Once abundant, blue birds now face habitat loss due to human development and competition from non-native species such as the European starling and the house sparrow. By properly installing a blue bird box and providing some minor maintenance, you can help make up for the loss of the bluebird’s habitat. FOW’s Structures Crew, and other volunteers led by Steve O’Kula of PPR, will be constructing blue bird boxes that will be available for purchase beginning in March at the Wissahickon Environmental Center. Proceeds will benefit FOW’s Wildlife Committee.
A MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT

As we step ever so boldly into our second ninety years of existence, I am regularly drawn to the enduring qualities of our organization’s mission statement, and how applicable it continues to be as we go about managing our various ongoing projects within the park. FOW’s mission is “to preserve the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley and stimulate public interest therein.” Two upcoming events—in May and June—highlight how diversely we can pursue this mission of both preserving wilderness and stimulating public interest.

The first, on May 13, is our second State of the Watershed Conference in association with the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (See p. 4.) This event will not only continue to educate the public on the state of the Wissahickon Watershed, one of the most compromised sub-watersheds in the Delaware Valley, through a panel presentation, but will also lead a discussion on what we as citizens and stakeholders in the Wissahickon Valley can do and advocate for in protecting our watershed and others throughout Pennsylvania. Much of the compromise in water quality originates beyond the park’s perimeter, so FOW and its partners must reach out to townships, land owners, and businesses throughout the region in order to inform them of the issues involved and create an effective plan of action.

The second event, to take place in May and June, is the installation of a comprehensive new signage system for the forty-four miles of upper trails in Wissahickon Valley Park (See pages 8-9.) Now that a substantive amount of work has been done on improving the quality of these trails through our Sustainable Trail Initiative, the ability to manage the use of these trails more effectively through a new signage program will be an invaluable way to improve park usage. There will be twenty-five new trailhead kiosks, 160 new trail markers, and numerous new trail blazes along trail corridors. Coincident with this new system will be a redesigned Wissahickon map, with added features based on user feedback. Not only will these new signs make the park more accessible to users and Philadelphia’s emergency services system, they will also have the added benefit of educating users about responsible park use, increasing user safety, and helping to create a more cohesive park identity that reflects the ongoing work being done by FOW and its partners.

Keep on eye out for updates on the new park signs and the upcoming water conference—just two of many examples of how you can help us with your involvement in our ongoing mission in the Wissahickon Valley.

Two upcoming events—in May and June—highlight how diversely we can pursue this mission of both preserving wilderness and stimulating public interest.

Will Whetzel
President
Walnut Lane Bridge to lose this Spring

The Walnut Lane Bridge will be closed for repairs starting this spring. State Representative Pam DeLissio has been quoted as saying that the closure is likely to take place in mid-to-late May and will last between eighteen to twenty months. According to The Fallser, the bridge will be brought up to current safety standards and the work includes rehabilitation of the bridge and the reconstruction of the roundabout at Blue Bell Hill. Sidewalk leading up to the bridge, along its length, and along each leg of the roundabout will also be replaced. PennDOT has announced that the recommended detour will be Midvale Avenue connecting Wissahickon and Henry Avenues through East Falls. Lincoln Drive will remain open throughout the project, and pedestrians will be allowed to cross the bridge during construction.

94th Annual Wissahickon Day Parade

The annual Wissahickon Day Parade will be held on Sunday, April 26, 2015. The Parade is the oldest annual equine parade in the U.S. and is sponsored by the Wissahickon Valley Riding and Driving Association. The Parade starts at noon, departing from Harper’s Meadow. Line-up will start with carriages in front of the Northwestern Equestrian Facility at approximately 11:30 a.m. Riders will fall in line behind the carriages. The Parade will travel along Forbidden Drive to the judging area at Valley Green Inn. A Horseshow will precede the parade at 10 a.m. Registration for both the Show and the Parade starts at 9 a.m. Spectators are welcome. Northwestern Ave. will be closed to traffic and parking to accommodate horse trailers and carriages. Parking will be available in the upper lots at Valley Green. For more information or to register, visit www.wissahickonday.org or contact Jo Catanzaro at jocat11@verizon.net.

Why I am a Friend of the Wissahickon

“I am an FOW member because of its great Trail Ambassador program. Becoming a TA helped me meet other nature lovers when I moved to this part of the city, while also learning together about the history, wildlife, plants and geology of the park AND getting certified in First Aid and CPR. The FOW happy hours are fun, too!”

— Edie Mannion, FOW Member since 2010

FOW Hosted Public Meeting on STI

The Friends of the Wissahickon hosted a public meeting on December 2, 2014, at Cathedral Village to discuss progress to date on recently completed and upcoming projects, analyze the progress FOW has made on the Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI), and share information about the new upper trails wayfinding and signage system that is set to be installed park-wide this year. The wayfinding and signage system is part of STI, a multi-year project that will make the 50 miles of recreation trails in the Wissahickon a physically and socially sustainable system for all park users. This project is being implemented in partnership with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation.

READ MORE: See page 8 for more on the wayfinding and signage system.

Become an FOW Crew Leader

The Friends of The Wissahickon needs Crew Leaders—experienced volunteers who are committed to FOW’s mission of habitat protection in the park, skilled in leading volunteer groups and building trails and/or restoring habitat, and interested in sharing their knowledge and expertise with others. Crew Leaders can participate in a variety of training sessions held throughout the year. The training session topics this year include: machinery operation, trail building, trail maintenance, tree and shrub planting, plant identification, First Aid and CPR, and volunteer leadership and safety. The subject of the first 2015 training session will be volunteer leadership and safety and will be held on March 7. Contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at holback@fow.org for more information or to register.

Friends of the Wissahickon • Spring 2015
Wissahickon Creek in Crisis: TIME FOR ACTION

by Erin Mooney, Publicist

Regional experts convene on May 13 to set a vision for protecting and preserving the watershed.

A panel of regional experts will address the many issues relating to the Wissahickon watershed at a meeting on May 13, 2015, and will offer tangible ways for community members to engage in protecting the 64-square mile area. Hosted by Friends of the Wissahickon and the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, Wissahickon Creek in Crisis: Time for Action will take place from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Arts Center Theater at Germantown Academy in Fort Washington and is free and open to the public. At 5:30 p.m. light refreshments will be served. Local organizations and businesses will also be exhibiting before the meeting.

This is a follow-up event to a 2012 town hall meeting which began a regional conversation about the current conditions in the Wissahickon Creek. Topics included flooding, water chemistry, and biology and the relationships between land use and watershed health.

The panel will include: Mike Helbing, a staff attorney with PennFuture; Jeffrey Featherstone, Director of the Center for Sustainable Communities and professor in the Department of Community and Regional Planning (CRP) at Temple University; and Chris Crockett, Deputy Commissioner of Planning and Environmental Services at the Philadelphia Water Department. The program will be moderated by Patrick Starr, Executive Vice President of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

“By bringing citizens together to learn more about the Wissahickon and its importance to the region, we hope to raise awareness about the creek as a valuable resource,” says Maura McCarthy, Executive Director of Friends of the Wissahickon.

