

NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Sandy Run Rowing Facility OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

Sandy Run Regional Park, also known as the Sandy Run Rowing Facility, was developed by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority in response to public demand for greater and safer rowing opportunities. The popularity of competitive and recreational rowing in Northern Virginia has continued to expand since the concept of rowing on the Occoquan Reservoir was first considered in the late 1960s. Today, after almost thirty years of planning and development, the park is nationally recognized as a premier rowing facility and a unique recreational asset for the citizens of Northern Virginia.

Sandy Run Regional Park provides for rowing, sculling and related activities, including competitive events, and primarily serves local high school scholastic and college rowing programs. While the park cannot begin to accommodate all such programs in the region, it is a heavily used resource for thousands of young or active adults.

The ever-growing attraction of the park with its limited capacity for boat storage, parking and racing lanes produces significant management challenges. The *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Operations and Management Plan*, with appendices, is a guideline for confronting these challenges and for reducing the impact of park visitors on the facility, environment and community.

History and Background

The Occoquan Reservoir in the vicinity of Sandy Run offers ideal conditions for competitive rowing. Situated near the Occoquan Dam between high, wooded hillsides, the racecourse is generally free of strong winds, tides, currents, waves and high-powered watercraft that represent major obstacles on other river courses. The Sandy Run Rowing Facility was seen at its conception to be a safer and preferred alternative to the Potomac River, which at the time was the only resource available to rowers in the Washington, D. C., area.

Following creation of a Five-Year Plan (1966) and subsequent Planning Commission approval (1968), shoreline and Sandy Run parcels were purchased by the Park Authority from 1970 to 1974. Acquisition of the combined park holding of 385 acres cost \$1,391,000, and was funded through the Park Authority's Capital Improvement Program and through a number of state and federal grants. The value of the land in 1995 was in excess of \$15 million.

The Park Authority conducted a Feasibility Study in 1974 to evaluate the site and access to the site for potential recreational activities. A year later, it established a master plan for specific development of a rowing facility.

Since the first boathouse was constructed in 1980, the following major improvements costing \$2,025,000 have been completed:

- Boathouse #1 (Constructed in 1980)
- Entrance Road (Constructed in 1978-79)
- Parking Lots
- Boat Docks
- Boathouse Toilet Facility
- Boathouse #2 (Constructed in 1984)
- Finish Line Toilet Facility (Constructed in 1982 and restored in 1996)
- Paved Trail to Finish Line and Spectator Area
- Bleachers (Constructed in 1983)
- Race Course Features
- Judges Stand
- Equipment Storage Building
- Boathouse #3 (Constructed in 1991)
- Electrical and Water Utilities
- Shoreline Erosion Protection
- Electricity to Grandstand

In 1978, the Park Authority improved Van Thompson Road from Hampton Road to the Occoquan Reservoir, creating a two-lane secondary road for park users and area residents. The Park Authority obtained state funds to improve the segment between the park gate and the reservoir and used Park Authority funds for improvements between Hampton Road and the gate.

Today, Sandy Run Regional Park is a premier rowing facility, housing 155 boats from eight high school rowing teams, one college, two rowing clubs and forty-three individual rowers. During the peak season, March through June, 500 to 700 rowers practice on weekdays, primarily from 3:00 p.m. to dusk. Out of state college teams often visit during spring breaks (approximately eight in 2003 with an average of 25 members) for training and practice, and six groups offer rowing camps during the summer and fall. Even during inclement weather when air or water conditions prohibit launching, rowers are present at the park repairing equipment, doing physical exercises and participating in team training.

The Sandy Run Rowing Facility currently hosts thirteen weekend regattas: eight are held by National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association (NCASRA) from March through May during the high school rowing season; two are held by George Mason University (GMU) during the February through May collegiate rowing season and one during the September to November fall collegiate rowing season; Occoquan Boat Club (OBC) conducts one regatta in the fall; and Northern Virginia Rowing Club (NVRC) hosts the Occoquan Challenge in the fall. The estimated attendance at regattas ranges from 500 to 2000 competitors and spectators, with the greater numbers being associated with high school events. Other special events, such as the National Scholastic Rowing Championships (last held May 21-22, 1999), Olympic training or trials and USRowing Masters National Championship (held August 15-18, 2002), are periodically welcomed at the facility.

