



# CURRENTS

SPRING/SUMMER 2022 | VOLUME 65, NO. 1

## RESTORING OUR CONNECTION *How Mindfulness in Nature Brings Balance*



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

BY: **MARGARET ROHDE**

Human connection to nature is undeniable. You are a part of the living earth as much as the trees outside your window. It's a fundamental truth, but it can be easy to forget.

There was a time when we spent our days immersed in the natural world, living alongside the plants and wildlife we depended on for survival. Our connection with other living things was deep; our lives intertwined with theirs. That's still true, but rather than living as a part of it each day, now we must seek out the natural world. What we discover when we find it is reconnection, and a feeling that might be described as belonging. Nature is our home. That may be why a quick internet search will produce endless articles covering the ways it makes us healthier and happier. From reducing our stress and anxiety and improving our sleep and memory, to helping us avoid or recover more quickly from illness, nature is essential to our wellbeing.

Like time spent outdoors, practicing mindfulness has positive effects on our mental, physical, and social health. Mindfulness is awareness. When we're aware, our minds are connected to our bodies and surroundings, and we live more fully in the here and now, better able to appreciate what is real and beautiful in the present. Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere, but when we practice in nature, we enhance the benefits of both, and deepen our connection with the earth.

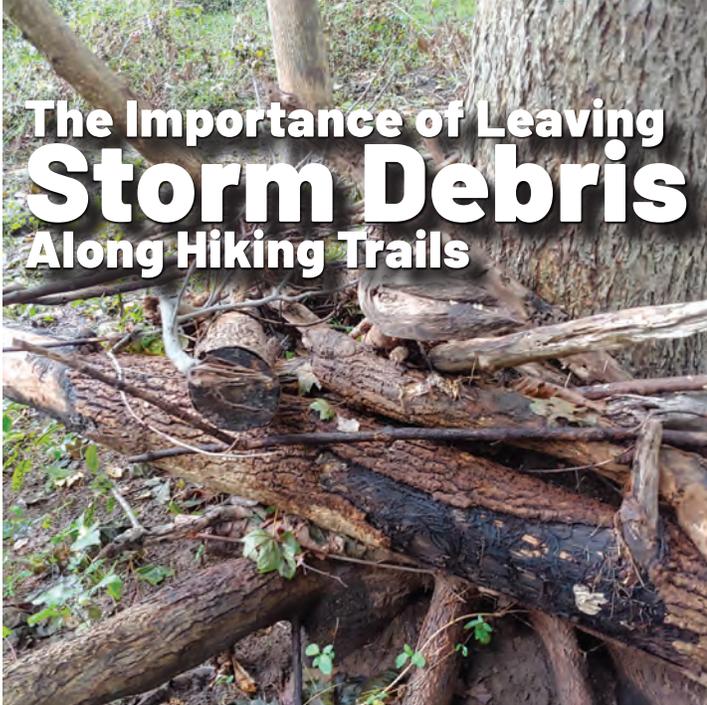
### Practicing Mindfulness in the Wissahickon:

Recommended preserves to visit: Armentrout Preserve, Dodsworth Run Preserve, and Four Mills Nature Reserve. Visit the 'Find Your Trail' page at [wissahickontrails.org](http://wissahickontrails.org) to plan your outing.

- **Bring your awareness** to the soles of your feet. Feel the solidity of the earth beneath you, supporting you.
- **If you're walking, go slowly;** there is nowhere to arrive.
- **Concentrate on your breath,** count "in 1, out 1, in 2, out 2..." up to 10, then back to 1. Relax your body, releasing tension with every outbreath. If you're sitting, place your hands on your chest, feel it rise and fall.
- **Continue breathing,** and notice the quality of the air – its freshness, coolness, or warmth, the scents it carries, its sensation on your skin. Feel it enter your nose and fill your lungs. It is the breath of the trees, exhaled for you.
- **Bring your awareness to any sounds.** The movements of wildlife, birdsong, shaking leaves on a branch, the wind in the grass. If you're walking, hear the sound of your body moving through the landscape. You are a part of it, too. If it's quiet, listen to the silence. Let its stillness fill you.
- **Come back to awareness** of the earth beneath you. Imagine its strength moving up and through your body, steadying you. It has always held you, and it always will.
- **Continue to walk or sit** for as long as you like, always returning to your breath and your senses, staying in the present moment.

