

VOL. 4, NO. 2 • APRIL 2022

# THE FORL FORUM

Official Newsletter of the Friends of Royal Lake



Image by Esther Shin

## From the Editor

BY NATASHA C. LENNON

Hey there friends!

I'm so excited to be joining the amazing FORL team as your new newsletter editor. Here's a little about me - I'm a sophomore at Robinson, and I'm looking forward to continuing Suzanne's work on this great publication. We will be continuing a quarterly release schedule, with a winter issue, a spring issue, to be followed by our summer and fall issues. Things may seem a bit different in the newsletter going forwards, but I hope you like the new look! My goal for the newsletter is to create a perfect blend of informative, fun, & visually pleasing! One major difference you may have noticed is that we have a new title for the newsletter - The FORL Forum. I'm hoping that this newsletter really can be a forum in which anyone who enjoys Royal Lake can contribute. If you are interested in contributing, feel free to email me at [forl.editor@gmail.com](mailto:forl.editor@gmail.com) any ideas, pictures, or articles that you want in the next newsletter!



Lakeside Park - March 2021

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Image by Angela Kinson

# Spring at Royal Lake

BY SUZANNE DOHERTY

“In just Spring when the world is mudlucious and puddle wonderful...”

-excerpt of a poem by e.e. cummings

I have walked the Royal Lake trail almost every day from season to season for forty-five years. In truth, each season in the Royal Lake parks offers an experience of the natural world that fills my soul, but Spring! Ah...”mudlucious” Spring is a wonder all to herself.

Like clockwork, during the first week of March, the burst of fuzzy red blooms of the maple trees is, for me, the first most visible sign of the shift in season. I rejoice because I know from this moment, Spring slowly unfolds herself on those warming days when the sap begins to run.



I am delighted to see on my walk on one of those first warm days that the awakening woods have sprouted all over in that bright, impossible new green. It is true that much of the early greening of the woods is due to invasive plants—especially honeysuckle vine, but the native viburnum shrubs have also burst their winter slumber and the skunk cabbage emerges in emerald triumph. Soon, the woods will be graced by the pinks and whites and lavender blooms of native trees.

Winter silence is broken by the trills and tweets, caws and coos of birds staking out territory and winning over a likely love. A beady-eyed goose stands on the trail between me and his mate. He arches his neck to look me over. He honks...have I moved too close? Soon there will be a nest and, even with park authority efforts to discourage, an inevitable gaggle of goslings to delight. Who can NOT be charmed?

Birds are not the only animal raising an exuberant song to Spring. During the first days of April, the water in the shallow ends of the lake boil in a spectacular orgy of frogs going about their reproductive business. Their lusty chorus, just a few days in duration, expresses, as just about nothing else can, the incredible life force that is Spring.

When I walk the trail on these “puddle wonderful” Spring days and pay attention with all my senses to the details of this season of growth and renewal I fairly kick up my old heels in celebration. Spring offers hope with the assurance that, midst the world’s troubles, the natural world endures in all its juicy, joyful splendor. Life goes on.





Image by Angela Kinson

# What are Invasive Plants & Why Should I Care?

BY SARAH LENNON

**Did you know...** The Fairfax County (FCPS) Park Authority has more than 23,000 acres of parkland in Fairfax County, but more than one-third of that is infested with non-native invasive species of plants and shrubs that cause ecological or economic harm. "How?" you may ask. Well, non-native invasive species reduce tree cover, decrease water quality, increase erosion and litter, and create more habitats for other invasive species, and that's just the beginning! The 300+ invasive plant species in our area further degrade the natural resources by threatening native tree, shrub, and understory species diversity, weighing down tree trunks and branches, and creating impenetrable thickets that block out sunlight. Some of them, like multiflora rose, can completely swarm over a section of woods and block out everything else. Did you ever get stopped in the woods by climbing vines or shrubs with thorns? They may have been invasive species. They also diminish the quality of wildlife habitat and the outdoor recreation experience when parkland seems unattractive and uninviting. Every natural area in Fairfax County is valuable and these ecosystems should be healthy, native forests.