Parking for all weekday practices and most weekend competitions occurs within the boundaries of the park, while larger events (generally five per year) may require overflow or satellite parking areas. Efforts on the part of user groups to provide mass transportation or to reduce the size of regattas help to eliminate some of the need for additional parking.

Capacity and Future Development

The popularity of rowing and sculling as regional competitive sports has grown well beyond the facilities of Sandy Run Regional Park. **The Sandy Run boathouses are filled to capacity.** The park manager maintains a waiting list of schools, groups and individuals desiring rack space in the order in which he receives requests. Those individuals or programs residing within a NVRPA supporting jurisdiction (the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church and the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun) are given priority.

Outside boat racks were built for visiting competitor use during regattas, but some of this space currently is allocated to long-term boat storage. In order to ensure the availability of rack space to visiting competitors, no additional racks will be rented for the purpose of storage. In addition, use of the launch docks and the on-water carrying capacity of the Occoquan Reservoir are maximized on a daily basis in the spring by rowers from both Sandy Run and from Prince William County's rowing facility. Summer and fall rowing camps have extended the rowing season and greatly increased on-water traffic.

Physical development of Sandy Run in the future will be restricted to improvements that will enhance the operations of the park, not expand its on-land and on-water capacity. Constructing more boathouses in the park would create an adverse impact on the environment and on the community. The creation of additional rowing practice and boat storage facilities at other locations in the region should be a priority of all organizations involved in competitive rowing and sculling.

Mission Statement

Sandy Run Regional Park is intended for use by the public for the purpose of education, training, practice and racing for competitive and recreational rowing and sculling. Activities are restricted to shells that are specifically designed for racing, training or recreational rowing and sculling. The park is managed in close cooperation with user groups to provide facilities and opportunities principally for scholastic rowing organizations from the Northern Virginia region, for those organizations with whom they compete and, under special circumstances, for select Olympic, national or statewide events.

The Park Authority recognizes its responsibility to the general public to minimize the impact of park development and use of park facilities on the land, environment and community.

Protection of the Environment

The Park Authority recognizes that the Occoquan Reservoir is a major source of drinking water for Northern Virginia and a significant watershed and recreational resource in the region. It ensures that the water quality and natural and cultural resources will be protected and preserved during all phases of park development and operation. The Park Authority strongly encourages all users to reduce air and water pollution by reducing the number of vehicles accessing the park daily and by mandating that 2-cycle boat motors be replaced by the less polluting, 4-cycle types by February 4, 2006. The Park Authority complies with regulations and orders of the Fairfax County Water Authority, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Fairfax County Planning Commission, and other government agencies having jurisdiction over the land and shores of Sandy Run Regional Park.

Hours of Operation

Sandy Run Regional Park is open from the first weekend in February through the first weekend in December, weather permitting, for activities related to rowing and sculling. The hours of operation are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset for persons or groups who have been issued a gate key. All boats must be off the water at sunset. Gate and boathouse keys are available to boat storage renters, coaches, and other approved users upon payment of a deposit fee.

The park entrance gate is open for weekday practices and during special events, and should be closed and locked at all other times.

Park employees periodically inspect the premises after closing to ensure compliance with the hours of operation.

Rules and Regulations

Sandy Run Regional Park is governed by the official *Park Authority Regulations* and the *Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority Rules* (Appendix F), and by the *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Rules and Procedures* (Appendix A) for public use of rowing facilities.

Compliance With Law

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority requires full compliance with all federal, state and local laws and all regulations and orders of the Park Authority affecting events and activities at Sandy Run Regional Park.

