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NEWSLETTER



FRIENDS OF ROYAL LAKE PUBLISHES LATEST COMMUNITY VISION PLAN

By Paul Gross

The Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) leadership team is happy to announce the publication of the 2023 Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake Parks that lays out a vision for Royal Lake Parks' enhancements. The Plan highlights two contiguous parks in and around Royal Lake: Lakeside Park and Royal Lake Park.

You may ask, "Why a Vision Plan for Royal Lake and what purpose does it serve?" This is YOUR plan as it reflects the inputs from the Royal Lake friends and builds upon that similar Vision Plan published in 2017. Its primary purpose is to provide the community's vision to the Fairfax County political leadership, Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES).

Our desire is to provide those important county organizations with important community input to help guide new enhancements, operations and maintenance, master planning, and to secure funding to achieve this vision. As the Plan outlines, there has been over the years a significant hands-on volunteer and county government cooperative working relationship to improve the parks and the environment. We want to build on these successful efforts and present our updated Plan.

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One of FORL's Own Awarded the Braddock District's Citizen of the Month

By Sarah Lennon



In March, Tom McCook was recognized by Supervisor James Walkinshaw for his outstanding work for our community. Tom has run the Kings Park West Civic Association (KPWCA)'s Parks and Lake Committee for many years, organizing trash clean ups in the KPW community and so much more! He also is the Coordinator of the KPWCA "Road Raiders" – a small band of volunteers who, in the early morning of the second Saturday of every month, tackle mostly roadside spots, addressing issues that VDOT does not; this includes trimming back vegetation so sidewalks are clear, picking up trash and clearing the curbs of leaves and other debris.

A former Eagle Scout himself, he has formed a strong, positive connection with several senior Scouts to help them plan and execute park-related projects that benefit the community and subsequently become Eagle Scouts.

Tom is a key member of the FORL team and has developed an excellent relationship with Fairfax County Park Authority, including its new Director Jai Cole. He invited her and Supervisor Walkinshaw to walk the full circuit trail around Royal Lake so they could see both the projects accomplished over the years and discuss FORL's future desired projects. He even thought ahead to preposition his vehicle at the half-way point in case someone

needed to finish the walk quicker or needed some relief. Great thinking!

Tom has undertaken many solo efforts when he sees a need, in his personal desire to keep trails maintained. He has been a teacher to many, including me! Last winter, a tree fell in Rabbit Branch Park over the sidewalk and he and I took it upon ourselves to remove it to clear the sidewalk. I brought my loppers and a hand saw, but Tom, master of the power tools, showed me how use a chain saw. That made the task much quicker and easier, to say the least! (and it was fun, if a bit scary!)

As Supervisor Walkinshaw wrote in the Braddock Beacon, "Known for his sense of humor, power tools, knowledge of park maintenance, and passion for keeping Fairfax County parks clean, Tom McCook embodies leadership that inspires his community and the next generation."

'Nuff said!

SHANES CREEK RESTORATION ON TRACK

Matthew Shepherd, Project Manager in (DPWES) for the Shanes Creek Restoration, recently issued an update to the status of the project. He reports that:

The county contractor for the project, Meadville Land Services, Inc., has competed over 65% of the stream work and is on track to finish in the fall.

The contractor has completed almost 100% of the tree clearing. The invasive plant treatment has begun and will continue after the project construction. A small portion of the native planting was done this spring, and many of those plants are beginning to leaf out. The remaining planting will be done in the fall and next spring.

Work schedule and hours are Monday to Thursday from 7am to 7pm with occasional weekend work that will be announced in advance.

For additional background on the project, please refer to our Winter 2023 FORL Newsletter article that can be found on our website: friendsofroyallake.org.

SECOND SUMMER PHOTO CONTEST

Share your photo views of the unique features of our Royal Lake environment!

Enter up to 5 photos in any (or all) of these categories:

- Scenic
- Bird
- Animal
- People
- Artistic

Send photos and note to permit publishing by June 30 to:
suzanneclairedoherty@gmail.com

FORL used a systematic approach with members of the community's active participation. In 2022, FORL sponsored a detailed survey that yielded 433 individual or family responses. Using information garnered from the survey, discussions with county officials, and community-wide meetings, FORL has created this Vision Plan.

