

# Friends of Arlington Parks

President: H.Suzanne Bolton  
Editors: Sarah Meservey, Larry Finch

June 2008

In this issue.....

Preservation of Arlington's Natural Areas. ....Pg 1

Four Mile Run Restoration Project Open House ..... Pg 3

Annual Meeting News.....Pg 3

Natural Heritage Resource Inventory .....Page 3

Arlington's Nature Centers.....Pg 5

Gulf Branch.....Pg. 6

Long Branch Pg. 8

The Arlington County Adopt-A-Park Program .....Pg. 10

Upcoming Park volunteer Events.....pg. 11

Membership renewal...Page 12



*Looking downstream along Long Branch.. See accompanying article on page 8 . Photos for the Long Branch article were taken by Greg Zell, Jennifer Soles and Rachael Tolman.*

visit us online:

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

## Preservation of Arlington's Natural Areas

Friends of Arlington Parks has long been an advocate of protecting and preserving the County's limited natural areas. As part of this campaign, FAP President Suzanne Bolton recently sent the following letter to County Board Chairman Walter Tejada. It concerns protection of the wooded parkland adjoining the Arlington Mill Community Center on Columbia Pike. The County Board will consider that project at its meeting on June 17<sup>th</sup>. Those wishing to express their views on the issues outlined in the letter can send messages to the County Board at:

[countyboard@arlingtonva.us](mailto:countyboard@arlingtonva.us).

Honorable J. Walter Tejada  
Chairman, Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Mr. Tejada,

Friends of Arlington Parks is concerned about the preservation of Arlington's natural areas against a variety of encroachments. The latest example of such a threat concerns wooded parkland adjacent to the Arlington Mill Community Center, a narrow strip of woods between the community center and Four Mile Run. This woods is part of the stream buffer along Four Mile Run, which has particular environmental significance and has been designated as a Resource Protection Area (RPA) under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. In connection with the Arlington Mill project, County planners have made two proposals that directly threaten this wooded parkland.

Planners have proposed installing the transformers for the community center in the edge of the wooded park. This would entail the use of County parkland for a non-park use and set a precedent that would be detrimental to the long-term preservation of parks and open space in the County. If this were a commercial project, the County would require the applicant to accommodate the transformers onsite. Moreover, since the project includes underground parking, the County probably would require the applicant to put the transformers underground. For public projects (and mixed public/private projects), the County should follow the practices it would require of commercial applicants.

*Friends of Arlington Parks urges the County Board to reject installation of transformers in this wooded park.*

Planners have recommended constructing a new bike trail across the parkland. The new trail would lead from the trail along Four Mile Run to the community center. To make its way up a steep hill, the trail would require switchbacks, resulting in the clearing of a broad swath through the woods and the loss of a large number of mature trees. The proposed trail is not needed because there is an existing bike trail to Four Mile Run about 100 yards farther north, just a few seconds' ride on a bicycle. The County's stock of natural areas is limited and that there will be few opportunities to acquire additional natural areas in the future, particularly in view of the limited funds available for land acquisition. In considering proposals to construct trails through wooded parks, it is important to balance the costs and benefits. In this case, the costs would be substantial but there would be very little benefit.

*Friends of Arlington Parks urges the County Board to reject the proposal for a new bike trail through this small wooded park -- and to make clear that preservation of the County's remaining natural areas is a priority goal.*

Sincerely,

Suzanne Bolton

President, Friends of Arlington Parks

cc: Members, Arlington County Board, Ron Carlee, Arlington County Manager

## Four Mile Run Restoration Project Open House

The Four Mile Run restoration Project involves the restoration of the lower portion of Four Mile Run. Plans to re-naturalize the stream bed, landscape the banks of four mile run and revitalize the area, are in the process of being reviewed.

The County is holding an open house for all who are interesting in hearing about or giving into to the initial design guidelines. The meeting is June 18<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 9:00 at the Arlington County Park Operations Building at 2700 S. Taylor Street, Arlington, Va.

## Annual Meeting Held

Friends of Arlington Parks held its annual meeting on May 14, 2008 at the Arlington County Park Operations Building. We were given a tour of the building by Parks and Natural Resources Division Chief Steve Temmermand, and Parks and Recreation Department Director Dinesh Tiwari was invited was invited to speak about the accomplishments and vision of the Parks department.

