



## NEWSLETTER

WINTER  
2021

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## VOLUNTEERS RECOGNIZED AS THE HEART OF FORL

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JAMES WALKINSHAW**

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Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) is comprised of a team of volunteers who enlist the support of more volunteers from the community to help maintain the functional aspects of the Royal Lake Parks (such as trails) and to preserve its abundant natural resources.

This year's pandemic has precipitated an increase in the number of visitors to Royal Lake, many of whom come from other communities. One recent visitor, upon meeting a volunteer at work in the woods, expressed her appreciation for the well kept condition of our particular county park. "It looks like it is very well loved," she said.

This issue of the FORL newsletter recognizes the efforts of myriad volunteers who have contributed to the sense of a "well loved" park and to Fairfax County officials who have supported those efforts.

The Friends of Royal Lake logo was designed by Alicia Tucker

## FROM SUPERVISOR JAMES WALKINSHAW.....

The Braddock District is home to great schools, great neighborhoods, and great people. But it's our sense of community and commitment to working together to make things better that truly makes our community great. Braddock District has more than 50 parks, including five lakes, that offer beautiful scenery and a reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the modern world. One of the unique challenges in being fortunate enough to have a green oasis is making sure it receives the attention and maintenance it deserves. Given the massive task at hand and limited resources, the Fairfax County Park Authority relies on local volunteer groups to lend a hand in maintaining our amazing parks. For more than half a century, environmental Friends Groups, like Friends of Royal Lake (FORL), have consistently enriched our quality of life through their volunteerism.

While COVID-19 curtailed large gatherings, I was proud to hear that FORL volunteers came out on their own to remove trash, debris, and invasive species. While no one could have predicted the challenges 2020 has brought, it is reassuring to know that we live in a district where dedicated neighbors selflessly put the needs of the community above their own. Some families even used these opportunities to soften the stress caused by the ongoing pandemic. I look forward to the time when I can once again work alongside you, the incredible FORL volunteers who take care of Royal Lake. Until then, on behalf of the Braddock District, I would like to thank each volunteer who has donated their valuable time and effort in service to the environment. You are greatly appreciated!

Yours in service,

Supervisor James Walkinshaw



James Walkinshaw, Supervisor representing the Braddock District, lends a hand and greets volunteers at a FORL sponsored clean-up day held before the pandemic struck last year.

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

by Sarah Lennon and Paul Gross

All of us who live near Royal Lake know that it is surrounded by precious parkland for all to enjoy. But it takes a village to keep it in top shape. After a difficult year in which so many struggled, we wanted to take a moment of gratitude to thank our Royal Lake “village” members! While we cannot name everyone individually, here is just a sampling of those who, to echo Supervisor Walkinshaw’s words, “selflessly put the needs of the community above their own.”

Many are familiar with the quotation “**It takes a village** to raise a child.” This is an African proverb that means an entire community of

people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment. I think that holds true in so many circumstances, including ensuring our parks and lake are thriving.

Here are just a few examples of the amazing volunteers we appreciate and admire.

**FORL trail maintenance.** FORL member **Andy Karp** leads this effort. He has marked every foot of the trail around the lake, noting the repairs that are required and grading them on an “A” to “F” scale. FORL shares that information with the County to help its planning. Hard-working women, men, boys and girls come out in the heat of summer and the cold of winter to shovel gravel, wheelbarrow it along the trails and tamp it down to



## VILLAGE, Cont'd)

ensure the trails are smooth and passable for all who come to enjoy the parks. Not an easy job, to say the least. But BOY is it rewarding!



Just ask these volunteers!!

**Kings Park West Civic Association (KPWCA) Parks & Lake committee.** The partnership between FORL and the KPW Civic Association is a case of the “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The Civic Association provides the money for many projects during the year, funded by voluntary donations gathered through the annual Membership drive. For example, after FORL decided that the community would benefit from dog waste stations and additional months of park porta-johns, KPWCA agreed to fund these projects. Semi-annual cleanups are also a joint effort between FORL and KPWCA, thereby increasing visibility of both organizations.



