



February 27, 2022

Superintendent Tyrone Brandyburg  
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park  
P.O. Box 65  
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Re: Proposal to close Maryland Heights parking areas

Dear Mr. Brandyburg,

Mid Atlantic Climbers (MAC), Access Fund (AF), the American Alpine Club (AAC), and Outdoor Alliance DMV (OA DMV) thank Harpers Ferry National Historical Park for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Maryland Heights permanent parking area closure.

### **Mid Atlantic Climbers**

Mid Atlantic Climbers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit representing roughly 2,000 members and supporters in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, DC, and West Virginia. Our organization is dedicated to preserving climbing access while promoting responsible climbing and environmental stewardship, and is committed to advancing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the outdoors.

### **Access Fund**

The Access Fund is a national advocacy organization whose mission is to lead and inspire the climbing community toward sustainable access and conservation of the climbing environment. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit and accredited land trust representing millions of climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing - rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering - the Access Fund is a US climbing advocacy organization with over 20,000 members and 130 local affiliates. Access Fund provides climbing management expertise, stewardship, project-specific funding, and educational outreach. For more information about Access Fund, visit [www.accessfund.org](http://www.accessfund.org).

### **The American Alpine Club**

The American Alpine Club (“AAC”) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Golden, Colorado, with over 25,000 members nationally. Founded in 1902 to support the research and exploration of mountainous regions, the AAC remains committed to supporting the climbing and human-powered outdoor recreation communities over a century later. Grounded in community and place, the AAC’s mission is to share and support our passion for climbing and respect for the places we climb. Through education, community gatherings, stewardship, policy, advocacy, and scientific research, the AAC strives to build a united community of competent climbers and healthy climbing landscapes.

## **Outdoor Alliance**

Outdoor Alliance DMV is a regional network of the Outdoor Alliance, and is a coalition of advocates from the Washington, DC area’s outdoor recreation communities. As climbers, mountain bikers, paddlers, and outdoor lovers, we know the Washington, D.C. area is a great place to live, work, and play. OA DMV connects local knowledge and priorities with national perspectives and expertise to preserve, protect, and enhance these opportunities.

## **Comments**

At 300 feet tall, the Maryland Heights cliff is a unique resource in the mid-Atlantic region for both traditional and sport climbing. The Maryland Heights trailhead is also an access point to top rope and bouldering opportunities. Climbers from throughout the region travel to the Park for these experiences, and many approach the Park from the Maryland side. Having this resource in close proximity to a major metropolitan region is important to providing access to the outdoors for local climbers living in more developed areas such as Washington, DC and Baltimore.

Our organizations understand the concerns of some local residents whose safe passage along Sandy Hook Road has been impacted by illegally parked cars. However, we believe the permanent closure proposal is premature without an accompanying solution to address the reduction in access to Maryland climbing and other recreational activities. We strongly encourage the Park to explore alternative parking and shuttle options to recreation sites on the Maryland side, allow for public comment on alternatives, and complete its [climbing management planning](#) process before making any decisions that would create additional barriers to accessing popular Maryland climbing areas. We would welcome an opportunity to not only address parking issues at Maryland Heights, but also the ongoing access issues for Balcony Rock, Balcony Jr. and other areas in the park.

Parking availability and safety have long been concerns for climbers accessing popular climbing locations on the Maryland side of the Park. As indicated in the [Social Science Research to Support Visitor Use Management at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park technical report](#) detailing the results of a 2021 climber survey, “parking availability” was identified by respondents as the top barrier and constraint that negatively impacted climbing experience or opportunities in the park. “Parking safety” was also identified as one of the respondents’ top barriers and constraints. Additionally, 34% of open-ended survey responses

focused on parking, the largest percentage of any topic mentioned. Permanent closure of the Maryland Heights parking areas will add barriers for visitors to access climbing areas within the Maryland side of the Park.

The current proposal recommends that visitors park in the main Visitor Center lot, ride the park shuttle to Lower Town, and walk across the footbridge to the Maryland Heights trailhead and climbing sites. This process may add a prohibitive amount of time to a climbing trip, especially for climbers traveling from mid-Atlantic region metro areas such as Washington, DC or Baltimore. In addition, parking at Maryland Heights helps visitors approaching from the Maryland side to avoid traffic that often occurs in West Virginia. The shuttle service hours also do not match with daylight hours, meaning those who may want to start earlier or climb later would lack the shuttle option for access. Currently, as [stated on the park's website](#), most small parking lots in the park are open from sunrise to sunset, while the shuttle runs from 9am through 5:30pm, 5:45pm, or 6:45pm depending on the season. Similarly, the Lower Town Train Station Parking Lot is open from 9am through 6pm. The current proposal would therefore eliminate the option for before, or after work climbing for those who work the average 9am-5pm work schedule.

In order to both address the safety concerns with the current Maryland Heights parking options and reduce barriers to accessing popular recreation areas, the Park should identify and analyze alternatives which include but are not limited to: building new parking areas or re-opening former parking areas near Maryland Heights in safer locations, adding a remote parking and shuttle option on the Maryland side and expanding shuttle hours, and implementing additional measures or physical obstacles to discourage illegal parking on Sandy Hook Road. This process should include another public comment period to receive input on proposed alternatives before a final decision is announced. Concurrently, the Park should also complete its climbing management plan to collect public input and identify solutions to holistically address parking availability and other barriers to climbing access on the Maryland side and throughout the Park.

We look forward to collaborating with the Park to find parking solutions that work for both recreational visitors and the local residents who use Sandy Hook Road on a regular basis, and are eagerly anticipating the public scoping notice for the climbing management plan. We would be happy to speak with the Park directly to further discuss our comments.

Sincerely,

Edwin Bachetti  
President  
Mid Atlantic Climbers  
[edwin@midatlanticclimbers.org](mailto:edwin@midatlanticclimbers.org)

Katie Goodwin  
Policy Analyst  
Access Fund

[katie@accessfund.org](mailto:katie@accessfund.org)

Elliott Becker  
Policy And Advocacy Volunteer Chair  
American Alpine Club, DC Section  
[elliottbecker@gmail.com](mailto:elliottbecker@gmail.com)

Ryan Delaney  
Representative  
Outdoor Alliance DMV  
[ryandelaney@gmail.com](mailto:ryandelaney@gmail.com)