## Natural Heritage Resource Inventory

In early 2006, Arlington's Division of Parks and Natural Resources began work on a comprehensive inventory of Arlington's remaining natural resources. Acquiring this information was the first step toward developing a Natural Resources Management Plan.

Preparation of the natural resources inventory has been coordinated by Greg Zell, one of Arlington's most experienced naturalists and for many years director of Long Branch Nature Center. In 2007, Greg relinquished his administrative duties to devote full time to the natural resources inventory.



**Four Mile Run  
Restoration Project -  
OPEN HOUSE MEETING**

Arlington County and the City of Alexandria have embarked on an exciting process to create Design Guidelines that will guide the visual and physical character of future improvements in the Four Mile Run Corridor.

**Please join us to review the initial Design Guidelines and to provide your input!**

**Wednesday, June 18, 2008  
6:30 PM – 9:00 PM**

Arlington County Park Operations Building  
Conference Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
2700 S. Taylor Street, Arlington, VA.

DIRECTIONS: From 395, take the exit for Shirlington. Go through the light at the end of the exit ramp onto Arlington Mill Drive. Drive about .5 miles and turn left onto S. Taylor St. The Park Operations building is on the right, with large silver cisterns. PARKING: Free parking will be available in the lot between the building and the school bus parking lot. The parking area will be marked with an "Event Parking" sign.

For additional information, please visit the project web site at <http://www.novarregion.org/index.asp?NID=214>, contact Aileen Winquist at [awinquist@arlingtonva.us](mailto:awinquist@arlingtonva.us) (703-228-3610) or Aimee Vosper at [Aimee.Vosper@alexandriava.gov](mailto:Aimee.Vosper@alexandriava.gov) (703-838-5095).



We talked with Greg about this project and its implications. He noted that most of Arlington is now developed, which makes it more important than ever to preserve the relatively limited natural resources that remain. For example, without this inventory, a new trail through a park could destroy a rare plant community without anyone even knowing that it existed.

As an indication of the scope of this project, more than 1000 acres of open space have received some level of biotic inventory, including native flora, plant communities, invasive species, geological features, and wildlife. Parks with substantial natural areas have received the most detailed attention. In addition, some effort has been devoted to Arlington Cemetery and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

One of the first benefits of the inventory was to identify the largest trees of each species in the county. Based on the results of this inventory, county staff worked with the Urban Forestry Commission to establish the Champion Tree Program. That effort included documenting 84 County Champion trees – the largest of each species in Arlington. It turned out that 31 of those trees were also the State Champions and two were even National Champions!



*Solitary Pussytoes Colony*

Altogether, more than 600 species of native plants have been documented, including more than 100 new Arlington County records and 15 species classified as rare in Virginia (“State Rare”). Native plant communities, including a number of rare, remnant wetlands, have been delineated and mapped.

An example of a rare plant is a Solitary Pussytoes colony (see photo); this is the only colony found in Arlington. In addition to the plant inventory, significant geological features have been documented and mapped in 20 parks and natural areas. This essentially completes the inventory of plants and geological features.



*Red Salamander*

Documenting the presence and distribution of wildlife species has been more challenging. Unlike plants, animals move about and often make a conscious effort to avoid human observers. An example of an animal which is both tiny and rare is a Red Salamander (see photo) found at only one site in Arlington.

Residents are more likely to see a Box Turtle (see photo), which is doing surprisingly well in Arlington's urban environment. Park visitors should also watch for interesting insects such as the Hickory Horned Devil caterpillar (see photo), which becomes a Royal Walnut Moth.

There are particular challenges in observing nocturnal animals: observation requires special photographic equipment and night-time visits to natural areas. A good example is the Southern Flying Squirrel (see article on Long Branch Nature Center).



*Box Turtle in Barcroft Park*

Plans call for wildlife field surveys to be completed by September of this year. When completed, the natural resources inventory will provide a basis for staff and citizen advisory groups to develop a Natural Resources Management Plan. That plan will be used to set



*Hickory Horned Devil Caterpillar*

priorities for preservation and protection work, guide park operations and maintenance, and develop funding strategies. Development of such a plan was identified as a priority goal in the Public Spaces Master Plan approved by the County Board in 2005.

