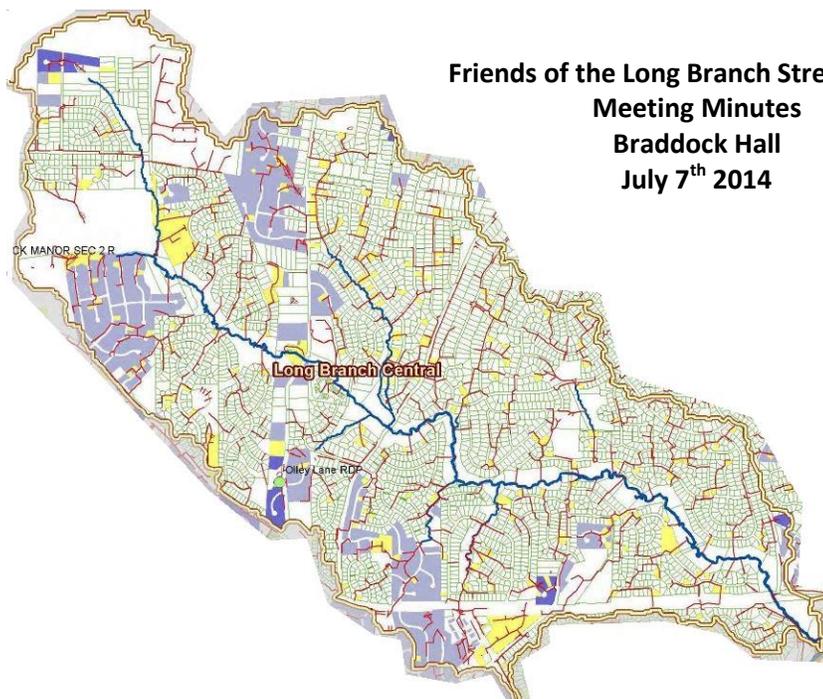


**Friends of the Long Branch Stream Valley
Meeting Minutes
Braddock Hall
July 7th 2014**



The meeting kicked off at about 7:05PM at Braddock Hall.

Kick Off

Supervisor John Cook provided opening remarks and said we are seeing erosion, degradation, and invasive species. We hope to form a group that will advocate for, maintain and help improve the Long Branch Stream Valley. We need help in these areas and the Friends Groups do that for the “wild” spaces that aren’t actual parks. All volunteer - put in what time you can. We have a list of many things that need to be done.

Introductions –

Attendees introduced themselves. Tony Vellucci said he had gotten several emails from community leaders who wanted to attend but were out of town for various reasons and said he hoped that more communities would have been represented. He thanked Long Branch and Stonehaven for sending representatives, and expressed his hope that the other invited communities (Rutherford, Red Fox Forest, Bradfield, Canterbury Woods) would send representatives to future meetings. Meeting attendees are at the end of these minutes.

There were several handouts provided by Supervisor Cook’s office. One handout showed a 1.72 acre infill donation property in the Long Branch Stream Valley just north of Olde Forge/Surrey Square. Tony noted that the Park Authority was in the process of acquiring the donation from Van Metre, and he would keep all informed as to its progress.

Purpose

Tony Vellucci said that he was hoping to form a Friends Group for the Long Branch Stream Valley by bringing together different communities who share a commonality – they border along the stream valley. He noted that while the Park Authority makes good use of Friends groups, we have not done so in the Braddock District as much, and that in forming this Friends group, he was looking to try to take a watershed perspective and a district perspective vice an individual community or park perspective to better serve the stream valley. He said that Lake Accotink Park gets a lot of trash from its tributaries and since Long Branch feeds into Accotink Creek, getting to it early means less trash downstream at the Lake Accotink Park marina and along the lake’s shore line.

Scope

The group then discussed what the scope of the Friend's group should be and briefly touched on the following topics: invasive management, trail safety; trail maintenance, trash removal, water quality monitoring. Chris Bauernshub (Stonehaven) recommended adding educational awareness - for all ages - to the list, and there was general consensus to do so.