**Road Raiders.** Led by **Tom McCook**, and aided by significant numbers of **Robinson Secondary School students**, Road Raiders contributes much time and a lot of effort to monthly community clean-ups. Road Raiders work where others do not, cleaning along the sides of the road and sidewalks. This activity keeps trash from getting further into the parks and lake. **For information about MLK (1/18) and Presidents' Day (2/15) park clean-ups, email Tom McCook at [kpwroadraiders@gmail.com](mailto:kpwroadraiders@gmail.com)**

## FCPA Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program.

The introduction and advancement of invasive species contribute to significant environmental problems in our parks. Working with the County, six individuals are volunteer site leaders in the IMA program. **Mary Boyer, Lynne Cline, Suzanne Doherty, Sarah Francia, Greg Sykes, and Suzie Xu** labor to remove invasive species such as nandina, honeysuckle, porcelain berry, multiflora rose. Later, the site is planted with a variety of native plants to restore the park habitat, the goal being to bring it back to its original natural state. In non-pandemic times, the site leaders conduct workdays involving groups of local students and other community volunteers in the management of invasive species.

There is currently much work being done solo or with small groups of regular volunteers. As an example, Mary Boyer is assisted by **Kelly Katz, Marjam Lika, Kailyn McGillicuddy, and Nick**

**Boyer** who worked in the woods almost daily this fall (and even in the dead of winter!)



The results are easy to see by those who walk the lake trail and see the many bags of noxious weeds that have been moved for pickup. Also welcome are the hopeful signs of new plantings in the woods.

**Newsletter and Website.** We are proud of the FORL Newsletter and FORL website as excellent means of informing the community about FORL and Royal Lake Park activities.

A special thanks to **Suzanne Doherty** for producing this newsletter. Suzanne, in turn, states she is grateful to all who contributed articles and pictures to making the newsletter possible.

Another special thanks to **Shelly Tucker** and **Britney Le** for their dedicated work on developing the FORL website. They brought an idea to life and it looks great...make sure to check it out!

[www.friendsofroyallake.org/](http://www.friendsofroyallake.org/)



VILLAGE, cont'd

**Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA).** Our volunteer efforts are supported by the FCPA. We thank **Ed Richardson**, Area 4 Maintenance Manager for his support of FORL and the KPWCA by providing the equipment and supplies needed for trail repairs and Eagle Scout projects. Most recently, Ed helped FORL and the KPWCA realize their goals of portable toilets and dog waste stations in the parks. **Walter Wesley** has moved on to manage another FCPA Area, but during his time in our community, he was a dedicated partner who would listen to our goals and help us reach them. **Julie Tahan**, (among many other responsibilities) ensures that information on our park clean-ups is shared broadly through the FCPA volunteer database. This serves to expand the reach of the Royal Lake Park Volunteer Team (PVT), which is what FORL is formally known as in the FCPA parlance.

**Gloria Medina**, pictured below with a truck load of new native plantings, coordinates IMA workdays, delivers tools and supplies and provides valuable encouragement to IMA site leaders.



**Scout Troops.** So many of our park projects benefit from the support of Boy and Girl Scout troops/packs. Scouts routinely participate in the spring and fall clean-up days; several Eagle Scout projects involved trail improvement or maintenance as well as management of invasive species.

**Finally**, we are grateful for all the caring, community-minded **neighbors** who volunteer and participate in the projects led by FORL to improve our parks. As you can see from this article, the projects require the effort and significant skills and dedication of the community. It truly takes a village to build and maintain a park.



## FROM THE FORL TEAM

Without the leadership of Paul Gross and Sarah Lennon, authors of the preceding article of appreciation, there would be no FORL “village.”

As co-founders of FORL, Paul and Sarah organized our “motley crew” to help carry out the tasks in support of the Royal Lake Parks. They maintain a critical connection to the FCPA in planning and implementing maintenance projects related to the Master Plan defined by community input several years ago. Sarah and Paul continue to advocate the evolving needs of our specific parks (most recently, FCPA installation of dog waste stations). They have also elicited invaluable community support from Kings Park West, Lakepointe, and other neighborhoods through hosting quarterly community meetings (pre-COVID 19 times!) and organizing semi-annual park cleanup days.