# The Importance of Leaving Storm Debris Along Hiking Trails

PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE



Decaying logs are essential for red-backed salamanders. They offer a safe place to shelter and lay eggs and because a variety of invertebrates – from ants and beetles, to worms and spiders – live in and feed on decaying wood, salamanders have plenty to eat.



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

Old fallen logs can become what are known as “nurse logs,” a name that refers to the way they support other living things. Imagine a little maple seedling falls from its branch in the early summer and lands on a rotting log. This seed will have advantages over one that falls right to the forest floor, because it will have more of everything it needs to grow: water, nutrients, and light.

BY: **MARGARET ROHDE**

As we continue to see more extreme weather in our area, we’ll also see more fallen trees, downed limbs, and broken branches on our trails and preserves. It’s easy to look at all the debris and view it as something messy and chaotic. But while these areas of destruction might not be pleasing to our eyes, they can be areas where wildlife find essential habitat.

If you’ve walked down any of our trails following recent storms, you might notice that although we move debris out of the way, we don’t remove it. Instead, we leave sections of cut up trees and large limbs to become a part of the landscape. Where possible, we create brush piles – places that wildlife can take refuge, which provide many of the necessities they need to survive throughout the year.

For birds, brush piles are an important part of daily life. Think of a Carolina wren and what it needs on any day and at any time of year: shelter, calories (insects), and a quick escape from danger. Brush piles can provide all of this.



PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY

These are just some of the benefits of all that storm debris, and just a few examples of the ways wildlife and plants – and the forest itself – can benefit from a little chaos in the landscape.

PHOTO: MADALYN NEFF



## Wissahickon Creek Headwaters Project Wins 2021 Environmental Stewardship Award & Governor’s Award

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

those who understand the importance of this for Pennsylvania, now and in the future.”

In November, the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners and the Montgomery County Conservation District honored the project with the 2021 Environmental Stewardship Award under the Montgomery Awards program. This distinguished award recognizes and promotes the best in planning, design, and conservation in Montgomery County.

Completed in fall 2020, the project is the culmination of 5 years of planning and strong partnerships. Funding and support for this project was made possible through public and private partnerships, with Wissahickon Trails

leading the effort. Partners include Merck & Co., Inc., Upper Gwynedd Township, PA DEP, PECO, William Penn Foundation, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The project restored and stabilized the stream channel and reconnected it with its floodplain along 1,775 linear feet of the Wissahickon Creek in the PECO right-of-way power line corridor. It addresses significant problems caused by suburban stormwater run-off, such as flash flooding conditions, stream bank erosion, loss of stream side vegetation and in-stream habitat, negative impacts on macroinvertebrates (small aquatic animals and insects), and pollution.



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

# CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP & LEGACIES

BY: **GAIL FARMER**

Those who know me have undoubtedly heard my mantra that conservation success is about people. One of the toughest parts of 2021 was the loss of four very special people to Wissahickon Trails, Phil Albright, Tom Dolan, Paul Felton, and Frank Ferro. Each of



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE

these people have helped shape this organization's past, present and future and they remind me how impactful a single person's engagement and support can be. PJ O'Rourke has famously said: "everyone wants to change the world, but no one wants to help mom with the dishes." Not these guys. Like all of us, they wanted to be a part of creating a better world, and they were willing to dig-in and do the work that was needed to help us get there, no matter how small, from reviewing contracts, to running the grill at an event, to serving on committees, and generously sharing that most valuable and limited gift – their time. Of course, they each contributed in bigger ways as well, most recently,

Phil Albright and Frank Ferro contributed significant time, dollars, and insight into the Four Mills Barn renovation planning and fundraising. Phil's early support and leadership was a driving force in launching this important project. Frank led the very first fundraising campaign for the Barn, which generated the



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

needed funds to commission conceptual designs of our plans. Paul Felton was our first Executive Director more than 60 years ago and Tom Dolan was our second. Just before the pandemic, Paul called me with feedback on the trail after having led a hike for friends – he was 99 years old at the time! It was during Tom's tenure that the vision for the Green Ribbon Preserve & Trail was born.

In my short time knowing each of these people, I can tell you that by the end of an interaction with any of them, I always felt better about the work ahead – their support made the task at hand feel just that much more possible. In conservation work, where the problems are big and solutions are complex, the gift of "possible" is priceless.

