Wild Washington

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As the landscape architecture intern at Dumbarton Oaks, I have spent the summer investigating a “Wild Washington.” This research, which builds upon my graduate thesis on “The Wild Anacostia,” envisions an alternative perspective of our nation’s capital based on the recognition and expression of the urban wild. It is a wild that can be discovered across scales and modes: from a fox crossing Rock Creek Parkway, to the Great Falls on the Potomac, to a dandelion growing from a crack in a parking lot. It is a wild that is not only found in plants and animals, but in stormwater, pollution, topography, and social behavior.

I began my research by exploring the words “wilderness” and “wild,” including their relationship to Beatrix Farrand’s design for Dumbarton Oaks. Through discussions with National Park Service employees, research in the library, and the creation of original graphics, I worked to situate Dumbarton Oaks within a wild spectrum that marks the D.C. landscape. As a hybrid on the edge of both a social and ecological spectrum, Dumbarton Oaks is an integral part of D.C.’s wild network.

Coming from the perspective of a landscape architect, I view research as a design tool to help the public better understand the ever-changing dynamics in their own cities. Therefore, my goal this summer has been to relate and condense the different aspects and qualities of a “Wild Washington” into a form and concept that can be more easily understood to people living in and visiting D.C. My time at Dumbarton Oaks has fostered my interest in the definition and manifestation of the urban wild, and I plan to carry this research with me as I embark upon my career in landscape architecture.
Thesis: Wild Anacostia
Anacostia sites
Thickening strategies for trail design

A. Thicken by widening
B. Thicken by encompassing
C. Thicken by migrating
D. Thicken by meandering

Thickening strategies for trail design
Urban wild as spontaneous vegetation
Urban wild as hydrology + topography
Urban wild as the invisible

Phase I: trail heightens the contrast between remediated and toxic ground

Phase II: trail breaks down as landfill is remediated
Urban wild as infrastructure

Engage + immerse  Play + perform  Observe + absorb
“Idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home”
-William Cronon

Wilderness: untouched
“Wildness is in our own backyards, of the nature that is all around us if only we have the eyes to see it”
-William Cronon

Wilderness: a refuge
Wilderness: separate systems
The Wild Garden
Beatrix Farrand’s wilderness
Beatrix Farrand’s wilderness today...
Wilderness vs. Urban Wild

“Wildness is in our own backyards, of the nature that is all around us if only we have the eyes to see it.”
-William Cronon
The Urban Wild
Reading list

*Rambunctious Gardens* by Emma Marris

*Urban Wildscapes* edited by Anna Jorgensen + Richard Keenan

*The Wild Garden* by William Robinson

*Planetary Gardens - The Landscape Architecture of Gilles Clement* edited by Alessandro Rocca

*Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv

“Terrain Vague” by Ignasi Sola-Morales

*The Wild Places* by Robert Macfarlane

People

Bill Yeaman - NPS Resource Management Specialist

Doug Curtis - NPS hydrologist

Scott Einberger - Ranger, RCP

Lou Slade - Dumbarton Oaks Park volunteer

Maureen Joseph - NPS, Park Cultural Landscapes Program

Mark Fray - NPS Exotic Plants Management

Scott Bates - NPS Wildlfie Biologist

Pat Campbell - NPS Inventory Monitoring

Jill Swearingen - NPS Invasive Species Management Coordinator

NPS Center for Urban Ecology

Research
Aspects, characteristics, + the multiple scales of the urban wild
Urban wild palette
Wild Washington matrix
Socio-ecological spectrum of the urban wild