



Winter
2025



Vol.7, No.1

NEWSLETTER



Braddock Supervisor Walkinshaw, Sarah Lennon, Natasha Lennon, and Alex Lennon at the award ceremony in December, 2024

IN THIS ISSUE

-  Lakeside Park shade structure installed
-  Shanes Creek Project update
-  Tree Rescuers activity in county parks
-  Presidents' Day volunteer event
-  Winter in the woods

One of FORL's Own Awarded Special Recognition for Service in Braddock District

By Paul Gross

We are pleased to announce that Braddock District Supervisor James Walkinshaw has given Special Recognition for Two Decades of Volunteer Community Leadership to FORL Co-Chair Sarah Lennon. As many of you know, Sarah is a tireless worker and leader in the enhancement of Braddock District as a place to live. In her professional life, Sarah is a senior official in the Department of Energy working on important national nuclear issues. Her efforts and accomplishments in our Braddock District community span over 20 years of sustained service that include the Braddock District Council, Kings Park West Civic Association (KPWCA), and Friends of Royal Lake (FORL).

Sarah was the Vice-Chair of the Braddock District Council in 2022-2023. She worked with others to revitalize the organization's focus on new topics that are relevant to the Braddock District and for out-reach to the communities in the Braddock District. Supervisor Walkinshaw publicly recognized Sarah for her efforts.

Sarah has been actively involved in KPWCA for over 20 years as Chair of the Membership Committee, Chair of the Parks and Lakes Committee and for the past four years as President of KPWCA. In these various roles she made significant improvements in the Kings Park West community.

Cont'd, p.3

Lakeside Park Shade Structure Nears Completion

By Paul Gross

Have you been to Lakeside Park recently and seen the construction of the new shade structure over the new picnic area concrete pad?



Shade over the picnic area at Lakeside Park has been a high priority in the Friends of Royal Lake's assessment of needs and improvements. FORL included this need in the "Royal Lake Community Vision Plan" and presented it to Park Authority officials. This project, while using separate funding, was included with the four other Royal Lake Park trail improvement projects funded by the American Rescue Plan Act funding.

County park employees brave the cold to build the shade infrastructure



Three new picnic tables are included in the final project, one of which will be installed when parts that "disappeared" (*Disappointing!*) can be re-placed.

If you look closely, you might ask where is the canopy? The Lakeside Park shade structure is designed with a fabric canopy that will be set up each spring and removed for storage in the late fall. When the canopy is installed in early spring, we will have an important addition to Lakeside Park.

The Park Authority will announce a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the community to celebrate in the spring.

Thanks to all who supported this project. In particular, **THANK YOU Tom McFarland and Elizabeth "Beth" Iannetta, Park Authority Program Managers**, for your hard work in implementing this project.



Cont'd. Sarah Lennon

Sarah's leadership skills were apparent when she recruited new individuals for key KPWCA committee positions, thus keeping the Civic Association a vital force in community life. Several important activities were enhanced under her positive leadership style as President of KPWCA. The Spring Egg Hunt and Fall/Halloween Festival have become important activities that bring together various members of our diverse community. She also recruited local businesses to assist and participate in these community-wide activities.

Sarah is a co-founder and co-chair of the Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) that began in 2015. FORL is a volunteer organization of like-minded neighbors who want to preserve and protect the natural beauty around Royal Lake and ensure an environment for families to enjoy the outdoors.



A woman of many talents, Sarah single handedly raises the tent at Halloween festival



Sarah Lennon, center in blue shirt, with workday crew

FORL works with Fairfax County Park officials, leads park clean-up days, organizes trail maintenance activities, participates in invasive plant removal and represents the community by advocating for improvements at Royal Lake Parks.

FORL's efforts involve a wide variety of activities from conducting community surveys, holding community meetings, developing a Royal Lake Vision Plan, publishing newsletters, supporting Eagle Scout projects, hauling and spreading stone dust on park trails, and picking up trash in park clean-ups. Sarah is involved in all the aspects of FORL's mission, especially leading park cleanups, trail maintenance activities and advocating to the Fairfax County Park Authority for major park enhancements.

