Response of Candidate Rachna Sizemore Heizer
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Friends of Accotink Creek

Watershed Questions for Braddock Supervisor Candidates – 2025

1. Resource Protection Areas and floodplains delineated along our streams and rivers are designed to limit erosion and protect our citizens from flooding. Yet these undeveloped protected zones offer a tempting target for developers hungry for low-cost alternatives to redeveloping in built-up locations. Additionally, they provide appealing "undeveloped" land for government works projects. What can Fairfax County do to maintain protections along our waterways intact?

For long-term safety and resilience of our public lands and private properties, Fairfax County must prioritize the preservation of Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and floodplains, as these zones are vital for preventing erosion and protecting residents from flooding. This is especially important as we deal with the more extreme weather events driven by climate change. These areas should never be viewed as affordable land for development, whether for private developers or county projects. In addition, to uphold the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, it is essential to enhance enforcement and focus new development in already built-up areas. The county must resist internal and external pressures to compromise RPAs, ensuring that environmental health and community safety remain the primary factors in land-use decisions.

2. Conservation corridors permit genetic flow of flora and fauna species between habitat areas, helping to prevent localized extinctions. What can Fairfax County do to preserve and enhance conservation corridors on county property, in county projects, and on private property?

Preserving and enhancing conservation corridors is vital for supporting wildlife, maintaining genetic diversity, and ensuring ecosystem health. Fairfax County can still meaningfully expand and strengthen conservation corridors by combining smart land-use policy, strategic restoration, and strong community partnerships. We can achieve this by addressing corridor protections in the Comprehensive Plan, expanding native plantings on county properties, and encouraging private landowners to engage in habitat conservation efforts. We can map ecological corridors—especially stream valleys—so that connectivity becomes a required consideration in every redevelopment, rezoning, and site plan review. Collaborating with environmental organizations, neighborhood groups, and schools can strengthen community stewardship, while comprehensive public education can help residents understand the importance of maintaining ecological connectivity.

Dense suburban infrastructure does not have to be a barrier; it can be redesigned to support ecological connectivity. We can partner with community organizations, utilities, and private businesses to retrofit roads, bridges, utility easements, and county-owned properties with green bridges, underpasses, pollinator plantings, native meadows, and green roofs that link fragmented habitats. Improving corridor quality also requires managing invasive species and restoring native plants at scale through coordinated programs that involve parks, public works, stormwater management, and volunteer groups.

3. Fairfax County adopted the Fairfax Green Initiatives to address climate change. Yet every day, trees, Nature's simplest carbon sequestration device, are sacrificed in favor of asphalt which increases heat island effect. This is often

done in the name of other environmental goals, such as bicycle paths or stormwater ponds. What can Fairfax County do to reverse the trend of tree cover loss?

To address the ongoing loss of tree canopy, the Counties tree strategy must balance mobility and stormwater management with environmental protection. This strategy should include the implementation of a "No Net Tree Loss" policy, updating development requirements to ensure that any removed trees are replaced or offset, enforcing stricter regulations on developers, and incorporating tree canopy assessments into all capital projects. Fairfax County can maintain clear canopy goals, map priority planting areas, and provide technical expertise, while private partners—such as HOAs, developers, nonprofits, utilities, and local businesses—can be partnered with to encourage contribution of land access, funding, and volunteer capacity. Fairfax County can implement streamlined permitting, and recognition programs, and can work with the State to develop incentives like grants, native tree rebates to motivate private property owners to plant and maintain trees on land the government cannot reach. Partnerships with schools, faith communities, and civic associations expand planting sites and help restore aging canopy in established neighborhoods.

When combined with long-term maintenance agreements, species diversity guidelines, and educational outreach, these collaborations create a cost-effective, scalable model that replaces lost trees, strengthens ecosystem health, and ensures the suburban canopy grows in a sustainable, resilient way.

4. In 2017, a TMDL plan for Accotink Creek was approved addressing sediment and chloride, however Accotink Creek remains an "impaired stream" and benthic invertebrate sampling remains solidly as unacceptable. What if anything would you propose to improve the health of the Accotink watershed?

Accotink Creek is still facing pollution issues, particularly from sediment and chloride, and effective solutions must target these problems at their sources. The County should work on upgrading outdated stormwater systems, reduce impervious surfaces through redevelopment and retrofitting, and enhance strategies for reducing chloride levels. Implementing upstream sediment controls, exploring innovative solutions such as floating wetlands or aeration, and obtaining stronger support from state and federal levels are crucial steps.

