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NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF ROYAL LAKE: “BEST OF BRADDOCK”

By Paul Gross and Sarah Lennon

At the December 7th “Best of Braddock” event, Braddock District Supervisor James Walkinshaw presented an award to Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) noting its accomplishments in “Neighborhood Beautification, Enhancement or Community-Building Efforts.” Virginia State Senator Dave Marsden awarded the FORL team with a Commendation certificate. FORL was also given a Congressional Record certificate noting that Congressman Gerry Connolly had recognized all the Best of Braddock winners on the floor of the US House of Representatives.

We appreciate the recognition from the Supervisor and the other elected officials in attendance, as well as the Braddock District Council. We want to especially thank Gordon Goetz, a very active volunteer in the Braddock community who took the time and effort to nominate FORL for the award.

The award announcement highlighted FORL’s dedication to Royal Lake and surroundings through its planning, analysis, and documentation of Royal Lake parks’ needs and activities.

(Cont'd, p.3)

FORL TEAM ACCEPTS AWARD



From left to right: Former Braddock District Supervisor John Cook, Fairfax County Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Jeff McKay, FORL Co-chair Paul Gross, FORL Co-chair Sarah Lennon, Braddock District Supervisor James Walkinshaw, State Senator David Marsden, FORL team members Paul Strasburg, Suzanne Doherty, Mary Anne Boyer, Frank Cumberland, Julie Strasburg, State Delegate David Bulova. FORL team members not pictured are Andy Karp, Tom McCook, Greg Sykes, Shelly Tucker.

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VISION PLAN FOR ROYAL LAKE MOVING FORWARD

By Paul Gross

During 2022, the Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) conducted a comprehensive assessment of the communities' views of Royal Lake and its surrounding parks. We took several different approaches to gather the information necessary to update our "FORL Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake" and related project lists.

As many of you are already aware, we conducted a comprehensive survey, conversed with many park patrons, held a public meeting, and the FORL leadership team held discussions with county park officials.

During late summer, we held a public meeting at Royal Lake Park to highlight the survey's findings. We are now compiling the various inputs and updating the Vision document and related supporting project lists. The FORL leadership team is planning to hold a community meeting to provide our findings and a suggested project list in February or March 2023.

Our 2017 Vision Plan shared the communities' views with the Braddock District Supervisor, the Fairfax County Park Authority, and the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and was well received. With their support and involvement and our volunteers' efforts, significant improvements were accomplished. We now are preparing a new Vision Plan for additional improvements.

Please look for the announcement of the February or March community meeting in a message from me and on Facebook and Next Door. Your participation at the meeting is important.

SHANES CREEK RESTORATION IN PROGRESS



By Paul Gross and Greg Sykes

Over the past two years, a series of FORL articles outlined the need, rationale, process, and progress of the Shanes Creek restoration project—the westernmost of Royal Lake's two primary tributaries. This article responds to a few questions and provides a construction update.

Some of the restoration project's goals are to adjust the waterway into the direction that it was already shifting towards, raise the streambed, and reinforce the banks to help stem erosion. This work includes repairing the riparian buffers, which are the natural areas adjacent to Shanes Creek. These buffers protect waterways from urban pressures, such as stormwater running off of hard surfaces directly into the streams and lake. An effective riparian buffer is filled with diverse native plant species. These plants form an absorption bed that filters out yard chemicals, asphalt residues, road runoff, domestic animal waste, and other human activities from polluting water.

Riparian buffers' strengths rest in their biodiversity. In addition to removing pollutants, the different root types—deep taproots, long-running rhizomes, dense root balls, and shallow surface roots—retain soil and absorb water so that not all of a storm's precipitation enters the creeks where that water's power would cause stream bank erosion. Instead of a monoculture or lawn, the roots of numerous plant species form a complementary network. Some riparian buffers fall under Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Area, which are sometimes called "RPAs." Shanes Creek's riparian buffer needs repairs so that poor water quality can be made healthy again. The restoration results in reduced sediment, pollution, and nutrients washing into Royal Lake and eventually the Chesapeake Bay. Thus, the stream restoration was necessary.

