

# *Riverbend Naturalist*

*Winter 2023/2024*



*Riverbend Naturalist* is the newsletter of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB). Riverbend Park is located at  
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## Coming Events

- The Annual Plant Sale is now open! Go to [www.forbpark.org](http://www.forbpark.org), then click on “2024 Native Plant Sale” to order your plants by March 24. Pickup is on April 13.
- Saturday, April 6 is the date of the Riverbend Park Bluebell Festival.
- This issue of the *Naturalist* contains articles on the following subjects: the Native Plant Sale; the Forest Preschool fundraiser for new equipment; Andrew Wilk, new Visitor Services Manager; Riverbend Park winter scenes; bridge repairs; holiday party for park volunteers; and the park’s latest Eagle Scout project.

## FORB's 2024 Online Native Plant Sale Opened on February 1

Online orders for FORB's Annual Native Plant Sale opened on Thursday, February 1, 2024, and will close on Sunday, March 24, 2024. All online orders can be made on our website at [www.forbpark.org](http://www.forbpark.org); click on the "2024 Native Plant Sale" tab at the top of the page, and then choose your plants and place your order. Over 500 plants from 56 species are available to order, including the ever-popular Virginia Bluebells, several varieties of Phlox, Cardinal Flowers, lots of ferns, and many, many more. FORB's online plant sale includes plants that are natives as well as plants that are hybrids or cultivars of native plants.



In addition to online orders, a one-day sale of Bluebells will take place on the deck of the Riverbend Park Visitors' Center on Saturday, April 6, 2024, from 10 am to 4 pm during the park's Annual Bluebell Festival. Quart-sized Bluebell plants will be sold for \$12 each by cash, check, or credit card on a first-come first-serve basis as long as supplies last. Bluebells may also be ordered from February 1 through March 24 through the online ordering process on our website, as noted above.

All online plant orders must be picked up on Saturday, April 13, 2024, between 10 am and 5 pm at the Riverbend Park Educational Pavilion on Potomac Hills Street in Great Falls. A 30-car parking lot is available at the pavilion for all plant pickups. The pickup site will be identified by a large 10-ft. banner "Native Plant Sale Friends of Riverbend Park" shown below.



FORB's Annual Native Sale is its major fund-raising event of the year. Come support Riverbend Park, beautify your lawn or garden, and enhance the local ecology by planting native plants.

## Forest Preschool Fundraiser for New Equipment

The Forest Preschool, now in its third year of operation, has reached the point of needing to upgrade its equipment, and would like to purchase improved and durable outdoor furniture that will last for years to come. To assist the preschool in reaching that goal, the Friends of Riverbend Park has embarked on an ambitious multi-year program to raise the necessary funds.

The Forest Preschool, under the direction of Amy Cullen, has the funding target of \$13,100 for redoing the outdoor space and making it fully functional for the future. This amount would cover the cost for a large shed for protected outdoor space and storage; a large play table; and five art and lunch tables with ten accompanying benches.



*The kids playing with musical instruments outdoors where the new tables would be located. The new shed would be placed close to where the playhouses in the background are.*



*Turtle hygiene is very important! Inside the Nature Center, the indoor portion of the Forest Preschool.*



*Making practice s'mores*



*Enjoying the snow in mid-January*

The Forest Preschool currently enjoys an enrollment of 15 students, with some attending five days a week, others for fewer days. The preschool is a labor of love for Riverbend Park, and supports the park's mission to provide a natural space for education. In addition, with Director Amy Cullen's background as a pediatric occupational therapist, the preschool has the ability to support children who are neurodivergent or have other disabilities. FORB has been supporting the preschool since its inception, at \$3,000 per year or more, mostly for scholarships. FORB is happy to assist in this current fundraising effort for the new equipment.

If you would like to contribute to this endeavor, you may do so on our website at [www.forbpark.org](http://www.forbpark.org), click on "Donate" and specify "Riverbend Park Forest Preschool" in the comments section.



*Riverbend Park staff member Jarod Golub shows a student how to properly touch a turtle.*

## New Visitor Services Manager at Riverbend Park

Kylie Lee, Manager of Riverbend Park, recently announced the appointment of Andrew Wilk to the position of Visitor Services Manager, which has been vacant since last spring. Andrew is an avid outdoor enthusiast with a degree in



*Andrew Wilk, Visitor Services Manager*

Recreation and Park Management from Frostburg State University. He is a Certified Park and Recreation Professional through the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and an active member of several outdoor organizations including the National Bluebird Society, Off-Road International Police Mountain Bike Association, Virginia Master Naturalists, and the Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts (MORE) Trail Club. His prior position was with the Prince William County Department of Parks, Recreation and Office of Tourism where he was the Lead Park Ranger for Community Outreach and a Trail Specialist. He has many years of experience working in a variety of Park settings including National Parks,

Regional Parks and a Maryland State Park. Andrew is extremely excited to begin his new position with the Fairfax County Park Authority at Riverbend Park, and FORB is happy to welcome him to the park's dedicated staff.

