



WINTER 2022

Vol. 4, No.1

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NEWSLETTER



Photo by Kathy Gross (January 3, 2022)

SO MUCH ACCOMPLISHED; MORE TO DO

The snowy day photo heading this issue of the newsletter showcases the beauty of the Royal Lake area in a way that invites us to reflect on its preservation throughout the seasons! Since its beginning, Friends Of Royal Lake (FORL) has launched numerous projects on behalf of its parks. The FORL team hopes to gather additional community feedback about how best to meet the needs of park users.

FORL Actions Impact Ecosystem

By Sarah Lennon

One aspect of FORL's efforts that is not often highlighted is the positive impact we have on our natural environment.

Picking up trash is important to keep the park more pleasant and beautiful, but the bigger impact is that there is less downstream pollution and contamination of a body of water that flows into the Atlantic Ocean!

Improving the circuit trail so that it is easier to walk also helps protect the natural habitat of many animals by keeping people and their leashed pets on a designated walkway and out of ecologically sensitive areas.

Managing invasive species also protects our local ecosystem. Non-native plants compete with and dislodge species that evolved specifically to live here. These plants degrade the soil, leading to erosion that can lower water quality. They crowd out and can kill important tree species that provide shade and habitat for native wildlife.

We welcome and are so grateful for everyone's help in protecting our small corner of the natural world.

New FORL Vision Plan in the Works

by Sarah Lennon

As we kick off what we all hope will be a better year than the ones in recent past, the Friends of Royal Lake team wants to share some reasons **why** FORL was created and **why** it is important to all. FORL has several purposes. Many of you may be familiar with FORL's coordination of volunteer efforts in the parks, such as quarterly trail maintenance, trash cleanup days, and removal of invasive plants. Another equally important purpose of FORL is to advocate for the community concerning Royal Lake Parks to strengthen the parks' programs and facilities to enhance the parks that benefit the community.

Our advocacy is most effective when we come together as a community. In 2018, we did just that, when FORL put together a comprehensive "Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake Parks." The Vision Plan provided a road map of proposed maintenance and capital improvement projects. What made the Vision Plan so important was the community participation in its development that highlighted what people liked about the parks, how they used them, and what the community wanted to see improved. The community's comments were gathered through a SurveyMonkey, several community discussion forums, and wrapped up

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FORL CELEBRATES VISION PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

by Paul Gross

In the previous article we talked about the importance of the initial Royal Lake Community Vision Plan. Before the development of the Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) Vision Plan, the project undertaken was to advocate and raise funds for the exercise equipment around Royal Lake trail. Additionally, Royal Lake was dredged and silt was removed in a multi-million-dollar project. FORL acted as a community focal point for the dredging project. Also, a volunteer team assisted county ecologists in rescuing native freshwater mussels.

Since the Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) Community Vision Plan for Royal Lake Parks was issued in 2018, a number of significant upgrade projects have been completed. The list below highlights those projects that were completed by either FORL volunteers or Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA); also, by collaborative efforts of FORL and FCPA, Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), and other Fairfax government organizations. FORL has supported several Eagle Scout projects and become a strong partner with the KPW Civic Association.

Royal Lake Projects Completed Since Vision Plan of 2018:

- ★ Installed additional steps in multiple steep areas just south and north of Lakeview Swim Club to facilitate usage by park patrons.
- ★ Removed overhanging tree limbs at the path from Richardson Drive to Lakeside Park and laid down wood chips on the trail from Richardson Drive to soccer fields.
- ★ Planted shade trees in Lakeside Park by the picnic area and along the path from basketball courts to Little League field.
- ★ Removed juniper bushes along trail from Little League field to Craven bridge. Upgraded trail next to the bridge at Rabbit Branch.
- ★ Added new trail segment to the Royal Lake circuit trail for safety to reduce pedestrian traffic through Lakeside parking lot.
- ★ Replaced small bridge at the edge of Lakeside soccer field with a culvert. Installed dog waste stations at Lakeside Park and Royal Lake Park.
- ★ Developed drainage system to remove standing water on the road/trail between Rabbit branch and Lakeside parking lot.
- ★ Paved trail at both parks in high traffic areas to park facilities (playgrounds, ball field, tennis courts, etc). Access to these facilities is ADA-compliant.
- ★ Upgraded trails by spreading crushed stone on areas prone to erosion and/or flooding and installed culverts to improve drainage in the area between the dam and Shane's Creek.
- ★ Removed extensive invasive plants and planted native plants in all areas of the park.
- ★ Removed trash during quarterly clean up days led by volunteer teams at Lakeside, Royal Lake, Crooked Creek and Rabbit Branch parks.