## Update on the Renovation of **FOUR MILLS BARN**



Here is a preview of what we will see from the back of the building, the balcony will be facing the Wissahickon Creek. Photo courtesy of Daedalus Design.

BY: **MICHAELLE FLEISHER**

Much has happened since our last update on the Four Mills Barn renovation project. As a reminder, the project's goals are to strengthen the flood resiliency and enhance the practical use of this beautiful and historic building. The first floor will be dedicated for community programming and high-water storage and the second floor will be office and meeting space. The addition of a balcony off the second-floor meeting room—hosting a wall of bird safe windows—will be one of the highlights of this renovation.

We have made significant progress in raising funds for this project, our architects have completed the detailed concept plans. We are now in the process of getting these plans approved by our local township and obtaining work permits. Our contractor is working with the architect and engineers on detailed construction drawings and materials list and will be ready to start this spring.

We look forward to more programs at our renovated Four Mills Barn, we can't wait to open our doors to welcome you! If you would like to contribute to this project and make a difference for generations to come, visit: [wissahickontrails.org/news/invest-in-the-future-of-four-mills-barn](http://wissahickontrails.org/news/invest-in-the-future-of-four-mills-barn).

# YOUR COMMUNITY AT WORK

PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY



## J & J Creek Clean Up

Volunteers from Johnson & Johnson completed a creek cleanup on the Sandy Run near their Fort Washington site.

PHOTO: MARGARET RÖHDE



**Serve the Preserve**  
Volunteers planted 100 trees and shrubs along the banks of the Sandy Run Creek, the largest (and most impaired) tributary to the Wissahickon. These species will help manage stormwater and provide food, cover, and nesting space for wildlife.

PHOTO: MARGARET RÖHDE



## Bat Boxes Installed

Local Girl Scout Senior, Alicia Simrak, constructed and installed several bat boxes at Willow Lake Farm and Dodsworth Run Preserve to serve as important roosting sites for bats.

Additional boxes will be added in the spring.

PHOTO: SUZANNE SMITH-OSCILOWSKI



## Mill Volunteers at Fall Fest

Volunteers ran the Fall Mill Fest, where the attendees could watch the blacksmith at work, paint pumpkins, make corn husk dolls, hammer tinsmith panels, and toast marshmallows while listening to historical fiddle music. Email [alex@wissahickontrails.org](mailto:alex@wissahickontrails.org) to volunteer.

PHOTO: JEFF CLARK



## Creek Watch Program

Creek Watchers have been busy sampling local streams for chloride to monitor the effects of winter street and sidewalk salting on our streams. Email [erin@wissahickontrails.org](mailto:erin@wissahickontrails.org) to get involved.

PHOTO: MARGARET RÖHDE



## Conservation Crew

Crew members played an important role in helping with site prep for Serve the Preserve. They also gave a much-needed hand with cleanup following Hurricane Ida. And they removed an impressive amount of purple loosestrife – a challenging invasive plant – at Crossways Preserve.

PHOTO: ANNA MARCHINI



## Center School Planting

Center School students visited Dodsworth Run Preserve in November to plant pollinator friendly perennials. While there, they spent some time birding on a beautiful fall day.

PHOTO: KRISTY MORLEY



## Key Bank Improves Habitat

Key Bank helped improve and protect habitat at Crossways Preserve by removing invasive vines threatening the health of native trees and installing netting around young forest saplings, ensuring they are safe from browsing deer.

PHOTO: ASHLEY HAN



## Green Ribbon Trail Clean Up

Caleb and Evan, members of Boy Scout Troop 303, spent a day cleaning and clearing the Green Ribbon Trail through Penllyn Woods along the Wissahickon Creek.

PHOTO: MARGARET RÖHDE



## Fairwold Academy Planting

Students and staff from Fairwold Academy's Interact Club planted 50 trees and shrubs at Piszek Preserve. The plantings create a softer transition between habitats and provide more food and cover for wildlife.

# Plan Your Visit to the WISSAHICKON WATERFOWL PRESERVE

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

The 18-acre Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve is located in Ambler near the Wissahickon Creek and is owned and maintained by the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve (WWP), a 501c(3) nonprofit and subsidiary of Wissahickon Trails.