The survey's high-level community findings include:

Universal agreement that the parks are a highly valued community resource,

Preserving peace, quiet and the natural environment are important goals,

Existing parks facilities, fields and trails need to be improved and maintained.



The Plan contains useful history and background information to support the complete understanding of our vision. The heart of the Plan is the "Community Vision Projects" section, which lists projects for enhancement and upgrade, along with "Royal Lake Proposed Enhancements" lists. This information, in an Appendix, is an extensive list of community needs to upgrade park infrastructure. The Appendix contains a list of completed projects, proposed and planned capital improvements and maintenance projects, and on-going support activities as pictured on the right.

FORL wants to thank the hundreds of individuals who completed the survey and attended the meetings to make this a community-wide consensus document.

While the Plan can be considered a living document, it is anticipated that the community needs lists will be updated on the most frequent basis.

The list of completed projects section shows a significant number of improvements that were requested in the 2017 Vision Plan. Our hope is to build upon this successful track record. Three project areas are of particular importance: trails, environment cleanup, restoration and improvements to existing facilities.

Trails allow access to facilities throughout the park and are heavily used. Trails are perhaps the most important feature of Royal Lake Parks needing upgrades and they are the resource that the community would like significant effort directed.



FORL will be holding a community-wide meeting on May 22 at Robinson Secondary School in the recital hall at 7:00 PM to discuss the Vision Plan and receive your feedback. We hope to see you there! Your participation at the meeting is important. The Plan will be available to view on the FORL website: friendsofroyallake.org after the May community meeting.

FORL AND EARTH DAY...MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Suzanne Doherty

A few weeks ago, on April 22, the world observed Earth Day. Sometimes April is called Earth Month with its international focus on protecting the environment for future generations. One might wonder why every day is not declared Earth Day since, indeed, this blue planet is all we have.

The first Earth Day, organized by then US Senator Gaylord Nelson on April 22, 1970, marked the official beginning of an environmental movement that eventually went global and is today observed by a billion people from more than 193 countries.

Each year, officials at EarthDay.org choose a theme to reflect its mission to remind us how closely connected we are to the earth and of our responsibility to protect it. This year's Earth Day theme is "Invest in Our Planet", a challenge for businesses, governments, and civil society to form partnerships in finding solutions to environmental problems. As individuals, we might ask, "what has this to do with me?"



The Earth Day theme of 2010 was "A Billion Acts of Green" and perhaps a better expression of the idea that small, individual efforts CAN make a big difference. Friends of Royal Lake is a community organization that, throughout the year, brings local residents together to work on several projects consistent with Earth Day's environmental objectives.



IMA volunteer, Ben Stutts, carries two of the eight bags of garlic mustard pulled out of the woods on a Saturday just before Earth Day

FORL's seasonally scheduled cleanup days, for example, is a local response to the world wide call for a "Great Global Cleanup" of plastic pollution so damaging to our natural habitats. FORL also supports the efforts of members' involvement with Fairfax County Park Authority management of invasive species (IMA) that threaten the health of our forests. This local effort is another of the environmental actions called for in EarthDay.org's "Canopy Project." The focus on saving the tree canopy is also among Fairfax County's official long term environmental objectives.

Many FORL sponsored projects involve young people--scouts, middle and high school students looking for volunteer opportunities--who participate in work days that help preserve and/or improve the natural environment of the Royal Lake parks. I love leading groups of young volunteers into the woods to tackle some of the invasive species causing harm to our native ecology. After a morning of removing English Ivy or honey-suckle from trees, these volunteers might be rewarded with nothing more than a very heartfelt thank you.

I like to observe with them that, while the environmental problems of the world seem so overwhelming, their individual efforts in this small patch of park combined with the individual acts of others in each their small patch of woods, contributes to the "billion acts of green" that can only help preserve the health of our home planet.