16 TONS OF CRUSHED STONE LATER...

By Andy Karp

On November 27 and December 4, Boy Scouts from Troop 1966 and community volunteers organized by Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) worked together to maintain and improve the trail around our beautiful lake while enjoying the camaraderie of friends and neighbors. Ryan Pittman (pictured just behind the wheelbarrow below) led the effort as part of his Eagle Scout project.



A wonderful assortment of neighbors joined in this endeavor including Scouts and their leaders, parents with helpful youngsters, Robinson High School students, and a couple of energetic retirees in their 70's. Also, Kathy Gross, who modestly didn't count herself as being one of the volunteers because she did not lift a shovel, handled the sign-in sheets and took some of the photographs that accompany this article.

The work consisted of installing two 24-inch diameter culverts across the trail, and placing crushed stone over

nearby sections of the Royal Lake trail where puddles form after even moderate rainfall. The section of trail that was worked on is only a few inches higher than the lake, and in the past the trail had been built up so that it would not be regularly flooded whenever it rains.

However, the raised trail became the equivalent of a dike, holding back water in the surrounding woodland from flowing into the lake. For that reason, culverts are needed. Otherwise, prolonged flooding in the woodland could endanger the natural habitat, killing trees that cannot survive waterlogged soil. Also, a water saturated dike-like trail causes the trail to swell upwards during freezing conditions and then settle in damaged condition when the weather warms up.

Last May community volunteers organized by FORL, together with employees of the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) installed low-profile wooden culverts across the trail here. The wooden culverts worked well until a heavy rain in September caused the lake level to rise and cover the trail with a couple of feet of water, resulting in the wooden culverts floating up and away from where they belonged. To avoid a repeat of this problem, FCPA and FORL decided that large-diameter metal culverts should replace the low-profile wooden ones. This was a major project because about **sixteen tons of crushed stone** had to be brought by wheelbarrows from the nearest place with truck access, which was 750 feet away.



(Vision plan, Cont'd)

with a meeting for community-wide consensus. We then presented the Vision Plan to the FCPA and other county officials, including past and present Braddock District Supervisors. Our Plan was favorably accepted, and much has been accomplished since completing and issuing the Vision Plan in partnership with County organizations, local groups, and community members like all of you reading this newsletter!

**SURVEY MONKEY*
COMING SOON TO
YOUR DOORSTEP**

We now want to build on successful park enhancements. In the FORL leadership's estimation, it is time for an updated Vision Plan. We are preparing a new survey and will schedule several community-wide meetings to gain input for the new Vision Plan. For the meetings, we will also invite park and county officials to discuss key issues.

The survey and upcoming meeting will be your opportunity to express your views and discuss them with others in our community.

Please look for upcoming announcements (emails, FORL website: www.friendsofroyallake.org, Facebook: [@facebook.com/friendsofroyallake](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofroyallake), and on Next Door) about how you can participate in developing a vision for enhancing the Royal Lake parks and giving some TLC to Mother Nature.

Two final and important notes from Paul Gross: First, we want to send a heartfelt THANK YOU to the many volunteers for their efforts over the years. We started with outstanding community support for the exercise equipment installed by FCPA; continued with support through the development of the Vision Plan; enjoyed ongoing support for the many volunteer work projects in service of the vision plan. FORL is very grateful for all our caring and community-minded neighbors. Secondly, the work is not done! Come join us in 2022; let us know what is important to you and contribute your effort to help improve our little corner of the world!

REMEMBER...

Martin Luther King Day (1/17/22) is a designated day of service. (May be dependent on weather conditions!)

Invasive Management Area site leaders plan to lead a workday tackling invasive species in Royal Lake parks. To sign up to help, contact Mary Boyer (nickmaryanne@yahoo.com), Suzanne Doherty (jewelboxgardensbysuzanne@gmail.com) or the FCPA volunteer program (fairfaxcounty.gov/volunteer.org)

KPWCA is sponsoring a community clean-up at Rabbit Branch Park, off Tapestry Drive from 9-11AM on Martin Luther King day, January 17.

