**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 – September 16, 2025

Next Meeting: October 21 (Third Tuesday of each month via on-line meeting: Login info will be posted with the meeting notice in the Friends of Accotink calendar.)

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**Present:** Gary Bangs, Philip Latasa, Sandy Collins, Avril Garland, Peter Clark, Katy Johnson, Beverley Rivera, David Lincoln, and Sue Kovach Shuman, all via on-line meeting.

**AGENDA:**

- *Represent FACC:*
  - *AT&T Development Community Meeting, August 27, 2025*
    Philip said that he was able to confirm at the August 27th meeting that plans remain to keep the tiny tributary stream in place. That area is now being called the "Nature Preserve" on plans. Invasives plants control will be part of the plans. He followed up with a letter urging the planners to use the Shade Garden at Wolf Trap as their model.

**Current AT&T site plan protects the stream and its buffer**

- *Springfield Bridge Walk:* Gary stated that he setup the FACC table at the bridge the walk the morning of August 30. Attendance was small for the walk over the bridge, less than last year, but the numbers of "vendor" tables increased. Additionally this year the county setup a stage in the parking lot, and vendors were in front of the stage area. This somewhat conflicted with trying to talk with anyone who came by the table, because it was disruptive to the presentations on the stage, especially for our table that was immediately next to the stage. Delegate Tran did stop by and talk, accompanied by her family. Two other persons stopped and talked after the presentations.

- *Federation of Friends Meeting:* Avril said that she called in to the September 3 meeting. Like previous meetings much of the talk was about the new budget proposals. For FY2027 all departments are instructed to reduce last year's budget by 5%. For the Park Authority whose budget has been stagnant for some time, this reduction will certainly cause pain in reductions of programs. Attendees were urged to speak to the Park Authority Board budget meeting on Sept 10th. Avril spoke as an individual and Philip spoke to represent FACC. His remarks will be linked to this Bulletin. Board Meeting Remarks

  After Philip and Avril spoke to the Board, the Alliance for Parks responded by asking FACC to sign onto their letter to the Board of Supervisors. The drafted letter has been provided to the board for review, and it was approved by board members to be included.

All the speakers at the Park Authority meeting received an email from Chairman Kiel Stone. The letter is worth reading and is included in the link with Philip's remarks. He pointed out that the Board of Supervisors will decide how much to cut, so we should also communicate with them now and participate in budget hearings starting in February. Philip will prepare a letter for the FACC Board to approve.

- *Latino Conservation Week:* Beverley said that on Thursday morning, September 18th she will host an event at her IMA site as she did last year. This will be 11am - 1 pm and everyone is welcome to attend. She plans to again walk along the trail and identify invasive plants, and Juan will cook some Mexican food to share. Gary said he would come and setup the FACC display table which has material on native and invasive plants, as well as the Tree Rescuer program.

- *Annual Climate Action Conference:* Sandy said that she and Brian are planning to setup at the conference on October 18. The theme will be "Restore and Protect Healthy Waterways" , which seems well suited to our mission and to calling attention to projects that harm both waterways and climate, such as the Cinder Bed Road Bikeway. We will be sharing a table with our sister group Friends of Holmes Run.

• *Accotink Gorge:* Avril stated as we discussed last meeting the dates are now set for fall workdays with Master Naturalists and with the Angelus Academy. The students of the Angelus Academy will join us October 29th. The Master Naturalists have been invited October 18th and 25th. We had talked about November 1st as well, but that date is complicated by the launch of Fairfax PRISM so that is TBD.

- *Fairfax PRISM Launch:* Dave spoke that Fairfax PRISM is planning to launch in November 2025. Partners like us have been asked to organize events in our magisterial districts the weekend of Nov. 7-9 and/or Nov. 14-16. We've been asked to invite local officials, including County supervisors, General Assembly, and Congress.

  The Accotink Gorge might be a useful venue, calling attention to both Fairfax PRISM and to our Gorge project.

  Dave happened to meet Peyton Smith of the Mount Vernon District supervisor office. He stated that they are still trying for funding from Costco.

  Philip said that we could have the event at any of our multiple invasives sites. We could have more than one event. We do have seven magisterial districts in our watershed, with invasives sites in five of those.

  Katy explained what she was planning to do in the City of Fairfax area, and said the goal is to get information out as broadly as possible about Fairfax PRISM.

  Discussion involved how coordination was going to occur, whether multiple events in a supervisor's district would be problematic, and how best to coordinate media coverage. Katy, Avril and Philip said they would explore this further.

• *Loisdale Invasives:* Dave said that the event on August 30th was organized by Chesapeake Climate Action Network, one of a series they have done at Loisdale Park and in the adjoining neighborhood. He represented FACC to provide an air of official authorization to work in the park. He said it went well and he was impressed with the organization.

