



The Arlington ENVIRONMENT

www.arlingtonenvironment.org

ACE Looks Back

Twenty-Five Years of Arlington's Environmental History

by Rebecca Lanning

The history of environmental issues in Arlington is, as in most urban areas, a tale of competing interests: how to balance the conflicting needs and desires of residents, businesses, developers, and government while protecting the natural environment. In the 25 years since ACE was founded in 1978, many of Arlington's open spaces have been built up, while existing neighborhoods have been filled in with even more dense development. At the same time, the County's population has increased by about 25%. These changes have strained our natural resources, forcing government officials to make difficult choices and creating a seemingly endless supply of projects for environmental activists.

Interstate 66, Metro, and Bike Trails

Today's Arlingtonians may take Interstate 66, Metro, and the adjacent network of bike trails for granted, but construction of these projects dominated the political and environmental landscape of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The original proposal for the interstate featured a six- and eight-lane superhighway through Arlington's neighborhoods that would resemble the Capital Beltway. The plan enraged

many Arlington residents, who formed activist groups, filed lawsuits, and sought to defeat, delay, or at least improve the project.

In 1977, some opponents and state and regional planners finally forged a compromise, approved by then-U.S. Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman, Jr., although not endorsed by Arlington. This plan resulted in today's largely below-grade, four-lane highway, with high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) incentives, restrictions on trucks, sound barriers, retaining walls, and bike trails. The construction covered up 100 acres of previously open space and claimed more than 500 homes and other buildings. Untold numbers of trees and other plants were destroyed, though

County workers saved and replanted an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 of them. Construction also devastated portions of Spout Run and permanently divided neighborhoods. One inadvertent benefit of the construction is the Ballston Beaver Pond, a wetland created when beavers dammed up the stormwater detention area that highway designers intended for Lubber Run.

Interstate 66 and the Custis bike trail opened in 1982 by which time Metro's Orange Line from Rosslyn to Ballston was in operation having opened in 1979. The Ballston-to-Vienna segment opened in 1986 using the I-66 median. In 1999, Representative Frank Wolf and Virginia Governor James

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ACE celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2003! As part of the celebration, ACE organized the Discover Arlington scavenger hunt in May with 25 locations throughout Arlington County. Here, participants Devon and Holly Parker visited Sparrow Pond. Read about the winners of the contest on page 7.



Arlington's Environmental History

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Gilmore announced their support for adding extra lanes to I-66 inside the Beltway. That proposal generated considerable controversy of its own. In June of 2003, \$2.5 million to begin study of the plan was reallocated by the Commonwealth Transportation Board because of other priorities.

Four Mile Run

Another big environmental issue in Arlington over the last 25 years, and a major focus of ACE efforts, has been the ongoing effort to revive Four Mile Run. In 1974, Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a flood-control channel in the lower portion of the stream at Arlandria, which had endured a damaging series of floods in the 1960s and 1970s. Completed in 1980, the project reflects what filmmaker and environmental activist Dave Eckert calls the "big drive to channelize and control" that often characterized attitudes toward urban waterways in the 1970s and 1980s.

While the Arlandria channel has proved successful at containing floodwaters, as well as the extra pollution that flooding can bring into the stream, the channel also accelerates the flow of sediment and pollutants into the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay and diminishes the stream's biodiversity.

The beginning of the 1990s marked a turning point in environmental activities in support of Four Mile Run. While earlier projects tended to focus on litter control (including those fostered by ACE, which began its life as a chapter of the Keep America Beautiful organization), stream activists gradually adopted a more holistic approach. Citizens became very involved in protesting one construction project on Four Mile Run at the Arlington/Falls Church border, ultimately resulting in a portion of the stream being daylighted and some stream bank restoration.