In short, Sarah has an impressive track record of over 20 years of service to the communities in Braddock District. This year, as Sarah steps down as KPWCA presidential leadership, Supervisor Walkinshaw recognized her impressive contributions to the community.

Royal Lake Trail Improvements

The Shade Structure at the Lakeside Park picnic area has been completed. You may wonder about the other four trail projects: Royal Lake Bridge Replacement, Richardson Drive to Lakeside Park trail, Royal Lake to Lakepointe Drive, and Royal Lake to Commonwealth Boulevard Trail.

The capital improvement project funding came from the American Rescue Act Plan (ARPA) and requires several more steps before construction. A major activity over the past few months was the documentation and public comment period concerning the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The public comment period ended in January, and the staff is adjudicating the comments.

After permit approvals happen, the construction will follow. Unfortunately, no firm construction dates are currently available. You may look at the FORL website www.friendsofroyallake.org or www.engage.fairfaxcounty.gov for the latest information. FORL will provide updates as we have construction information.

PUBLIC BEHAVIOR THREATENS ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION OF SHANES CREEK RESTORATION PROJECT

By Greg Sykes and Suzanne Doherty

The Shanes Creek Restoration Project, by its very nature, caused significant disturbance of the environment around this waterway. Since the project's completion in the autumn of 2023, the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) continues assessing the restoration zone and found that much of it is healing well. County park officials expressed concern, however, that some remediation efforts are being negatively impacted by people who take actions that harm these sensitive areas.

For example, in addition to tree saplings, the county planted native grasses, shrubs, and a variety of seeds in the recovering work zones. Last fall, some of these new plants were weed-whacked or mowed down. Furthermore, new "social trails" were created by trampling the vegetation in restoration planting zones. Both actions impacted or killed the restoration plants and voided the limited warranty coming from the nurseries.

Aspects including water chemistry, flow, sediment, and stream design features are monitored by multiple agencies—county and federal. Removing or rearranging rocks into dams alter erosion countermeasures, water flow, and overall assessment of this project's stream design.

The "official" trail from Roberts Road to the Royal Lake loop trail is in bad shape which might encourage walkers to wander across restoration areas. Park officials are aware of this situation. Until the official trail is improved, restoration of the disturbed land depends on citizens being aware and careful of how they act upon the land.



This "social" trail was trampled between Shanes Creek and a flood control wetland. The pink ribbons mark the potted restoration plants that were added and found alive during a recent County survey. No potted restoration plants survived on the unauthorized path.

PLEASE

- *refrain from walking on territory not clearly evident as a trail**
- *do not disturb newly planted trees, shrubs, and seed plants**
- *keep rocks and stones in place to serve their purpose**



The ultimate success of the Shanes Creek Restoration Project to contribute to the overall health of Royal Lake Parks' environment involves, not only the project itself, but also the healing of the land necessarily disturbed by the demands of the project.

Everyone can be a Tree Rescuer and help the Environment!

By Sarah G. J. Lennon

As part of February's National Invasive Species Awareness Week (Feb 24-28), I spent a morning with volunteers from the Fairfax County Park Authority Invasive Management Area (FCPA IMA) program. In a two-hour span, 5 pods of volunteers, numbering 25 people total, saved more than 150 trees in the Difficult Run Stream Valley Park in Oakton.

The goal was to kill invasive vines growing on trees, which both removes the seed source and reduces the extra weight on trees, giving them a chance to thrive. Trees are critical for our environment; they improve the habitat of local wildlife. For more information on the important roles trees serve in mitigating the effects of climate change, check out this website: <https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/a-breath-of-fresh-air-how-trees-help-mitigate-climate-change>



English ivy on its way to killing a tree

The IMA team began by educating us on what invasive species are and why they are so harmful to our local ecosystem. We were quizzed on how some of these invasive species end up in the parks (Answer: seeds carried on the bottom of your shoes, carried by birds...) They shared photos of the various invasive vines that we would be targeting on this day (primarily wintercreeper and English ivy). https://www.plantnovatrees.org/_files/ugd/1c70fb_14856968b75145c68fc76855b15b9171.pdf

Then we walked into the park and saw the results of previous vine cutting workdays – dead dried out vines that could no longer harm the trees.