Before discussing each item in depth, Tony asked Philip Latasa and Kris Unger, representatives from Friends of Accotink Creek (FACC) to provide an overview of the stream valley. They both walked a good part of the stream valley prior to the meeting and Philip Latasa provided the following initial evaluation:

- Surprisingly light on trash - one small raft found. Other attendees noted it could be because the stream valley is surrounded pretty much by communities of single family homes. Greg Sykes noted the trash he comes across as the IMA Site Leader at Royal Lake and that much of it comes from townhome communities that border the lake. In addition to finding trash behind dense townhouse communities, a lot of trash can be collected by following creek "tributaries" which lead to storm drain outfalls.
- Abundant fish were found. Most likely because there are significant pools of water along the way.
- Erosion is the main issue. It would be helpful to slow down the water flow out of yards by using rain barrels, etc.
- Some people who back up to the stream valley have thrown their yard debris into the park; thereby spreading the invasives planted in their yards and some are encroaching by mowing on park land.
- Some public access ways have been cut off by neighboring homeowners who have incorporated public land access into private yards.

[Editor's Note: Although not identified at the meeting, the complete results of Kris and Philip's analysis of Long Branch Stream Valley can be found at

<http://www.accotink.org/DMLongBranchCentralJune2014.htm>]

Invasive Management

Justin Roberson, Natural Resource Specialist, Natural Resource Management and Protection Branch, Fairfax County Park Authority (Phone:(703) 324-8586) provided an overview of a new piece of equipment the Park Authority Board recently authorized staff to purchase. For lack of a better name, it appears the term Invaserator is sticking. Park Authority staff tested the equipment on an autumn olive patch in Poplar Ford that had been taking over a meadow. The equipment knocks down trees up to 12 inches in diameter and chews up the debris. It has also been used in Rocky Run Stream Valley, and on such invasive species as Bradford pears and bamboo. After the Invaserator knocks down patches of heavy invasive infestation a contractor (Invasive Plant Control Company) comes in to apply an herbicide. After that, volunteers are needed to replant and to help check for plant regrowth.

The equipment cost about \$95,000 to purchase and the money came from monopole funds the Park Authority receives for having cell phone towers on park land. Park Authority staff is finishing up on the exact specs to place the order and hopes to have the Invaserator delivered sometime in the Fall. There are a couple of short videos that show what the Invaserator can do, and Tony said he would bring them to the next meeting. The videos are too large to email. He is hoping the Invaserator can be used on

several stretches of bamboo growth in the stream valley- especially across from the new bridge in Canterbury Woods - and that volunteers will take on the replanting and monitoring of stream valley sites.

Justin then continued talking about the Invasive Management Program. He said that there is only one other person in his office working the program - Erin Stocksclaeder, and so, the program is heavily dependent upon volunteers. He noted that there were two key IMA leaders in the room – Greg Sykes (Royal Lake IMA Site Coordinator) and Philip Latasa (Lake Accotink Park IMA Site Coordinator). He also noted that while several IMA site leaders just remove invasives, both Greg and Philip were actually restoring the sites to native vegetation and that their efforts were having a positive impact. He provided a brief overview of the IMA Site training program and said volunteers are trained and then advertise work days and organize other volunteers to do projects. He said he is always looking for new leaders to come forward to help.

Trail Safety

Margaret Thaxton (Stonehaven) talked about an attack on a female runner on the path in the stream valley and noted she was able to get away, but that she did not believe the runner reported the incident to the police and she had no further information on it. Tony noted that it would be important to get this type of information out to the communities to pass information about incidents, and that emails were probably the best way to do so now. He noted that there were patches along the trail where heavy brush obstructed a clear line of sight and that thinning out the forest would provide a less obstructed line of sight so that people could see ahead and feel safer. And, if the heavy brush was an invasive, then there would be no regret at removing the invasive to provide that line of sight.