Be prepared to clean up and walk through wooded and potentially wet areas of the park. Please wear boots, work-gloves and appropriate weather related clothing. We'll have trash bags to distribute.

We ask that everyone practice appropriate social distancing and wear face coverings (mask/bandanna).

We are seeking neighbors of ALL AGES to help us out. Every age can participate and support this community day of service.

For more information contact Tom McCook (kpwwroadraiders@gmail.com)

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

Martin Luther King

*Survey Monkey is an online survey tool to elicit ideas, opinions, and recommendations that FORL will use to design an updated Vision Plan for meeting the needs of park enthusiasts.

(16 Tons, Cont'd)



Thank you to all who turned out to help with this project!!!

This was the third and final set of trail maintenance workdays with FORL involvement in 2021. Previous workdays were held in May and August. It is anticipated that a similar sequence of workdays will take place in 2022. These workdays are an opportunity to enjoy the company of friends and neighbors as we keep the trail around our beautiful lake in good condition for everyone to enjoy.



The crushed stone had to then be placed as a mound over each culvert, with minimal slope to allow easy walking on the trail going over them.

The loading and wheelbarrowing of sixteen tons of material brings to mind a number one song from long ago, about "you load sixteen tons and what do you get?" The song was about hard-working coal miners who were poorly paid with credit vouchers, whereas our Scouts and community volunteers have been well-paid with the satisfaction of maintaining the trail for friends and neighbors to enjoy, with students earning community service hours and Scouts completing advancement requirements.

Over two days, a total of eight hours of muscle strengthening aerobic exercise was done by ten Scouts and eleven community volunteers. The first day was the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend, with everyone cheerfully burning off calories from Thanksgiving dinner, although it was bitter cold out. The work was completed the next Saturday when we were blessed with spring-like weather. The FCPA provided the new culverts and crushed stone.

IN CASE YOU ARE WONDERING....

16 tons equals 32,000 pounds!

...3 average size elephants

...1 semi 16 wheeler truck

...68 bushels of apples

...32,000 blocks of butter

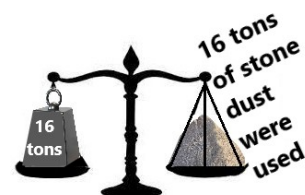




Photo by John Gratz

REFLECTIONS ON A WINTER DAY

By Suzanne Doherty

It doesn't take much snow to beckon sledders to the slopes of Royal Lake parks and the merest dusting on natural surfaces is a feast for the photographer's eye. Our January snow storm was cause for celebration for many!

Winter is not my favorite season—give me a sun drenched beach closer to the equator any time! But I have learned to appreciate winter's often unexpected beauty when I wake to a world sheathed in snow. I love to walk the park trails after a snow storm to see the natural world very differently—sharp edges softened; trees frosted against a cobalt sky; the rounded lumps and bumps of snow shrouded terrain; ice-defined

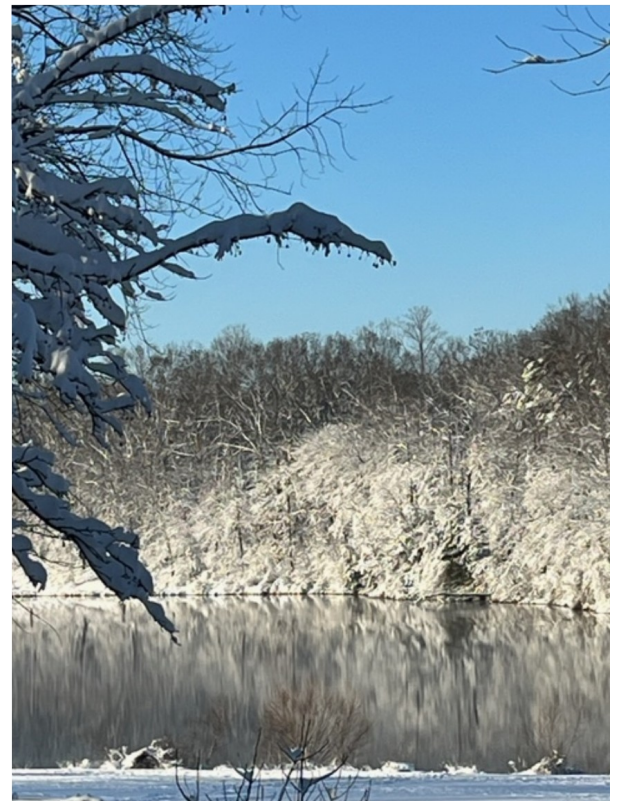


Photo by Kathy Gross



Photo by Cindy Quinn

branches sparkling in the sun. AND I love to watch children cavorting on a snowy hill.

