



Bulletin of the Proceedings of the Friends of Accotink Creek

Our meeting notes serve as bulletins of our activities, interests, and discussions, supplemented by your submissions.

Friends of Accotink Creek Town Meeting – March 15, 2016

Next Meeting: April 19, 2016 (Third Tuesday of each month)

Audrey Moore Rec Center, Senior Center Lobby

[DONATE/SUPPORT](#)

Present:

Sue Kovach Schuman

Dave Lincoln

Beverley Rivera

Kris Unger

Ted Welch

Suzy Foster

Philip Latasa

David Widawsky – Welcome, Dave!

Shula Widawsky – Welcome Shula!

Jeff Oliu – Welcome Jeff!

Guests:

Michelle Sullivan, educator, Mantua Elementary School

Bill Huddleston, scoutmaster, Troop 1532

Upcoming events:

- Next FLAP meeting, March 24, 2016
- Potomac Watershed Cleanup, April 2 – May 14, 2016
- Mantua Bird's Eye View Project, April 5 & 18, 2016
- FLAP presentation to Park Authority Board, April 13, 2016
- Americana Park Meadow Restoration, April 29 & 30, 2016
- Creek Critters Stream Monitoring, May 7, 2016
- Lake Accotink Park Master Plan meeting, May 16, 2016
- Lake Accotink Park Stream Monitoring, June 11, 2016

Action Items:

- *Everyone – Brainstorm grant application ideas*
- *Kris – Solicit NVATU contribution to mussel survey*
- *Sue – Coordinate event with Rep. Connolly*
- *Dave – Support FLAP presentation to Park Board*
- *Kris – Contact Choose Clean Water on plastic bag bill*
- *Kris – Discuss storm drain art project with Springfield Art Guild*
- *Kris, Ted, Philip – Plan Creek Critters event*
- *Ted - Contact Scout Store*
- *Dave – Obtain property owner permissions at gorge*
- *Suzy – Contact Fort Belvoir*
- *Kris – Schedule wisteria workday*

FACC Subjects Discussed –

- Mantua Elementary:

Michelle described plans at Mantua Elementary School for an MWEE ([Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience](#)) project examining birds, bird habitat, and watershed health. The project is in collaboration with Judy Lathrop of the [Piscataway Creek Discovery Center](#) *, who has a Virginia Department of Environmental Quality grant to provide funding. There will be classroom sessions April 5th, and a field day April 18th, preceded by a showing of [The Messenger](#) at Cinema Arts Theatre March 29th. All are welcome to observe and volunteer environmental educators are needed.

Students will make observations they will enter in the [eBird](#) database, visit about 8 learning stations, and may have an excursion to Crook Branch, adjacent to campus, if access is obtained. Michelle hopes this will be the first of many such projects extending into future years.

Suzy noted most schools have conservation easements, but they are often mowed and that DPWES is working on proposals to reforest these easements and to amend soils of other mowed school areas to enhance infiltration of precipitation. Suzy acknowledged the tension between many schools' interest in tidy grounds versus the county interest in maximum reforestation yielding MS4 permit credits.

Slightly diverging to the topic of Crook Branch, Suzy also reported the stream restoration project design is moving along slowly.

*When it was asked how Judy, based in Maryland, had come to be interested in the Accotink Creek watershed, Philip recalled her interest in American eels, host of mussel larvae, had led her to join our survey of Accotink mussel populations last year.

- Troop 1532:

Bill described Troop 1532, based at St. Ambrose Church off Woodburn Road, soon to observe its 20th anniversary as a troop, in 2017. Bill talked about a number of environmental projects the troop had undertaken, including a nature trail and bat box at Camelot Elementary and the dock at the frog pond in Eakin Park. Bill shared the information that the 2016 revision of the Scout Handbook now requires half of projects to be nature related. Bill has been in touch with the Virginia Adopt-A-Stream program and may be interested in taking over our Woodburn Road site, very near St. Ambrose.

Bill offered to spread the word about FACC at the scout districts roundtable meeting. Bill also suggested FACC should put up posters at the Scout Store in Ravensworth Shopping Center. Ted will follow up.

- Potomac Watershed Cleanup:

Philip announced we have several groups signed up, including Accotink Universalist Unitarian Church, Alpha Phi Omega-Alpha Delta Delta, Vietnamese Young Buddhist Association (whom Dave will host on 4/24), and Asian American LEAD (who will be at Americana 4/16 where Dave hopes to host). Anyone available to join Dave will be appreciated.

Philip observed Fort Belvoir will have its Accotink Creek cleanup on April 3rd and suggested making contact with the naturalists, especially for future cooperation on the Accotink Gorge. Suzy will attend.

Philip displayed a cleanup poster from Friends of the Occoquan and inquired who might ask how they manage to have all the sponsors they do. There were no takers.



- Gerry Connolly:

Sue conveyed the disappointing news that Congressman Connolly's schedule may not allow him to join us. Shula suggested Supervisor Penny Gross might be able to attend.