Trail Maintenance-

Allison Hagner (Long Branch) noted the issue of trail maintenance and said that several portions of the trail have gotten so bad that hikers have started new trails to get around puddles of water that have formed. Greg Sykes cautioned about starting new trails as individuals do not always understand how their actions – even with the best of intentions – could cause greater damage. The group noted the possible need to close portions of the trail and rerouting at times, and that there would be a need and an opportunity to educate the community on why rerouting needs to be done, and how it should be done with the least impact to the environment. Stream valley trails do not always get all the attention they deserve. All of the Park Authority area managers are under adverse staffing pressure due to the constraints on the county budget and that the Area 4 Manager Ed Richardson not only has the stream valley, but also four lake parks he is responsible for – Lake Accotink Park, Burke Lake Park, Royal Lake Park and Woodglen Lake Park. Tony said that his community had taken on a trail project with Ed's assistance and he was able to get 20 volunteers to help out and knocked out the trail rehabilitation over a couple of weekends. Until the county budget improves, and staffing can be raised to pre-2008 levels, concerned residents can work with Park Authority personnel to help out especially helping to rehabilitate trails in the parks.

Trash Removal

Tony noted that while the Park Authority owns the land in the park, the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) owns the water – and especially the stormwater that runs through the parks, and so, as much as there is a relationship with the Park Authority, so too there should be one with DPWES. A key concern will be to see if DPWES can assist with a man-made trash trap that volunteers could empty out periodically so that trash is not scattered along the stream banks and does not make its way down to Lake Accotink's marina and shore line. There was also general consensus that trash days were a great activity for younger kids who may not have the attention span to participate in a water monitoring program, but could easily have fun getting wet, muddy and dirty (moms permitting) pulling

trash out of the stream banks.

Editor's Note: Danielle Wynne (DPWES) was afforded an opportunity to review the minutes and noted that, DPWES does not actually own the water – nor do they own the streams. The water “belongs” to the state, and DPWES has to get permission to work in the streams as much as anyone else.

Water Monitoring Program

Kris Unger and Philip Latasa talked about establishing a water quality monitoring program. noted what was involved, netting the invertebrates on the bottom of the stream – putting observations into a formula and getting readings and info and giving that to the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD). He said that the most important thing is to ensure getting readings from the same site. His readings for Accotink Creek get about a 4 out of 12 on water quality testing. Not good. He said that there are a couple of water quality monitoring sites at the lower end of the LBSV that had been tested historically but not recently. He reviewed the training program the NVSWCD has saying that training is simple with an open book test at the end to make sure volunteers can accurately identify the invertebrates; testing takes about two hours. Each site should be monitored 4 times a year. It makes sense to do it at the lower site and be able to maintain the testing for the long term. Good to consider getting involved doing some outreach with this - perhaps with Canterbury Woods Elementary School or the middle schools to get some community engagement.

After some discussion, the group identified an action item to coordinate with NVSWCD to determine whether the dormant LBSV monitoring sites were still viable, or whether new / different sites should be identified. Once we have that information, then we can seek volunteers who may be interested in measuring water quality and reporting the observations/results. Philip Latasa agreed to take on that action item.

Organizational Structure and Leadership

Tony said he was willing to work to get the group started, but that the leadership needed to come from the Long Branch Stream Valley communities. He said rather than coming up with a whole new set of volunteers, one idea might be to have the leadership rotate among the affected communities on a pre-determined schedule. One community/civic association or HOA could run it for 6 months and then change to another.

Tony asked how the Friends Group could work with the BDC and asked if they could use the BDC website. Cliff Keenan said the BDC website was not that dynamic so Philip Latasa offered using the Friends of Accotink Creek website (accotink.org). FACC could accommodate us and give us a page or feature projects on their site. Tony noted that currently the Friends of Lake Accotink Park (FLAP) were making use of the FACC website. With that, there was consensus to leverage the synergy of having Long Branch Stream Valley information on the FACC website. Philip noted that, just as Long Branch is a tributary of Accotink Creek, we should consider the possible benefits of the Friends of Long Branch being in some sense a “tributary” of FACC.