“When you educate municipalities and citizens alike on the issues facing the water quality of the Wissahickon Creek and get everyone on the same page, all of our collective actions can make a positive impact and move the needle on improving water quality,” says Dennis Miranda, Executive Director of the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association.

PROJECT UPDATE

by Henry Stroud, Project Manager

FOW will be completing two large trail closure/reroute projects from March 15 through June 15, 2015.

At Gorgas Lane, a section of the Yellow Trail has become deeply eroded creating unstable and unsafe trail conditions. During rain events it contributes large sediment and stormwater loads to Gorgas Run, a tributary of Wissahickon Creek. At Roxborough Avenue, surface erosion and focused stormwater runoff along an unpaved roadway are contributing sediment and stormwater loads directly into Wissahickon Creek.

At both locations, the eroding road and trails are to be decommissioned and restored back to natural habitat. Both routes will be replaced with sustainable trail corridors. Between March 15 and June 15, expect changed trail conditions at both locations.

Roxborough Avenue Site

The Yellow Trail may be detoured to surface streets between Roxborough Avenue and Walnut Lane at times during construction. People travelling along the Yellow Trail are strongly encouraged to use Forbidden Drive between Green Lane and the Blue Stone Bridge. Detour Signs will be posted. There will be no access to the Yellow Trail from the Kitchen's Lane Bridge road during construction.

Gorgas Lane Site

The Yellow Trail will be closed for four to six weeks from Livezey Lane (Pachella Field) to Gorgas Lane during construction. People travelling along the Yellow Trail will need to use Forbidden Drive between these locations. Detour Signs will be posted. An upcoming Philadelphia Water Department stream restoration project may close this section of the trail for up to one year beginning in Summer 2015. FOW will release information as it becomes available.
Annual Creek Clean-Up on April 25

The Friends of the Wissahickon and the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) are once again joining forces to clean the Wissahickon Creek on Saturday, April 25, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. All volunteers are invited to the Talkin’ Trash Picnic at Fort Washington State Park at the Flourtown pavilion on Mill Road from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

This spring marks the 45th anniversary of WVWA’s Annual Creek Clean-Up, which is sponsored by Merck & Co. It is the sixth year that FOW has worked with WVWA to clean the Wissahickon Creek.

The Friends of the Wissahickon will clean up a section of the creek in Chestnut Hill, at Northwestern Avenue and Forbidden Drive, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. To work with FOW in Philadelphia, meet at Northwestern Avenue and Forbidden Drive at 9 a.m. Please register at www.fow.org and indicate if you plan to attend the picnic. Contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback with questions at 215-247-0417 x107 or at holback@fow.org.

In Montgomery County, volunteers of all ages will be pre-assigned sections of the Wissahickon Creek or a tributary, extending from Lansdale to Flourtown. Register online at http://www.wvwa.org/creekcleanup/ or contact Madalyn Neff at madalyn@wvwa.org. Please indicate the name, size, and age range of your group and whether you will attend the picnic. You will be contacted regarding your clean-up location assignment.

Registration is not required but is recommended in order to be notified in case of any changes due to weather. The event will be cancelled in the event of heavy rain. Check FOW’s or WVWA’s website or Facebook page for updates.

Volunteers of all ages are encouraged to participate. Volunteers will be assigned to clean sections of the area and will be given bags in which to collect trash.

Thanks to Our Sponsors

Sponsors of this event provide funding for WVWA’s stewardship efforts throughout the year. The presenting sponsor is Merck & Co. Volunteers from Merck’s West Point plant located at the headwaters of the Wissahickon Creek will help with the Clean-Up. Conservationist sponsors include Covanta, DOW Chemical Company, First Niagara Bank, and MSS Movers Specialty Service. Both DOW and First Niagara Bank will also send employee volunteers to help with the Clean-Up. Additional sponsorship is provided by Aqua Pennsylvania, Ambler Savings Bank, Artman Lutheran Home, BBD, LLP, Caddick Construction, First Priority Bank, Manufacturer’s Golf & Country Club, North Penn Water Authority, The Philadelphia Cricket Club, Rotary Club of Blue Bell, and Russell Roofing. Companies interested in sponsoring the Creek Clean-Up should contact Gina Craig at WVWA (215-962-8726).

It’s Spring—Avoid Muddy Trails

It’s Mud Season in Wissahickon Valley Park, and FOW is urging park users to refrain from biking, hiking, or horseback riding on muddy trails. Use Forbidden Drive instead, or run the risk of getting very dirty and damaging the upper trails in the park.

Spring is when trails are most vulnerable to erosion and long-term damage. As frost thaws, it releases water. During this period it is important to leave the soil undisturbed so it can mix with organic leaves and other organic matter and dry out naturally into trail dirt. If disturbed while muddy, the soil will be washed away leaving exposed rocks and roots.

According to Project Manager Henry Stroud, all the upper trails can become muddy in the spring and are highly susceptible to damage. When coming upon a muddy trail, FOW advises park users to ride or hike through it, rather than around it, which widens the trail and encroaches on plant and animal habitats near the trail. Park users can also consult the Map of the Wissahickon Valley Park for alternative trails. Maps are available from FOW at http://fow.org/about-park/maps.
**TA Walks**

Meanderings in the Wissahickon with Shelly Brick

Enjoy our park, meet new folks, and “talk story.” The path is more than the destination. Pace will be set by the group, and remember to bring water and wear sturdy shoes. All ages welcome.

Saturday, March 28 • 4 pm
Meet at Kitchen’s Lane entrance to the park.

Sunday, April 26 • 11 am
Meet at Chestnut Hill and Seminole Aves.

Saturday, May 23 • 4 pm
Meet at Rex Ave. entrance to the park.

Sunday, June 28 • 11 am
Meet at intersection of Wayne Ave. and Allen Lane.

Explore the Woods and Andorra Meadow with Kimberly Quinn

Saturday, March 28 • 11 am–1 pm
Hike the Andorra Meadow. Learn about the former Andorra Nursery and visit the Wissahickon Environmental Center (Tree House); see the Great Beech and Fallen Magnolia.

Level: Moderate. Distance: 3 miles. Wear good sneakers or hiking boots. Children 8+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Cedars House–Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Trails Less Traveled I: Monoshone Trail with Gerry Schweiger

Sunday, March 29 • 1–3 pm
Did you know that there is a trail along Monoshone Creek? Or that trails lead up to the Yellow Trail from the Lincoln Drive bike trail? We will hike over these little-used trails. Cover legs and arms due to poison ivy. Children 8+ with responsible adult welcome. Duration: 2 hours. Meet at Johnson St. between Wissahickon Ave. and Lincoln Drive. Johnson is one way between Wissahickon and Lincoln, so enter Johnson from Wissahickon. Park on Johnson as close to Lincoln as possible.