(Photos for this article were taken by Greg Zell.)

## **Arlington's Nature Centers**

It is widely recognized that residents of urban areas are healthier and happier when they have regular contact with nature. Fortunately, Arlington has wooded parks

and natural areas where people can be close to nature. To help park visitors better appreciate those natural areas, Arlington has two nature centers – Gulf Branch and Long Branch – staffed by naturalists who are not only knowledgeable but enjoy sharing their knowledge with others.

The nature centers are part of the Conservation and Interpretation Section of Arlington's Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources. In a future newsletter, we will report on the other two elements of the section: Fort C.F. Smith Park and Historic Site and the Park Ranger Unit.

The responsibilities of the Conservation and Interpretation Section include:

- providing environmental and historical interpretation and preservation on a county-wide basis
- providing the county with technical expertise on environmental, historical, and natural resource management issues
- providing the public with natural and cultural history information services

## Gulf Branch

The Gulf Branch Nature Center and Natural Area is located at 3608 N. Military Road. It opened in 1966, making it the oldest facility of its kind in Arlington. The center is in a beautiful setting under towering oak trees, just a few yards from the banks of Gulf Branch.



*Gulf Branch Nature Center*

The center is located in a quartz-and-fieldstone house built around 1921. Thanks to some detective work by Arlington historian Cornelia Rose, we know that silent screen star Pola Negri rented the house in the 1930s.

As visitors enter the building, the first thing they see is a beehive where honeybees are busy making honey. The observation hive allows visitors to watch these fascinating insects and learn about the important work done by pollinators. Children have fun looking for the queen bee.

Exhibits at the center include a variety of snakes, turtles and other wildlife that can be found in Arlington parks. Visitors who go to the lower level of the center will find an entirely different kind of exhibit: artifacts of Native Americans who lived in what is now Arlington before the arrival of European settlers. Exhibits include weapons, containers, and even a full-size dugout canoe made from a tulip poplar.

Outside the nature center, visitors can explore 38-acre Gulf Branch Natural Area, which includes an eastern hardwood forest, the stream, a pond, and extensive hiking trails. The trails lead upstream to the headwaters of Gulf Branch and downstream to the Potomac River. The trail to the Potomac is moderately strenuous, with several stream crossings. In addition, there are stairs to be negotiated in the Potomac Palisades area near the river. Rock was quarried from that area for many years in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Naturalist and Park Director Denise Chauvette explained that the goals of Gulf Branch Natural Area include preserving and protecting wildlife habitat and its constituent natural communities, and also serving as a resource for educating the public about natural resources. The park is known to provide habitat for 121 species of birds, 26 species of mammals, 35 types of reptiles and amphibians, and a



myriad of insects and other invertebrates. Two examples of wildlife that can be found at Gulf Branch are the Screech Owl and Wood Frog (see photos).



*Screech Owl at Gulf Branch*

A short walk from the nature center, visitors will find the Robert Walker Log House, which incorporates materials from a house built by Robert and Maggie Walker in 1871. Located on the property now known as Glebe Park, the Walker family's house was acquired by the County in 1967 and remodeled to make the Glebe Recreation Center. When that building was demolished in 1978, some of the materials from the original 1871 homestead were used in building the Robert Walker Log House at Gulf Branch.

Near the log house is the Blacksmiths' Forge built in the early 1980s. The forge is operated by the Blacksmiths' Guild of the Potomac, a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching and keeping alive the art of blacksmithing. Park visitors

are welcome to visit with the smiths whenever they are working in the forge.

Denise Chauvette pointed out that Gulf Branch offers a wide range of courses and activities for both children and adults. The program for the summer of 2008 can be found in *The Snag*, published by Arlington's Conservation and Interpretation Section. Here are a few examples of activities at Gulf Branch this summer:

- *Arlington: Heroes, History and Hamburgers*. This excellent film about Arlington history, produced by WETA, will be shown on Tuesday evening, June 17<sup>th</sup>. Before the showing, there will be an opportunity to tour the Robert Walker Log House.
- *Blacksmiths' Open Forge* on Saturday afternoon, July 12<sup>th</sup>. An opportunity to see blacksmiths making tools and other objects. The nearby Robert Walker Log House will also be open to visitors.
- *Bat Fest Arlington 2008* on Saturday evening, August 16<sup>th</sup>. An opportunity for children and adults to see live bats and learn all about them.



