

OWNED LAND ACTIVITIES REPORT
June 2014

BULL RUN MOUNTAINS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

VOF has been working with our many partners. Over the weekend of May 31st, the Antioch Fire Station, the closest emergency fire and rescue station to our trailhead in Prince William County, conducted a drill on the preserve. VOF staff have been coordinating with both Prince William and Fauquier County emergency responders for the past several years. One of the challenges the emergency response teams have is getting and remaining familiar with the property. Emergency personnel are rotated among all the county stations, so VOF encourages the captains of the two closest fire stations to periodically have personnel visit the property to make sure that the current crew have had a proper orientation.

Staff from the Antioch fire station spent 2.5 hours hiking the Chestnut Ridge Trail to the white rocks and practiced deploying the all-terrain vehicle that they purchased in anticipation of needing it at the preserve.



The Antioch Fire and Rescue Station sent a fire truck and an ambulance to participate in their practice drill.



Both of the fire stations which are closest to the preserve have acquired these small all-terrain vehicles. The vehicles are small enough to navigate our narrow trails, but can accommodate someone on a gurney, which can be seen behind the driver.

We were also visited several times in May by staff from Natural Heritage. The Division of Natural Heritage, which is part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, identifies critical habitats and rare ecological systems across the Commonwealth which merit special protections. As one of the 61 properties so designated by Natural Heritage, the Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve is monitored by Natural Heritage staff in a similar manner to VOF's monitoring of properties under conservation easements. Over the past month, ecologist Gary Fleming has revisited the preserve to study some of the 72 sample plots he first established from 1998-2001.



Gary Fleming and a colleague take notes on a sample plot. With the help of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, 27 sample plots are being permanently marked in 2014 to aid future study efforts.

In addition, Natural Heritage stewards visited the preserve to search for wavy leaf basketgrass. This particularly aggressive invasive species was first identified in Virginia in 2008. We were very happy to learn that no sign of it was found on the preserve.



Mike Lott and Kevin Heffernan visited the preserve as part of their routine stewardship of the property and to look for wavy leaf basketgrass.

HOUSE MOUNTAIN

The issues surrounding the House Mountain Management Agreement were the topic of another article, this time in the Lexington News-Gazette. This follow-up article, and the subsequent letters written by RACC members, repeated some of the same mistaken themes from the earlier article in the Rockbridge Advocate. To reiterate and clarify the issues from VOF's perspective, Steph Ridder wrote a letter in response that was published at the end of May.

At the April meeting between VOF and RACC, the RACC members took on the task of drafting a new agreement proposal that incorporates the methods used by the friend of the state parks groups. As of June 2nd, VOF has not yet received the new draft.

In the meantime VOF staff continues to focus on the goals and specific management tasks we would like to accomplish over the summer and coming year. This includes increased efforts to engage with and receive input from our immediate neighbors that front along the access road and current parking location for House Mountain.

Amanda Scheps traveled on May 30th to meet on site with neighbors of the House Mountain property to discuss their assistance with road and trail maintenance and to consider alternative locations for parking and the gate. One of our neighbors, Brian McCanon, has provided incredible assistance with maintenance of the road, trails, and gate. He has constructed and maintained waterbars across the road and very recently blazed the new Little House Mountain trail alignment. Brian's recent work on the waterbars has returned the road to drivable conditions and he is enthusiastic about working closely with us in the future.

Another neighbor, Philip Clayton, has a parcel for sale that may offer a good option to replace our current parking area. The existing parking is somewhat inadequate in size and is located about a mile and half from VOF property. The gate which prevents vehicle traffic to VOF property is located some distance from both the parking and VOF property. This separation encourages some visitors to drive past the parking area to get closer to the trailhead. The additional traffic and haphazard parking disturbs some of our neighbors. The Clayton parcel is large enough to accommodate any number of parking spaces we might require and is located much closer to the VOF property. This would allow both the parking and the gate to be in the same location. The parcel has the additional benefit of providing exceptional views across the valley. If the parcel were in VOF ownership, that view would continue to be open to the public. Staff is considering the benefits of that parking scenario, among other options, and will organize proposals for the trustees' future consideration.

ACQUISITIONS

Bull Run Project – Fauquier County

One of VOF's highest conservation priorities in the Bull Run Mountains Project is acquisition of inholdings and parcels adjacent to the 2,500 acre Bull Run Mountains State Natural Area Preserve. VOF has mapped and identified high priority parcels within or adjacent to the preserve that would be of interest for acquisition. Several of these high priority parcels are subject to delinquent taxes and other title issues. VOF staff is working with counsel to investigate the potential for acquisition and solutions for these parcels which, if acquired, would become part of the Preserve. In addition, a long time supporter of VOF is working on the acquisition of a critical in holding that has been on the market for over one year. If successful, this will be a great relief to have it in safe hands and to be able to work with the landowner on conservation options.

SALE PARCELS:

Bull Run Mountains Estate lots – Prince William County

The VOF board approved the sale of the two lots in Bull Run Mountain Estates at the April 22, 2014 meeting. Closing took place on May 21st and the proceeds, as directed by the board, will support the Bull Run Mountains project.

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.