- Represent FACC:

- *Friends of Friends of Parks 2/27*

Kris and Beverley attended and reported a friendly atmosphere with about 40 persons present and that FACC had received positive mention.

- *Mount Vernon District Annual Town Meeting 2/27*

Dave related that the FACC display had been next to the Potomac Riverkeepers and Friends of Dyke Marsh. He made connections with Fort Belvoir staff and Police Explorers.

- *Heritage Mall meeting 3/2*

Kris attended this meeting regarding townhouse construction on what is currently a parking lot on Heritage Drive in Annandale. He and Amy Gould of Fairfax County Restoration Project both spoke in favor of enhanced stormwater controls and their remarks were well received by the attendees and the developer. Supervisor Cook and his staff member Rosemary Ryan are also encouraging stormwater controls.

- *FAPA Appreciation Luncheon 4/8*

Philip presented the opportunity for anyone to represent FACC at the Park Authority volunteer appreciation luncheon. There were no takers.

- *FLAP presentation to Park Authority Board 4/13*

Dave will speak in support of FLAP's president. Philip encouraged anyone interested to attend as a show of support.

- *Parks Count Open House 4/14*

Philip advised a Parks Count open house will present the findings of the 2015 survey of citizen opinions on the future of Fairfax County parks.

- *Green Inspirations Film Festival 4/30*

Kris remarked that the Fairfax County Restoration Project environmental film festival will be at Lorton Workhouse. Philip mentioned Amy could use some assistance if anyone is interested in helping out.

• Accotink Gorge:

Kris confirmed he had worked with Rentz Hilyer of Northern Virginia Conservation Trust as a gorge partner and, in a “remarkable turn of events”, Rentz had received the Park Authority go ahead for wisteria workdays. The initial workday would focus on an area identified as having a light early-stage infestation. April 4 had been discussed as a possible first workday, but Kris will confirm a date.

Philip pointed out that the Park Authority requested written permission from owners of adjacent private property needed as staging areas. Dave will work on permission.

• Master Plan Lake Accotink Park:

Philip related the activities of the initial Master Plan meeting March 14th, attended by over 100 persons. The comments of presenters and the public were generally favorable to natural preservation, including a quote from project manager Gayle Hooper, “Right now we’re basically loving Lake Accotink Park to death.” Kris spoke at the meeting, as did the president of FLAP.

The next meeting, on lake sustainability, will be May 16 at Kings Park Elementary.

For reference, Philip provided copies of earlier FACC positions on the Master Plan, as well as some recent research discoveries by Donald Pless regarding the General Management Plan and County Comprehensive Plan, appended at the end of this bulletin.

Shula raised the question of dam removal, which led to a discussion of dam pros and cons, including the effect the dam has in preserving the downstream mussel population, as noted in our [2015 mussel survey](#).

A questionnaire has been added to the Lake Accotink Master Plan Revision project webpage. We can link to it through the [FACC Master Plan webpage](#) to make our opinions count.

• Americana Meadow:

Suzy provided an update on the 2nd phase meadow planting of approximately 1000 plants, scheduled for April 29 & 30. A contractor will bush hog, till, and seed with native grasses and wildflowers beforehand. Philip noted Alpha Phi Omega Alpha Delta Delta has signed on to provide 10 – 15 volunteers. There will also be invasive treatment along the stream bank.

Philip asked about mowing of the 1st phase area and Suzy indicated it will wait until the meadow is better established.

• Scout Projects:

Philip advised we have two current Eagle Scout candidates:

- Stuart Lowe will repair Lake Accotink Park kiosks April 23rd.
- Jonathan Bach will install a boot brush station and do invasives removal at Americana Park May 7th & 8th.

Philip invited any FACC members to be present at either project.

- Community Grant:

Philip reminded all that our community outreach grant will soon be used up and we need proposals for another grant. There was some discussion of previous proposals for a storm drain art project or for paid advertising or articles in local media. Dave brought up the idea of an FACC display kit more professional than our current recycled cardboard panel, whereupon Kris revealed he has another display he put together.

There was general lamentation of the departure of Bill Nell, our one-time trash artist in residence.



Bill Nell trash sculpture

- Luther Jackson Wildlife Project:

Kris described a proposed wildlife project at Luther Jackson Middle School, funded with a possible \$90,000 grant from the National Wildlife Federation. Bill noted the School Board meets at Luther Jackson, giving the project a likely multiplier effect.

- I-66 Project:

Philip mentioned a recent advisory from the Sierra Club regarding legal insufficiency of environmental studies done for the proposed widening of I-66. It was unclear what this meant and what action should follow. Kris & Philip will evaluate further.

Shula related the experience of Accotink Creek floodwaters entering her basement during the [495 Express Lanes](#) project after backing up from the work zone.

- Meetup/Facebook:

Philip stated he had sent the welcome message discussed at our last meeting to all existing Meetup members and set it up to go to all new members automatically.