**Did you know...** Invasive species' can mature quickly and generate many offspring and can tolerate a range of habitats. For example, Japanese stiltgrass can produce seeds in as little as 1% sunlight. They out-compete native species for the same resources, eventually reducing the populations of native species and, in some cases, even eliminating species from a community altogether. Some invasive species have more complicated effects that cause negative ramifications up the food chain, and that can lead to fewer native birds and less wildlife. Finally, invasive species alter the natural functions of a plant community or an ecosystem by changing soil conditions, which then can change which plants can grow there.

**Did you know...**the FCPA Invasive Management Area (IMA) program works to build a community-based network of individuals whose goal is better resource stewardship that will help improve the function of our watersheds. It is so much more than just pulling weeds! IMA volunteers restore habitat on parkland first by removing invasive plants that are detrimental to the environment. Then they plant native species that are needed by local wildlife and enhance the ecosystem services available in that area. The IMA program engages volunteers in small neighborhood projects spread throughout the county. It began in 2006 with only 20 sites and now there are 65 active sites with nearly 100 Volunteer Site Leaders. (You've probably seen several of them day in and day out around Royal Lake.) The program has restored 50 acres of valuable forest ecosystems in 40 local parks, utilized more than 21,000 hours of volunteer service, removed tons of invasive vegetation, and planted more than 3,000 native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses -- all in support of our mission to provide local hotspots of native biodiversity for human and wildlife enjoyment. It may seem overwhelming when you look at the total picture, but every hour makes a difference. YOU can make a difference. We need more volunteers to pitch in and support the work of the IMA Program. Check out Invasive Management Area Program (IMA) – Fairfax County Park Foundation ([fairfaxparkfoundation.org](http://fairfaxparkfoundation.org)) for more information.



**The bottom line is...** if you see areas with signs of new plantings around Royal Lake, please give those natives plants a wide berth and let them grow. And if you see some folks pulling up the bad and replacing it with the good, perhaps take a minute and thank them for their effort and dedication, and spend some time learning how we all can make our little corner of the world a better place.

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| <b>Resources for Native Plant Alternatives to Invasives</b>  |
| Earth Sangha: <a href="http://www.earthsangha.org">www.earthsangha.org</a>                         |
| Northern Virginia Conservation Trust: <a href="http://www.nvct.org">www.nvct.org</a>               |
| Plant Nova Natives: <a href="http://www.plantnovanatives.org">www.plantnovanatives.org</a>         |
| Plant Virginia Natives: <a href="http://www.plantvirgianatives.org">www.plantvirgianatives.org</a> |
| Virginia Native Plant Society: <a href="http://www.vnsp.org">www.vnsp.org</a>                      |



Image by Angela Kinson

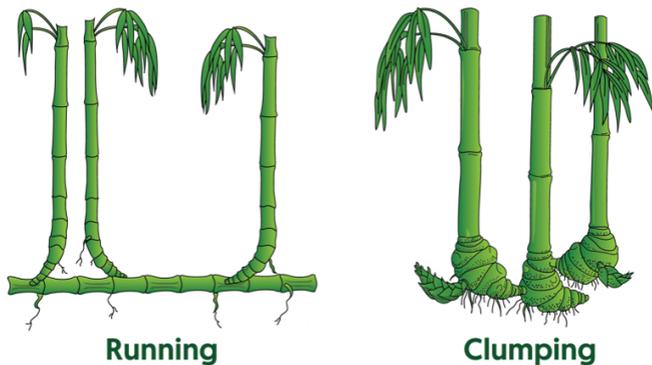
# Bamboo, Liriope & English Ivy, Oh My!

BY SARAH LENNON

Invasive species are widely considered to be the second-worst cause of ecosystem function degradation. The first is habitat loss, but really, invasive species and habitat loss go hand in hand. To learn more about invasive species removal in Fairfax County parks, visit the Invasive Management Area (IMA) website. Healthy ecosystems provide better air quality, better water quality, more opportunities for wildlife, and plant diversity. In Fairfax County, less than 10% of our land is protected in natural areas, making it even more important that our natural areas function as best they can. Some great replacements for English ivy include ferns, spring beauty, Dutchman’s breeches, and trillium.