Wissahickon Walkers with Kris Sofia

Wednesdays, April 1–June 10 • 9 am
Join us every Wednesday for a brisk paced walk on Forbidden Drive from The Cedar’s House Café to the Covered Bridge and back. Rain cancels. Meet at Cedars House–Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Bird Walk in Houston Meadow and Nearby Woods with Mary Phalan

Saturday, April 4 • 9–11 am
Bring binoculars and a bird book if you have one. Please, no dogs. Children 12+ with responsible adult welcome. Bird watching requires slow and silent walking, listening, and looking. In the past, common yellow throats; blue grosbeaks, blue birds, and indigo buntings have been seen, but no guarantees. Rain cancels. Meet at Cathedral Rd. downhill from the Courtesy Stable. Use on-street parking.

Invasive and Native Plant Safaris with Michael Kopena

Sundays, April 5, May 10, & June 14
2–4 pm
See the effects of aggressive alien monocultures. Learn about the dangers of decreased biodiversity in our ecosystems and discover the origins of some of the valley’s tenacious invaders. Meet some treasured native species. Learn how to create native habitats in your own garden. Level: Easy–moderate. Children 8+ with responsible adult welcome. Sturdy comfortable footwear recommended. Meet at Kitchen’s Lane.

Explore the Woods and Andorra Meadow with Kimberly Quinn

Sunday, April 12 • 10 am–Noon
Hike the Andorra Meadow. Learn about the former Andorra Nursery and visit the Wissahickon Environmental Center (Tree House); see the Great Beech and Fallen Magnolia.

Level: Moderate. Distance: 3 miles. Wear good sneakers or hiking boots. Children 8+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Cedars House–Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Trails Less Traveled II: Cresheim Creek South Trails with Gerry Schweiger

Sunday, April 12 • 1 pm
There is limited trail usage on the north side trail of Cresheim Creek, but there are trails covering the hillside along the south (Mt. Airy) side. We will hike two of these less-used trails and visit Climber’s Rock. NOTE: These trails cross several steep draw/ravines. Meet at St. Martin’s Lane and Huron St. in Chestnut Hill. Both streets can be accessed from Mermaid Lane, where there is ample parking. For GPS and internet use: 7500 St. Martin’s Lane, Philadelphia, 19118.

Spring in the Wissahickon with Scott Quitel

Saturday, April 18 • 9 am–Noon
Hike some mildly rigorous trails in search of Tulip Poplar flowers, trout lily, and bloodroot, and other spring ephemerals. Smell the fresh spicebush. Pass by skunk cabbage wetlands. Listen to toads, bullfrogs, snakes, and other critters. Cross frothy brooks. Bring your senses. Meet at Forbidden Drive and Bells Mill Road.

Wellness Walk with Mike Kopena and Acupuncturist Rachel Kriger

Sunday April 19 • 2–4 pm
Experience the energy of spring as it manifests on the trail, in the trees, and in our bodies, emotions, and day-to-day life. Learn about the gifts of the springtime: clarity, creativity, and flexibility. We will practice exercises to focus on how you can feel balanced, peaceful, and healthy in spring. Sturdy, comfortable footwear and a warm scarf recommended. Level: Easy–moderate. Children 10+ with responsible adult welcome. More info. from Rachel Kriger at thatsthepoint@gmail.com. Meet at Cedars House–Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Scavenger Hunt with Bruce Wagner

Sunday, April 26 • 5–5 pm
This guided walk will test your knowledge of spring and the Wissahickon, as well as your creativity. Registrants for this walk will divide into teams for a scavenger hunt by collecting photographs of the sought items. Look for familiar park icons, natural specimens, and some “kooky” items. Use of digital cameras or phone-cameras are accepted. Families with children welcome. FOW TAs are judges and will be available for hints. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Bird Walk along Forbidden Drive with Mary Phalan

Saturday May 2 • 9–11 am
Bring binoculars and a bird book if you have one. Please, no dogs. Children 12+ with responsible adult welcome. Bird watching requires slow and silent walking, listening, and looking. Expect to see spring warblers, hawks, woodpeckers, and many more species. Meet at the concrete picnic tables at Bells Mill Rd and Forbidden Drive.

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**TA Class 2015**

Front row: Bruce McDowell, Diane Heil, Marianne Johnston, Debbie Carr, Nancy Baxter, Maria Texidor, Mike Indorato, Russell Mahoney, Heidi Ochsenreither, Jeff Frazier.


Not pictured: Kylie Costello and Jill Weingarten.

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**Visit www.fow.org for updated information.**
Explore the Woods and Andorra Meadow with Kimberly Quinn Saturday, May 3 • 1–3 pm
Hike the Andorra Meadow. Learn about the former Andorra Nursery and visit the Wissahickon Environmental Center (Tree House); see the Great Beech and Fallen Magnolia. Level: Moderate. Distance: 3 miles. Wear good sneakers or hiking boots. Children 8+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Cedars House—Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Varied Terrains of the Wissahickon with Scott Quitel Saturday, May 9 • 9 am–Noon
Hike up the gorge to Houston Meadow, then continue on to Devil’s Pool and Pee Wee Rock. We’ll discuss the likely formation of Wissahickon rocks as the result of plate tectonics and learn to identify several different types of rocks. Children 10+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Meet at Cedars House—Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Kid Friendly Hike with Marv Schwartz Saturday, May 9 • 1–3 pm
We will walk along Forbidden Drive and visit the Livezey Dam and Gorgas Creek cave, cross the Mt. Airy Bridge and hike the hillside trail, then pass through Fingerspan Bridge. We’ll snack, then continue on to Devil’s Pool and Pee Wee Rock on our return. Level: Moderate on some rocky trails. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Geology Hike with Sarah West Saturday, May 16 • 3–5 pm
This hike covers about 1.5 miles along a rough, steep trail on the east side of the creek upstream from Valley Green. It can be slippery or muddy in places. We’ll discuss the likely formation of Wissahickon rocks as the result of plate tectonics and learn to identify several different types of rocks. Children 10+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Butterfly Walk in the Wissahickon with Kris Soffa Friday June 5 • 10:30 am–Noon

Pre registration required. Meet at Wissahickon Environmental Center, 300 Northwestern Ave., 19118

History Walk on the Lower Wissahickon with Sarah West Saturday, June 20 • 3-4:45 pm
See two Revolutionary War era historical sites and more. Learn the history of the Wissahickon Tumpke, Forbidden Drive, the Walnut Lane Bridge, and more. Distance: 1 mile along lower Forbidden Drive on level ground as far as Walnut Lane Bridge. Meet at the small parking lot where Forbidden Drive meets Lincoln Drive, a short distance downstream from Rittenhouse Town.

This hike covers about 1.5 miles along a rough, steep trail on the east side of the creek upstream from Valley Green. It can be slippery or muddy in places. We’ll discuss the likely formation of Wissahickon rocks as the result of plate tectonics and learn to identify several different types of rocks. Children 10+ with responsible adult welcome. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Spring Birding with Ruth Pfeffer
John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum • Saturday, May 2

The spring bird migrations will be in full swing soon, and many birds pass through Tinicum on their way north while others return to nest from their wintering grounds. Join FOW and Ruth Pfeffer of Birding with Ruth on this special trip. Sights of songbirds, flycatchers, and herons are possible. Ample time will be provided for everyone to enjoy the impressive exhibits located in the Visitor Center.