Best of Braddock, cont'd

Documentation included items such as the "Friends of Royal Lake Community Vision Plan" and point papers that highlighted park improvements, all of which had been presented to county officials.

Other activities were noted, such as the many volunteer efforts in responding to surveys and in participating in park cleanups, invasive plant management and trail maintenance. The FORL leadership team accepted the award; however, all of you who have participated in FORL efforts to improve the parks deserve a share of the credit for the award.

THANK YOU

If you are worried about the recent beaver activity around Royal Lake, this article re-printed from the Winter 2019 issue of the FORL newsletter might calm your fears!

What the Beavers Are Up To....

By Greg Sykes

The beavers (aka *Castor canadensis*) at Royal Lake prefer to establish their lodge near one of the two main tributaries. Since settling by Shanes Creek, the beavers' activity is obvious, especially gnawed trees and shrubs by the shore and the boat ramp's hillside. This sort of tree felling is perfectly normal in riparian habitats. Filling their ecological niche, beavers help to create healthy transition zones between wetlands and forests.

Since humans purged many beavers from this area long ago, some people today do not know how the land/water interfaces should actually look. Transitional woody species such as common alder, silky

dogwood, American elderberry, river birch, sycamore, and black willow thrive under the beavers' pruning. An opened canopy enables native marsh plants to flourish.

Sometimes people feel inclined to prevent beavers from felling trees, but the best policy is to allow these animals to freely interact with their environment.

Many folks already follow the transformations brought forth by North America's largest rodent. Visit Royal Lake and observe these creatures in action!

For more information visit:

www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/12c_2008-12.pdf



Photo by Grant McDonald

Shanes Creek Restoration, Cont'd



The year and a half needed to restore the creek can look like a period of destruction instead of improvement. A common concern is tree loss and whether it is necessary. The short answer is “yes,” but bear in mind that one of the project planners’ goals is to have every tree removal be purposeful. The trees impacted are generally of low quality, meaning that they are early succession, fast-growing trees (e.g., red maples, tulip poplars) in wooded areas that have low biodiversity and high invasive plant density. In the final stages of the restoration, the county or its contractors will plant thousands of trees and shrubs that will support Shanes Creek’s biodiversity.

During construction, the trail from Roberts Road to Royal Lake is being disrupted. Starting in mid-December, 2022, the Shanes Creek trail running between the Royal Lake loop and Gainsborough Drive is now blocked at the midpoint. Anyone can walk the trail to that midpoint but will then need to turn back. The construction zone ends at private property so trying to circumvent the fencing is not an option. It is best to consider this path to the lake inaccessible until further notice. The portions of the trail that will be permanently altered will have a new, natural-surface path connecting to the existing trail.

As previously reported, the stream restoration is slated to be a 600-day project—from April 2022 to November 2023. The work is being done by Meadville Land Services, a firm that specializes in stream restoration. The projected work hours for the construction team are Monday-Wednesday 7:00 am to 7:00 pm and Thursday 7:00 am - 11:00 am. Please remember these are the expected shifts (days and times are subject to change) and the big caveat of working outside is, *weather permitting*. They may be on-site outside of these hours, especially to perform emergency work.

The Fairfax County project manager reported that Meadville is picking up the pace with additional crews and already completed over 1200 feet of stream construction. The second construction site entrance that was originally planned on Gainsborough Drive near Claridge Court is unlikely to be used. This change will reduce the tree loss, lower the project cost, lessen the disturbance to the site, and eliminate construction trucks traveling through the neighborhood.

Greg wrote several more informative articles on stream and environmental subjects including how we can help the environment in our daily activities. Copies can be made available by contacting Friendsofroyallake@gmail.com.

DPWES’ website is a good source of information with timely updates as the project progresses: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/stormwater/plans-projects/rabbit-branch-tributary-restoration-project-collingham-drive

Please note on the Fairfax County website, the project is officially called Rabbit Branch Tributary at Collingham Drive.

Shanes Creek was officially renamed after the restoration project’s conception.