Accordingly, no one may be excluded from participating in, nor denied the benefits of those activities and opportunities afforded by the park, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination because of a person's race, color, sex, religion or national origin. All programs and facilities at the

park will provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, in strict accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Park Management and Personnel

The park grounds and facilities are managed by on-site Park Authority personnel consisting of the full-time manager, who supervises Sandy Run, Fountainhead and Bull Run Marina Regional Parks, and a seasonal/part-time ranger. Additional staff are employed or transferred from other operations to perform special projects or to prepare and conduct regattas. Staff employed on behalf of regattas usually are considered an expense of the regatta sponsor.

User Group and Community Involvement

Citizen involvement from both user groups and the community is vital to the operation of Sandy Run Regional Park. User groups are defined herein as organizations, schools, teams, clubs, camps, or programs conducting rowing or rowing-related activities at the park. The Park Authority will invite the community and each of the primary user groups, the National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association, George Mason University, the Occoquan Boat Club, the Sandy Run Scullers and the Northern Virginia Rowing Club to appoint a liaison to the Rowing Facilities and Programs Committee for the purpose of providing input at the time of annual review or upon special invitation.

In order to keep the community aware of activities at the park, the Park Authority will forward a copy of the regatta schedule, on or about February 1 of each year, to each resident of Seven Hills Estates and Hampton Woods III.

Fees and Charges

It is the policy of the Park Authority to collect fees and assess charges to defray operational expenses of the park. Boat storage, daily use and regatta fees (Appendix B) are adjusted annually by the Park Authority Board and reflect rates of similar operations in the Washington metropolitan area. Other fees and charges may apply in certain situations and are at the discretion of the park manager. These include, but are not limited to:

- Permit fees for sale of food, beverage or souvenirs
- Parking fees during regattas
- Charges for employment of police, additional park personnel or rescue squads
- Charges for damages incurred to park property
- Charges for rental of park equipment during regattas, such as radios, tents, temporary toilets, etc.

Contracts and Permits for Group Activities

Contracts are intended to insure compliance with the *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Operations and Management Plan* (including appendices) and to clearly identify responsibility for group member actions and safety. Contracts or permits are required by the Park Authority for any and all groups using Sandy Run Regional Park for rowing or rowing-related activities, with the exception of schools, teams or clubs participating in, but not hosting, regattas or other authorized events. Activities that are deemed by the Park Authority as fund raising or profit generating, such as camps, regattas, special events, or retail sales, may require a special use permit that addresses additional user fees and conditions.

Insurance and Indemnification

Any and all groups using the facilities at Sandy Run Regional Park are required to secure and maintain a minimum of \$2 million in general liability insurance covering all on-land and on-water activities, naming the Park Authority as an additional insured, and must provide a certificate of insurance to the Park Authority prior to conducting rowing-related activities. Similarly, product liability insurance (\$2 million with the Park Authority named as additional insured) is required for sale of food, beverage or souvenirs. The level of insurance coverage will be reassessed periodically by the Park Authority and may vary depending on the type of activity. Also, groups must indemnify and hold harmless the Park Authority against liabilities resulting from the group activities and actions.

While the National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association provides insurance for high school regattas, schools or their rowing teams or clubs must provide the required \$2 million general liability coverage for practices, camps and other non-competitive activities located both on the water and on land.

Acknowledgment of Requirements for Participation in Scholastic Rowing

Coaches and leaders of high school rowing teams or clubs assume responsibility for the safety and conduct of participants under their supervision on park property or the Occoquan Reservoir. They are required to be fully aware of the policies and procedures identified in the *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Operations and Management Plan* and appendices. High school administrators, booster club presidents, and coaches must formally agree (Appendix E) to comply with the policies and procedures before the team or club is permitted to use the rowing facilities, including storage areas, parking lots, grounds, or docks.

