



Spring 2023 Newsletter

“One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring.” - Aldo Leopold

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Spring has arrived at Leopold’s Preserve! If you visit the wetland just before dusk you might be lucky enough to hear the loud chorus of Spring Peepers and Red-Winged Blackbirds singing as they search for mates. We had the good fortune last week to observe a Woodcock perform his elaborate mating ritual at twilight, as Michael from the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy taught us all about this unique bird. There’s still time to take in the sights and sounds of spring. Come enjoy the 7 miles of hiking trails on your own, or join our next guided spring naturalist hike on April 1st.

It is with much gratitude that I make the bittersweet announcement that I will be taking a position with another like-minded organization. I will be working for our partner organization, the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, to continue the good work of conserving land in our region. I’m moving on to this next chapter of my life with so much appreciation for the time I’ve spent with the WHFF and for my interactions with all of you.

I am leaving the WHFF and Leopold’s Preserve in good hands and heading in a great direction. I’m so proud of where we are today, and I look forward to many good things to come. I will not be a stranger in my new role, and I hope to see you on the trails!

Laura Hassell, WHFF Executive Director



Nancy Vehrs lectured to a full house about spring wildflowers.

WINTER LECTURE SERIES

Our Winter Lectures wrapped up this month with a record number of participants! We are so glad that everyone enjoyed this series of indoor educational programs and are excited to be continuing the series next winter in partnership with the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy. Special thanks to our excellent speakers - Dave Larsen ([Virginia Society of Ornithology](#)), Valerie Huelsman ([Virginia Cooperative Extension](#)), Alison Zak ([Human-Beaver Coexistence Fund](#)), and Nancy Vehrs ([Virginia Native Plant Society](#)) - for leading engaging discussions about a variety of natural topics.

We hope to keep the momentum of this series going by offering programs year-round on the first Wednesday of each month. Join us on April 5th for Art in the Park! This event will feature art sessions led by local experts, open to artists of all ages and skill levels. Choose between nature journaling, plein air painting, and nature photography. [Click here to learn more and register for an art session!](#)



Invasive vines like Japanese Honeysuckle strangle native trees, scarring and eventually killing them.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT LEOPOLD'S

Updates from the Preserve

Invasive Plant Management

Invasive species are non-native organisms whose introduction causes or is likely to cause environmental harm. There are many reasons to manage invasive species in natural areas- they can alter ecosystem processes, structure, composition, and the genetic makeup of native species populations.

Over 19 species of invasive vines, plants, grasses, and shrubs have been identified at Leopold's Preserve, and eradication is ongoing. Park manager Nick Davis has many responsibilities, including managing invasive species at Leopold's. You too can help prevent the spread of invasive species by following these guidelines:

- Clean your hiking gear
- Check your pet's paws when hiking with them
- Volunteer at removal efforts
- Plant native species in your garden

Vine Clearing Volunteers

As our large-scale invasive species management plans have progressed this winter, it's high time for us to have a large-scale volunteer program to match. We are pleased to be offering the opportunity for trained volunteers to work independently on invasive vine removal in the Preserve. Attend one of our upcoming training sessions to learn about vine identification and removal, then come back to the Preserve at any time to complete service hours on your own. [Next training: 4/22.](#)



PARTNERSHIP WITH RIVER FARM

We have partnered with the [American Horticultural Society](#) (AHS) to manage invasive species at their headquarters, historic River Farm in Alexandria, Virginia. We facilitated forestry mulching across 5 acres of the property, tackling the worst areas of infestation. Now, we are working with AHS to cultivate a group of dedicated volunteers who can help with the next phase of invasive plant management. Park Manager Nick Davis will be at River Farm on March 18th to provide guidance at the first of their many volunteer workdays! If you'd like to help, contact volunteer@ahsgardening.org.



Spring peeper

Seasonal Observations

- Red Maple blooms
- Virginia Pennywort
- Spring Peeper
- River Otter
- Ring Necked Duck
- Wood Duck
- American Woodcock

PLEIN ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP

We are now accepting scholarship applications for the 2023-2024 academic year! Students can receive up to \$15,000 over the course of four years to support their studies in an environmental field. Please share with any high school seniors or current students at Northern Virginia Community College who may be interested! Applications close on April 28th. More details are available on our website, www.whfarmfoundation.org/scholarships.

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: JON HINKLE

Jon has been volunteering at Leopold's Preserve since before we were even open to the public! His diligent stewardship inspired our annual trash cleanup day, where a team of volunteers focuses on cleaning up an abandoned dump site that he discovered in 2020. At this year's cleanup, volunteers removed two dumpsters full of trash from the site.

As a resident of the nearby Villages of Piedmont neighborhood, Jon often visits the Preserve to complete volunteer work on his own time. He also enjoys observing the variety of plants and animals that live on the land, especially wetland creatures like river otters, trumpeter swans, and beavers. Jon's diligent work to remove invasive plants and clean up trash in the Preserve is his way of giving back to the ecosystem in his backyard.



We appreciate all the time Jon has given to improving the Preserve and look forward to working with him on more volunteer projects in the future. Want to join us? Sign up for a session of the Friday Conservation Corps or reach out about independent invasive vine training.

JOIN US: UPCOMING EVENTS

Spring Birds and Blooms

Saturday, April 1, 10 AM - 12 PM
Leopold's Preserve

Led by the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy (BRMC), this guided walk will focus on early ephemeral wildflowers and bluebird boxes.

Art in the Park

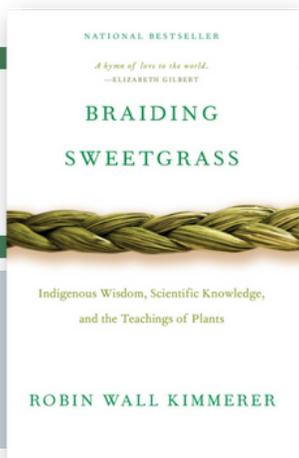
Wednesday, April 5, 10 AM - 12 PM
Leopold's Preserve

Join us for a morning art session followed by a public art sale at noon. Choose from nature journaling, plein air painting, or nature photography.

Earth Day Tree Planting

Saturday, April 22, 9 AM - 12 PM
Leopold's Preserve

Celebrate earth day by helping us plant native trees as part of our savanna habitat restoration! Please bring your own shovel.



Braiding Sweetgrass, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Kimmerer weaves together plant science, Indigenous knowledge, and autobiographical stories in this compelling book. She argues that by cultivating gratitude for nature's gifts, we can improve our relationship with the land.

What We've Been Reading



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