## History

The preserve is an example of how a community can come together to reduce the negative impacts that humans can have on the natural world and turn it into something beautiful. At the encouragement of local birders and community members, Wissahickon Trails purchased the site in 2006. In 2007, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency became involved and declared three parcels as a superfund site, now known as the BoRit Asbestos Superfund Site. During this time, the EPA worked with the community and a Community Action Group (CAG) was formed to provide input. According to the EPA, they removed any potential risk from asbestos and completed all removal cleanup work in 2017. After the work was completed, a 511-foot hard surface walking path and benches were installed around the fenced-in 11-acre pond.

PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

## A Haven for Wildlife

The pond provides important habitat for a variety of birds year-round. Follow the crushed stone path along its perimeter and you are likely to see wood ducks, common mergansers, great blue and green herons, savannah sparrows, and killdeer. Wintering and migrating birds often seen here include spotted, least, and solitary sandpipers, ruddy and ring-necked ducks, northern shovelers, hooded mergansers, and bufflehead. As you look out across the pond toward the island, you will see an artificial chimney. The structure was constructed in 2018 to provide an essential nesting and roosting site for chimney swifts, a remarkable bird whose numbers have been declining.



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

Hooded mergansers at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve.

## Getting There

One of our more accessible preserves, visitors can connect to this trail on foot from the Green Ribbon Trail or Ambler Borough and can arrive by bicycle, car, bus, or regional rail. Parking is along Maple St. headed towards Ambler Ave.

# ALES FOR TRAILS - Hike Local. Drink Local.

BY: **LISA HANSELL**

Wissahickon Trails is thrilled to be partnering with several local breweries, wineries, and distilleries for a new program - Ales for Trails. Purchase a \$50 Ales for Trails Passport and receive one free item from the following participating businesses: Boardroom Spirits, McAllister Brewing Company, Round Guys Brewing Company, Stone & Key Cellars, Tannery Run Brew Works, Ten7 Brewing Co., and Well Crafted Beer Company.

It's a great way to support our local businesses



crafting delicious beverages and Wissahickon Trails' efforts to protect open space, maintain the trails, and improve water quality in the Wissahickon watershed. Dave Schloegel, Manager at Tannery Run Brew Works in Ambler says, "We strive to be part of the community and play a role in making it better for everyone. Supporting the natural spaces in our area is a win-win. We are part of the community and we all use the trails frequently."

Visit our website for complete details and to purchase your Ales for Trails Passport.

# SPRING & SUMMER ON OUR PRESERVES

PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY: **KRISTY MORLEY**

It's no surprise that spring and summer provide great opportunities for wildlife viewing on our preserves and trails. Below are a few things you might see when you visit:



**Spring Beauty Miner Bee** – Spring beauty flowers emerge in early spring and if you look closely, you might find one of our tiny native bees collecting pollen. The bees use the pollen to provide a food source to larva that live in underground burrows until they emerge next spring.



**Prairie Warbler** – Spring is a great time to see and hear the 25 species of warblers that move through our area, such as this prairie warbler. Listen for its distinctive buzzy song in shrubby fields.



**Wild Cherry Blossoms** – Wild cherry trees bloom in mid-April before their leaves emerge. Later in the summer, the

small cherry fruits provide an important food source for birds such as American robins, brown thrashers, and cedar waxwings.



**Baby Animals and Birds** – Summer can be a great time to observe animals raising the next generation. Babies like this white-tailed deer or mourning dove sometimes choose a “hide in plain sight” strategy. This is a good reminder to us that these babies don’t need any help from us, and that their parents are often close by to care for them.



**Variegated Fritillary** – These butterflies are most common late in the summer and can be found foraging for nectar from a variety of flowers. If you have violets in your garden, you may be able to see the bright orange and black caterpillar, as they are an important host plant for this butterfly.

## Wissahickon Trails Has A New Look Along the Roads

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

As you drive down Morris Road, you may have seen our updated preserve signs. These new signs are part of our ongoing Wissahickon Trails rebranding efforts. So far, signs have



PHOTO: MADALYN NEFF

been installed at Four Mills Nature Reserve, Four Mills Barn, Camp Woods, Armentrout Preserve, and Dodsworth Run Preserve. We plan to install the rest of the preserve signs in 2022. From there, we'll move on to trail signage. Thank you for your support and understanding as we continue our rebranding efforts.