Stream activists have made much progress in the past 25 years, particularly in keeping heavy metals and other

toxins out of Four Mile Run and in raising community awareness, but more still needs to be done. Although point source pollution has come under stricter governmental controls, nonpoint source pollution remains a serious problem. Eckert says that one relatively low-tech pollution control measure would be to strain the water that flows into the stream through storm drains. Small sections of some of the 300 storm drains on public land could also be "daylighted," creating miniature filtration ponds before the runoff enters the stream. Community efforts led by ACE and other organizations, such as stream monitoring, the storm drain decal project, the stream stewards program, and other educational activities, are vital to the future of Four Mile Run.

Wastewater Treatment

Inevitably, as the population of Arlington has increased, so has the amount of waste that residents produce. The County's first sewage treatment plant opened in 1937, and the system has been periodically expanded and updated ever since. The facility, which is located on South Glebe Road, releases treated wastewater into Four Mile Run.

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Greening Arlington One Home at a Time

by Joan Kelsch

Did you know that the energy used in a typical home generates more greenhouse gas emissions than the average car? And imagine, if every house in the United States replaced lighting in one room with Energy Star® approved lighting, greenhouse gas generation would decrease by 1 trillion pounds each year. This figure illustrates the tremendous impact homebuilders can have on energy demand and pollution reduction, simply by focusing on readily available green building technologies.

With this in mind, Arlington County recently launched its Green Home Choice program for homebuilders and homeowners who want to reduce the environmental impacts of new home construction. Arlington's program provides a comprehensive list of green home components, each with an assigned point value. By incorporating green building components into the home, and achieving a target point level, the project is awarded a green home choice label from Arlington County.

Arlington's Green Home Choice is based on the Southface Institute's EarthCraft House program in Atlanta, Georgia, with adjustments made to apply to Arlington's climatic region and specific environmental concerns. The program incorporates the U.S. EPA's Energy Star® Home program, focusing on insulation, high-performance windows, tight construction and ductwork, and energy efficient air handling systems. The program also

considers resource efficient design (i.e., generating less waste during construction), using recycled content materials and materials that last longer, improving indoor air quality, and reducing water usage, both indoors and out.

It is easier than you think to build houses that use 30% less energy and up to 20% less water. How the house is situated on the site can help save large trees, minimize erosion, reduce stormwater runoff, and maximize the benefits of solar energy, natural ventilation and daylighting. Carefully selected windows reduce the need for heating and air conditioning. Energy efficient appliances use less energy, and water efficient appliances and fixtures significantly reduce indoor water usage. Outdoors, incorporating rainbarrels or cisterns and landscaping with drought tolerant plants can reduce the need to use potable water for irrigation. Carefully selecting construction materials and indoor finishes reduce allergens and toxins in the home.

New homes built to the Green Home Choice standard save money in the long run. Builders who choose to participate in the Green Home Choice program can take advantage of front-of-the-line plan review, are listed on the County's website as program

participants, and are provided with signs to use during construction that identify the project as a green home.

In the future, Arlington hopes to adapt the new home guidelines to apply to home renovations and additions. In the meantime, there are many components of the program that can be used in renovation and expansion projects. ♠

For more information on greening your home, visit the following websites:

Arlington County

www.co.arlington.va.us/des/epo/greenhome.htm

EPA's Energy Star® Program

www.energystar.gov

Environmental Building News

www.buildinggreen.com

Natural Home Magazine

www.naturalhomemag.com

Sustainable Buildings Industry Council

www.sbicouncil.org

Green-e Renewable Electricity Certification Program

www.green-e.org

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SALES & LEASING



Turtle Troubles

By Greg Zell

Arlington's nature centers are well known by residents and school children for the many nature-related programs that are offered there. But most people are probably unaware that Long Branch Nature Center also serves as a regional turtle rescue center. The center and its staff are licensed by the state to accept and care for injured wildlife. Long Branch Nature Center specializes in the rehabilitation of turtles. One of the

Urban wildlife profiles

requirements of the state-issued permit is to release into nature turtles that will be able to survive after treatment. At the center, those turtles undergoing rehabilitation are not on public display. They are housed in a separate, quiet area where they receive attentive care. The center receives an average of 50 to 60 turtles each year, with the majority seen between the months of April and October.