The key is to gently pull a vine away from a tree, a foot or so above the ground and cut it, leaving a foot gap between the two parts of the vine. (See photo on right) We then pulled the bottom part of the vine to get the roots out of the ground, and then made sure we didn't just drop the pulled vine/roots on the ground where they could possibly regrow. We were told not to pull the vines all the way away from the tree because that could dislodge bark, which harms the tree.



While most of us were looking UP to spot the invasive vines spiraling around the trees as we walked in the park, the IMA leader Sara explained that it is also

important to look DOWN to check the base of every tree to find any vines that are just starting to grow up around the tree. Making that method change, I was able to save 10 more trees before the vines started strangling them! Check out this site for more information: <https://www.plantnovatrees.org/rescuing-trees>

As fun as the Saturday morning was, the best part about it was that we all left with the knowledge of how to save the trees in our backyards and parks. I ask that everyone reading this article consider removing these common invasive vines & plants from your yard and replace with native plants. For ideas about how to replace invasive plants see the Plant NOVA Native page and check out <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/ima> for more opportunities to join the IMA fight!

MORE ABOUT HOW TO HELP SAVE THE TREES....

IMA

The Fairfax County Park Authority INVASIVE MANAGEMENT AREA (IMA) program is always looking for volunteers to join workdays (usually on weekends) dedicated to removing invasive vines and other unwanted plants from park land. Visit volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov to find an IMA opportunity to make a contribution to our parks' ecosystem.

Fairfax Tree Rescuers: A Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM)

Homeowners are not always aware of the threat invasive vines pose to the health of the tree AND to the safety of the surrounding property.

Tree Rescuer volunteers distribute door hangers to alert neighbors of trees at risk from invasive vines on their properties. Raising awareness of the problem in residential areas has made a difference in Northern Virginia!

Since September 2021

16,522

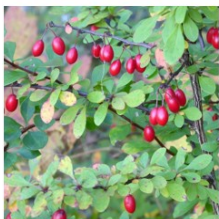
trees have been saved

For more information on how to join the effort to rescue our threatened tree canopy, contact FairfaxPRISM@gmail.com



Invasive Plants in Fairfax County

Do not plant on your property—remove them!



Japanese barberry



Pachysandra



English Ivy



Liriope



Butterfly Bush



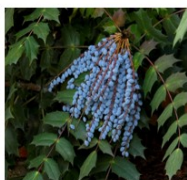
Burning bush



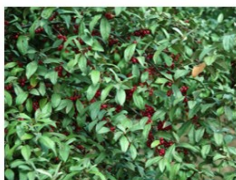
Nandina



Asian wisteria



Leatherleaf mahonia



Autumn olive

Homeowners are not always aware that many of the plants in their yards and gardens, other than vines, are invasive species. These plants also often “jump the fence” and end up in harming the natural ecology of our forests.

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

By Kelley Newsad

On President's Day, volunteers gathered for another successful park cleanup at Crooked Creek. The event, organized by the KPWCA Road Raiders, saw a handful of participants who worked together to clear debris and pick up litter that would have ended up in our lake. Thanks to their efforts, the park is now in better shape for the community to enjoy.

The cleanup event not only helped improve the environment but also strengthened community bonds. Participants filled over 6 large garbage bags and left with a sense of accomplishment while contributing to the beauty of their local park. Special thanks to all who showed up to lend a hand.



Road Raiders volunteers 'celebrate' Presidents Day

Volunteering counts towards required community service hours. We invite everyone to join in our upcoming cleanups and help maintain our beautiful parks and lake!

Saturday, March 9th from 9:00-10:00 a.m. at the Royal Lake dam

Saturday, April 19th from 9:00-11:00 for our big Earth Day cleanup at Royal Lake and its surrounding parks

We are also looking for a few volunteers to assist with leading some of the cleanup efforts, If interested Please email parks@kpwca.org .



A Royal Lake Winter



Photos by Suzanne Doherty

A hushed white world, where
branches bend,
A frozen stillness, no sound
to send.
The forest sleeps beneath a
snowy shroud,
A silent beauty, stark and
proud.

Edna St Vincent Millay





Photo by Suzanne Doherty

EDITORS: Paul and Kathy Gross
LAYOUT: Suzanne Doherty

Thank you from the FORL team for all your support