The most effective strategies focus on keeping soil in place before it reaches the water. Fairfax County can partner with community organizations and property owners to stabilize stream banks with native vegetation, install riparian buffers, and manage stormwater through rain gardens, bioswales, and other green infrastructure that slows runoff and allows sediment to settle. On construction sites, the county must enforce erosion and sediment controls, such as silt fences, stabilized entrances, and timely re-vegetation. In addition, county roadway and development projects can incorporate permeable pavements and improved drainage to slow flow into streams

In addition, community involvement is essential to reducing high chloride levels in local streams because many of the most significant sources—road salt on sidewalks and driveways, water softener use, lawn care choices—are controlled directly by residents, HOAs, and local businesses. Fairfax County can drive education campaigns to teach people how overuse of de-icing salt harms freshwater ecosystems, corrodes infrastructure, and raises long-term water treatment costs, while offering practical alternatives such as applying salt sparingly, using sand or calcium magnesium acetate, and shoveling early and often. Partnering with community groups to implement neighborhood workshops, scout or school projects, and volunteer stream monitoring programs will help residents see the connection between their choices and stream health. Partnerships with civic associations and shopping centers can encourage responsible salting practices in parking lots, while "Salt Smart Community" pledges give HOAs and businesses simple standards to adopt. By empowering residents with knowledge, tools, and recognition, our local communities can collectively reduce chloride pollution and protect Accotink Creek for the long term.

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5. Fairfax County is pursuing a program of stream restoration projects to reduce stream erosion. Yet the cause of the erosion lies not in the streams, but in upland built-up areas. How can Fairfax County directly address the excessive runoff from paved surfaces that is the prime cause of stream erosion?

Both upland runoff and the conditions of the streams themselves causes the erosion observed in many waterways. Therefore, for stream restoration to be effective the County should prioritize stormwater interventions aimed at preventing runoff before it reaches the streams. These interventions include permeable pavements, green roofs, expanded vegetation, and rain gardens. Additionally, upgrading aging stormwater infrastructure during redevelopment is crucial. Revisiting zoning and land-use policies that contribute to the growth of impervious surfaces can also help reduce long-term erosion. Focusing on prevention strategies is more effective and cost-efficient than repeatedly repairing streams.

6. The Long Branch Central Project, is a series of such stream restoration projects, focused on a single sub-watershed upstream from Lake Accotink. It's scale offers the opportunity to inspire neighbors to engage in complimentary stormwater control projects on private property. How can more public education and inclusion enhance the effectiveness of the project?

The Long Branch Central Project can serve as a model for stream restoration efforts. To enhance success and expand to other sub-watersheds, the County should prioritize early and ongoing outreach that leverages community organizations such as HOAs, school environmental clubs, Scouts, local nurseries, and environmental groups. The County can provide and facilitate workshops on rain gardens and stormwater-friendly landscaping, publicly share project impacts through transparent dashboards, and engage residents as ambassadors for the initiative. When people understand the environmental benefits and view themselves as partners in the effort, the chances of successful restoration increase significantly.

7. The future of Lake Accotink is being decided now. Sediment buildup from excessive erosion is accumulating in Lake Accotink at a rate that has defied solutions for nine years of study and counting. Decisions on the lake's future should offer hope for preservation of the sole surviving freshwater mussel population downstream and addition of fish/eel passage. What is your position on the future of Lake Accotink?

The future of Lake Accotink demands a careful, transparent, and science-based approach that safeguards both recreational use and ecological health, including the wellbeing of downstream mussels and migratory fish. A balanced solution could involve targeted dredging, the expansion of wetlands, upstream sediment controls, and necessary upgrades for dam safety. Some community members have suggested exploring a marsh transition similar to that at Huntley Meadows, which could provide long-term ecological benefits. It is essential that the decision-making process includes meaningful public engagement and timely action.

8. Streams in Fairfax County are plagued by accumulations of immortal plastic trash that originates on paved surfaces and flows down storm drains. Volunteer stream cleanups are merely a bandaid approach when surgery is needed. What can or should the county do to address trash in Accotink Creek and other streams?

Preventing plastic waste from entering Accotink Creek and other waterways requires more than just occasional cleanups. Fairfax County should prioritize source reduction by expanding zero-waste initiatives, enforcing littering and illegal dumping laws more vigorously, and partnering with businesses to minimize single-use plastics. Installing storm drain filters and trash traps, along with promoting public education on proper waste disposal, can significantly reduce pollution downstream. Additionally, programs like Operation Stream Shield demonstrate how environmental efforts can be combined with supportive services that benefit vulnerable communities.