Kris Unger said that apparently there are three different tributaries that are all called Long Branch - a north one in the Merrifield area, and a south one down by Franconia Springfield Metro and then ours (central), and the others are on the FACC website also.

Meeting frequency –

Tony noted that with new groups, his experience has been to have several meetings up front, but there was a general consensus to not have a meeting in August – especially given the attendance at the

current meeting. The next meeting will be scheduled for Monday September 22nd 2014 at Braddock Hall.

Legal -

Tony noted that obviously it was way early to talk about becoming a 501(c3), but that it could be a future goal for the organization. Kris Unger noted that FACC has a 501(c3) application pending and is looking to receive the designation soon, but in the meantime, has been working with the Fairfax County Park Foundation. Tony also noted everyone should be aware of the Chesapeake Bay Act and Resource Protection Areas (RPAs).

Coordination With Other Entities--

Tony said that Friends groups usually establish a relationship with the FCPA, but that he thought it was too early to do so. Depending upon how the organization matures, it might be something to do in a year or so to figure out what each side can bring to the table.

As mentioned, DPWES owns the water, and so while an agreement with FCPA is important, we should also see what agreement might be beneficial to establish with DPWES. A DPWES rep (Danielle Wynne) was invited to attend but could not and Tony said he would ensure she gets a copy of the minutes, and an invite to the next meeting.

Supervisor's Office / Braddock District Council – Tony asked Cliff Keenan to speak about how the two organizations could work together. Cliff said it is difficult to get involvement unless there is some hot button issue. Cliff did recommend reaching out to NOVA and/or Mason to get students involved that are studying environmental management.

As a discussion item, attendees noted the age appropriate activities the group could provide and that using Boy and Girl Scout Troops to help with getting certain projects accomplished should also be investigated.

Lastly, Tony noted that FLAP recently established a newsletter that has been enthusiastically received by members and others in the community. He said that too might be a goal of the group, but for now, emails might be the best way of conveying information.

With that, the attendees focused on action items and upcoming activities that could be supported.

Future Activities

- “Follow the Water” Walk (August 30th 2014)
Kids Long Branch Stream Valley Education Day / Nature Hike -
The walk seeks to reinforce educational awareness to residents of all ages – although it is primarily geared to children. It will be held on Saturday August 30th at both 9:00 AM and 11:00AM. Meeting locations to be determined. Representatives from Friends of Accotink Creek will provide a 45-50 minute walk (Stream Valley 101) providing general information about a stream valley's ecology and why some actions are harmful - like mowing to the water's edge. They will also point out invasive and native plants, discuss water quality, erosion issues and answer any questions children, or their parents might have. The walks will be advertised in Supervisor Cook's Beacon and by email.
- September Meeting (September 22nd 2014)
- District Wide Long Branch Stream Valley Clean Up (October 18th 2014)

Oct 18th is the Lake Accotink Park Watershed Clean Up Day for Fall 2014. Since this date is already scheduled, Tony noted it would also be a good date to hold a Long Branch Stream Valley Clean Up. This far in advance would allow the date to be advertised and coordinating it with Lake Accotink Park provides for a district watershed perspective vice an individual park / community perspective.

The meeting adjourned at about 9:15 PM.

Meeting Attendees

Braddock District Supervisor

John Cook (Supervisor)

Lindsey Smith (Staff Park Liaison)

Fairfax County Park Authority

Tony Vellucci (Braddock District Representative to the Park Authority Board)

Justin Roberson (Resource Management Division)

Greg Sykes (Royal Lake IMA Site Manager) (Volunteer)

Friends of Accotink Creek (FACC)

Kris Unger (President/Primary Conservator)

Suzy Foster (Secondary Conservator)

Philip Latasa (Chronicler)

Friends of Lake Accotink Park (FLAP)

Jim Hickey (Secretary)

Suzanne Dorick

Braddock District Council

Cliff Keenan (Chairman)

Long Branch

Alan Rulis

Allison Hagner

Stonehaven

Chris Bauernshub

Margaret Thaxton