• *Tree Rescuer Herbicide Training:* Gary stated that FCPA has offered herbicide training to Tree Rescuers on October 25th. He and Dave have signed up. The session is limited to 30 persons so TBD who gets into this session. This training will be identical as IMA site leaders received.

• *Vienna Invasives:*
  - *Vienna Water Tower Park*
    Avril stated that she has gotten together a few volunteers to remove invasives and plant native trees in the informal and unnamed pocket park at the Vienna water tower on Tapawingo Street. Most of the park is mowed grass, but there is a small grove of native trees and they plan to plant more groves. However, they are waiting for approval from a couple different government offices.

• *Water Caltrops Update:* Philip said that he received an update on the Water Caltrops, or Water Chestnut, removal at Lake Accotink. The program is in its third year. The infestation is now confined to a small area at the far end of the lake and may take a couple more years to eradicate. A contractor for Soil and Water visits monthly from spring through fall to monitor and treat.

This is good news, since this weed has the capacity to completely cover the lake

In other lake news, the Park Authority is lowering water levels at Lake Accotink to complete the assessment of the dam. The assessment will tell us the dam integrity and identify repair needs.

• *International Coastal Cleanup: Philip (5 min)*
Philip said that we begin our first Saturday of cleanups this weekend, with about 25 volunteers signed up. It's not a big number, but we will take what we can get.

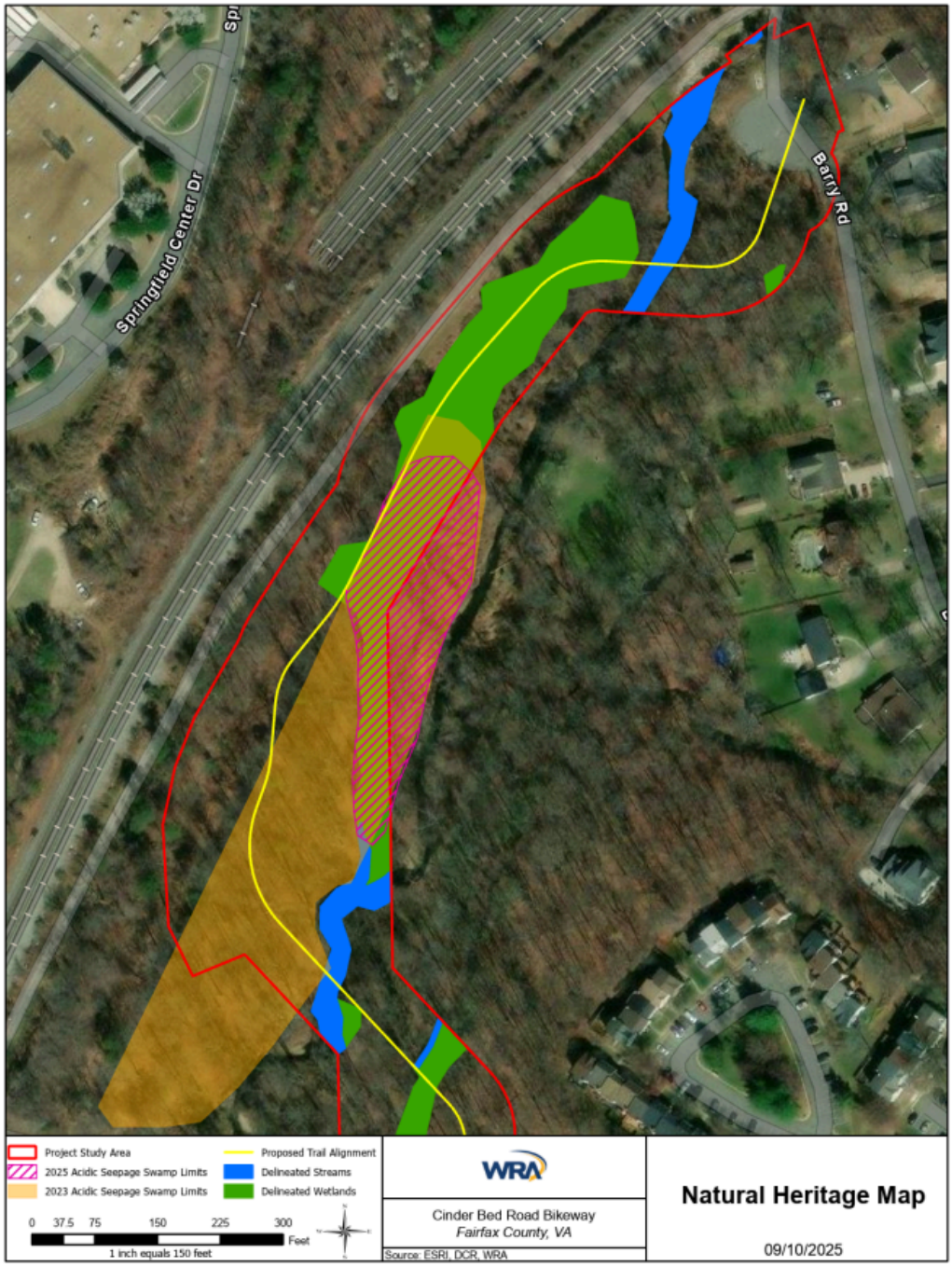
He recently learned Clean Fairfax has moved its headquarters to a location in Fairfax City, right on the banks of Accotink Creek, and also right along the proposed route of the George Snyder Trail. They are doing quarterly cleanups in Shiloh Street Park at that location.