9. Americana Drive in Annandale is plagued by continual dumping of construction waste, auto repair liquids and parts, household goods, mattresses, and landscaping wastes. Our next Americana Drive cleanup is Nov. 11th and

candidates are welcome. Anyone is welcome to try to solve the problems of Americana Drive at the source. As supervisor, how could you aid this distressed neighborhood?

Americana Drive requires a coordinated response from multiple agencies to address ongoing illegal dumping and environmental degradation. Proposed solutions include stricter enforcement with significant fines, the use of surveillance tools like cameras in areas prone to dumping, and collaboration among the FCPD, DCC, DPWES, VDOT, public health, and waste management authorities. Physical measures such as barriers or fencing could also help restrict access to dumping sites. Additionally, it is crucial to involve residents in identifying both the problems and potential solutions, possibly through the establishment of a dedicated task force that includes community members, county staff, and service providers.

10. Fairfax County is collaborating with Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in developing a Northern Virginia road salt management strategy to reduce salt contamination of aquifers, streams, and drinking water. What steps can Fairfax County take to address this issue?

To reduce salt contamination in streams and aquifers, a comprehensive strategy that relies on data, training, and community involvement is essential. Fairfax County should enhance training for both contractors and staff on proper salt application, collaborate with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to adopt best practices, and explore alternative methods such as using brine. Additionally, public outreach efforts should educate residents and commercial property owners—who significantly contribute to the issue through sidewalk and driveway salting—on efficient and environmentally friendly winter practices. Implementing real-time monitoring and public dashboards could also promote transparency and accountability.

11. The Braddock Road Project proposes to eliminate roadside tree cover in favor of asphalt multi-use paths on both sides. A number of neighbors suggest one side would be enough. Can you comment on the trade-offs being made for this project and specifically how you feel natural resources protection aligns with capital works projects?

Natural resources protection should be an integral part of planning and implementation of capital works projects. Any redesign of Braddock Road must carefully balance multimodal mobility improvements with the preservation of tree canopy and the protection of ecosystems. Enhancing safety and accessibility with the implementation of multimodal paths must be implemented with minimal impact on tree cover. The County should prioritize designs that preserve as many trees as possible, incorporate public feedback from the earliest stages, and ensure that natural resource protection is treated as a fundamental aspect of capital project planning, rather than an afterthought.

12. Cinder Bed Road Bikeway is in Franconia District, but the pointless degradation of forest habitat, the loss of globally rare wetlands, the squandering of millions in taxpayer dollars when taxes are rising and budgets must be slashed, and the taking of private lands to accomplish all this are countywide issues. Should Fairfax County take the opportunity to direct the Bikeway onto nearby existing routes at far lesser environmental and financial cost?

Considering the substantial environmental and financial costs associated with the proposed Cinder Bed Road Bikeway alignment—particularly its effects on forest habitats and globally rare wetlands—the County should explore all options for the bikeway, provided they offer similar connectivity. Any final decision must include a comprehensive review of community input, transportation needs, environmental impacts, and public spending. It is essential to thoroughly evaluate alternatives that result in less harm and lower costs.

13. In the county planning process two concerns have consistently been seen. 1) Far too short of time for community input or lack of communication in order to provide input AND, 2) Examining environmental factors happens too late in the planning process. Generally speaking, after the train has left the station, there is NO turning back leading to frustrated and angry citizenry. Can you provide when in the planning process you believe looking at environmental factors are important, and how you would ensure communication for input is sufficient?

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Environmental considerations and community engagement should begin at the very start of the planning process. Too often, residents aren't aware of opportunities to provide input until decisions have already been made. To mitigate this issue, the County should require early environmental impact reviews, provide clear and accessible communication about projects, extend comment periods, and ensure outreach is multilingual and equitable. The County must have and follow established guidelines for early engagement and transparency to prevent wasted resources, build community trust, and lead to better environmental outcomes.

14. When is the best time to plant a tree?

A – Now
B – 20 years ago
C -- All of the Above

C -- All of the Above - The best time to plant a tree is both twenty years ago and today. We should constantly be focused on tree planting, and improving our tree canopy. It's also important to focus on native species that support local ecosystems. Expanding the canopy now will ensure that future generations inherit a healthier and more resilient Fairfax County.

♦ **Think about your watershed as a candidate asking voters to put our future into your hands.** ♦

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