Traffic and Transportation

Vehicular traffic within the park or on roads leading to the park is a serious concern in respect to safety of both visitors and community residents. The Park Authority supports efforts to curtail the

amount and speed of traffic on Van Thompson Road and will continue to pursue measures that will resolve traffic and transportation problems related to park activities. These measures will include:

- Support efforts to have the Virginia Department of Transportation establish a 25-mph restriction on Van Thompson Road.
- Request the Fairfax County Police Department to increase surveillance of Van Thompson Road and to periodically provide radar enforcement of the speed limit.
- Continue to encourage user groups to establish car pooling and busing for teams and shuttle busing for regatta spectators.
- Work cooperatively with user groups to restrict the size of regattas or limit the number of spectators and spectator vehicles.
- Require regatta sponsors to hire police officers to provide traffic control at critical road intersections during large events or times of high visitation.
- Require regatta sponsors to provide road monitors on Van Thompson Road during large events to minimize traffic congestion and damage to private property.
- Provide residents with identification passes that will expedite travel to their homes during regattas.

Alternative Access

The Park Authority has considered potential alternative routes to the park in hopes of reducing traffic impact on the community. However, alternative access through the power line easement or other approaches has been determined to be impractical due to environmental concerns and cost considerations, given the steepness of the terrain and the need for bridging over creeks and inlets.

Parking

The Park Authority will not permit general daily use of the rowing facility to exceed the park's capacity for parking vehicles and equipment.

Parking space is limited in the park. While more than adequate parking is available within park boundaries for daily use and practices, parking lots within the park cannot always accommodate the many spectators who visit during weekend regattas. The Park Authority offers two satellite overflow parking areas for large events and requires regatta sponsors to arrange additional satellite parking when anticipated large spectator crowds would exceed the capacity of Park Authority satellite lots. A complete description of satellite parking is provided in the *Regatta Guidelines and Permit Application* (Appendix C).

A summary of the two satellite parking areas owned by the Park Authority is as follows:

Loisvale Field

This site is a grass field located on Park Authority owned land adjacent to Sandy Run Regional Park and private residential property. It has a 155-vehicle capacity. Visitors can walk to the launch area by way of a wooded trail.

Van Thompson Field

Located on the corner of Van Thompson and Hampton Roads approximately three-fourths of a mile from the park entrance, the grass field is restricted to 250 vehicles. Shuttle bus service (Appendix C) is required to transport visitors to the park. While state law will not allow the Park Authority to prohibit walking along Van Thompson Road, park staff will strongly discourage visitors from doing so for the reasons of public safety and possible infringement on the privacy of Van Thompson Road residents.

Van Thompson Field

The use of Van Thompson Field as a satellite parking area was approved by the Fairfax County Planning Commission in 1995. The following restrictions apply to use of the Van Thompson Field:

- The site will be used only as overflow parking in connection with regattas and similar events at Sandy Run Regional Park. When not in use for overflow parking, the property will be maintained as woodland and open grassy areas with no public or active use.
- In no event will the Park Authority allow more than 250 vehicles to park on the property at a given time.
- The Park Authority will not remove trees or grade and excavate for the purpose of establishing or expanding vehicle parking and access areas.
- The Park Authority will maintain grass parking, except where gravel or pavement become necessary at the point of access to Van Thompson Road and shuttle bus turnaround.
- In no event will the Park Authority use the field more than ten times per year.
- The field will be used only in conjunction with daylight events.
- The Park Authority will not construct buildings or other substantial structures on the property, other than necessary signs and security fencing.
- The Park Authority will maintain both a cable security fence on the lot and a rustic fence characteristic of the community. Installation of the rustic fence was not addressed by the Planning Commission and is not intended for security but as an aesthetic improvement to the site.
- The Park Authority will promote existing natural growth along the cable fence or, if necessary, will introduce other plants that will serve to improve the aesthetics of the site and fence line.
- A management plan for use of Van Thompson Field is included in the *Regatta Guidelines and Permit Application* (Appendix C).

Regattas

Regattas present the heaviest impact on park and community roads and resources. Problems related to regattas usually involve the parking and shuttling of large numbers of spectators. Events that do not draw great interest are relatively free of incidents, such as traffic congestion and inconvenience to park neighbors. Regattas are restricted to no more than 2000 competitors per day. A

“competitor” is defined in terms of one event per person. A person entered in two events will be counted as two competitors.