## Bamboo

Bamboo, which technically is a giant grass, is one of the world’s most invasive plants and poses a threat to biodiversity, while crowding out native species. All bamboos spread via rhizomes, stem-like extensions that run horizontally underground and sprout roots below and new plant shoots above. While clumping bamboos tend to grow outward from a central plant, running types quickly extend across a lawn or garden and pop up where you may not want them. Bamboo that spreads and escapes your yard may cause ecological problems as well. Once established, it is next to impossible to control. The sprouts that shoot up from the ground each spring can grow 12 inches every day!



If running bamboo is bushy and attracts nesting birds and rodents, it can also attract snakes. They’ll hide in the bamboo, find something to eat like eggs from the bird’s nest or a mouse, then lay out in the sun to digest their meal. Concrete foundations and driveways are not safe from the havoc wrought by bamboo, which can buckle them as the rhizomes spread underneath. In a building with a weak foundation or cracks, the bamboo rhizome would get into the crack and begin to grow thicker there. It can damage the foundation of your house, especially if it is made of bricks. Due to the extraordinary distance the roots can travel, running bamboo has the potential to be more damaging to property than Japanese knotweed and has similar abilities to push through brickwork, drains, cavity walls, and patios, as well as exploit cracks or weaknesses in concrete.



Leaves of the running bamboo

**TAKE NOTE!** The Braddock Board of Supervisors recently adopted an ordinance to limit the spread of invasive running bamboo. The new ordinance does not prohibit the planting of bamboo, but it does require that property owners contain the bamboo on their property and prevent it from spreading to adjoining properties. The Board delayed the effective date until January 1, 2023 to reduce the maximum civil penalty fine that violators could incur. The Board will seek to educate residents about the invasive nature of running bamboo and the various methods to prevent it from spreading.



Image by Angela Kinson

# Bamboo, Liriope & English Ivy, Oh My! (cont.)

## Liriope

Creeping liriope (or monkey grass) is an invasive species from Asia. Arlington and Alexandria are among those recognizing it as a problematic weed that can crowd out the flora. Creeping liriope in Fairfax County parks, including the Royal Lake watershed, is more frequent than it was 10 years ago. Spreading by rhizomes lends to the “creeping” part of its name. The roots grow stealthily across property lines or can be spread by neighbors illegally dumping yard debris that contains liriope roots, or by gardeners who mistakenly believe it’s a positive addition to their yard!

With few diseases or animals to reduce the spread, liriope root fragments and seeds start growing wherever they please. Since liriope is hardy and cheap, it has become over-utilized in landscaping projects by both contractors and private residents, thereby increasing its coverage. Countless gardeners who thought creeping liriope would be a good, easily controlled addition to their plot ended up regretting planting it. I inherited a large garden full of liriope, and I’ve been battling its immutable march through my garden for years. What I thought was just an annoyance, I now realize is really much more than that! I am redoubling my efforts to dig it up this year, and have purchased a special tool to break through those tough roots.



Liriope dug up from a local garden

## English Ivy

English ivy has been used as a “carefree” ground cover for years, but in reality, it can stifle and eventually kill trees! It is often described as a lovely, evergreen groundcover, but in truth, it’s a damaging invasive species. English ivy is especially dangerous to trees. Once the vine reaches branches, its extra weight can cause those branches to break, injuring the tree and opening an entry point for dangerous infections. Even if the tree can manage the extra weight from the vines, English ivy will eventually cover all the branches, shading leaves and leading to the tree’s death. Deciduous trees are particularly vulnerable to English ivy because the vine can take advantage of the extra light in winter after the tree leaves have fallen, and further shade the understory, preventing new saplings. The excess weight of English ivy may cause additional damage to trees during winter storms. Additionally, this ivy can affect local wildlife by displacing the plants they depend on. I have learned, from my IMA colleagues, that these vines can be cut a few feet from the ground on the tree trunk to kill the upper portion, which will prevent the ivy from growing into the tree canopy. The trees behind my house in the Rabbit Branch area are now on my spring “to-do” hit list and I have great intentions of cutting the vines to prevent further growth.



