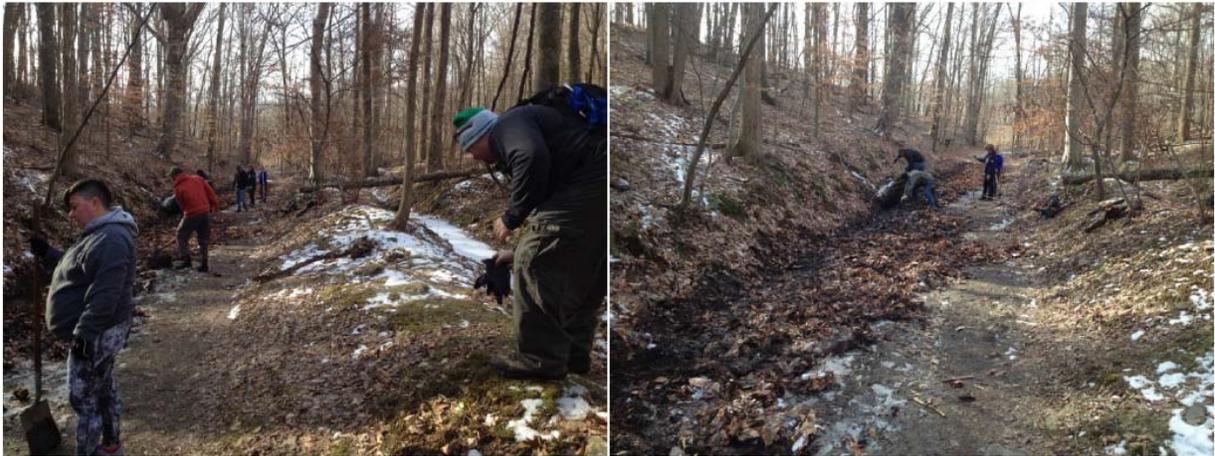


OWNED LAND ACTIVITIES REPORT
April 2014

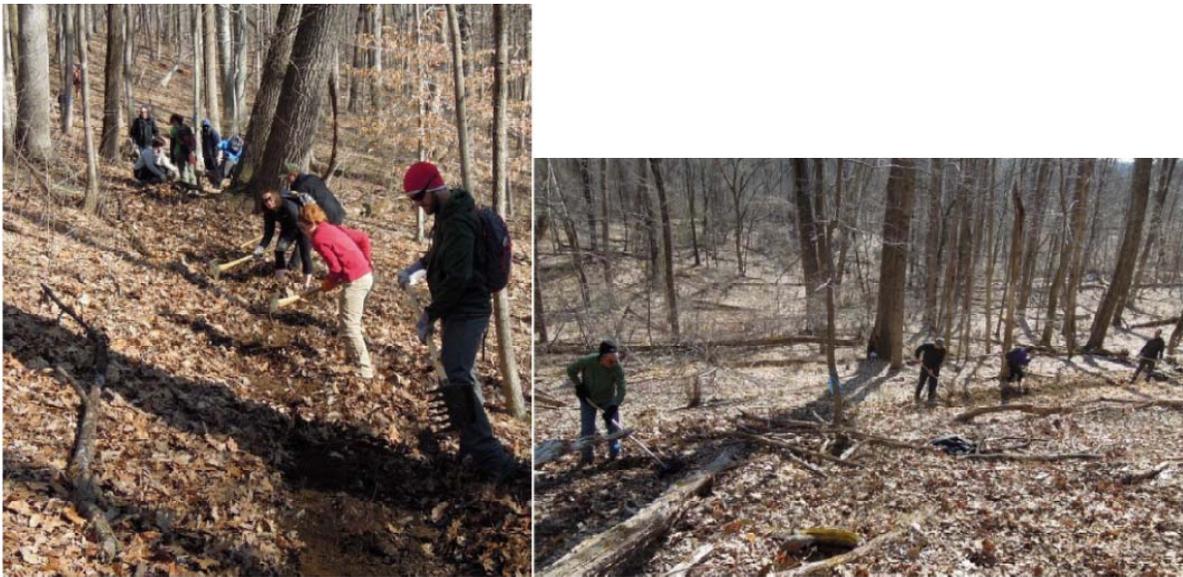
BULL RUN MOUNTAINS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

At the end of 2013 VOF applied for a grant from the Chichester-duPont Foundation. The Foundation awarded VOF a \$25,000 grant for trail building, repairs to the Stone House, and other costs of opening the northern end of the preserve to visitors. Some of this grant will fund additional archeology on the area around the house where parking will be located.

So far this year, 500 volunteer hours have been donated to the management of the preserve. Trails have been improved, realigned, or closed as the situation demanded.