Why are so many turtles brought into the nature center each year? With urbanization and resulting loss of habitat, it's often not safe to be a turtle. Many of the turtles referred to the nature center have experienced an injury such as being hit by an automobile or being attacked by raccoons or pet dogs. A number also have symptoms of respiratory illnesses. Each summer, several very large snapping turtles are brought to the center with injuries from cars or commercial lawn mowers. Fortu-



This box turtle will now be released after care at Long Branch Nature Center.

nately, they often survive and can be released after treatment. By far the most common species seen at the center is the native Eastern Box Turtle.

What should you do if you find a turtle and it's not injured? Unfortunately, many of the turtles brought to the center need no human care. Well-meaning people think that because they found a turtle in the city that something must be wrong. It's important to remember that many types of turtles are native to northern Virginia and belong here—even if it is crowded. Turtles found in the road may be safely helped across (in the direction they are traveling) or released in a nearby wooded environment—away from cars, kids, and pets. Also, far too often, the center receives turtles that have been “kidnapped” from their home environ-

ment by residents on vacation. This is not a good practice for several reasons. These turtles are often non-native to this region and cannot be released, and it's almost impossible to return them to their original homes. Wild turtles should be left wild unless obviously injured and in need of human care.

If you find a turtle in a park or your backyard, can you keep it? No. All wildlife in County parks are protected and should stay there. Under state law, you may keep a non-endangered turtle found in your yard as a pet if you choose, but it's not a good idea. It's difficult to keep wild turtles healthy in captivity, and they need to hibernate over the winter. Avoid the temptation to keep a box turtle as a pet. It's OK to keep

(continued on next page)



Wildlife Habitat #33,928

by Tereza Marks

Being a typical urban dweller in an Arlington condominium, I had a very small space in which to create my backyard habitat. As well as being small, the area is also shaded and damp most of the year. I started working on the habitat almost three years ago, and it has been trial and error trying to find plants that can survive under these conditions. The habitat now contains two species of bleeding heart; Virginia creeper; celandine poppy; native fern; bloodroot; trillium; and golden ragwort. With the wet spring and the fact that the soil is already very damp, most of the plants did not reach their full potential this year. I provide two sources of water: one in a bird bath at ground level and one from an over-the-deck bird bath. For housing, I maintain a small rock pile for invertebrates, a toad house, and a nest box. My entire habitat is shaded by a beautiful black cherry tree, which is a great food source for a variety of birds and for squirrels. I supplement feeding with two bird feeders, which are cleaned weekly. My feeders are regularly visited by typical urban birds including house sparrows, cardinals, chickadees, blue jays and titmice, as well as being raided by gray squirrels. ♣



The Arlington Community Wildlife Habitat team invites you to join this exciting initiative, working to create 1,000 wildlife habitat sites in Arlington County's backyards, schoolyards, apartments and condominiums, parks, places of worship, and work places. For more information or to request a free information packet, please contact ACE at 703-228-6427 or office@arlingtonenvironment.org.

Rehabilitating Turtles at Long Branch Nature Center

(continued from previous page)

the turtle for a couple days to give your family an opportunity to discover a joy of nature, then release it in the exact spot it was found. Don't keep any turtle too late into the fall. They need time to find a proper location for hibernation.

What about releasing the turtle you bought at the pet store? Please don't. It's bad for several reasons. Many are tropical species that would not survive Arlington's winter temperatures and have food requirements that local habitats could not provide. In addition, pet store turtles may have communicable diseases, which could

pass to local native populations.

If you get tired of your pet store turtle, can you take it to the nature center? Sorry, the center has enough mouths to feed already.

When considering the purchase of a turtle from a pet store, remember that some turtles may live for 40 to 60 years.