Since the City will have its Community Cleanup on October 26th, Philip said that he may focus some volunteers on that spot and draw a little attention to the George Snyder Trail at the same time. .

• *George Snyder Trail:* Sue Kuiler was unable to attend the meeting but had provided a summary to Philip. A news article is going out in the Fairfax Independent newspaper this week questioning whether the information at the council meeting was correct and providing language in the contracts obtained under FOIA which seem to indicate all the money does NOT have to be repaid.

• *Fairfax Elections:* Philip said that the Braddock District supervisor Walkinshaw was elected to Congress filling the late Congressman Connolly's seat . He has since resigned and been sworn into his new office. Braddock District will sort of be on auto pilot until a replacement is elected. The special election date has yet to be decided. Gary offered to draft questions to provide to supervisor candidates.

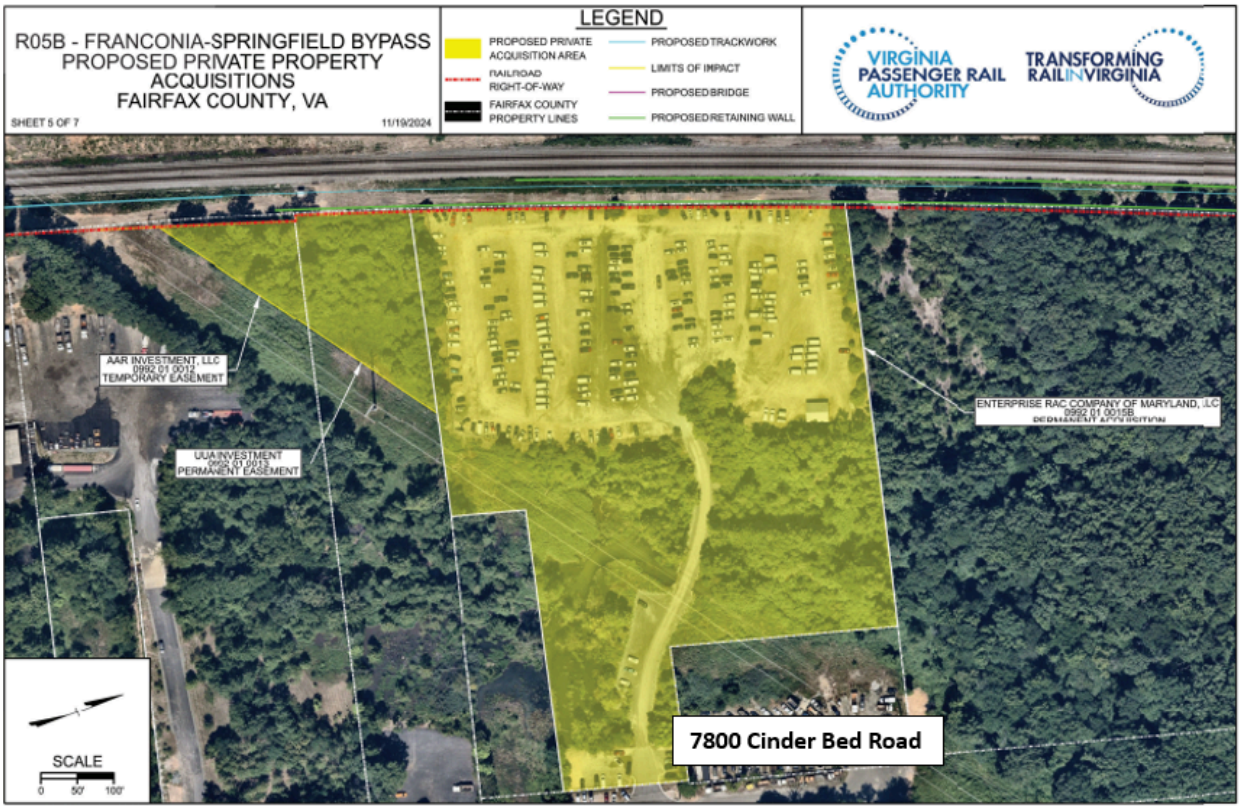
• *Cinder Bed Road Bikeway:* Philip said that on September 3rd he accompanied staff from FCDOT and Virginia Department of Conservation & Resources to reexamine the delineation of the rare acidic seepage swamp habitat. Unfortunately, the newest delineation somewhat reduces the expanded footprint DCR produced in 2023. The new delineation rather too conveniently allows the Bikeway to skirt just barely at the edge, although still located in more common wetlands.