Tinicum was chosen as the first Important Bird Area in the State of Pennsylvania. The first bald eagles to nest in Philadelphia chose Tinicum. It consists of 1,000 acres which include impoundments for waterfowl, woodland trails, etc.

Bring hat, water bottle, and binoculars or field guides if you have them. Wear comfortable shoes and dress for the weather. Loaner binoculars and field guides will be available.

Departure is at 7:45 a.m. with expected return by 2:30 p.m. Meet at the FOW Office at 8708 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118.

Tickets are $65/person. Purchase tickets at www.fow.org. Transportation to and from Tinicum and lunch are included. Seating is very limited. Choose a lunch preference when you purchase a ticket. For more information, contact Outreach Manager Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org.

TA Talks
All TA Talks take place at The Cedars House Café, located at the north end of Forbidden Drive near Northwestern Ave. TA Talks are cancelled if driving conditions are hazardous or if Cedars House Café must close. Visit www.fow.org for updates.

From Winter Comes the Joy of Spring Presented by Bruce Wagner Sunday, March 15 • 1:30–3 pm
A long, cold winter slowly begins to warm. And just in case we need a reminder, this slide show offers us an hour of brilliant color and texture replicating spring in the Wissahickon. Spend a while and feel the new season emerge.

Historical Geology of the Wissahickon Gorge Presented by Sarah West Sunday, March 22 • 2 pm
A 45-minute PowerPoint presentation following a short, easy geology walk along Forbidden Drive between Northwestern Ave., and Bells Mill Rd. (if weather conditions are suitable.)

Art and the Wissahickon Presented by Diane Garvey & Hildy Tow of the Woodmere Art Museum Sunday, March 29 • 2 pm
45-minute presentation of old photographs and artwork of scenes of the Wissahickon. Learn what art tells us about people, culture, and history in the Wissahickon.

Celebrate Earth Day with One Man’s Trash

Readers of FOW's newsletter have been keeping up with Trail Ambassador Bradley Maule’s progress with his litter project One Man’s Trash throughout 2014. The exhibition he promised will open on Earth Day, Wednesday, April 22, at 6 p.m. at the Fairmount Water Works (640 Water Works Drive, Phila.). One Man’s Trash seeks to shine a light on the abuse of Wissahickon Valley Park by collecting, cataloguing, analyzing, and displaying a year’s worth of litter amassed by just one person. The goal of the exhibition, ultimately, is to elevate a higher consciousness of environmental and civic stewardship, and to bring the “carry in, carry out” principle to a larger audience. The exhibit and opening are free and open to the public. More information at www.fairmountworks.com.

Photo by Steve Powell
Connecting Philadelphia residents with the natural world and the fun, enriching experiences our parks have to offer is the goal of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation's new brand *Find Your Path*. Over the last three years, FOW has been developing a new signage and wayfinding system for the upper trails to do just that. The new system will make Wissahickon Valley Park more accessible and allow everyone, from first-time visitors to seasoned park users, to maximize their experience.

The upper trails in the Wissahickon are the roughly forty-four miles of trails apart from Forbidden Drive, and the smaller discrete networks in Carpenter's Woods and Clifford Park. The Yellow and Orange Trails are considered to be part of the upper trail system. The new signage system that FOW has developed for these trails is part of the Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI).

STI is an effort to balance the impact trails in the Wissahickon have on the environment with the need to manage the park as a recreational resource that improves the quality of life for people in the Philadelphia region. The quality of the habitat and water within the lower Wissahickon watershed is intrinsically linked to the quality of the trails and to the actions of the 1.1 million annual visitors to the park. A new trail signage system is an important step toward delineating established trails, managing trail traffic, and connecting with and informing trail users.

There are two existing trail sign systems in Wissahickon Valley Park. The older, tombstone shaped trail markers were installed by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation in 1996. Newer markers in the Andorra Natural Area were installed by staff at the Wissahickon Environmental Center. These markers have been well received and serve as a proof-of-concept for a trail marker system with modular, interchangeable content. The new sign markers to be installed this spring are very similar to this system.

Using a $271,000 grant from the PA Department of Community & Economic Development, FOW awarded two contracts. Tahawus Trails LLC was hired for the trailhead kiosk design and construction. Tahawus was a natural choice for this project as the company has significant experience working on natural timber structures and can match the style of structures in the park, many built by FOW volunteers, that exist in the park today.

A.D. Marble & Company, based in nearby Conshohocken, was hired to update the FOW map, create interpretive kiosk panels, and program the trail marker system (determine what information will be provided on each post). A.D. Marble employs professional graphic designers and environmental scientists which has allowed them to create effective environmental messaging for the kiosk panels.

FOW would like to give special thanks to Darren Fava at Philadelphia Parks & Recreation for his support over the last three years. Darren has provided guidance and technical expertise for which we are eternally grateful.

**What are FOW’s goals?**

Through an online survey, stakeholder meetings, and a public meeting, FOW developed a set of goals for the project and identified design themes that would be incorporated into the sign designs.

- **Get people into the park!**
  Make the park more accessible to all citizens. Erase barriers that keep people from utilizing green spaces.

- **Promote responsible park use.**
  Educate the public about the park, environment, and proper trail etiquette.

- **Increase user safety and reduce user conflict.**

- **Create a cohesive park identity.**
  FOW wants people to know they are in Wissahickon Valley Park and the city of Philadelphia by matching the signs’ design to the Wissahickon aesthetic.

- **Create a durable system that is simple to maintain.**

**READ MORE:** History of Wissahickon signage on p. 10!
What is being installed?
Twenty-five (25) new trailhead kiosks will be located throughout the park. The trailhead kiosks are hand-built, black locust timber structures that are made up of one to three panels. There are three types of panels. At a minimum, each trailhead will have a park information panel which includes a “heads-up” map display, basic information about the park, and park and trail guidelines. Additional panels include a park directory with descriptions of nearby attractions and a park stewards panel that outlines the work of FOW and its partnering agencies. Recommendations on how visitors to the park can limit their impact on the environment are also included.

A total of 160 trail markers will be located at every designated trail intersection and trailhead. Each trail marker will consist of a wooden 4” x 4” post with modular content blocks. Each post will clearly identify which users are allowed on which trails (hikers, bikers, equestrians), indicate which of the four primary trails a person is on (yellow, orange, white, lavender), and display distance and directions to key attractions. The help locator system is being expanded to the colored trails.

Trail blazes located along trail corridors. Trail blazes are useful for identifying the trail corridor in hard-to-read areas like rock scrambles or in snowy conditions. Historically, an Appalachian style paint blaze has been used in the park, in which a square of bark is scraped off of suitable trees and the underlying cambium layer is painted. Wissahickon Valley Park needs a more flexible system that will allow FOW to easily move the blazes as we make changes to the trails. A colored plastic disk, similar to those used in New York State Parks, will be used that can be easily moved as trail changes occur.

