



June 23, 2022  
Superintendent Tyrone Brandyburg  
Harpers Ferry National Historical Park  
P.O. Box 65  
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Re: Maryland Heights parking area closure

Superintendent Brandyburg,

Mid Atlantic Climbers (MAC), Access Fund (AF), the American Alpine Club (AAC), and Outdoor Alliance DMV (OA DMV) respectfully submit these comments to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in regards to your recent decision to implement a permanent closure of parking areas at Maryland Heights.

### **Comments**

Our coalition of organizations is disappointed to learn of the recent decision to permanently close the Maryland Heights parking areas. As stated in the 2021 Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Climbing Study, and noted in our previous comment letter, parking availability and parking safety have long been major issues for climbers attempting to access climbing areas within the park. The decision to permanently close these parking lots, while proposing no new solutions for visitation, will only increase barriers to entry for climbers and other visitors to the park.

As stated in the permanent closure of Maryland Heights decision-making process presentation, park management received many comments with potential alternatives such as: 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, implementing additional measures or physical obstacles to discourage illegal parking on Sandy Hook Road, seasonal parking closures, etc., yet none were seriously considered in the park's decision making process. The park's rejection of the request to develop proposed alternatives for additional public comment and data-gathering is concerning to our organizations and undermines the park's commitment to provide outstanding recreation experiences to a diverse

population. Additionally, the decision by the park to consult with a sole individual on the impacts this parking closure would have on the climbing community rather than an organization such as Mid Atlantic Climbers—a 501(c)(3) nonprofit representing roughly 2,000 members and supporters in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, DC, and West Virginia—is not in alignment with active MOUs which outline the park’s commitment to partner with Access Fund (and affiliates) and American Alpine Club on issues related to rock climbing.

While we understand that there are legitimate safety concerns stemming from the parking issues at Maryland Heights that need to be addressed, park management’s proposed solutions are inadequate and do not address the increased barriers to entry that will result from the permanent closure. We urge park management, with the involvement of the public and representative organizations, to explore additional solutions that prioritize visitor safety while providing access to an historical climbing area that is regionally important to several generations of mid-Atlantic climbers.

Our organizations are committed to working with the park to manage rock climbing in a sustainable manner, which includes parking access for climbing resources. Our organizations have engaged with the park to develop a Climbing Management Plan, through a climbing resource inventory and survey, and we urge the park to continue the process and complete the plan. We are standing by to provide resources and assistance throughout the process.

We look forward to collaborating with the park on solutions to address parking concerns, outdoor recreation access, and climbing management. We would be happy to speak with the park management directly to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

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### **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, DC 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.

Cc:  
Tammy Stidham  
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National Park Service Region 1 - National Capital Area