FORL SPONSORED TRAIL WORKDAY LAST OCTOBER 29th

By Andy Karp

Four times each year FORL organizes a workday for maintenance of the trail around our beautiful lake. This is an opportunity for neighbors to volunteer, enjoy camaraderie, get some exercise, and maintain the trail for all to enjoy. The most recent such workday last October 29th was a glorious day to be out in the fresh air.

Volunteers hard at work

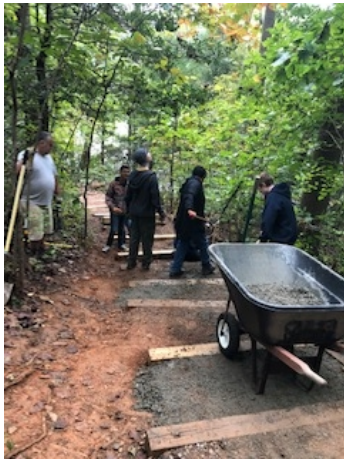
The photos here tell the story of a successful workday at three locations: the steps at Chatsworth Court, the steps near the soccer field on the lake circuit trail which involved, in part, widening the trail so strollers could be accommodated, and the trail at the soccer field leading to the entryway at Richardson Drive.



VOLUNTEERS are the backbone of FORL efforts to keep our trails in good shape!!!



Workday, Cont'd



before



after



Transformation of soccer field steps



“View of Royal Lake while we were working on this beautiful autumn day!” Andy Karp



Several of the volunteers on this productive workday



Plant This...Not That!

By Suzanne Doherty

In winter, when my garden sleeps, I dream and plan for what is yet to grow into the next season. My visits to local garden centers do not stop in winter! When I browse the offerings at my local garden centers, I am appalled that flats of English Ivy are still among the ground covers homeowners may choose for their landscaping needs. I am also aware that most folks probably don't know how destructive this plant and other invasive species, such as Vinca vine and Japanese honeysuckle, are to the ecosystem of our public lands.



Native groundcover: Golden Groundsel

The question: if not English ivy, what CAN I plant as an effective ground cover? Homeowners who are mindful about their landscaping and garden choices will consider

native plant alternatives to the invasive species on sale in garden centers. Native plants often require less maintenance, support native wildlife, and contribute to the general health of the ecosystem. Some suggestions for native plants to serve various landscaping purposes include:

GROUND COVERS: Golden groundsel, Wild ginger, Creek sedge, Moss phlox, Green and gold

TREES: Red maple, Serviceberry, White oak, Sweetbay magnolia, Flowering dogwood

SHRUBS: Summersweet, Virginia sweetspire, Winged sumac, Spicebush, Native viburnums

GRASSES: Little bluestem, Purple lovegrass, Muhle grass, Pennsylvania sedge

PERENNIALS: Goatsbeard, Milkweed, Wild indigo, Butterfly weed, Coreopsis, Wood aster, Liatris

For a more comprehensive list of native plants go to:

<http://www.plantnovanatives.org/quick-start-guide>

www.plantnovanatives.org/quick-start-guide

FORL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Presidents Day Cleanup: Monday, February 13, 9-11 AM. Meet at Crooked Creek Park on Commonwealth Blvd. and clean up the stream bed towards Rabbit Branch. Contact Tom McCook at KPWRoadRaiders@gmail.com.

Earth Day Cleanup: Saturday, April 22, 8-11 AM. Our annual tradition is to clean up Lakeside Park, Royal Lake Park and associated stream beds. Contact Tom McCook.

ROAD RAIDERS volunteers work to improve sidewalks, streets, etc. and meet on the second Saturday of each month. Next meeting is Saturday, March 11, 8-8:30 AM. Contact Tom McCook for location.

TRAIL WORKDAY: Saturday, March 11, 9:00-12:00, Location is near the dam at Royal Lake. Contact friendsofroyallake@gmail.com.

FORL COMMUNITY MEETING ABOUT THE VISION PLAN: This meeting is an opportunity to discuss the Royal Lake Vision Plan and projects – date TBD

Remember to check out the FORL website

<http://www.friendsofroyallake.org/> for the latest information

about upcoming events and to view back issues of the newsletter!



Photo by Tom McCook

Happy New Year from the FORL Team