- M.O.M.S.:

Philip commented the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay will have a Shop at MOM's Organic Market day at Maryland locations, receiving a donation of 5% of sales. The suggestion that someone approach the M.O.M.'s location in our watershed for a similar day found no takers.

Lake Accotink Park Master Plan – Positions of Friends of Accotink Creek

- Upgrade of facilities

While we are largely neutral on facilities, we ask that planning be guided by the principles of no net increase in impervious surfaces and no increase in runoff. Further, any renovations or construction that may be undertaken would offer opportunities to incorporate advanced environmental and watershed-friendly features.

- Study moving or modifying parking at dam

The parking lot at the dam has been damaged more than once in recent years by tropical storm flooding. Relocating all or part of the parking lot out of the floodplain could avoid future damage and allow

revegetation of the riparian corridor. One possibility for relocation is exchanging the locations of this parking lot and the upper field near the Heming Ave entrance.

- Invasives removal/prevention
Invasive alien plant species are pervasive within Lake Accotink Park (as in many other parks), diminishing both environmental and recreational value of natural areas. While the Park Authority's Invasive Management Area volunteer program addresses a few small areas, park-wide invasive prevention and control should be integrated into all maintenance and planning.
- Defend natural resources over recreation
The demand for active recreational and sports use of parks is infinite, but our remaining natural areas are finite. Destruction of irreplaceable habitat to satisfy demands for active recreation is an unwise course. Likewise, encouraging types of recreation in natural areas that degrade those areas is also destined to be regretted.
- Study dam removal
The lake is a treasured recreational resource and the wetlands at its upstream end have habitat value. The lake also provides the benefit of keeping sediment from downstream waters. However, the dam is expensive to maintain and blocks natural migration of aquatic wildlife. Sediment dredging is also a continuing expense. The master plan should explore alternatives.
- Stream restoration or protection projects
Fairfax County is undertaking, at great expense to taxpayers, a series of remediation plans to restore the health of all streams in the county. As steward of so many of our streams and natural areas, the Park Authority has a key role to play in the success of this endeavor. Park Authority actions cannot be conceived in isolation from this larger goal or work at cross purposes. The master plan should incorporate elements of the county's Accotink Creek Watershed Plan affecting the park and integrate the goal of watershed protection.
- The park as a watershed-friendly demonstration area
County facilities in general, and parks in particular, are in the public eye and should serve as showcases for watershed-friendly practices, providing inspiring examples for property owners to follow, thus serving as a multiplier for county watershed restoration expenditures.
- Pavement
Pavement is the primary cause of impairment of stream health in our county, by causing streambed erosion through excessive runoff. The Park Authority could set the example of reversing this trend by avoidance of creation of impervious surfaces, by replanting, by depaving, by replacing conventional pavement with pervious pavement, and by mitigation of new construction.
- The balance needed between preservation vs. increased demands for park revenue
Ever growing requirements for parks to produce revenue are inconsistent with the concept of parks as a public benefit. Pursuing revenue producing activities will render our public parks indistinguishable from shopping centers or private amusement parks.
- Cost avoidance value of preserving natural areas
Rather than asking our parks to produce revenue, let us consider the cost avoidance value to our community of maintaining and enhancing natural areas for flood control and water quality.

Lake Accotink Park Master Plan – Donald Pless Research Summary, March 2016

When it comes to the impact of human activity on the native ecosystem, I can assure you that the impact is significant which raises the issue of carrying capacity for the Park.

I am concerned that the FCPA will try to proceed with the master plan without conducting a thorough science based study and evaluation of the ecological condition of the Park.

Use of the term "developed" was most troubling as was the short time frame.

General Management Plan—

The GMP for Lake Accotink Park is a good plan. Unfortunately, this plan--like many others the FCPA has developed--such as the Natural Resource Management Plan--came after most of the development in the Park had already been completed.

It appears that after these plans were approved by the FCPA senior management that they were all but forgotten for decades.

The GMP states the first purpose of Lake Accotink Park is to preserve, protect, and restore natural resources--both terrestrial and aquatic.

The FCPA reply to FOIA Request #82014 stated that natural resource conservation was not a goal for Lake Accotink Park.

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan –

The Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2013 Edition, Area 1, Annandale Planning District, Amended through 4-29-2014, A6-Accotink Community Planning Sector, Page 134, Parks and Recreation Recommendations Sector A6, Park Classification identifying Lake Accotink Park as a Natural Resource Park.

While the FCPA Policy Manual states that the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for park natural resource protection and management, there is no reference to the Comprehensive Plan in the public notice of the revision to the Lake Accotink Master Plan.

The Lake Accotink Park master plan web site omits any reference to the FCPA's Natural Resource Management Plan which provides the framework of protecting natural resources in Fairfax County.

Although the FCCP, the NRMP, and the General Management Plan for Lake Accotink indicate that areas like Lake Accotink should be managed to protect native ecosystems, the FCPA has failed to develop a Natural Resource Management Plan for the Park or clearly identify or actively protect areas shown as habitat protection zones on the site map.