English ivy taking over a forest



Image by Angela Kinson

# Community Vision for Royal Lake Parks

BY PAUL GROSS

As many of you are aware, an important focus of FORL is to advocate for the community concerning Royal Lake Parks. Our desire is to strengthen the parks' programs and facilities to enhance the parks that benefit the community.

Our advocacy is most effective when we come together as a community. In 2018, we did just that, when the FORL put together a comprehensive "Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake Parks". The Vision Plan provided a roadmap of proposed maintenance and capital improvement projects. An important attribute of the Vision Plan was community involvement that highlighted what we liked about the parks and what we would like to see improved.

We then presented the Vision Plan to the Park Authority and other county officials, including past and present Braddock District supervisors. Our Plan was favorably accepted, and many of our enhancements have been completed since the publication of the Vision Plan

## Before & after on a recent trail maintenance project



BEFORE



AFTER

As Friends of Royal Lake, your views as patrons of the parks are important. The survey and upcoming meetings will be your opportunity to express your views and discuss them with others in our community. Please look for upcoming announcements (emails, [www.friendsofroyallake.org](http://www.friendsofroyallake.org), [facebook.com/friendsofroyallake](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofroyallake), and Next-door) about how you can participate in developing a vision for enhancing the Royal Lake Parks.

## Vision Plan Update

We now want to build on successful park enhancements. In the FORL leadership's estimation, it is time for an updated Vision Plan. Our process for a successful Vision Plan is to survey the community and hold a few public meetings to expand our understanding of survey results and community comments.

**Park Survey** - As a first step, we have released a survey to gain an understanding of community views. The survey focuses on all the aspects of the park, including trails, ball fields, playgrounds, courts, exercise equipment, and the environment. This survey is an opportunity to express your views and will serve as a guide for our updated Vision. The link to the survey is: <https://forl.persontopersonquality.com>. The survey can be completed on a smartphone, but it is much easier to do on a PC or tablet. The deadline for filling out the survey is May 10th.

**Friends Community Forums** - Following the survey, we will schedule several community-wide meetings to present survey results and gain additional inputs for the new vision plan. For the meetings, we will also invite park and county officials to discuss key issues. Our goal, besides gaining an important understanding of community ideas, is to gain a community-wide consensus.

**Prepare and Present Vision Plan** - After the inputs are consolidated, we will prepare a new Royal Lake Community Vision Plan. That plan will then be presented to the Park Authority and county government officials for consideration.



Image by Angela Kinson

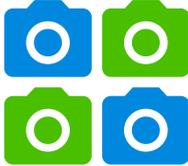
## Upcoming Events & Announcements

**PLEASE JOIN FRIENDS OF ROYAL LAKE FOR VOLUNTEER TRAIL MAINTENANCE**

**Saturday, April 30  
9 AM - noon**

We'll meet and work near the east edge of the base of the earth dam, not far from the Lakepoint townhouses (see accompanying map)



 Friends of Royal Lake   
**SUMMER**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST**

Do you love taking pictures? Do you spend a lot of time around the lake?  
Is your camera roll piling up with pictures of a stray wildlife & scenery from the parks?  
If you answered yes, consider submitting a photo from around Royal Lake to our  
Summer Photography Contest!

The winner from each category - People, Animals, Plants, & Landscapes will be published in the summer edition of the FORL Forum.

