

COLUMNS

Gerald Winegrad: The battle of Greenbury Point; let's save an important ecological site | COMMENTARY

By Gerald Winegrad Annapolis The Capital May 05, 2023 at 6:00 am



The 231 acres of Critical Area forests and wetlands of Greenbury Point natural area are threatened by plans to construct a golf course. (Jeffrey F. Bill/Capital Gazette)

The Battle of the Severn was fought on March 25, 1655, and centered on who would control the Maryland colony and its land. A new Battle of the Severn is under way centered on control of 231 acres at Greenbury Point.

This new battle will decide whether this land remains an ecologically diverse public natural area or becomes a private golf course.

The first battle lasted only a day; the current battle began one year ago this week and is still raging.

The 1655 combat originated when disaffected Puritans, who fled religious persecution in Virginia, were welcomed to settle at Greenbury Point by Maryland Gov. Thomas Stone. King Charles I had granted Maryland to the Catholic Cecil Calvert who followed a course of religious toleration.

In January 1650, the Virginia Puritans established the first European settlement in what is now Anne Arundel County, and called their new home Providence. It was located at Greenbury Point and extended into the Broadneck Peninsula.

The Calvert family's political leadership was upended in 1652 as the English Civil War pitted Roman Catholic Royalists against Protestant Parliamentarians, primarily Puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell. They executed King Charles I in 1649 for treason.

Opportunistic Virginian leaders, led by their governor, exploited the political turmoil seeking to takeover Maryland and enlisted the Providence Puritans who established a war council. Capt. William Fuller was appointed to lead its forces.

Two visiting British ships were pressed into service. Stone recruited an armed force to repel the usurpers that arrived by ship in the Severn River. The Battle of the Severn ensued with 200 to 300 men engaged.

The bloody fight ended quickly as Stone's ships were outmaneuvered and his forces, embarked on a creek, were surrounded. Stone surrendered, his men suffering more casualties than their opponents.

Fuller imprisoned the captives. Then, he and other Puritan leaders sitting as a war council, sentenced 10 of Stone's men to death. Four prisoners were shot "in cold blood." Only the pleas of Puritan women and soldiers saved the others.

The rule of the Calverts was restored in 1658. Greenbury Point, despite the construction of Puritan buildings there, eventually reverted to and remained in agriculture for 250 years.

In 1909, the Navy bought 180 acres of Greenbury Point farmland for a dairy farm for the Naval Academy, which moved to Gambrills in 1913. An early Naval Air Facility was established and in 1918 a Naval Radio Transmitting Facility was built with communication towers operating until 1996. In 1999, all but three of the towers were dismantled.

At the time of this decommissioning, the Navy agreed the undeveloped 231 acres at Greenbury Point would be managed as a natural resource conservation area emphasizing environmental and cultural education of the public.

The Navy honored this commitment as Naval Support Activity Annapolis manages the land under a legally required Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan.

Greenbury Point is entirely in the Critical Area surrounded by Carr Creek, Mill Creek, the Severn River and Chesapeake Bay, providing public water access and magnificent views.

It is home to more than 700 species of plants and animals and is a birding hot spot with 224 avian species including state endangered Short-eared Owls, Mourning Warblers and Royal Terns. The extensive forests, wetlands and grassy meadows are accessible by three miles of trails.

Starting in 1989, Tina Lorentzen served as the Naval Academy's natural resources manager and, following the management plan, oversaw many conservation improvements. They included a Nature Center, 33 acres of wetland habitat, planting 35 acres of grassland meadows, a diamondback terrapin release program and exhibits at the center regularly hosting local schools and scout groups.

A large reforestation area around the remaining towers was planted as mitigation for the Navy's clearing of Critical Area forest to build the nearby Brigade Sports Complex. The 231 acres also have important archaeological value. North of this natural area, the Navy has developed much of Greenbury Point, including this year with cottages costing more than \$5 million.

Unfortunately, the Navy's environmental and public access commitments have come under assault by misguided plans by the Naval Academy Golf Association (NAGA) to construct an 18-hole golf course on most of the remaining sensitive land.

The nearby USNA golf course was completely rebuilt to championship level in 2020, costing \$7 million and meeting all brigade requirements. Many large trees were removed. This golf course has many non-military members who pay \$22,500 to join and \$3,768 in annual dues.

News of a golf course on this natural area gave rise to the Second Battle of the Severn, a/k/a The Battle for Greenbury Point.

The usurping combatants are led by NAGA President Chet Gladchuk, who sought a single source contract from the Navy secretary. Gladchuk pledged to publicly explain the plans and scheduled a May 10, 2022, meeting to do so and receive input.

Growing public opposition caused Gladchuk to cancel the meeting. Since then, details have been hidden from the public. The Navy fenced off and limited public access to the trails on the site reversing years of regular public access—a shot across the bow in retribution?



The Battle for Greenbury Point will rage until the golf course is defeated and the 231 acres of forests, wetlands, and meadows are permanently protected. (Sue Steinbrook)

The loyalists supporting the Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan by opposing the construction on the conservation area include [SAVE GREENBURY POINT](#), formed one year ago and led by Sue Steinbrook.

It has been joined in opposition by thousands of citizens, Congressmen John Sarbanes, 50 conservation groups, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Chesapeake

Conservancy, Severn River Association, Severn Riverkeeper, Sierra Club, Waterkeepers Chesapeake, and 25 community associations.

County Executive Steuart Pittman submitted plans to lease the property, keeping it as a conservation area under Recreation and Parks. Tina Lorenzen has died, but her family, led by her 100-year-old mom, sent a scathing letter condemning the golf course proposal as inimical to what Lorenzen achieved.

Retired Rear Admiral Thomas Jurkowsky, an Annapolis resident who served at the Naval Academy, has written eloquently in opposing the golf course as redundant and “doing nothing to support the mission of the Naval Academy: to develop midshipmen mentally, morally and physically.”

The admiral noted “he is personally embarrassed as a 31-year Navy veteran to see local Navy leadership support such an idea. ... It’s time to put our heads on straight and focus on the things that truly matter for our Navy. A new golf course is not one of them.”

I served as a Naval officer during the Vietnam War, later reaching the rank of Commander in the Naval Reserves My dad served in the Navy in WW II on destroyers in the north Atlantic.

I join in condemning the proposed desecration of such an important ecological and historical site. Even if using best practices, golf courses are notorious polluters causing significant nutrients and chemicals to sully local waters.

Despite the single source contract being denied, Gladchuk/NAGA are persisting while he minimizes environmental impacts as “infinitesimal.”

He unceremoniously fired respected and beloved Navy football coach Ken Niumatalolo after a November loss to Army despite Niumatalolo’s 27 years at Navy, 15 as head coach, winning more games than any predecessor.

Gladchuk is badly losing the second War of the Severn and embarrassing the U.S. Navy. It is he who should be fired.

Gerald Winegrad represented the greater Annapolis area as a Democrat in the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate for 16 years. Contact him at gwwabc@comcast.net.