

Release No. MCBQ 080130.1701

(in conjunction w/ Commonwealth of VA)

For Immediate Release

January 30, 2008

Contacts:

Wildlife Regional Manager Jerry Sims
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
540-899-4169
Jerry.sims@dgif.virginia.gov

Executive Director Kim Hosen
Prince William Conservation Alliance
[703-499-4954](tel:703-499-4954)
Kim@pwconserve.org

1st. Lt. Brian P. Donnelly
Public Affairs Office
Marine Corps Base Quantico
[703-432-0305](tel:703-432-0305)
Brian.p.donnelly@USMC.mil

Game Department Purchase of Merrimac Farm Conserves Important Natural Habitat

Site expected to be open to the public this spring

Nokesville, VA – Merrimac Farm, a more than 300-acre property in Prince William County, is the newest addition to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) statewide network of wildlife management areas. The land features diverse wildlife habitats – wetlands, hardwood forest and upland meadows – as well as access to Cedar Run. The property was recently acquired by the VDGIF with support from the Prince William Conservation Alliance, Marine Corps Base Quantico, and the McDowell family (who owned the property). As a result of this successful partnership involving state and federal agencies, local non-government organizations and private individuals, this scenic property has been permanently conserved for public use including hunting, fishing, wildlife watching and environmental education programs.

It is anticipated that the Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area (WMA) will be open to the public in the spring. A formal dedication is being planned to coincide with the peak of the bluebells. The site boasts one of the largest single patches of Virginia bluebells in northern Virginia.

Why Merrimac Farm WMA is Significant

The acquisition of Merrimac Farm presents a unique opportunity to protect forested wetlands and vernal pools, some of the most threatened habitat in the United States, in one of the fastest growing communities in the country. The proximity to highly urban populations makes Merrimac Farm an ideal place for the more than 2 million northern Virginia residents to participate in wildlife-related recreation and education. Plans for the site include special managed hunts, fishing, wildlife viewing areas, and environmental education programs. VDGIF will use this site to demonstrate wildlife management principles and practices in an urban/suburban setting which will hopefully serve as a model for other public lands in

northern Virginia. To protect the integrity of the property as well as to minimize user conflicts and negative impact on habitat, Merrimac Farm WMA will have some restrictions. Horseback and bicycle riding, use of all-terrain vehicles, dog walking and jogging will be prohibited.

In addition to protecting wildlife habitat for such species as bobwhite quail, songbirds, waterfowl, deer, fox, rabbits, frogs and salamanders, the establishment of Merrimac Farm WMA – with its one mile of frontage on Cedar Run – will protect this important watershed and enhance restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Cedar Run flows into Occoquan River, a tributary of the Potomac River. Protecting the wetlands along Cedar Run will also promote better water quality for northern Virginia. Occoquan Reservoir provides drinking water to more than 1.2 million people who reside in Prince William, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun and Stafford counties.

Previously the property had been managed as part of a shooting preserve, resulting in excellent wildlife habitat. Merrimac Farm WMA is adjacent to 59,000-acre Marine Corps Base Quantico, forming an impressive contiguous tract of wildlife habitat.

Partners Made the Acquisition Happen

Merrimac Farm was purchased for \$2,859,500 using funds from a variety of sources. The Prince William Conservation Alliance (PWCA) secured a Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) grant in the amount of \$820,773 to be used by the VDGIF to purchase the property. Administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, VLCF grants are used to acquire and protect special lands. The grants require a 50 percent match. The VDGIF provided \$608,997 from its capital funds toward the purchase. The U.S. Department of the Navy contributed \$1,429,750 to VDGIF under the federal encroachment protection program.

Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr. said of the acquisition, “Merrimac Farm is an excellent example of how partnering organizations can use the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation grants to protect important habitat. This project contributes to Governor Kaine’s goal of conserving 400,000 acres by the time he leaves office. Achieving that goal will not only protect our land and water for wildlife but also improve the quality of life for all Virginians.”