## The Joys of Winter at Riverbend Park

One of the distinct advantages of living in Northern Virginia and in the Great Falls and Riverbend Park areas, is that we can enjoy four clearly separate seasons in an area of great natural beauty. In spring, Bluebells and many other native ephemerals carpet the floodplain of the Potomac River. In summer, tall, leafy trees shade the park, offering relief from sometimes oppressive heat. In fall, the park is covered with the brilliant orange, red and gold colors of the falling leaves. Winter, however, is often overlooked, and can be as beautiful and dramatic at times as during other seasons of the year.



© Robert Young 2015

The photo above, for example, was taken by former FORB Board Member, Rob Young, in 2015, during an intense polar vortex spell when many parts of the Potomac River froze and “sheet ice” was prevalent on the river.



Other scenes during the winter in the park involve equally beautiful and interesting snowscapes as well as the park's native animals sheltering from the cold and snow. For example, the photo below (courtesy of Jonathan Foust) shows a large gaggle of geese gathered on the river's edge during the intense winter cold.



Just walking through the park, whether by the river's edge on the Potomac Heritage Trail or on the many interior trails, yields many fresh, new perspectives and is well worth a visit, even in the snow and cold.



## Bridge Repairs in Riverbend Park

The bridge over the Follow the Hollows Trail, close to where it joins the Potomac Heritage Trail (the trail along the river), was repaired by park staff in December. This bridge was originally built around 2014, and before that there was a smaller foot bridge at the same location. Normally, a wood bridge should last about 20 to 25 years. However, because the decking is exposed to the weather and gets a lot more wear and tear than the supporting structure of the bridge underneath, it needs to be replaced more frequently, about every ten years.



*Casey Pittrizzi, Natural Resource Manager, and Matt McNeal, Maintenance Crew Chief, working on the bridge on the Follow the Hollows Trail*



*The finished bridge*

This was not the only bridge repaired in the past year. During 2023, staff at Riverbend have also replaced the decking on the Conn's Farm Meadow Pond boardwalk, the Potomac Heritage Trail bridge (near the lower parking lot), and the bridge between the Nature Center and the Bootlegger trail. The decking boards on the Clark's Branch Bridge (the large metal bridge) have also been replaced as needed.



In 2022 staff replaced the deck boards of the Potomac Heritage Trail bridge located just before the hill to Witch Hazel Bluff, when walking up river. Park staff have also replaced the stair treads on some of the staircases around the park. The blue stars drawn on the trail map at the left show the approximate locations of these bridge repairs so that you can spot them during your hikes.

## Riverbend Park Holiday Party Brings Cheer to Park Volunteers

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, the Riverbend Park staff organized a holiday party from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm at the Maintenance Facility for all Riverbend Park volunteers. Between 30 and 40 persons, including several FORB Board Members, attended the occasion, which featured refreshments supported by a \$300 donation from FORB.



Riverbend Park is a sprawling 400-acre park requiring much maintenance, and its many volunteers help to keep the trails clear, plant seedlings, remove invasive plants, report downed trees requiring removal, and, recently, they even reported a rooster who decided to make the park his home for a few days. Fairfax County Animal Control was notified and eventually the rooster made his way back to his owner before a hungry fox managed to find him for dinner. Thanks again to the many Riverbend Park Volunteers who do so much to help keep the park thriving!



*Photo courtesy of Michael Rahn*

## Eagle Scout Project Repairs Bootlegger Trail

Last fall, local Troop 673 Eagle Scout, Preston Brown, completed his Eagle Scout project on a section of the Riverbend Park Bootlegger Trail where it meets the Connector Trail from Weant Drive down to the Potomac Heritage Trail. With the approval of his Scoutmaster, Martin Heinze, and under the supervision of Riverbend Park staff members, Casey Pittrizzi and Ian Zipfel, and of Scout leaders, Preston and his crew replaced six degraded water control bars along the trail. They were each replaced by a long wooden pole held in by several pieces of rebar. They also built four feet by four feet check dams out of surge stones spaced four feet apart along three different ravines.



Finally, the crew planted, staked and fenced two dogwood saplings in each of the three ravines, to help stabilize the trail and its soil from future runoff water erosion.



## Friends of Riverbend Park Contact Information

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