THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

Trails Stewardship Committee

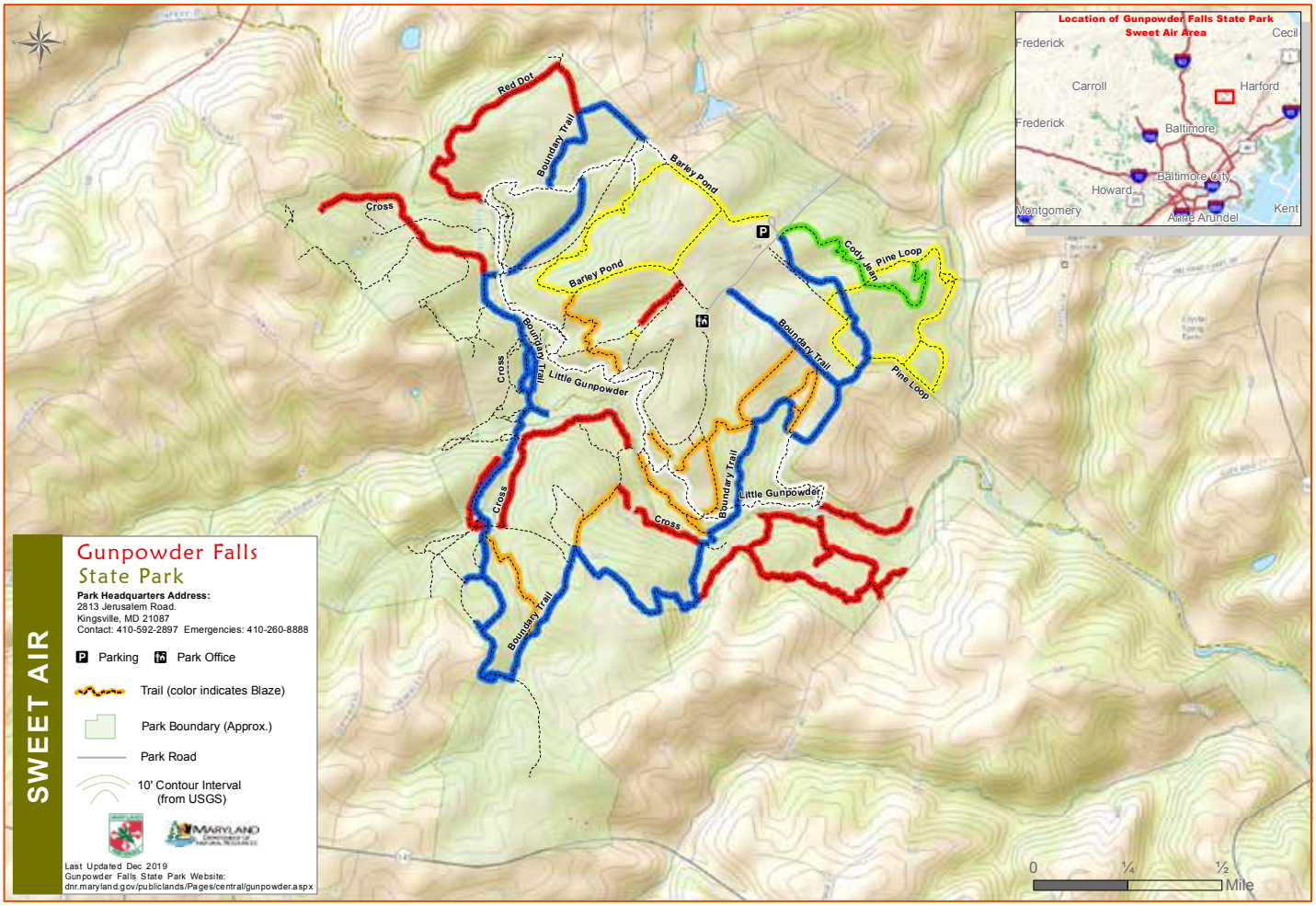
Spotlight on Harford County: Gunpowder Falls State Park – Sweet Air Area

by Katherine O. Rizzo

The Gunpowder Falls State Park in Harford County was established in 1959 to protect the Gunpowder River and the Big and Little Gunpowder Falls watersheds. It is thought that the river got its name from the amount of saltpeter found along its banks. The valley's 7,031 acre Gunpowder Manor near Baldwin was surveyed for Charles Calvert III Lord Baltimore in 1683.

Gunpowder Falls State Park is now Maryland's largest state parks and includes over 18,000 acres across Harford and Baltimore counties. The park as a whole contains more than 120 miles of multi-use trails and is also open for fishing, kayaking, canoeing and swimming.

The Sweet Air Area has trails in both Harford and Baltimore counties. The ranger station and parking lot are on Dalton Bevard Road in Baldwin. This area covers 1,250 acres and straddles the Little Gunpowder Falls, which is a popular destination for both hikers and horseback riders. The falls themselves are the border between the two counties. The area was part of a 500 acre land grant in 1704 that was originally known as Quinn. It acquired the name Sweet Air by 1758, when it was purchased for Henry Hill Carroll.

Sweet Air contains 18 miles of multi-use trails, except for the Cody Jean and Red Dot Trails, which are both restricted to hikers only. Park officials request that people do not use the trails for horseback riding or bicycling within 24 hours after a heavy rain. Trail users should expect a varied topography including tidal wetlands and steep, rugged slopes.

The park is open from sunrise to sunset year-round. Parking for both trailers and cars is at 2840 Dalton Bevard Road, Baldwin, MD 21013.