Restored signs on Forbidden Drive. Contingent on the availability of funds, FOW will be making restorations to existing interpretive and informational signs along Forbidden Drive.

Redesigned Wissahickon Map, available now (see p. 3). Based on park user feedback, we have added elevation contours and more trail distances. The map artwork will be used in graphic displays at the trailhead kiosks.

When will the new signs be installed?
Signs will begin to appear in the Wissahickon this spring, with the full system to be installed by early June. Expect work crews to be present as soon as the ground is thawed enough to work. Look for upcoming FOW volunteer workdays to help remove the old trail signs and install the new trail blazes!

Give to STI
The Sustainable Trails Initiative is a comprehensive approach to improving forest habitat, stormwater management, and park user experience. To meet these goals, FOW has partnered with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to protect the habitat, water, and trails in Wissahickon Valley Park. Over $6 million dollars has been raised towards the $10 million dollar goal. To learn more about the projects and programs that make up STI or to make a donation, contact Ruffian Tittmann, Director of Development & Operations, at tittmann@fow.org or 215-247-0417 ext 102.

Within Wissahickon Valley Park there are:
- 123 trail intersections
- 40 trailheads
- 44 miles of upper trails

Trail Head Kiosk Locations

This map is available online at fow.org
Park Signage History: An Appreciation

by David Dannenberg, FOW Board Member

As park users enjoy the benefits of the new, more comprehensive—and more costly—signage system, it is appropriate to acknowledge the value of the existing upper trail signs and the work and dedication that went into their construction and installation.

In 1996, after much public discussion, debate, and hand wringing, a limited number of specific trails were first designated as multi-use (open to cyclists, equestrians, and pedestrians). At that time there were effectively no signs on the upper trails and close to no money in the Fairmount Park Commission (now Philadelphia Parks & Recreation—PPR) budget to create and install them. Yet, there was an obvious need for a clear and simple way to indicate to park users which trails were open to which uses.

Enter Chris Palmer, then head of Fairmount Park District 3 (now Operations Manager for PPR) and David Bower, then part-time Volunteer Coordinator for Fairmount Park (as well as volunteer chair of FOW’s Conservation Committee). Palmer designed the signs and tasked Bower with installing them. The signs were constructed both by students at the Swenson Skill Center and Bower himself at District 3 headquarters.

Bower, who now works full time as a Volunteer Coordinator for PPR and who remains a highly self-motivated park steward, managed almost single handedly to complete and install close to 100 of the heavy wooden hand-made signs. He accomplished this feat in about two seasons, in addition to fulfilling his other responsibilities. FOW’S Newsletter reported in the winter of 1997: “New trail signs are sprouting up in the Wissahickon as part of Fairmount Park’s efforts to implement the new regulations for trail usage in the Valley. The signs are intended to be rustic and as unobtrusive as possible, yet inform hikers, bikers, and horseback riders which trail [they are permitted] to be on. Some 50 of these signs were installed this fall by David Bower . . . Another 40 signs will be installed next spring.”

Signage on the fifty-plus miles of natural surface trails in the Wissahickon has not been addressed comprehensively since 1997. Although, in 2003, under the leadership of Mark Focht, the Fairmount Park Commission conducted a major overhaul of the signage along Forbidden Drive—removing signs of various vintage, quality, design, effectiveness, and appropriateness, and replacing them with seventeen high-quality signs of beautiful, appropriate, and consistent design.

The new signage system will improve navigation on the upper trails, as well as provide much useful information. But it is worth remembering how much the public has benefited from the existing signage system for eighteen years and appreciating the efforts of the people who, with very limited resources, worked so quickly and diligently to bring it into existence. Had this system not been in place, much more work would have been required to create the new system, and much more confusion would have been experienced by visitors to Wissahickon Valley Park.

Volunteer Highlights

by John Holback, Volunteer Coordinator

The students of Crefeld School have not been deterred by biting winter weather and continue to devote Wednesdays to work in the Wissahickon. They have been hard at work removing invasives at Thomas Mansion, landscaping the gardens around the new composting toilet at the Tree House, and helping FOW do some Spring preparation by cleaning out the tool sheds which, no pun intended, is no walk in the park!

FOW’s weekday volunteers have been focusing on tackling the large amount of invasive species in the woods at Blue Bell Hill. Devil’s walking stick, bittersweet, honeysuckle, English ivy, and multiflora rose are no match for our volunteers. Thanks John, Dave, Jim, and Sharan!

Just before Christmas a hardy bunch of volunteers came out to do some trail work around Blue Stone Bridge. Bad erosion had claimed a 100 foot section of trail adjacent to the bridge which was rebuilt. The gutters on the bridge were cleaned out and the curb exposed, which will allow water to now drain harmlessly from the bridge’s drains instead of flowing onto the trail.

The Structures Crew continued their weekly workdays even while the weather turned chilly. Highlights from the season include finishing the large shed at the District Four yard and repairing more park benches.

Eighteen volunteers attended a cleanup day around the historic Lake Surprise, just north of Buttercup Cottage on the Creshheim Creek. In addition to 40 bags of garbage, a huge iron boiler door, some folding chairs, a fire extinguisher, and a plethora of other oddities were removed from the creek bank.

FOW volunteers annually inspect, repair, and replace the dozen or so wood duck boxes along Forbidden Drive. This year three boxes had confirmed wood duck nests complete with eggshell fragments from the last breeding season. Thanks to Steve, Rich, John, Sam, John, and Jim for helping out on this fun winter project!

50 Volunteers Come Out on MLK Day!

Outside Thomas Mansion it was a typical January day in Philadelphia—cloudy, cold, with a driveway covered in a treacherous sheet of ice. Inside, a dedicated group of about fifty volunteers gathered in the mansion’s former dining room. They had decided to sacrifice their day off from work and school to celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by having a “day on” instead. David Bower, Volunteer Coordinator for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, gave an inspiring talk about the history and significance of MLK Day followed by a description of the work that was to be done that morning. Volunteers then gathered tools and began working to rid a section of the property of invasive plant species. Wineberry bushes were removed, devil’s walking stick was up-rooted, ailanthus trees were felled, and vines were cleared from the native rhododendron bushes. By the end of the morning, almost 10,000 square feet of land had been cleared. Thanks to everyone who helped make MLK Day 2015 incredibly productive and lots of fun.

Jim and Simon Labor at MLK Day
Volunteer Night
by Sarah Marley, Outreach Manager

Over 100 volunteers, board, and staff gathered on December 11 at Valley Green Inn to celebrate the achievements of the dedicated corps of Friends of the Wissahickon Volunteers. A delicious dinner was enjoyed by all, compliments of Jack Ott and the staff at Valley Green Inn. Everyone enjoyed a short program that detailed all of the accomplishments of the Structures Crew, Trail Ambassadors, Crew Leaders, 90th Anniversary volunteers, and Conservation volunteers throughout 2014. John Cassidy was honored with the Kevin Groves Volunteer of the Year Award for his valued contributions over the years. John has served as a mentor, leader, and smiling face at workdays throughout the park and is well respected by all of our volunteers and staff. This past year, more than 800 volunteers contributed over 11,000 hours throughout Wissahickon Valley Park. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time in 2014!!

