisted on maintaining this trail in its unpaved condition. WVWA feels that adding an 8 foot wide blacktop trail to a floodplain is an unacceptable amount of impervious surface in a watershed already plagued by too much impervious surface.

About 5 years ago, the Montgomery County Parks system took over about a mile of the GRT at its lower end, and installed an 8-foot impervious surface trail there. WVWA feels that this is an equivalent trail experience that disabled users can use. Additionally, Lower Gwynedd Township installed an ADA-accessible trail at its Penllyn Woods Park, another equivalent trail experience. Finally, the Forbidden Drive Trail in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park is a 7-mile trail along the Wissahickon that is also accessible.

The GRT has always been restricted to walkers and equestrians. WVWA has had many requests to use the Trail from bicyclists over the years, but has always demurred, due to the erosion concerns.

DOJ Assessment Factors

Pedestrian Traffic

The GRT is a well-used suburban trail. Walkers and runners are observed on the Trail constantly. In places, the Trail is only a few feet wide. The use of other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMDs) could constitute a safety hazard to pedestrians and equestrians.

Harm

The use of OPDMDs constitutes a serious risk to the maintenance of the GRT as a nature trail designed for quiet enjoyment of nature. The noise of these devices will scare away birds and other wildlife, thus interfering with a primary reason that users come to this trail, i.e. observation of wildlife.

The use of OPDMDs constitutes a very real risk of compromising the GRT, due to its location in an active floodplain. Tires cause erosion, and sediment is listed as a major pollutant of the Wissahickon Creek (see EPA TMDL plan). Sediment is detrimental to the health of many aquatic organisms.

The GRT crosses the Wissahickon Creek at six (6) points. Motorized vehicles often have fluid leaks, and this could further compromise the health of the Creek. Additionally, PADEP does not permit powered vehicles to be used in Pennsylvania waterways.

WVWA believes that OPDMD use would compromise the main reason for protecting the Green Ribbon Preserve; that is, to protect, maintain and improve the stream buffer of the Wissahickon Creek. This buffer performs valuable ecosystem services to the Creek, the wildlife that depend on a healthy Creek, and the human communities that reside there.