



12/7/2014

The Honorable Aubrey Layne  
Secretary of Transportation  
Commonwealth of Virginia

The [Friends of Accotink Creek](#) (FACC) was outraged to discover that VDOT contractors had recently mowed broad swathes of the revegetating 495 corridor in the Accotink watershed. This section of 495 used to be densely forested, with many areas where you couldn't see the opposite lanes through the trees. During native plant rescues, prior to construction, we found these forest strips along the highway to be excellent native habitat.

All of this was lost during the construction of the 495 Express lanes. FACC [documented and reported](#) extensive construction-related negative impacts to the Accotink watershed. We partnered with the [Potomac Riverkeeper](#) in a lawsuit that resulted in improved enforcement by the Commonwealth of Virginia. FACC also supported the [Fairfax County Restoration Project](#) and its partners, including [Audubon Society of Northern Virginia](#), [Virginia Dept. of Forestry](#), [Virginia Native Plant Society](#), [Fairfax County Park Authority](#), and [Northern Virginia Soil & Water Conservation District](#). FCRP's effort resulted in an allocation of \$100 million for sound walls, mitigation, and restorative landscaping, and increased the use of innovative (for VDOT) restoration techniques, including native seed mixes, mulch blankets, enhanced stormwater detention, and emphasis on the use of native plants.

This partnership resulted in restorative landscaping that was a significant improvement over traditional VDOT landscaping practices. The use of wet meadows, the native seed mixes, and the extensive plantings of native plants and trees all supported and accelerated the reestablishment of native habitats and ecosystems along the disturbed 495 corridor. These activities were amplified by natural processes - the recolonization of the disturbed areas by adjacent remnant ecosystems.

FACC has watched the growth of thousands of oak seedlings, sumacs, sycamores, sweet gums, and other volunteer natives. So it was with great dismay and outrage that we saw that much of this area had been aggressively mowed. While planted trees were mostly respected, thousands of native plants, both planted by humans and native volunteers, were mown to the ground.

We are in conversation through the FCRP with VDOT about how to mitigate this damage and prevent its recurrence. While Nature always wins in the end, and many of the damaged plants will again reestablish themselves, FACC is concerned at the indifference and/or disrespect shown by VDOT in allowing this to happen. Accidents like this confirm that VDOT is not sufficiently aware of the importance of protecting and restoring native ecosystems, despite their spending millions of tax dollars on these plantings.

We will work with FCRP, VDOT, and our partners to help restore and protect these native ecosystems in the VDOT easement for the benefit of the Accotink watershed. Documenting pictures and commentary are available on our website here: [http://www.accotink.org/2014/HOTplanting\\_2014.htm](http://www.accotink.org/2014/HOTplanting_2014.htm)

Kris Unger, Primary Conservator, Friends of Accotink Creek

cc: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
local Virginia Delegates & Senators

**Friends of Accotink Creek :: 9306 St. Marks Pl, Fairfax, VA 22031-3047 :: [www.accotink.org](http://www.accotink.org)**

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