Volunteer Coordinator

John Holback’s work as FOW’s Volunteer Coordinator was not a foregone conclusion. In 2010, he graduated from the Berklee College of Music in Boston with a degree in Professional Music, moved to Philadelphia, and supported himself with restaurant work while he tried to figure out his next move. Luckily for FOW, that first move was checking out AmeriCorps at the suggestion of friends. “I got on the website one day and read about the National Civilian Community Corps,” he says. “I filled out the application right then. Within a month they called me for a phone interview. After that I got the acceptance letter.”

AmeriCorps was John’s first exposure to environmental work, but not his first time enjoying the outdoors. Growing up in Landenberg, Pennsylvania, White Clay Creek State Park was practically in his backyard. He describes a childhood of family camping, fishing, hiking, building forts, and “arrowhead hunting in the woods.”

John’s year with AmeriCorps included much travel and all types of work, such as building houses for Habitat for Humanity and tornado clean-up in Indiana. But he also gained experience in trail building, outdoor maintenance, and invasive species removal. So when he returned to Philadelphia, he started exploring more environmental opportunities.

In 2013 he joined FOW’s Trail Ambassador program, took a summer position as an environmental educator at the Wissahickon Environmental Center (WEC), and worked as a Land Manager at The Laurel Preserve, a Brandywine Conservancy property. As Land Manager, he learned more about trail maintenance, invasive species removal, and riparian plantings and corridor restoration. He loved the job, but it was seasonal, so he took another position with the WEC beginning in January 2014. “The Tree House was such a great place to work. I was outside working with kids and I learned that sometimes, the best way to enjoy the environment is to teach others. My job at the Tree House opened my eyes to different possibilities.”

During his tenure at the Tree House, John volunteered for FOW workdays. “I realized that FOW was a group I really wanted to be around more. I liked the mission and all the work that was being done. When I applied for the Volunteer Coordinator job, I felt good about it.”

John has fun and realistic goals in his role at FOW: increase the number of volunteers and accomplish more projects; train more skilled volunteers and give them more autonomy; and expand FOW’s Crew Leader program; and help increase visibility and attendance at WEC or organize a cooperative project between FOW and WEC around the annual maple sugaring.

His love of the Wissahickon is in the early stages, but looks like it will last. “I just love the Wissahickon,” John says. “Moving to the city is always fun and exciting, but eventually you get a little drained from all the lights and the noise. Then it’s nice to be outside where it is quiet and the Wissahickon definitely offers that. It’s like being in the city but not in the city.”
**FOW Awarded CHHS Preservation Award**

*by Erin Mooney, Publicist*

In January, FOW was awarded a Stewardship Award by the Chestnut Hill Historical Society for the organization’s work refurbishing the interior of 164-year-old Valley Green Inn.

The award was given to the project for its “excellent preservation practices that can serve as an example and inspiration.”

Executive Director Maura McCarthy said that the award was an endcap to a year-long celebration of 90 years of stewardship. “The Stewardship Award validates the work we have done to maintain the Valley Green Inn's standing as the gem of the Wissahickon. We're honored to receive the distinction and look forward to many more decades of caring for such a valuable Philadelphia institution,” McCarthy said.

FOW invested a great deal of work in advance of its 90th anniversary celebration to make improvements to the Inn. Led by interior designer Ann Kelly, a renovation team of local designers—Amie Cafiero, Jane Good, and Rebecca Paul—worked with FOW and generously donated their skills to make renovations to the Inn. From plaster repairs, painting, new chairs, and refinished wood floors in the main dining rooms and foyer, to new lighting and light fixtures throughout the building and new tile floors in the back hallway bar, the renovations have given the Inn a new look and feel. Bathrooms were renovated, the building’s exterior was repainted, and the porch steps were repaired. In addition, the dining room windows were restored and new shingles were replaced in the archway of the old rose garden.

These improvements were in addition to major repairs and improvements recently made to help prevent water damage to the Inn that occurred during previous storms. The preventive improvements include a backflow preventer, sump pumps in the basement, and a new generator. The generator will help the Inn continue to operate during extreme weather events.

Now that these latest improvements have been completed, FOW is looking to the future of the Inn. FOW hopes to fully enclose the banquet pavilion with French windows, add a new roof, and install a complete HVAC system which would make the space functional for weddings and other special events during all four seasons of the year.

READ MORE: [http://articles.philly.com/2014-10-17/food/55112631_1_snack-bar-gala-fow](http://articles.philly.com/2014-10-17/food/55112631_1_snack-bar-gala-fow)

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**Valley Green Inn Committee Solicits FOW Member Input**

*by Shirley Gracie, FOW Board Member*

As we enter 2015, the members of FOW’s Valley Green Inn (VGI) Committee are discussing ways in which to encourage more patrons to enjoy the fine amenities the Inn offers. The recent makeover of the Inn’s interior, with new colors, furnishings, and lighting has resulted in creating one of Philadelphia’s most attractive restaurant settings. Together with the sylvan location, the historic importance of the Inn, and the sense of place in the memories of thousands of local residents, we have in our midst a unique dining establishment.

Although the Inn is frequently the place of choice for lunch on the porch, outdoor weddings, and holiday brunches, the number of evening diners is below capacity. The Valley Green Inn Committee would like to know why. We recognize that the Inn is a bit isolated and requires a dark drive down into the Wissahickon Valley, but FOW members are familiar with the routes, and the Inn itself is well lit and inviting.

Are members aware that the Inn is open every day of the year? How many local, full service restaurants are open on Mondays and Christmas Day? Are FOW members aware that they receive a 10% discount on dining there?

FOW, as lease-holder, derives much-needed revenue through rent and profit-sharing from the Inn (though the Inn’s restaurant business is run independently by Bigway, Inc.). FOW uses this revenue not only to maintain the structure, but also for general conservation needs in the Wissahickon. So, the more we all dine at Valley Green Inn, the more income for FOW to perform its good works.

The VGI Committee would like to hear from the FOW membership. We solicit your views on dining out: where you dine; why you do not often choose Valley Green Inn; what can be done to get you there in the evening hours. We do not ask for compliments or complaints about the food or service—those should be properly directed to the Innkeeper. What we would like from you are constructive suggestions and ideas. We want to identify a realistic wish-list for us to try to fulfill.