The length of the scholastic rowing season currently restricts the number of regattas that may be conducted at the park. While additional events may be scheduled throughout the year (except winter), approximately ten regattas are conducted in the spring season, February to May, and three are conducted in the fall season, September through the first weekend in November.

Limited space within the boundaries of the park necessitates use of satellite parking and shuttle bus service. Regatta sponsors must develop management plans for their events that fully meet the Park Authority's requirements for satellite parking, personnel and measures to reduce traffic impact.

Requirements for the conduct of regattas are detailed in the *Regatta Guidelines and Permit Application* (Appendix C).

Most regattas involve rowers from the Northern Virginia region or those who are invited to compete with Northern Virginia teams. From time to time, the Park Authority may permit events that involve regatta sponsors and groups from outside Park Authority jurisdictions. Such events will be considered on an individual basis.

Scrimmages

Scrimmages are permitted at Sandy Run only between two or among three organized teams under the following conditions:

- All scrimmages must be held in accordance with NCASRA *Rules*.
- All scrimmages must be organized by a team currently housed at Sandy Run or Bull Run Marina or by a team located within one of the six NVRPA member jurisdictions (Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church and Counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun).
- All scrimmages must be scheduled at least two weeks in advance with the park manager.
- Only one scrimmage will be permitted per day.
- In the event scrimmages are conducted as fund raising activities, they are subject to special permit restrictions and fees. (See “Contracts and Permits for Group Activities” above)

Rowing Camps and Programs Requiring a Special Permit

Camps for the purpose of teaching rowing and sculling are held during the summer and fall at Sandy Run by individuals and organizations other than Park Authority staff. These programs require express written permission by NVRPA and must comply with the National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association rules regarding out-of-season practice when applicable. Camps and programs must be scheduled at least thirty days in advance with the park manager and must pay a user fee of 15% of the gross receipts or a minimum flat fee of \$100.00, whichever amount is greater.

All camps and programs must comply with the Sandy Run Rowing Facility Operations and Management Plan (including appendices). Camp and program operators must secure and maintain a minimum of \$2 million in general liability insurance, naming the Park Authority as additional insured, and must provide a certificate of insurance to the Park Authority prior to conducting rowing-related activities.

Collection of Litter

The Park Authority recognizes an obligation to the community to police Van Thompson Road, Van Thompson Field, all parking and other event areas for litter or debris generated by regattas or other rowing activities. Such policing will occur within 24 hours of the event or as otherwise needed. All individuals, teams and organizations are responsible for cleaning up their group's area and disposing of litter and debris in appropriate receptacles on a daily basis.

Teams and organizations are expected to support the recycling program by supplementing the park recycling containers and appropriately disposing of the collected materials.

Park Entrance

The park entrance gate must remain locked, except during weekday practice from 2:00 p.m. to one-half hour after sunset and during special events. The Park Authority maintains a turnaround for vehicles and trailers that are unable to enter the park.

Parking is prohibited in the vicinity of the park entrance or on private property. A bus turnaround is maintained inside the park near the entrance to encourage users to organize mass transportation and to reduce congestion on the community roads during practices and regattas.

Boat Storage

Boat storage in the boathouses and on designated outside racks has been filled to capacity. It is the intention of the Park Authority to have boats that are not in continuous use removed to make space for other boats. Individuals who own a boat and store it at Sandy Run are required to row a minimum of ten (10) times per year (February through November) in order to meet requirements for rental of rack space. These individuals must notify the park manager of the dates when he/she rowed by filling out a log sheet placed inside the entrance to each boathouse.

When boathouse rack space becomes available, it shall be a priority to fill the space with boats from individuals or programs residing within a NVRPA supporting jurisdiction. Consideration should be given to allocating the space to a scholastic rowing program new to Sandy Run. In the event a new program is not selected by NVRPA, the rack space will be offered for rent to the team already residing at Sandy Run with the smallest number of boats. Should that group decline, the rack will be offered to the team with the next smallest number of boats. In the boathouses, boats may be stored only in spaces designated by NVRPA.