*Wood Frog in Gulf Branch Pond*

To see a complete listing of Gulf Branch activities, with information on registration and fees, check *The Snag* (posted on the County website) or call 703-228-3403.

(Gulf Branch photos by Denise Chauvette)

## Long Branch

The Long Branch Nature Center, located at 625 S. Carlin Springs Road, is in a beautiful wooded setting overlooking Long Branch, a tributary of Four Mile Run. Cars enter the park from S. Carlin Springs Road. The center is also accessible by walking or cycling along a trail from Glen Carlyn Park and Four Mile Run. That trail follows Long Branch, one of Arlington's most beautiful streams (see photo on page 1).



*Long Branch Nature Center*

The 17-acre nature area includes a meadow, two ponds, demonstration gardens, and a mixed hardwood forest of oak, hickory, tulip poplar, and black gum. The Nature Center opened in 1972 in a converted home dating from the 1940s. One of the former residents was Mae Hickman, a pioneer in the field of wildlife rehabilitation and co-author of a book on that subject, "Care of the Furred and Feathered". The nature center continues to be actively involved in the rehabilitation of injured wildlife.

In walking from the parking area to the nature center, visitors will see several native plant gardens. Naturalist and acting park director Alonso Abugattas took us on a tour of the gardens, pointing out that plants are labeled for easy identification by visitors. Anyone considering native plants for their own gardens can observe them at Long Branch. For example, a wide variety of ferns can be seen in the fern gardens near the entrance to the nature center.



*Long Branch Naturalists at Poplar Pond*

As this newsletter goes to press, the butterfly season has arrived, and many varieties of butterflies can be observed in the butterfly garden. Long Branch is also home to native bees, and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia recently listed Long Branch as a Model Habitat for Native Bees.

The park has two ponds. Poplar Pond (see photo) , near the native plant gardens, is home to a variety of fish, turtles, and other aquatic life. On one visit, we saw two large turtles were sunning themselves on a rock and a female Mallard resting



on a small structure in the pond, safe from foxes and other predators in the woods. Willow Pond, located near the road into the park, is home to large numbers of frogs (see photo). Alonso Abugattas explained that frogs thrive in this pond because there are no fish to eat the tadpoles.



*Willow Pond*

Inside the nature center, visitors will see live animal exhibits -- examples of wildlife that can be found in Arlington's parks. The center is staffed by naturalists who enjoy talking with visitors about plants and wildlife. A variety of programs are offered to help Arlingtonians better understand their parks and natural areas. On summer evenings, some programs are offered outdoors in an amphitheater a short walk from the nature center.

Long Branch has recently helped initiate a Virginia Master Naturalist program, modeled on the Master Gardener program. The mission is to develop a corps of volunteers "to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities." Those completing the course and volunteer service will be certified as Virginia Master Naturalists.

For young and old alike, one of the most popular activities at Long Branch is observing flying squirrels. These small animals with large eyes (see photo) are found in most of Arlington's wooded parks but are rarely seen because they are nocturnal. For the programs at Long Branch, residents accompany a naturalist into the park after dark to see these tiny creatures that glide from one tree to another.



*Southern Flying Squirrel at Long Branch*

The nature center also provides meeting space for a variety of programs. The Washington Area Butterfly Club, the Microminerologists of the National Capital Area, and the Northern Virginia Mineral Club are among the organizations that meet regularly at Long Branch.

Here are a few examples of coming activities:

- *Creepy Crawlies*. Do some animals seem scary? On June 28, families with children 5 and up can learn something about a variety of creepy critters and perhaps discover that they aren't really scary at all.
- *Long Branch Overnight*. Children ages 9-13 are invited for a sleepover at the nature center the night of July 25-26. There will be marshmallow roasting and stories around a campfire, followed by a visit to the woods to see nocturnal animals when they are most active.
- *Digital Nature Photography*. On August 2, children ages 10-14 can learn how to photograph plants, animals and nature.

