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

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Friends of Accotink Creek Town Meeting – March 18, 2025
Next Meeting: April 15 (Third Tuesday of each month via on-line meeting: Login info will be posted with the meeting notice in the Friends of Accotink calendar.)

Present: Gary Bangs, Philip Latasa, Dave Lincoln, Beverley Rivera, Sandy Collins, Susan Kuiler, Sue Kovach Shuman, Liz Train, Karen Olson Weaver, and Kim Schauer all via on-line meeting.

AGENDA

- *Represent FACC:*
  - *Restoring Mussels to the Potomac*: Philip said that we didn't learn much from the February 23rd presentation, but we did make connections with the Four Mile Run Conservancy . We found a mutual interest in conducting mussel surveys later this year. The Conservancy may have connections with a local surveyor, so we'll try to work out arrangements.

  - *WMCCAI Expo*: Dave said he attended the expo on March 7 & 8. He talked with Melinda Soltys of Wild Ones about HB528 , a bill to stop HOA.s in Virginia from restricting native plant gardens, and the resistance to it by HOA's. He also talked with Stan Reid from Arlington who said Arlington has a program for tax credits when homeowners do specific environmentally friendly landscaping, etc. Dave will try to find more information on that program.

  - *Suzy Foster Retirement*: Philip said that at her retirement gathering on March 6, Suzy expressed interest in returning to being more active in FACC, perhaps starting by leading a tour of the recent Crook Branch stream restoration when she returns from travel later this spring.

Suzy Foster speaking on behalf of FACC in 2015

- *Tallamy Talk – Home Grown National Park, March 9, 2025, Dave/Avril (5 min)*
  Dave said that this was a presentation by well-known environmental advocate and author Doug Tallamy on his concept of the Homegrown National Park , sponsored by the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions. He said Avril and a friend, Sylvia Bocskor, helped staff the table and did an excellent job engaging the public. Delegate Krizek stopped by the table and discussed how impossible bills like HB528 are in the legislature. Dave said that he spoke briefly in the Q&A session about HOA opposition to native gardens. There was a fee of $200 for the sponsorship table which was approved by the board.

The FACC display gets attention at the Homegrown National Parks presentation

- *Anthony Amos Meeting*: Sue Kuiler said that a few of us will be meeting with newly elected Fairfax City Councilmember Anthony Amos March 19 to discuss issues of interest to FACC. Before his election, Anthony was on the staff of Springfield District supervisor Herrity, but since he no longer works for County government, our topics are likely to be limited to Fairfax City topics.

- *Symposium on Innovative Park Stewardship*: Philip said he plans to attend this online presentation by the Northern Virginia Bird Alliance on March 25 and hopes to gain insights on how others turn ideas into action locally. He urged others to tune in if they can.

- *Garnett Civic Space Earth Day*: Philip said that we have an opportunity to have a display table at the Garnett Civic Space Earth Day event on April 19. We would be sharing a table with our neighbor watershed group, Friends of Holmes Run. Saturday 1:00 – 4:00 PM Gary and Sue Kuiler said they would attend.

- *Leadership Fairfax Board and Brew* : Kim said that this event on April 23 is intended to pair up nonprofits seeking experienced leadership with persons able and willing to provide such leadership. We didn't have much luck last time we attended, but it may be worthwhile continuing to try. It will be at the Mason District Government Center.

- *HisTree Day*: Philip said that we will again have a table at the Fairfax City Earth Day and history event on April 26. He will be there and anyone who would like to attend is welcome.

• *Accotink Gorge*: Katy said that she has persuaded the Fairfax Master Naturalists to partner with FACC and take on the Accotink Gorge as a Chapter Project. The first step will be to coordinate with the Northern Virginia Mineral Club to lead a Geology Walk in the Gorge on April 19. Nature walks may follow. We hope the Master Naturalists' interest will turn into effective support for the wisteria control project.

We were contacted last week by the Angelus Academy , a Catholic school with 50 middle schoolers interested in tree rescue. Since the school is located in the industrial parks next to the Accotink Gorge, Phi;ip suggested they might like to join our fall wisteria expeditions. The teacher is enthusiastic, so we will need to begin planning some dates.

• *Potomac Watershed Cleanup*: Philip said that our schedule is posted online and volunteer registrations are coming in. Please share the schedule anywhere you think would be useful.

Our usual staging area for the Pickett Road site is currently under construction. We will instead meet on the opposite side of Pickett Road, in the City Property Yard.

Our own cleanups begin April 12th, but on April 5th there are three other cleanups in our watershed that would be worthwhile to attend, mostly for networking if anyone is available:

- Stonehurst's cleanup of Hunters Branch at the corner of Rt. 50 and Nutley Street
- Town of Vienna Community Cleanup
- Ossian Hall Park cleanup in Annandale. The leadership might be a source of ideas and support for nearby Americana Drive.

