

Swatara Creek Watershed Association Position Paper on Old State Road

February 3, 2006 by Jo Ellen Litz

The Swatara Creek Watershed Association respects and appreciates the time, effort, and input involved in compiling the Master Plan for Swatara State Park. We have pledged to assist by offering the services and resources of our Association and others in the community to help tackle the challenge of the remaining \$26 million that will be needed to complete the improvements (per the master plan) in Swatara State Park. There are people in our community who want to help solve the challenge and not just ask, "when are you (DCNR) going to get it done?" We want to help with everything from seeking corporate support to individual volunteers with expertise useful in these types of circumstances.

Since there are only so many dollars allocated for development of the Park, and Appendix II of the Master Plan Feasibility Study relates to impact from I-81. Has DCNR explored the possibility of PennDOT helping to pay to correct these problems from I-81? I-81 and Old State Road are only 200' apart. So exhaust fumes and noises can filter across the area. Accidents spew litter down the bank. Storm water runoff is a concern too. Quotes from the Master Plan follow:

1. Trail segments near I-81 in the proximity of Aycrigger's Falls require buffer plantings to reduce the visual and help temper the auditory influence of the interstate (M-1).
2. Drainage:..During Old State Road construction, culverts were provided to allow the natural surface flow from Blue Mountain to be conveyed under Old State Road. With the completion of I-81 in 1970's, these tributaries were subject to increased flows from stormwater runoff from the highway road surface and associated right-of-way. It appears that the original culvert designs along Old State Road are unable to effectively convey the peak volumes of stormwater that are now generated. This condition has resulted in the Old State Road pavement being very damaged and in some cases compromised, at low spots in the landscape....(Among others), the section of Old State Road northeast of Bordner's Cabin, closely parallels I-81 and exemplifies surface drainage flow across the road surface. The slope between I-81 and Old State Road is very steep where Old State Road was constructed terraced into the existing hillside. Old State Road acts as an impediment to the natural flow of surface drainage that includes stormwater runoff from I-81. As a result, the upslope side of Old State Road shows severe signs of pavement stress. To alleviate this situation, a drainage ditch has been constructed on the uphill side of Old State Road. However, this ditch has collected large amounts of debris that inhibits proper drainage (M-4).
3. In this area, the slope between I-81 and Old State Road is steep and the presence and influence of the interstate becomes unavoidable.....

4. Drainage:...increasing the size of the culvert may be necessary....In areas where upland drainage flows across the current road surface, a trench with a subdrain should be considered for construction on the uphill side of Old State Road. The subdrain would consist of a perforated pipe installed parallel to the road in a bed of crushed stone. The pipe would act to direct drainage to a location where a culvert can convey the runoff under the road surface....Another option would be to remove the culvert and part of the road for replacement with a small bridge. Although this option would likely be more costly, a bridge would create a point of interest along the trail and enhance the experience of the park user (M-9)....

Therefore, no matter whether the macadam road remains or a dirt and gravel road results as outlined in the Master Plan, storm water runoff impacts from Route 81 need addressed. We wholeheartedly support the dirt and gravel road, with its porous surface, which is more environmentally friendly and able to promote ground water recharge. Further, the Dirt & Gravel Road program can provide ongoing funding to maintain dirt and gravel roads.

Of note, **for the seven model parks highlighted in the Master Plan, the number one activity was "pleasure driving."**

Page 129 outlines a "recommendation" that the mid-portion of Old State Road be vacated as a roadway and converted into part of the multi-use trail loop system that circumnavigates the park. Does the word "recommendation" suggest "wiggle room?" The statement, "Emergency, maintenance, and special permit access (for those with mobility limitations) would still be accommodated." This confirms the road will be maintained to accommodate emergency vehicles, but expands upon use for "special permit access." Without changing the master plan, could the road be open daily from dawn to dusk, or at the least, weekdays when fewer visitors are at the park? How about in off-seasons for leisurely drives? **The concern with a "Stony Valley" type opening once a year is the line of traffic emitting choking dust and exhaust fumes.**

Page 131 states, "Existing former roads..., former driveways,... have been incorporated, where feasible, into the trail system. The point that can be made here is that the road is shared with trail users at both ends of the Park. Only the middle three or four miles is scheduled for limited access--to reduce interaction with pedestrians. A standard road must be 20' wide to accommodate two-way traffic. **The rail-trail spur to the Jigger Shop in Mt. Gretna is only 10' wide. If we retain the existing 20' width, there would be room for the hikers, bikers, horseback riders, and one-way travel of slow moving vehicles. A trolley was suggested as an alternative. Exclusive use hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails do exist on the west side of the Park.**

As bad as Old State Road is right now, people are able to travel the entire length with a two-wheel drive pick-up truck. We acknowledge that the road is in poor

condition; however, an open road provides access to a major portion of the park, which showcases the Swatara Creek—the main attraction in Swatara State Park. It would also allow the option of dropping off elderly or physically challenged visitors to view Armar Bordner's cabin and Acrygg's Falls. The majority of cars can still be directed to park at designated spots on the north and south ends of the road.

It is our observation that erosion of banks comes from four-wheelers and "monster trucks," which should cease. It doesn't seem fair that the few people causing the environmental damage should prohibit the masses from continuing to enjoy a leisurely drive through what has become a part of our history. Because most people carry cell phones, signs with phone numbers to report violators would go a long way toward identifying and prosecuting those violators.

Also, SWA has no animosity toward animals, but we have read that exotic plants will more likely come from the fur and manure of horses rather than from vehicles.

It is with utmost respect and appreciation for your difficult job to please everyone that SWA presents these options to DCNR. While we have encountered a hand full of people who would like the road closed, the overwhelming majority of people who live in the area would like Old State Road to remain open. Anything that you can do to accommodate this request will be greatly appreciated.