VDGIF Acting Director G. Mike Bise commented, “This acquisition simply could not have taken place without all the players coming together. The Prince William Conservation Alliance and its Executive Director Kim Hosen kept this project alive and in front of our Board. The Quantico Marine Corps Base established a restrictive easement under a federal program that secures buffers for military installations. The McDowell family had a strong desire to create a legacy for Dean McDowell by conserving this property. This has been a long time coming, and it was the cooperative spirit that finally got the job done.”

The U.S. Marine Corps’ involvement in the acquisition is part of a federal program to work with state and local agencies, conservation organizations, and willing landowners to protect the mission integrity of military installations by establishing an easement that will act as a buffer area outside the installation’s existing border to protect against incompatible development that could impact current or future military operations occurring within the current installation boundaries, as well as to support local land conservation efforts. Merrimac Farm is the first acquisition of its kind in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

"This partnership not only allows us to continue our mission of training Marines, but also lets the local community enjoy important Virginia habitat in its natural state," said Quantico Base Commander Colonel Charles Dallachie. "We are happy to partner with the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Prince William

Conservation Alliance to honor the wishes of the McDowell family and protect this land from development. I look forward to other opportunities with willing partners for compatible land use efforts on all sides of the base."

Merrimac Farm was originally owned by Col. Dean McDowell, who purchased the property after World War II and whose untimely death in 2002 put his property at risk of development. The continued support of Col. McDowell's heirs and their commitment to the preservation of Merrimac Farm for public uses has been instrumental to the success of this five-year effort. Gail McDowell said, "Our family is committed to conservation. We are delighted that the property will be protected and available to the public."

About VDGIF

With Merrimac Farm WMA, the VDGIF expands its statewide network of WMAs to 37 with well over 200,000 acres statewide. For a complete list of state-owned Wildlife Management Areas, go to www.HuntFishVA.com.

It is the mission of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; and to promote safety for persons and property in connection with these outdoor activities.

About the PWCA

Beginning more than five years ago, the Prince William Conservation Alliance (PWCA) initiated efforts to protect Merrimac Farm. By making this a priority for the local community, the PWCA raised the profile of the project and successfully obtained a VCLF grant for VDGIF.

The Prince William Conservation Alliance is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that Prince William's environment is protected for the good of all its citizens. The PWCA is working to conserve, preserve and restore local waterways and natural areas, and increase community participation in stewardship opportunities. The organization has been a leader for more than five years in establishing higher goals for parks and natural open space in Prince William County.

PWCA Executive Director Kim Hosen emphasizes the Alliance's commitment to land conservation, saying, "Merrimac Farm is a model for the type of public and private involvement Prince William County can use to capitalize on land conservation opportunities to ensure we have green spaces that are open to the public to enjoy. Our work to assist the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in purchasing Merrimac Farm has been an important part of our ongoing efforts to preserve a network of high quality, natural, open space in Prince William County."

The PWCA will continue to work with the VDGIF to provide educational and volunteer opportunities at Merrimac Farm WMA. For more information, visit the Prince William Conservation Alliance's Web site at www.pwconserve.org.

While the site is not officially open to the public, the Prince William Conservation Alliance will host a special series of public tours and clean up days beginning on February 9, 2008. For more information, visit the Prince William Conservation web site or call 703.499.4954.

About Quantico

Since its establishment in 1917, Quantico has been home to many of the nation's most innovative, intelligent and patriotic men and women. It is at Quantico where vital concepts, training, and equipment of the future are developed. Some of the most important techniques in warfighting have been born here, including expeditionary warfare, for which the Marine Corps is renowned. In addition, all Marine officers are trained at Quantico in the tactics, techniques and leadership skills that enable them to continue to fight and win the nation's wars.

###

Photo opportunities and tours by members of the news media can be arranged by calling either Jerry Sims or Kim Hosen. Their contact information is listed above.