Volunteers open the drainage along Mountain Road between Fern Trail and Chestnut Ridge Trail.



The new Quarry trail being constructed.

VOF is experimenting with new strategies to address the negative impacts of public use of the preserve. The number of visitors to the preserve is increasing each year and there are some weekends that the number exceeds our capacity. For instance, we can safely accommodate about 60 vehicles at any one time. On one fine Saturday this past March, we had 125 cars filling the parking area and lining both sides of the road. This level of use makes the trails crowded, damages the fragile mountain conditions, and makes access by emergency vehicles questionable.



Cars lining both sides of Beverly Mill Drive.

This year, for the first time, VOF opted to close the trails over a wet weekend to prevent further damage from foot traffic. The public was almost universally supportive of that decision and we are now prepared to take that action more frequently when it is warranted.



The VOF truck closing the NAP on Sunday.

We have also changed a policy that has been in effect for the last three years. The Division of Natural Heritage allows leashed dogs on their Natural Area Preserves, and we followed suit for consistency. Unfortunately, the experience has not been a positive one. We had a very noticeable increase in users after the dogs were allowed. In addition, users noted that sightings of turkeys and bear were down, leading us to conclude that high number of dogs was impacting the wildlife. Dogs have not been allowed since March 29th and Brian Laposay, Bull Run Ranger, has already observed a dramatic decrease in the number of visitors.



HOUSE MOUNTAIN

There has been a great deal of activity over the last month regarding attempts to create a new partnership agreement between VOF and the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC). VOF and RACC first signed an agreement for the management of House Mountain shortly after the purchase by VOF in 1989. The agreement automatically renewed every four years for 24 years. This past November VOF formally gave notice to RACC that we wished for that agreement to expire so that we could work on a new agreement.

The expired agreement had a number of issues which VOF staff found to be problematic and ultimately unworkable from a landowner perspective. That agreement created a seven member board called the House Mountain Management Committee. The committee included the president of RACC, a trustee of RACC, a member of RACC, a VOF staff person, a representative of Washington & Lee, a representative of VMI, and a community member chosen by VOF. The committee was given voting power over VOF's management of the property. The prior agreement also contained provisions that prevented VOF from "dissemination of information of the openness of this Property to the public".

Reviewers from the Attorney General's office highlighted the shortcomings of the agreement both when the original agreement was being drafted and again recently. The most problematic aspects of the agreement are VOF's "paucity of control" over the committee and the limitations on the promotion of the property for public use given VOF's expenditure of public money for the purchase.

In our discussions with RACC, VOF has stressed the need for a partnership that will help us with active land management tasks such as keeping trails clear. We have also emphasized that a new agreement must not include provisions that give an appearance that House Mountain is a private preserve. VOF also cannot recreate a partnership that allows a third party to outvote VOF on land management matters. These three points have proven to be the most sensitive in terms of discussions regarding changing the agreement. VOF has suggested that reformatting the current management committee from a voting body into an advisory board might address key issues for VOF and preserve much of the existing functionality and participants.

A member(s) of RACC, who may have been misinformed about VOF's ownership of the property, recently alerted a local journalist of VOF's attempts to "steal" the mountain and contacted Creigh Deed's office with similar complaints. VOF responded to the inquiries from Creigh Deeds's and the local journalist with facts that seem to have been lost in the course of history. An article relating to the negotiations is in this month's Rockbridge Advocate.

While this issue is being worked out, volunteers continue to contribute to the management of the mountain. The weekend of April 5th, five new apple trees were planted in the area of the historic orchard. The original apple trees had reached the end of their lifespan and in 2000 a local man collected cuttings that he grafted in order to maintain the specific apple variety on the mountain. 14 years later, those grafted trees have now been installed.

VOF and RACC have a meeting for further discussion scheduled for Tuesday, April 15th. Recent conversations with key RACC representatives have been positive and we are optimistic that a new agreement will be developed building on the long history of working together on this project.

SALE PARCELS:

Bull Run Mountains Estate lots – Prince William County

See the agenda item in board packet for April 22 meeting re: offer for board consideration.

White House Creek lot – Lancaster County

Staff has notified all neighbors of the White House Creek lot of our intent to sell the property. Staff received no indication of interest and will move on to listing for sale.

Schilling donation – Nelson County

The donation of two lots in Nelson County was considered and approved by the VOF Board at the October 2013 meeting. The transaction was completed shortly thereafter with settlement and closing occurring in December of last year. The lots were donated with the intent that VOF will sell them and use any proceeds in furtherance of VOF's mission. Staff will now move on to the process of establishing an asking price and listing these lots for sale.