

Resolution to the University Senate – December 10, 2009

Preservation of the Wooded Hillock at the University of Maryland, College Park Campus

Motion to consider resolution as follows:

BECAUSE OF ITS VALUE TO THE EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, THE SENATE RECOMMENDS THAT THE WOODED HILLOCK BE PRESERVED IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Background (Additional information at: www.savethehillock.com)

The campus forest, known as the “Wooded Hillock”, located near the North Campus dormitories, the Comcast Center and directly upstream from Campus Creek, contains the only remaining native upland forest on campus, which provides a rare and valuable resource for teaching and research within a metropolitan campus.

The University has approved plans to grade and clear-cut approximately nine out of 24 acres of the Wooded Hillock in order to relocate campus motor pool vehicles and services, facilities management work and office space; and add 423 new parking spaces. Facilities Council approved the plans (February, 2009) without considering the significance of the Wooded Hillock to the research and educational missions of the University.

The Wooded Hillock is used for hands-on-learning by 8 undergraduate programs within four Colleges and the Honors Program. Twenty undergraduate and three graduate courses (total student enrollment – 1355) are known to use the Wooded Hillock for instruction. Four additional courses (estimated total enrollment – 852) are likely to be revised to integrate the Hillock into laboratory exercises.

The Wooded Hillock serves as a long-term research site important because of its ecological integrity and significance in studying climate change. Bird surveys conducted at the Wooded Hillock from the 1960’s- 1980’s have documented the decline in local song bird populations. On the other hand, a bird survey at the Wooded Hillock (2009) reported an astounding number of bird species “almost certainly due to the presence of the mature trees and diverse plant life.” The Wooded Hillock is also home to the native lady slipper orchid, where the population ecology of this rare orchid has been studied since the 1970’s. Permanent soil pits and buried environmental sensors are being used to record climate change over time. Dataloggers record this significant database, while students observe underground temperature variation in real time.

The development of the Wooded Hillock is in direct conflict with major plans of the University and the National Science Foundation.

- Master Plan Update (2007): “The campus plan will strive to protect and enhance existing natural environments (woodlands, wetlands, and floodplains) and create connections with

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adjacent habitats, and new development will be guided by principles of smart growth and environmental stewardship.”

- Strategic Plan (2008): The University strives to be “recognized as a national model for a Green University.”
- Climate Action Plan (2009): The University has “agreed to increase research on climate change and expand the educational curriculum focused on sustainability.” “To be successful, the institution’s efforts to green its operations must be matched by its efforts to green the curriculum.”
- National Science Foundation (2009) finds that fundamental research and education are not keeping pace with our environmental challenges and are leading an initiative “to strengthen our understanding of links between human behavior and natural processes.”

There are alternate sites for relocation of East Campus facilities that would have less negative impact on the environment (East Campus Redevelopment Project Sustainability Perspectives, Office of Sustainability, March 2009) or research or education at UM.

On the other hand, no alternative sites on campus offer comparable hands-on learning and long-term research opportunities for studying regional climate change and ecosystem processes of a natural area heavily impacted by human influences.

Faculty, students, and staff have voiced strong and widespread opposition to developing the Wooded Hillock, documented as:

- Unanimous approval of Graduate Student Government resolution (October 16, 2009) calling on the University to halt development of the Wooded Hillock;
- Unanimous approval of Student Government Association resolution (March 2009) supporting alternatives to the wooded hillock East campus redevelopment project.
- 24 faculty, 3 staff, and 7 student letters were submitted to the Senate to support preserving the hillock.

Finally, if we want to educate our students to value and protect our natural treasures, it is critical that we model this behavior as an institution.

Therefore, be it resolved:

BECAUSE OF ITS VALUE TO THE EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, THE SENATE RECOMMENDS THAT THE WOODED HILLOCK BE PRESERVED IN ITS ENTIRETY.