To see a complete listing of Long Branch activities, including information on registration and fees, check *The Snag* (posted on the County website) or call 703-228-6535

(Long Branch photos by Greg Zell, Jennifer Soles and Rachael Tolman)

*Friends of Arlington Parks asked County Park Manager Lydell Core to submit the following article outlining the County Adopt-A-Park Program.*



## **The Arlington County Adopt-A-Park Program**

The Arlington County Adopt-A-Park Program is designed to develop community relationships which support and sustain the natural and recreational resources of Arlington County. The program can provide opportunities for park supporters to be further engaged and make a commitment beyond the occasional enjoyment of the resources. The basis of an Adopt A Park agreement is a negotiated contract with a group of residents or park customers and the Arlington County Parks Area manager, who represents the County.

The agreement is for one year and identifies the specific park area and duties the volunteer group will undertake to take care of the park area. Terms of agreements depend upon the interests, activities and abilities of the sponsoring group. The duties can be as simple as a regularly scheduled trash and debris cleanup of a specified area. Other agreements have outlined the formation and coordination of a group to identify and remove invasives and replant native plants. All community canine areas have a standard agreement which enlists the sponsor to serve as a liaison for the user group and customers of the park.

The adopt a park agreement provides an opportunity to establish a strategic partnership which can provide the benefits of additional resources for park development and maintenance. But the most valuable outcome is a strong connection for improving customer service and park experiences.

For additional information please contact Lyndell Core at (703) 228-6523 or via email at [lcure@arlingtonva.us](mailto:lcure@arlingtonva.us). Life can be an interesting journey made more enjoyable by the relationships we initiate, nurture and grow.

## News from the Arlington Parks and Recreation Website on Park Clean-up Opportunities

### Location: Bluemont Junction Park

Second Saturdays @ Bluemont Park | June 14, 2008 | 9:00am

**Cost:** Free

**Sponsor:** Arlington Invasive Removal Program

**Contact:** John Huennekens 524-3853 [jhuenn@gwu.edu](mailto:jhuenn@gwu.edu)



**Description of Event and Additional Information:** Neighbors and RiP volunteers continue to meet at Bluemont Junction Park on the second Saturday of each month. Come help out for an hour or two. Some training and tools provided. Long pants and long sleeves recommended. If you have clippers, loppers and/or gloves, please bring them. Park near the bike trail at the bottom of Illinois St. Enter Illinois St. from Wilson Blvd. Meet alongside the Bluemont Bicycle Trail near N Jefferson and Fifth Streets. Contact John Huennekens at [jhuenn@gwu.edu](mailto:jhuenn@gwu.edu). Unfortunately, this will be John's last Second Saturday at Bluemont Park. If anyone is interested in taking up the site leader position in his place, please contact Jenn at 703-228-7636.

### Location: Barcroft Park

Summer Solstice Celebration | June 19, 2008 | 7:00pm

**Cost:** Free

**Sponsor:** RiP & ACE

**Contact:** Elenor Hodges 703-228-64 [volunter@arlingtonenvironment.org](mailto:volunter@arlingtonenvironment.org)

**Website:** [www.arlingtonenvironment.org](http://www.arlingtonenvironment.org)

**Description of Event and Additional Information:** An evening to enjoy our long daylight hours with various service projects and light refreshments. Meet at the Barcroft Park parking garage, 4200 S. Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington.

**NOTE:** Some training and tools provided at volunteer events. Long pants and long sleeves recommended. If you have your own clippers, loppers and/or gloves, please bring them along. For more information, please contact Jenn Truong at 703-228-7636 or [jtruong@vt.edu](mailto:jtruong@vt.edu).

visit us online:

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



## Friends of Arlington Parks Membership Form

To join *Friends of Arlington Parks*, or renew your membership, mail this form and payment to:  
Terry Hillerich, Treasurer, 3555 N. Somerset Street, Arlington, VA 22213

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Check here to get your newsletter by email \_\_\_\_\_

Add me/us to the volunteer list and contact. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$7 Individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 Family \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Other contributions

*Please make checks payable to "Friends of Arlington Parks"*

You may also renew your membership on the web with a credit card by visiting [www.foap.org](http://www.foap.org).

**Friends of Arlington Parks**

**3555 North Somerset Street**

**Arlington, VA 22213**