For more information on turtles, turtle

care, or other wildlife in Arlington, call or visit Long Branch Nature Center, 625 S. Carlin Springs Road, 703-228-6535. ♣

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Arlington's Environmental History

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In response to environmentalists' concerns about pollution in the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, the County completed a major overhaul of the facility in 1981, adding advanced treatment processes that filtered out more solid wastes and removed phosphorus. According to Jeff Harn of Arlington's Environmental Planning Office, future upgrades of the wastewater treatment facility will bring the plant in line with new Virginia water quality standards designed to reduce the amount of nitrogen in the Chesapeake Bay.

Garbage

The fate of Arlington's garbage has changed considerably in the last 25 years. An incinerator built in the late 1950s on South Glebe Road served Arlington's disposal needs for many years until the Clean Air Act of 1970 forced the county to find a better alternative. The solution was to send the county's garbage to a transfer station on South Glebe Road, where it was loaded onto trucks and hauled to a landfill in Lorton.

In the early 1980s, says Harn, the impetus for finding a new way to deal with Arlington's garbage was threefold: first, the Lorton landfill was nearing capacity; second, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had begun promoting new "waste-to-energy" disposal systems; and third, neighboring Alexandria was facing its own garbage crisis and was willing to explore a shared facility. After a feasibility study, the two communities chose Covanta, Inc., to build and operate a new waste-to-energy plant on Eisenhower Avenue in Alexandria.

Opened in 1988, the Covanta plant burns trash to produce electricity, which is then sold to Dominion Virginia Power. Incineration at the plant reduces trash volume by 90%; leftover ashes are trucked to an ash-only landfill near the old Lorton site. Environmentalists have raised concerns about the toxicity of the remaining ash, arguing that hazardous residues from the ash could seep into the groundwater. Arlington County is currently updating its Solid Waste Management Plan, which will establish guidelines for the county's garbage disposal for the next 20 years. The agreement with Covanta expires in 2013.

Recycling

Recycling in Arlington got underway in the 1970s, when school groups began collecting newspapers, glass, and aluminum for both service and fundraising projects. Financial incentives were somewhat tenuous, though, as the glut of newspapers and other items often proved too much for the fledgling recycling industry to handle. In the 1980s, the movement gained momentum as community groups and the County opened several new recycling centers.

In the late 1980s, the Arlington County Board adopted the recommendations of a recycling task force that urged gradual implementation of a comprehensive recycling program. A trial program of voluntary residential curbside collection began in 1991, with all single family residences and duplexes phased in by 1994. Recycling also became mandatory for all in 1994. The program has repeatedly expanded its scope, now covering multifamily dwellings and businesses and collecting

magazines, catalogs, mixed paper, paperboard, phone books, corrugated cardboard, Christmas trees, and yard trimmings along with the usual newspapers, bottles, and cans. The county now recycles about 32% of its solid waste, an amount that exceeds the state requirement of 25%.

Arlington County can take pride in its environmental successes, such as the recycling program, the efforts to clean up local waters, improvements in waste treatment systems, and multi-modal transportation options. In times of limited financial resources and expanding social responsibilities, however, the work of ACE and similar groups is today even more critical to the county's environmental health than it was 25 years ago. It falls to creative individuals, groups, and governments to continue to seek viable new solutions to our environmental problems, no matter how intractable they may seem. ♠

ACE's Roots

Unfortunately, ACE history has not been well kept. An article written in the Summer 1998 *Arlington Environment* describes what is known. ACE was founded in 1978 by the Arlington Department of Public Works as a charter of Keep America Beautiful. Over the years, ACE's focus evolved beyond litter to include recycling, stream protection, and schoolyard education. To read the complete article visit ACE's web site at www.arlingtonenvironment.org/newsletter.



Mini-Grants Help Four Mile Run

Ten properties in the Four Mile Run watershed are incorporating landscaping practices more friendly to our streams, thanks to a mini-grant program administered this year by the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT).

Each landowner received \$500 at a ceremony in April to use towards landscape improvements they submitted in an application to NVCT.

The award winners include Meg Klekner and Paul Segretto, Paul Kovenock, ParkFairfax Condominium Association, Ellen Gilmore and Sam Beatly, Patrick Henry Elementary School, Susan Butler and Peter Rusy, Dawn and Eric Sword, Marty Nielsen, Leslie Garrison, and Randolph Elementary School. The properties are located in Alexandria, Arlington, and the City of Falls Church.