• *Fairfax PRISM*: Dave and Philip spoke about "Fairfax Tree Rescuers: A Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM)". This is the mouthful of a name chosen for the new invasives group modeled on Blue Ridge PRISM. We may hope it will be commonly known as simply "Fairfax PRISM".

Liz Train, a co-facilitator with the group provided an overview of objectives and planning thus far.

Sustainability Matters will provide banking and insurance coverage until Fairfax PRISM becomes a 501c3 organization.

Fairfax PRISM's next goals are organizing volunteers and partners and collaboration with the County on a public awareness campaign.

• *Stream Stories*: Gary said that the meeting to discuss what to do to obtain stream stories as followup with Nature Forward and Follow the Streams has been scheduled. He, Katy, and Dave are planning to attend a virtual meeting.

• *Accotink Gravity Sewer*: Philip said that we have learned from the Providence District Office that the project is still working on easements and permit approvals. They estimate bidding in summer 2025. That would likely mean clearing would start next winter.

This sewer, and other apocalyptic juggernaut projects like it, are a source of greater urgency to work to limit habitat loss caused by projects which are entirely optional, like recreational trails.

Amphibian egg masses in vernal pools in the path of the Accotink Gravity Sewer

• *George Snyder Trail*: Philip and Sue Kuiler. discussed that on February 28th, the City organized a walk with Mayor, councilmembers, and City staff along the eastern portion of the proposed route. A couple dozen concerned members of the public turned out, many wearing stickers and carrying signs against the trail. Since the tree clearing for the adjacent stream restoration project had already begun, it made clear to everyone there just how much more impact the trail would have. It was not clear how much any of the council members may have been swayed one way or another.

On March 8th Katy and Philip accompanied Councilmember Tom Peterson on a walk through the western end of the proposed route. Councilman displayed impressive wildlife tracking skills, and held no sympathy for paving the habitat that supports that wildlife.

On March 11th City Council held a work session regarding the trail. This was only a discussion, with no vote taken. One issue that is up in the air is how much, if any of the money already spent on

planning would the City need to return to the granting authority if plans are changed. Plans are to make a decision around May 1.

Northern Virginia Bird Alliance wrote another informative letter to City Council, focused on the devastating levels of engineering needed to push the trail through this challenging terrain. Two-thirds of the trail will be constructed above or below the existing land surface.

Protest sticker from the February 28th trail walk

• *Cinder Bed Road Bikeway*: Philip reported that the March 4th Board of Supervisors eminent domain hearing for the Bikeway was cancelled last-minute after the three property owners settled with the County. Unfortunately, this meant the chance to address the Board of Supervisors at the hearing was also cancelled.

Philip had gone to the hearing in hope of speaking anyway. He was not recognized, but afterward Supervisor Lusk and his Chief of Staff were considerate enough to come up into the audience to speak with him. Supervisor Lusk indicated a public hearing on eminent domain for Amberleigh could come as soon as May, but he possibly meant May of 2026. Amberleigh is the last property yet to be asked for an easement – and also the largest and most sensitive parcel.

Later, the Franconia District staff advised that the railroad property line dispute is resolved, and that Supervisor Lusk is open to meeting with, suggesting July. We will try to accelerate that schedule.

The group of the concerned plans a public online Cinder Bed Road Bikeway presentation May 6th, 7pm. Nature walks, bike tours, and a media/social media push are also under discussion.

• *Follow the Water*: Kim said she was still following up with some teachers as possible resources as discussed last meeting.

Philip said that Bryan Campbell is coordinating a spring Follow the Water at Canterbury Woods Elementary. Dates and details to follow.

• *Long Branch Central Project*: Philip said that the Long Branch Central Project is emerging from a couple years of dormancy. Announcements have gone out for an online public meeting regarding the Willow Woods Park stream restoration project. This would be the first of a coordinated string of projects throughout the Long Branch central watershed.

Dominik Meade who is a Woodson H.S. student whom we met a couple years ago when he took the initiative to report and document a sewer line leak on Long Branch. He now intends to reactivate a forgotten biological stream monitoring site along Long Branch. Bryan and Philip are working with him to start with an April 5th monitoring. We hope these monitoring sessions can serve as a forum to educate the public about motivation and benefit of the Long Branch Central Project, since the County seems to be falling down on their promises to make public education a major component.

• *8800 Richmond Highway:* Philip stated that 8800 Richmond Highway was a 7.9 acre floodplain parcel on Dogue Creek proposed for development in 2018, but turned down by the County. Last week we got the good news that the County purchased the property to prevent future development. It's an approach we would like to see on all the vacant floodplain properties that remain along Accotink Creek.

• *Donations*: Philip reported that this month we received $50 from Eleanor Quigby in memory of Kris Unger.