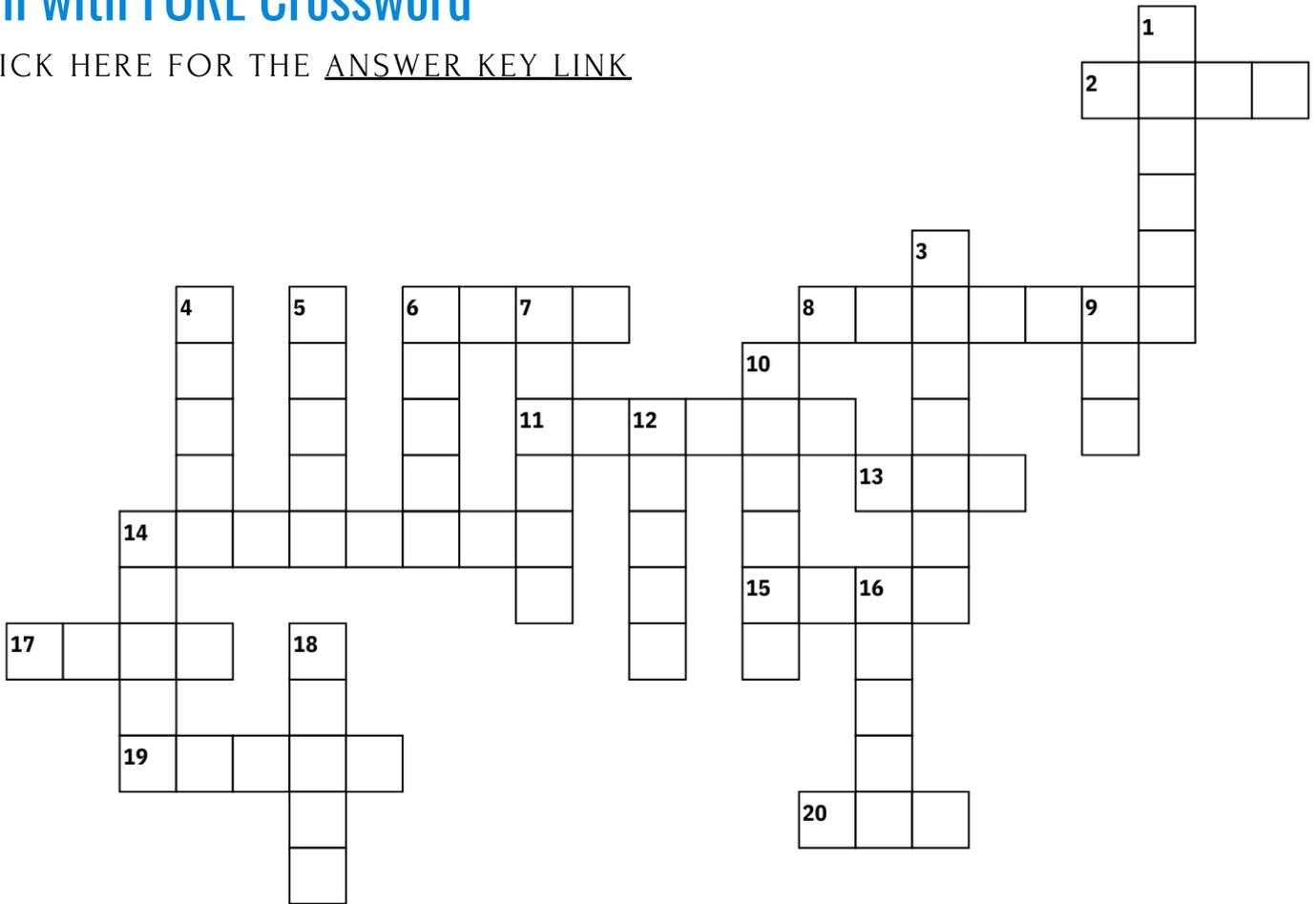
Keep an eye out on social media for more details. We look forward to seeing all of the incredible photos you have taken!



Image by Angela Kinson

## Fun with FORL Crossword

CLICK HERE FOR THE [ANSWER KEY LINK](#)



### Across

2. to frolic outdoors or to \_\_\_\_
6. use a rod and reel
8. 1994 classic sitcom
11. it's all around
13. don't look for too long, it's bright
14. take me out to the \_\_\_\_\_
15. small body of water
17. a place to play
19. let's go play on the \_\_\_\_-set
20. look up, it's blue!

### Down

1. cotton candy of the sky
3. take a \_\_\_\_\_ of the beautiful lake
4. the animals around us (also a Disney fairy)
5. a queen or king
6. the plants around us (also a Disney fairy)
7. come out and see it at the end of the day
9. the Hoover \_\_\_\_
10. circular path around the lakes
12. provides shade & filters the water and air
14. watch them fly
16. closed-top paddling boat
18. open-top paddling boat