

Park's Future Studied

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JM Correspondent

The Virginia Division of Forestry is seeking the suggestions of area citizens on the future use of Conway Robinson State Forest at Gainesville.

Three representatives of the state agency spoke this week to local citizens groups which gathered at the home of Oswald Robinson.

The presentation focused on the potential that the state forest, located along U.S. 29-211, between the highway's intersections with Interstate 66 and Va. 234, holds for area residents.

The 400-acre forest was deeded to the state division in 1938, but has remained practically undeveloped in terms of established nature trails and guided educational trails.

Part of the land was cleared for picnic tables, a picnic shelter and comfort station, but few people are familiar with the interior of the forest. Harold Olinger showed slides of the forest and wildlife and wildflowers which might be found.

He noted that in the 1938 agreement, the forestry division was encouraged to work with the Audubon Society and the National Wildflower Society in developing the forest. Monuments have been erected, at the park, by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Virginia Federation of Gardens Clubs. Civic groups periodically clean up litter, but there is not an established maintenance program, the citizens were told.

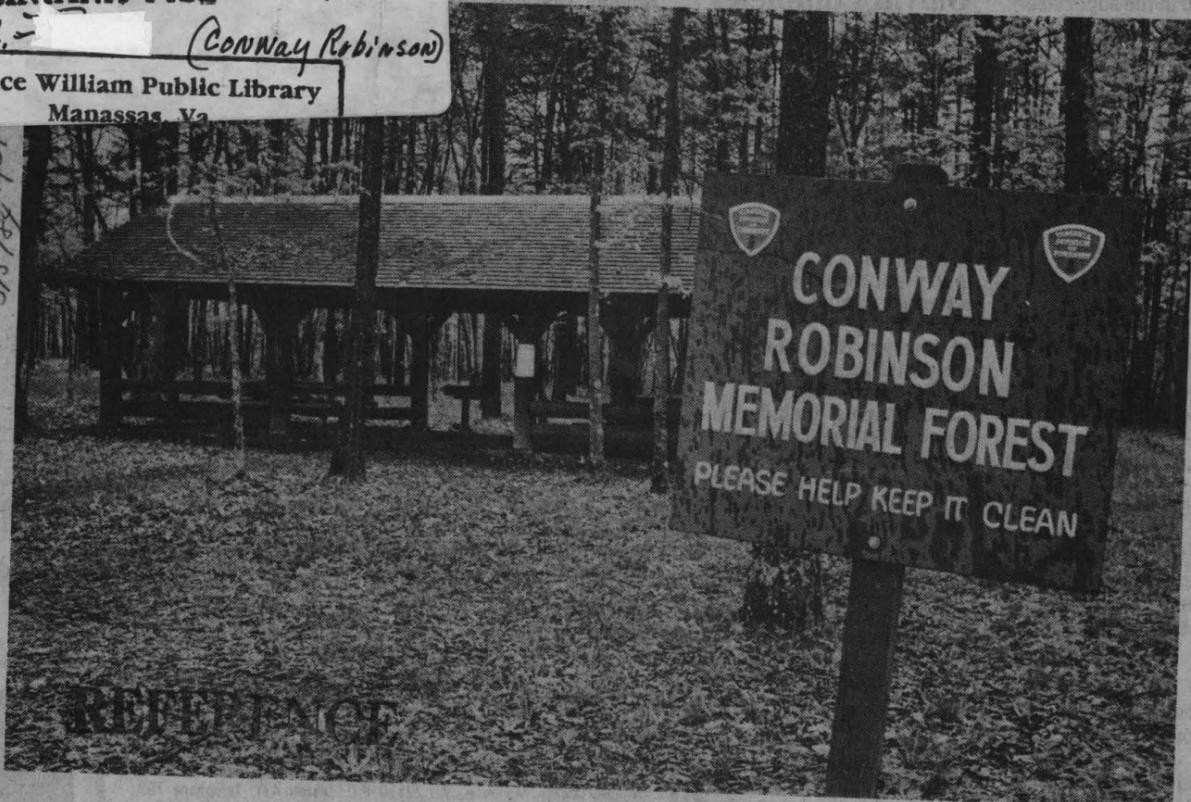
Olinger also said an inventory will be taken of the forest to identify types and ages of trees, numbers of dead and diseased trees, and trees that need to be removed for safety reasons.

VIRGINIANA FILE SEP 19 1984

P.W.C. -

(Conway Robinson)

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.



Picnic shelter at Conway Robinson State Park near Gainesville. Talmadge Rutledge—The Journal Messenger

Stands of pine occupy 50 acres of the forest. One stand of loblolly pine is falling prey to a thin layer of top soil and a shale base. Harvesting and replanting of that area would be feasible, Olinger said.

He also explained that a dense stand of hard wood is not conducive as a wildlife or wildflower habitat. Judicial thinning allows for healthier and hardier growth of remaining trees and provides a diverse environment for wildlife; culling of dead and diseased trees prevents insect-borne disease from being passed on to healthy ones.

Olinger cited the need for a management plan for the entire forest and called on knowledgeable and concerned members of the area to

take part in the planning.

Another representative of the state agency, Tim Tigner, said the state forest would provide an opportunity for educating visitors as to the environment, resources, wildlife and conservation of the forest. He sees a need for a philosophical consensus of the community and Forestry Division in planning how best to use the forest.

He says, "The Division of Forestry welcomes the opportunity to work with people. The forester has the same sensitivity to natural resources as others."

Because no funds are set aside for Conway Robinson, the state relies on volunteers to lead efforts to educate the public to the forest's attractions.

Jean Chitren, a member of the

Prince William Wildflower Society, said he is familiar with the interior of the forest where he has found some unique specimens. He has spotted a mature oak with a four-foot diameter trunk.

He additionally leads nature walks at the forest several times year, announced in the local newspapers, and would like to see directional signs erected for the walking trails.

Tigner envisions volunteers, especially youth groups, helping due to the lack of funding. He suggests civic groups, garden clubs, scouts, and other community members.

State Forester Jim Garner called the forest, because of its "uniqueness" and "diversity of conditions,"

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just "like a lab waiting to be used."

He sees potential in its use for historical, scientific, natural and environmental education.

He also noted that a part of the old abandoned railroad line, which was constructed during the Civil War, lies within the forest.

Rolland Swain, superintendent of the nearby Manassas National Battlefield Park, sees the forest's value in its educational potential to the urban residents who have little contact with land management.

"They could see the benefit that multiple use, resource management, and land use management have on a forest preserve. I think it would be a good idea for this area."

Gainesville District Supervisor Tony Guiffre questioned Garner, "Why hasn't the State Forestry Division been taking care of it (Conway Robinson)?"

Garner explained that the state forests pay for themselves with a carefully-executed harvesting schedule.

Garner additionally stated that the state division did not want to initiate any activity at the local state forest until the original 1938 agreement had been clarified and the attorney general's office was asked to review the document.

The state agency also wanted to establish a rapport with the community and seek suggestions on the future use before proceeding.

Those wishing to comment are asked to contact the Virginia Division of Forestry by writing to State Forester Jim Garner, P.O. Box 3758, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.