No team may reserve an unoccupied rack space for more than one (1) year. After one (1) year, the vacant space will be allocated to another team by the park manager.

When designated outside rack space becomes available, it will be returned to use for temporary staging during regattas and camps. Temporary outside racks can be installed near the boathouses in preparation for large regattas.

When new boats are purchased, the organization or individual must remove an equal number of their existing boats. Boats may be moved to outside racks only on a temporary basis and only with the express written permission of the park manager. While on the outside rack, the daily rack fee will be charged for the boat.

Sub-leasing of any and all rack space may be effected only by the Park Authority. Any team, organization or individual with rack space they wish to sub-lease must notify the park manager. The park manager will allocate the space for a limited term on behalf of the primary leaseholder, but will continue to bill the primary leaseholder. Primary leaseholders may charge no more for their sub-let space than the Park Authority rack fee for the same period of time. Rack space will be sub-leased under the same considerations given to the long-term reallocation of rack space. Rowing programs or individuals not housed at Sandy Run will have to remove their equipment from Sandy Run at the end of the sub-lease term. Sub-leasing rack space does not convey preference for full-term leasing of rack space should such space become available.

Renters of boat storage space must pay a deposit fee to receive a key to the entrance gate and boathouse.

Trailer Storage

Empty boat trailers belonging to teams or organizations that rent boat storage space at Sandy Run may be stored at the park at no charge and at the discretion of the park manager, provided that:

- The trailer owner must waive in writing all claims against the Park Authority and its agents and employees for damage to and loss of the trailer including but not limited to damage or loss by theft, pilferage, fire, flood, vandalism or acts of God.
- Trailers will not be kept in the park on regatta days and must be removed at least 24 hours in advance of the event in order to provide parking space for in-coming competitors' trailers, buses and vans.
- Trailers must be removed within a 48-hour notification by the park manager.
- No boats may be stored on trailers without the park manager's express written approval.
- The trailer owner must agree in writing that NVRPA, in the event of non-compliance with storage policies, has the right to relocate the trailer, that the trailer owner will pay all expenses for such relocation, and that the trailer owner will assume all liability for the trailer while it is moved and stored at another location.

Boat Motors

No boats with a motor larger than 10 horsepower may be launched from Sandy Run according to Fairfax County Water Authority regulations. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is prohibiting the production of 2-cycle boat motors after 2006. In order to comply with the spirit of the EPA regulations and to improve the environmental quality of the Occoquan Reservoir, all 2-cycle boat motors in use at Sandy Run must be replaced by 4-cycle motors by February 4, 2006.

Racecourse

The racecourse of the Sandy Run Rowing Facility is a straight 1500 and 2000-meter course involving six racing lanes. The course is designed, constructed and maintained by the National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association. Use of the course is subject to permission from the National Capital Area Scholastic Rowing Association and must be in accordance with requirements stated in the *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Rules and Procedures* (Appendix A). Other temporary courses may be established for individual events.

Grandstand and Finish Line

Because of steep grades and narrow width of the pavement, the paved access road to the grandstand and finish line is restricted. Only vendors, event officials, public shuttles and other vehicles expressly approved by the park manager are allowed to use the road or the limited parking at the grandstand.

In the interest of public safety, event participants and spectators are not permitted to walk upon the paved access road to the finish line. The Park Authority maintains a pedestrian trail from the parking lot to the judges' stand at the finish line.

Changes to the Plan

The *Sandy Run Rowing Facility Operations and Management Plan* is subject to review as park conditions and needs change with time and use. The Park Authority will continue to review and amend the plan to better serve public and community interests.

APPENDICES

- A Sandy Run Rowing Facilities Rules and Procedures
- B Fees and Charges
- C Regatta Guidelines and Permit Application
- D Park Authority Regulations and Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority Rules