A final word of appreciation to Sarah and Paul for their encouragement and support of the FORL team....

# THANK YOU





Q. Is this a random collection of garbage from our parks?

Read below for the answer!

Clue: it has to do with FOXES

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Red foxes are curious, crafty, and all-around cool critters. Like many other intelligent animals, they are playful, too. However, the urban fox's choice of toys often pertains to feet, feces, and food with some dog toys thrown in. Photographed above are some of the items collected between a long established den in Royal Lake Park and a new one a few hundred feet away. Fox tracks connect the dens, loop through the forest, and circle large trees as the foxes chased each other around the thick trunks, leaving these "toys" in their wake.

- **Feet:** foxes take shoes, boots, and flipflops from front steps. Matching sets show the foxes might pinch the pair! Best to thwart these little kleptos by always bringing shoes inside. Foxes also grab footwear that washes down from the streams.
- **Feces:** torn dog poop bags and two dirty diapers (top right of this image) are also frequent finds. Whether obtained by raiding trash or from neglectful people tossing contaminants into the woods, foxes bring it home for their kits.
- **Food:** foxes carry back a fair amount of food wrappers and bottles. Whether food was present or the lingering smell are the attractants is unknown. In any case, the packaging became toys.

All of these items contain plastics and most bore teeth marks. Sometimes, passed plastic particles appear in fox scat. Even worse is when the plastics lodge into the animal's digestive system, which can be fatal. Unlike pets, wild animals usually lack veterinarian assistance unless it is so sick and someone chances upon it and calls a wildlife rescue organization (in Fairfax County, call Animal Control at 703-691-2131).

Please be sure to secure all belongings that a fox can drag away from the yard. Dispose of all trash in a tough container instead of in open bins or kitchen bags by the curb. Bags are an invitation for wildlife. Finally, please do not toss trash along the trails or into the woods. Good citizen bonus points go to those who pick up rubbish as they exercise outdoors. Taking these small, healthy steps help keep everyone safe and the environment clean.

Learn more about foxes in the [Let's look at Foxes](http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/94_2019-10.pdf)  
[http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/94\\_2019-10.pdf](http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/94_2019-10.pdf)

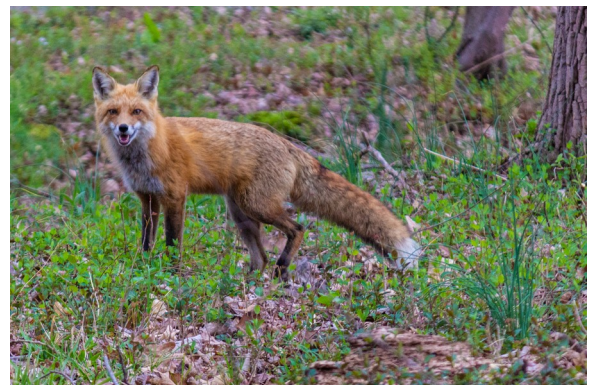


Photo by Lynn Cline

# SHANES CREEK RESTORATION PROJECT (Part 2\*)

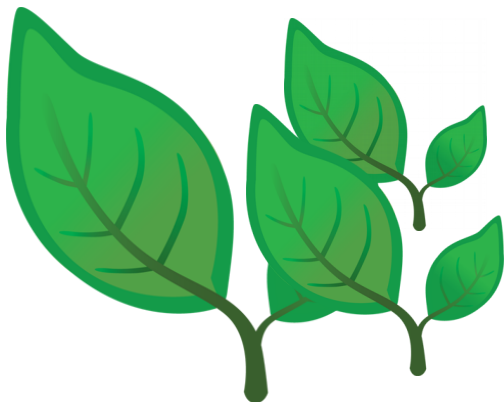
By Meghan Fellows

Over 20 years ago, Fairfax County recognized serious degradation of Fairfax County streams, symptoms consistent with what has now been diagnosed as Urban Stream Syndrome. Ecologists, engineers, citizen stakeholders and watershed planners created a series of watershed management plans for the entire county.