FORL APPLAUDS DEDICATED FAIRFAX COUNTY EMPLOYEES

By Paul Gross

It seems in almost every Newsletter we have an article or announcement thanking the dedicated efforts of the many volunteers who support Royal Lake Parks, and this is very appropriate. However, we volunteers are not alone in the efforts to maintain and improve Royal Lake. We rely on the men and women of the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and the Braddock Supervisor Office who carry the bulk of the load in maintenance and capital improvements.



In this article, we want to give a big thanks to the dedicated county government employees who are working to support Royal Lake, its parks and the environment. Many of us have worked with the following leaders and their staffs:

- Allison Rankin** (Friends Federation)
- Julie Tahan** (Volunteer Management)
- Marcos Suarez** (Park Maintenance)
- Beth Borostovik** (Park Maintenance)
- Paul Shirey** (Park Planning)
- Tom McFarland** (Trails Management)
- Charles Smith** (DPWES Water Management)
- Matthew Shepherd** (DPWES Stormwater Management)
- Patricia Greenberg** (IMA Program Manager)
- Gloria Medina** (IMA Volunteer Manager).

These individuals represent a much larger community of dedicated people. I almost did not want to list any names for fear of leaving someone out of the list who is a dedicated employee who works closely with FORL. The support we receive from those mentioned above is representative of a larger team of individuals that the FORL Leadership Team has worked with and who provide valuable effort in enhancing Royal Lake Parks.

We not only want to thank those dedicated county employees we know, but also those who we don't know personally but see the fruits of their labor from planning to the implementation of park improvements.

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Just a few of the many Fairfax county employees hard at work!

Photos for this article taken by Paul Gross



(County employees, Cont'd.)

From my vantage point living in a house that overlooks Lakeside Park, I get a front row seat, so to speak, of many of the activities that take place to maintain and improve the parks. Their efforts run the entire gamut of projects such as Royal Lake being dredged, trails made ADA-compliant, ball fields maintained and upgraded, facilities fixed, etc.

An additional point is that the FCPA and DPWES leadership and staff listen to the needs and wants of the FORL community and, within their ability, work to respond to those needs.

As we have mentioned in other articles, they appreciate the information we provide from our survey, Community Vision Plan, and related point papers that provide community ideas and consensus on park issues.



To all the dedicated county employees who make Royal Lake Parks what they are today –

Thank you thank you thank you thank you

UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Community meeting: Monday, May 22, 7:00, in the recital hall at Robinson Secondary School.

Trail Workday -- Eagle Scout Project support for an upgrade of trail segment at Royal Lake Park, 5344 Gainsborough Drive, Saturday, June 3, 9:00-12:00. Location near the Royal Lake Playground.

Road Raiders: May 13 at 8:00 AM for only 30 minutes of your time
June 10 at 8:00 AM for only 30 minutes of your time

Location to be determined and information sent by email and community signage boards,
To participate in this activity, contact KPWRoadRaiders@gmail.com.

MORE EARTH DAY ACTIVITIES

By Tom McCook

Earth Day – April 15, Kings Park West Civic Association (KPWCA) and Friends of Royal Lake started Earth Day – early to mitigate some aggressive spring growth of weeds and underbrush that may inhibit finding that elusive plastic water bottle and other trash.

We had a great turn-out from a local Girl Scout Troop # 55018 from Holy Spirit Church who provided the “girl-power” at Lakeside Park and Crooked Creek watershed, and we had 12 dedicated neighbors to support the clean-up at Royal Lake Park and Shane’s creek watershed.

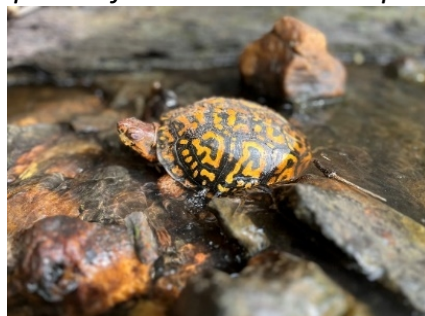


Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has... Margaret Mead



Our clean-up objectives:

- a. Discover Nature, explore our parks and improve our community.*
- b. Every single person and every piece of trash removed improves our Parks and environment.*





A representative of a new generation of activists already hard at work
(Photo by Andy Karp)

Thank you from the FORL team for all your support