• *Franconia to Lorton Third Track:* Philip also discussed the negative impact the railroad projects also pose to the Newington Conservation Area alongside the Cinder Bed Road Bikeway. The information is more clear now after a couple of public meetings last week. The impact will be as extensive as one might expect would be required to add a third railroad track. This will take a slice out of the woods and regrade all the way from the Franconia VRE station south beyond our watershed. The existing railroad bridge over Accotink Creek will be widened.

Confusingly, there are actually two projects occurring in the same place at the same time that are sometimes presented together and sometimes separately. One is the Franconia to Lorton Third Track and the other is the Franconia-Springfield Bypass, which would enable trains to switch tracks.

Something intriguing about the Bypass project is its proposal to acquire an 8.5 acre industrial parcel on Cinder Bed Road for construction equipment staging and later for maintenance access. This will be too big a space for future access, so there is some hope of restoration of habitats, especially since the parcel is next to woods and wetlands belonging to the Park Authority.




**Hope for restoration along Cinder Bed Road?**

• *Vernal Pool Contamination*: Philip said that he learned from talking to the crew that the enormous steel sheets being driven into the slope along the Lake Accotink Park entrance road are to stabilize the slope against landslides and will soon be covered with soil. Apparently, the engineers in charge of the first failed repair fiasco in 2021 didn't notice the mature trees stabilizing the slope before they cut them all down. The crew couldn't tell him about plans beyond the steel sheets, but if anyone else is passing by, it wouldn't hurt to ask the crew that comes in for the next stage.

• *Accotink Gravity Sewer: Avril/Philip/Dave (10 min)*
Philip said that we have kept in touch with Juliana and Morgan in the Providence District office, who have communicated our concerns to the project manager. What we have sent to them includes Mike Hayslett's report on the vernal pools in the path of the project and two edited transcripts ( **1** , **2** )of his on the ground commentary. If Juliana and Morgan have understood correctly, the project has been held up while some adjustments are made to address our concerns for the vernal pools.

• *Fort Belvoir PFAS Hearing:* Philip said that oddly enough, on September 15th, DEQ held a public hearing that was not quite public on the topic of a renewed stormwater discharge permit for Fort Belvoir. Only

those who had previously commented on the permit renewal were allowed to speak and only to comment on DEQ's responses to earlier public submissions. The main issue is the presence of PFAS "forever chemicals" in the base environment and DEQ's lack of interest in doing anything about it. Philip spoke at the meeting on behalf of FACC. Potomac Riverkeeper was also in attendance and spoke.
Fort Belvoir PFAS Remarks

• *Active Fairfax:* Philip said that Active Fairfax is a planned vision for pedestrian and bicycle transportation in Fairfax County.

**Take the survey online** and share your feedback by September 19th.

We want to speak in favor of preservation of habitats, rather than paving them, following the guidance of the Northern Virginia Bird Alliance. In particular, we want to question the line on the map showing an undefined future trail in the Accotink Gorge.

• *Daniels Run Elementary School:*
  - *CareFirst /Accenture Day of Service:* Philip said that we usually have one workday per year with CareFirst at Daniels Run Elementary School, but they have proposed a second one this year as part of the CareFirst/Accenture Day of Service on October 13th.

    However we have run into a problem with the school system's new volunteer registration process. It is so complex and intrusive it is not going to work for casual volunteers such as this corporate group. It also requires direct supervision by school staff in almost all circumstances. We are awaiting clarification from the school.

• *Donations:* Philip said that we received one donation of $1000 from CareFirst following their Daniels Run Elementary workday. Board approved to send $600 to Lands & Waters as usual.

• *Kris Unger Memorial:* Philip said that we have the report from Mike Hayslett evaluating the possible memorial vernal pool sites as well as his videos and transcripts, as well as a couple more recent communications.

We only had a handful of possible sites to evaluate, so if anyone thinks they know a more likely spot, we could take a look. Our next step is to share with the larger circle of persons interested in the memorial pool and set up an online meeting to discuss.

• *Whither FACC: Anyone*
  - *FACC 20th Anniversary:* Avril said that they are still looking into possible press coverage of whatever is decided. She, Sue Kuiler, and Katy have agreed to look into doing something, just not sure yet what.