With the development of the plans, Fairfax County committed to a program of restoration and rehabilitation of local streams to prevent further degradation and improve stream corridor health.

A combination of degrading conditions such as eroding banks, significant tree loss, as well as deteriorating water quality ranked Shanes Creek high on the priority list for restoration. In 2017 Shanes Creek was placed on the county work plan and in 2018 a contract was given to Wetland Studies and Solutions (WSSI) to design the restoration plan. With a final plan to be completed in early 2021, construction could begin as early as summer 2021.

In addition to tree loss, a topic described in a previous issue of this newsletter, the problem of eroding stream banks is also to be addressed in this restoration project. All streams have some erosion. However, when too much water enters a



stream bed that is too small to accommodate it, streams become deeper and wider by pushing sediment downstream. In the case of Shanes Creek, the sediment ended up in Royal Lake, which necessitated a major project to dredge the lake. Once Royal Lake was dredged, forestalling additional sedimentation by correcting upstream erosion became a priority. The stream restoration includes a series of wetland features that should function to improve water quality measures.

Shanes Creek has been lucky to be part of a long-term study Fairfax County is conducting with the US Geological Society to study the health of urban streams. We know that upstream of Roberts Road, the water quality of the stream is actually pretty good. Just south of the 54" main within the restoration reach, the water quality is more compromised.

The receiving waters of all of Fairfax County streams are penultimately, the Chesapeake Bay. The Bay water quality is under threat from three main pollutants – nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment. Although the dam at Royal Lake catches a lot of the sediment and phosphorus, nitrogen still runs through it and can cause downstream problems. Restoring Shanes Creek, and especially the addition of the wetlands, should be especially powerful in removing nitrogen from the stream.

At the very least, the restoration will prevent further degradation. In the best case, it will reset the Shanes Creek trajectory into a system that will self-heal over time. The stream will be resized to stop the erosion. New trees will be planted. Wetland features will be developed. Restoring Shanes Creek is part of a long-term strategy to make sure the natural resources of Fairfax County remain as high, or even higher, a quality that they are now.

**Meghan Fellows is a Project Manager for Stormwater Planning, a division of the FXCO Department of Public Works and Environmental Services**

For the latest information about this project, visit the website below.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/stormwater/pohick-creek-watershed>

\*Shanes Creek Project, Part 1 appears in the Summer 2020 issue



**MORE  
VOLUNTEERS  
AT WORK....**



**"Great things...are never done  
by one person. They're done  
by a team of people."**

**-Steve Jobs**



Top from left: maintenance volunteers; Paul Gross; Kailyn McGillicuddy.  
Bottom: Scouts and neighbors; IMA site leader Mary Boyer, Kelly Katz,  
Mirjam Lika

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## **ONE LAST WORD: FORL AND WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

As we have announced in previous messages, Fairfax County established a community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) with the purpose, in part, to create a county-wide climate mitigation plan. The plan is being developed by the Fairfax County Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC), a county-selected contractor (ICF), key county businesses and local citizens selected by the County Supervisors. While not directly related to Royal Lake improvements, many of you who support FORL have expressed interest in CECAP and its larger implications to the community.

The CECAP Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination ([oeecinfo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:oeecinfo@fairfaxcounty.gov)) is looking for public comments, which they consider essential for meaningful results. Many of you previously participated in either a survey and/or commented on the county website. The summary of the results are on the Fairfax County website along with other related, useful information. In February and May 2021 all of us will have another opportunity to comment on the progress. FORL leadership will send out the specific time for comment when it becomes available. Please take the opportunity to review the county website and comment on this important issue.





Photo by Kathy Gross

**EDITOR:** Suzanne Doherty

**COMMENTS? SUGGESTIONS? IDEAS?**

Contact Suzanne at  
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