The landscape improvements cover a variety of techniques includ-

ing installation of rain cisterns, development of rain gardens, and planting of trees and other native plants.

This program was funded by a Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grant received in 2002 by ACE and its partners including Arlington County, the City of Alexandria, the City of Falls Church, and NVCT. ♠



Mike Nardolilli from the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust awards a mini-grant to Urath Gibson, a teacher at Randolph Elementary School.

Discover Arlington Winners

The Discover Arlington scavenger hunt contest celebrating ACE's 25th anniversary was a big success. Participants visited 25 locations around Arlington and answered questions at each location.

The grand prize winner was eight-year-old Grady McDavit who received a \$150 gift card for the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City.

"The most memorable part of the contest was walking through the small and large tunnels at Dark Star Park," said Grady McDavit. Grady also enjoyed exploring the Potomac Heritage Trail.

The first-place winners were awarded a \$75 gift card for the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City for getting the highest score in their age category. The adult winners were Bernard Berne and Sam Ferro, tied with 50 points. The teen winner was Joey Huennkens with 31 points and the child winner was Danielle Tillander with 47 points.

ACE thanks the sponsors of Discover Arlington: Covanta Alexandria/Arlington, Crescent Resources, the Kiwanis Club of South Arlington, and Wealth Conservancy International. ♠

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Volunteers this Quarter:

Groups: Girl Scout Troops 3931 and 3052, Gunston Middle School, Hyatt Arlington, People to People, SRA International, TC Williams High School

Individuals: Rob Aldrich, Rachel Baltus, Maggie Bernard, Corrine de Jesus, Michael Evering, Janine Finnell, Fred Grady, Bill Guey-Lee, Pat Hilgard, Brian King, Mary Ann Lawler, Michelle Mandolia, Tereza Marks, Kendrick McCabe, Julien Merzoug, Marty Nielsen, Kate Oberg, Lisa Palmer, Bintou Ouattara, Dan Radke, Melissa Reese, Judith Richter, Leigh Rodes, Brian Segal, Jim Serfis, Janet Siddle, Alex Singer, Sharon Sundial, Brian Wilson, Steve Woolwine, Michael Zuiker

ACE is grateful to our supporters, and we apologize if we overlooked anyone!



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mark Your Calendar!

Potomac River Cleanup

Spend one of the hot, hazy days of summer with ACE improving the Potomac River watershed. Our summer cleanup will take place on **Saturday, July 26, 10 a.m. to noon.**

Meet ACE at the intersection of Chain Bridge and Glebe Roads, under the George Washington Parkway. Because of the rocky conditions, volunteers must be 12 or older. Please wear sturdy shoes that can get wet and bring work or dishwashing gloves. For more information, contact the ACE office at 703-228-6406 or via e-mail at volunteer@arlingtonenvironment.org.

Enjoy Wednesdays in the Park

This summer presentation series at Potomac Overlook Regional Park (PORP) runs every other Wednesday from 6 to 9 p.m. Adults are invited for informal presentations, conversation, and a light supper. PORP is located at 2845 N. Marcey Road. There is a suggested donation of \$4 for dinner. For reservations, call 703-528-5406. Programs include:

- **July 23** - Bird life in the Donaldson Run watershed
- **August 6** - Trees and tree planting
- **August 20** - "EcoTeams," a local conservation strategy emphasizing neighborhood participation.

Summer Festivals

Look for the ACE booth at the following community events and festivals this summer. Volunteers are also needed to help ACE staff these exhibits and lead educational activities for children. Contact ACE at 703-228-6406 or volunteer@arlingtonenvironment.org to volunteer.

- **July 27** - Peru Festival
- **August 3** - Bolivia Festival
- **August 9** - Arlington Farmer's Market at the Courthouse
- **August 21-24** - Arlington County Fair
- **August 24** - Ecuador Festival

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