We think of winter as the end of the growing season—nature's quiet retreat. Above ground, plants are withered and dried (except for some of the invasive plants!). Overt signs of plant life, absent. For humans, winter can be a cruel season: cold and dreary and the nights go on forever. Beneath the snow, however, nature slumbers. (Cont'd) 6

Winter, Cont'd

This season of quiet stillness is the necessary prelude for the renewed life promised in spring.

This winter reflection brings me to my stepping away from serving as editor of this FORL newsletter. The winter issue seems a fitting space to acknowledge this ending for me. My personal winter offers me time to think about where to go, how to serve next. I have so much appreciated the support given me by the FORL team and by members of the Royal Lake community who have contributed articles and photos to make the newsletter possible. Thank you all!



Photo by Suzie Xu



NEWSLETTER EDITOR WANTED

After three years and twelve seasonal issues, Suzanne Doherty is stepping down from serving as the editor of the FORL newsletter.

Consequently, the FORL leadership team is looking for someone in the community willing and able to take up the role of FORL newsletter editor. Suzanne will gladly help a volunteer make the transition into the task.

For more information or to jump right in to the role, please contact
Suzanne (jewelboxgardensbysuzanne@gmail.com),
Paul Gross (paul.grossjr@verizon.net), or
Sarah Lennon (sarahgjlennon@gmail.com).

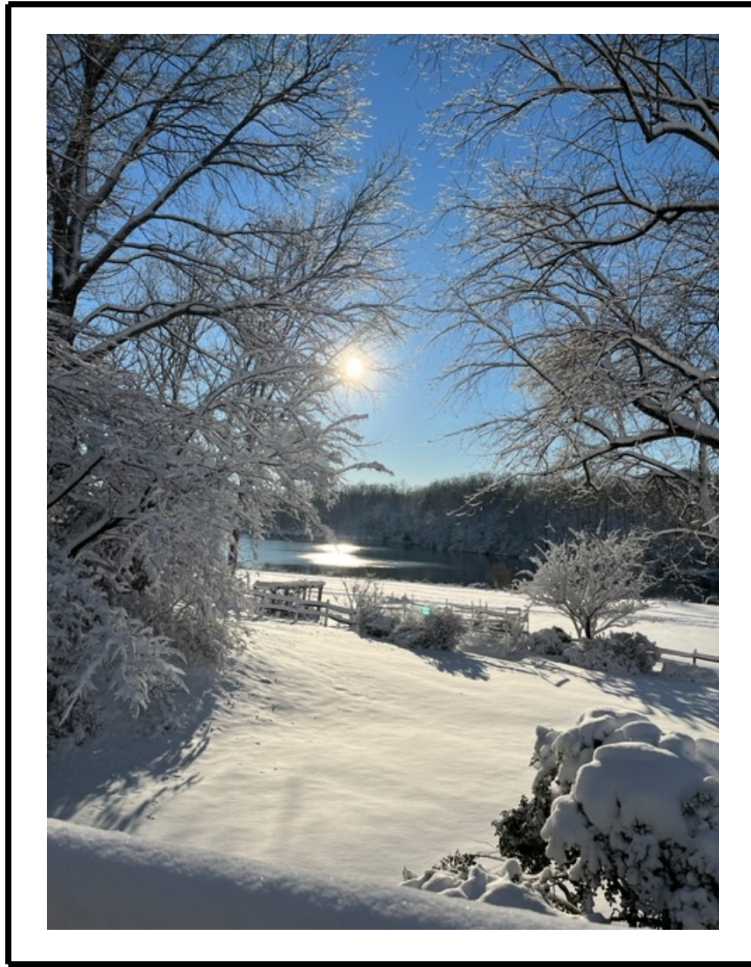


Photo by Kathy Gross

EDITOR of this issue: Suzanne Doherty

EDITOR of future issues: To Be Announced



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