Please, as you consider your response, bear in mind that while many other venerable Philadelphia restaurants have come and gone, Valley Green Inn has served food to patrons day in and day out, in all kinds of weather, for nearly 130 years. Succeeding over the long haul in the restaurant business is not easy. Please e-mail your responses to Shirley Gracie at lamsgracie@gmail.com.
Philadelphia Parks & Recreation's Forest Management Framework has moved into the first phase of implementation. After extensive research into the current thinking on urban forest management, it became clear that climate change is a key factor in future forest composition, function, and health. The National Wildlife Federation's Climate-Smart Conservation states: Making a transition to forward-looking and climate-smart conservation will require that we pay particular attention to the following overarching themes:

- Act with intentionality
- Manage for change, not just persistence
- Reconsider conservation goals
- Integrate adaptation into existing work

To begin to apply these principals, PPR has selected three large-scale, core forest areas in the park system. Our planning work began in the Haddington Woods area of Cobbs Creek Park, a twenty-seven-acre site which includes a variety of forest types and conditions. PPR has formed a group of technical advisors to help us develop restoration approaches that we can test on these sites. This Urban Forest Working Group is made up of a variety of land managers, regulators, and academics who have been meeting to advance theories and experiments for our sites. We have also recruited interested community partners from the Cobbs Creek area and throughout the City (including FOW staff) to participate directly in this process. In order to prepare for this “participatory research,” and to provide a knowledge base for working collaboratively with the technical advisors, they have attended a series of classes focused on ecology, land management, and experimental design. These partners will help to inform the management methods for the site. In addition, they will monitor sites and gather data that is critical for successful adaptive management.

The two additional core forest sites, Wissahickon Park near Wigard Avenue and Pennypack Park at Three Springs Hollow, will also be conserved using these methods. Haddington and Wigard invasive vegetation clearing is underway and will continue through March 2015. Herbicide treatment will be done this summer. Deer exclusion fencing will be installed later this spring on all three sites. Implementation of a variety of experiments related to management techniques and vegetation species selection will follow, along with rigorous, on-going monitoring.

While we recognize that climate adaptation is still an emerging field, PPR has a strong interest in understanding what truly constitutes climate adaptation, and more importantly, how it can be applied in our urban natural areas. The work we do over the next several years will help us begin to answer those questions.

Joan S. Blaustein is Director of Urban Forestry in the Ecosystem Management Division of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation.
Top Ten Tips for Staying Well in the Spring
Derived from the ancient wisdom of the Five Elements

by Rachel Kriger, M.Ac., L.Ac.

10 Declare it and it is so! Use your stored power from winter to declare what you want. Generate joy and confidence as you see your visions manifest!
9 Practice making short and long term plans. Use discipline and flexibility. You could plan to take weekly walks in the Wissahickon, or you might wake up one morning and decide to go for a walk. Both are great ways to practice planning and following through.
8 Exercise your eyes by focusing wide, far, and close. Then, close your eyes. Focus inwards. You can try this at the Indian statue and the covered bridge in the Wissahickon.
7 It’s pruning time. Let go of what is no longer necessary (things, thoughts, etc.). While on your next jog in the Wissahickon, notice the trees and limbs that have fallen. Nature has its way of removing weaknesses to make room for new growth. Luckily, we do not have to break our limbs to grow. We can simply notice any thoughts or belongings that no longer serve in our lives, and choose to let them go.
6 Pay attention to your dreams and be creative with your interpretations. Did you dream of drinking a delicious smoothie at The Cedars House? What does it mean?
5 Have a routine for sleep, eating, and exercise. Go to bed early. Wake up early. Regular exercise will keep your qi moving smoothly. Eat green vegetables. Incorporate peppery and bitter tastes. Create an attitude of gratitude while cooking and eating. The Cedars House has great healthy foods for your nourishing enjoyment.
4 Wear a scarf (even when it’s warm) to protect your neck from the wind. Be prepared for fickle indecisive weather outside and in your way of being.
3 Allow frustration and anger to move through you. It is best to do this away from other people. You can shout into a pillow, punch the air, scream into the car with closed windows, and cry. Wait and breathe. Then, let it go, or be creative and take effective action. The Wissahickon is a great place to let the emotions move through you, and reconnect with nature and your deeper sense of being.
2 When you notice yourself in opposition to a person or situation, ask “what else is possible?” Be flexible, benevolent, and willing to see beyond your expectations. Those trees and limbs that still stand in the Wissahickon are stronger after this past winter. We are like these trees when we choose to grow stronger from the opportunities disguised in a challenging situation.
1 Please follow these suggestions to the degree that they are helpful for you. Pay attention to your unique body. In springtime, focus on your liver, which stores emotions, and your tendons and ligaments, which enhance flexibility.

Wellness Walk with Trail Ambassador
Mike Kopena and Acupuncturist
Rachel Kriger on Sunday, April 19.
See p. 6 for more info.

Guest Feature:

Partners in Park Stewardship:
Friends of the Cresheim Trail

by Susan Dannenberg, Friends of the Cresheim Trail

The Cresheim Trail continues to thrive within Fairmount Park through the efforts of Friends of the Cresheim Trail (FoCT). Thanks to the support of a dedicated group of volunteers and the generous lending of tools and expertise by the Friends of the Wissahickon, the trail is now open within Fairmount Park. The trail extends from a main trailhead at Allens Lane and Lincoln Drive, through to Germantown Avenue, and includes a one-mile loop. Two trailheads on the north side of Cresheim Road provide access to both the loop trail and Germantown Avenue from the nearby Allens Lane train station. A spur in the section south of Cresheim Road leads to an entrance on Emlen Street and connects the Cresheim Trail to the rest of the Wissahickon trail network. (See FOW’s Map of the Wissahickon Valley Park.) The Cresheim Trail connects to the street grid and sidewalk grids in Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill as well as the trail system in the Wissahickon. Year round, the trail sees daily use by joggers, hikers, dog walkers, and mountain bikers.

Friends of the Cresheim Trail volunteers recently constructed a natural wood bench at the “Grotto,” where the trail passes beneath a dramatic stony outcropping above Cresheim Valley Drive across from Navajo Street. Constructed from a fallen tree, this bench provides a resting spot with a lovely view over Cresheim Valley Drive to the patch of forest on the other side.

The City of Philadelphia is negotiating with PECO to acquire the old Pennsylvania Rail Road right-of-way to complete the Philadelphia portion of the Cresheim Trail over the Germantown Avenue Bridge to Stenton Avenue.

After reaching the city limits at Stenton Avenue, the proposed Cresheim Trail will continue into Montgomery County to connect with the Green Ribbon Trail in Flourtown. There is also a planned connection with the Tookany-Tacony Trail in Montgomery County. This off-road transportation option will connect public transit, trails, neighborhoods, schools, and religious institutions in two counties and three townships. Part of this Circuit, the Cresheim Trail has the explicit support and is on the plans of regional and local planning commissions.

The Friends of the Cresheim Trail invites you to explore the built portion of the Cresheim Trail and further asks that you consider joining FoCT’s efforts. You can support the trail by volunteering, becoming a member, joining the FoCT board, and by writing to District 8 Councilwoman Cindy Bass to let her know of your support.

Building trails requires continuous effort over the long term. Success is predicated on community support. Please enjoy your trails, and please, let your voice be heard.

Susan Dannenberg is trained as a Transportation Planner. When not working on the Cresheim Trail, she works with the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, a forty-year-old advocacy and education organization. She is grateful to live in Northwest Philadelphia, where nature is a part of everyday life.
Springtime at the Pond

by Trish Fries, Wissahickon Environmental Center

“If you build it, they will come.” Although not the exact quote from the movie Field of Dreams, it applies at the Tree House. They are frogs, toads, ducks, and other wildlife that gather at a stormwater basin built just above the upper parking lot of the Wissahickon Environmental Center. They use the water to find food, a home, or a drink.

In 2009, to reduce the amount of water that races past the Tree House during heavy rains, park staff dug a large basin to hold the stormwater washing off Northwestern Avenue. The soil proved to have more clay than expected, and instead of the water slowly soaking into the ground, it stayed. To keep the water from becoming too deep, a drainage channel was built, so when the water gets too high, it trickles out and continues on its way to the Wissahickon Creek.

With the basin has come wildlife. Dragonflies, butterflies, ducks, green frogs, honeybees, raccoons, dogs, and toads can be seen using the water in the stormwater basin. Within a year, the food web of this pond kept mosquito larvae in check. Each year toads return to the pond and for several days in the spring the mating sound of the male American toad can be heard hundreds of yards away. Male toads arrive first to establish their territory and begin to call the females. The trill is unmistakable. Last year we counted at least thirty toads on a warm spring day. Once paired, the female lays eggs in two spiral lines that look like a phone cord. The eggs hatch about one week later, and the tiny tadpoles mass together eating the pond algae. The warmer the water, the faster they develop. By early June, when the legs are formed, thousands of toadlets leave the pond and begin their journey into the forest. At that point they are the size of a small fingernail—so small and numerous that you need to watch your step to avoid them all!

Once the toads have left the pond, there is still plenty to see. Green frogs lie under the cattails, and Monarch butterflies and black and white dragonflies add a splash of color to the pond. Honeybees from our hives can often be seen taking a drink of water along the edge.

This spring you may see work being done to the pond. The cattails are expanding and soaking up the water too well, and at times in the summer the pond is almost dry. A few cattails will be removed and a deeper pool will be created to increase the water volume and allow frogs and tadpoles a place to go until the next storm. So next time you park your car in that lot, take a peak over the grassy hill, and see what life you can find!

Trish Fries is an Environmental Education Program Specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.
**WISSAHICKON VALLEY WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

WWVA offers many public programs as part of its mission to protect the quality and beauty of the Wissahickon Creek and to enhance life in the Wissahickon Watershed. Located at 12 Monts Road in Ambler. More info. at www.wwva.org.

**RAINFOREST GARDEN WORKSHOP** • Thursday, March 28

**TREE ID WALK WITH Ken LEROY** • Saturday, March 28

**BIRDING BASICS CLASSES** • Sunday, March 29

**SERVE THE PRESERVE** • Saturday, April 11

**IN SEARCH OF SALAMANDERS, FROGS AND MORE!** Saturday, April 18

**EVANS-MUMBOWER MILL OPEN HOUSE** • Sunday, April 19

**BEGINNERS GARDEN DESIGN USING NATIVE PLANTS** • Friday, May 1

**NATIVE PLANT SALE** • Friday, May 1

**WWVA 21ST ANNUAL BIRDRAID** • Friday, May 8

**EVANS-MUMBOWER MILL, OPEN HOUSE & SHEEP SHEARING** • Sunday, May 17

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**WISSAHICKON ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER**

Registration is required for all programs unless otherwise noted. The Tree House is open the second Saturday of every month, 10 am–4 pm. For information or to register, call 215-868-9265 or email WEC@phila.gov.

**THURSDAY TOTS**

Bring your preschooler for an hour of discovery at the Tree House. Each month we will explore a new topic that celebrates the season. Ages 3–5. Parents stay with their child. $5/child per lesson. Registration required.

**TOADS & TADPOLES, APRIL 16 • 1-2 PM**

Warming up from winter, toads will search the pond for toads, tadpoles, eggs, and other creatures on the move.

**FLOWERS FOR HONEY, MAY 14 • 1-2 PM**

Tots will learn about the honeybee, take a walk to the bee hives, taste honey, and plant native flowers for our bees.

**FIREFLY FUN, JUNE 19 • 1-2 PM**

Tots will learn about their “bio-light,” bodies and behavior, through games, stories and exploration. They will then make a bug box to take home.

**WOODOCK WALK, SUNDAY, MARCH 15 • 9:30–7:30 PM**

Hosted by local birder Martin Selzer, this bird hike aims to locate the American Woodcock during its incredible mating ritual. Meet at Houston Playground, weather permitting. Bring a flashlight. All ages. Registration required. FREE

**CATCH IN, TRASH OUT, SATURDAY, APRIL 11 • ONGOING 10 AM – 4 PM**

It’s springtime cleaning time! Join us for trash picking and a bit of your GPS for self-guided geocaching. We will give you coordinates and a trash bag, and you will collect trash on your way to find a cache, where you will find a hidden treasure. All ages. Registration required. FREE

**TOAD TIME, SATURDAY, APRIL 11 • 3 – 4:30 PM**

Join us for an introduction to the fascinating world of toads during their spring migration. Find toads and other amphibians and reptiles that live in the Wissahickon. All ages. Registration required. FREE

**MEADOW BIRD WALKS, SUNDAYS, APRIL 26 & MAY 24 • 7:30 – 10 AM**

Hosted by local birder Martin Selzer, these bird hikes take place during spring migration. We’ll check out the birds in the Harper’s Meadow and Houston Meadows. All ages. Registration required. FREE

**LOVE YOUR PARK GARLIC MUSTARD PULL, SATURDAY, MAY 9 • 10 – 1 PM**

Join us for the first day of Philadelphia’s Parks & Recreation’s Love Your Park Week. Lead a hand as we find out exactly how much of this invasive/delicious species we can remove. Stick around for some tasty garlic mustard dishes. All ages. Registration required. FREE

**KIDS GONE WILD: SCHOOL’S OUT, SATURDAY, JUNE 13 • 1 – 3 PM**

School’s out for almost a month, so let’s play! Summer days are meant to be spent in the forest, skipping rocks, getting feet wet, and climbing trees. Ages 6+. Drop-off. Registration required. FREE

**FATHER’S DAY FISHING, SUNDAY, JUNE 14 • 9 – 10 AM**

Dads, bring your children for a day of fishing on Wissahickon Creek. Poles and bait will be provided. No experience necessary. Participants ages 16+ will need a PA fishing license if they will be actively fishing. All ages. Registration required. FREE

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**RUNNING CLUBS**

**EVERY THURSDAY**

**Wissahickon Wanderers Trail Run** Run. 4-5 miles. Starts 6:30pm sharp at Valley Green Inn. No Fees. All runners, speeds, skill levels welcome! Fun food and Cash Bar afterwards courtesy of the Valley Green Inn for updates and more info visit www.wissahickonrunningclub.com

**EVERY SATURDAY**

**Shawmount Running Club** Starts at Northwest Ave. & Anderson Rd. (north end of Forbidden Drive). From 2nd Saturday in May thru 2nd Saturday in October, start at 7:30 am. From 3rd Saturday in October thru 1st Saturday in May start at 9 am. Distances are at the discretion of runners. All levels welcome. Emphasis is on fun! More info at www.shawmountrunningclub.com