## Maple Sugaring Festival in the Wissahickon

BY: **KRISTY MORLEY**

The annual Maple Sugaring Festival is set for Sunday, March 6, 2022 and will take place at Penllyn Woods. This guided event is great for all ages. Participants are invited to hang out afterwards and enjoy tasty treats from Philly Waffle Cabin food truck. Visit [wissahickontrails.org](http://wissahickontrails.org) for more details and to register.



PHOTO: DAVID FREED

**Fun Facts about Maple Syrup** to impress your friends and family:

- ✿ It takes 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. To put that in perspective, that's as much liquid as fills an average bathtub, boiled down to the equivalent of a carton of milk.
- ✿ The average sugar maple tree produces anywhere from 5 to 15 gallons of sap, which means the sap from 2.5 trees needs to be combined to make a single gallon of syrup.
- ✿ A maple tree must be around 45 years old before it is tapped for syrup making. A maple tree can yield sap (used for making syrup) for 100 years.
- ✿ There are 13 species of maple trees thriving in Canada and the United States, but only 3 are tapped for syrup. Sugar maple, black maple, and red maple are the main varieties tapped for syrup.

# Board of Directors News

BY: ANNA MARCHINI & MADALYN NEFF

Wissahickon Trails' Board of Directors is comprised of a group of dedicated volunteers, each bringing a different perspective and expertise that helps the organization grow and position itself for the future. This year, we welcome four new members and recognize the service of two members who have completed their service on the board.

## Welcome New Members

**Darrell Gunter** – Darrell brings incredible talent and experience to the board. Trained in sales, marketing, customer service, and international arenas he is currently president and CEO of Gunter Media Group. "Being a part of

this great local board that focuses on preserving land, protecting water, and creating a safe trail system is an important role for me in our community."

**Patrick Hitchens** – Patrick is an attorney at Kilkenny Law. He was previously at Timoney Knox, where he first started advising Wissahickon Trails on complicated land transactions. Patrick has been an incredible resource on the Four Mills Barn and Conservation Committees. He lives along the Sandy Run, with his family. "As a board member, I hope my prior experiences will assist to further our goals and mission."

**Todd Outten** – Todd, a serial entrepreneur and a hands-on tech executive, has been at Comcast for the past four years, currently as their Distinguished Engineer. Todd is an

avid trail user and serves on our Public Programs and Outreach Committee. "As the climate continues to be challenged, it is important that we preserve and protect these valuable resources locally."

**Kristian Smith** – Kristian is the founding Director of Development at the Museum of the American Revolution. Prior she was at PennFuture and the Nature Conservancy. Kristian and her husband live in Upper Dublin. "These past two years have allowed a priority shift, and for me that means being part of an environmental organization right here in my own community."

## Recognizing Years of Service

**Sue Floyd** – Sue served on the board, Governance, Education, and Engagement Committees. She was a dedicated event and education program volunteer. During her tenure, she could always be counted on to lend a helping hand and offer insights to strengthen the organization. The Floyds opened their home in 2012 when the Green Ribbon Gala was hosted there.

**Cheryl L. Young** – Cheryl served on the board as secretary. She will now join the Emeritus Board and continue to serve on the Impact and Governance Committees. We thank her for her tireless leadership on the board and look forward to continue our work together to protect the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

COURTESY OF: DARRELL GUNTER



COURTESY OF: PATRICK HITCHENS



COURTESY OF: TODD OUTTEN



COURTESY OF: KRISTIAN SMITH



PHOTO: DANIEL BURKE



PHOTO: DANIEL BURKE



## Welcome New Staff: Alex McWhorter



PHOTO & BIO COURTESY OF ALEX MCWHORTER

Alex is our coordinator of volunteers - helping recruit, plan, and manage the efforts of our community members looking to help make an impact. From science programs to fundraising events to land and water stewardship, Alex is the go-to for anyone interested in getting involved.

After graduating with a journalism degree from the University of Georgia (Go Dawgs!), Alex spent nearly a decade in the media industry. But after living across the breadth of the west coast alongside his travel-nurse wife, he is now incorporating his love for the outdoors into a new career path. He is an avid hiker, biker, kayaker, rock climber, reader and writer – when his rambunctious dog, Boone, will allow.

# OUR MISSION

We inspire and engage diverse communities of people to protect, steward, and enjoy the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

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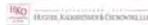
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## GREEN RIBBON GALA



## WALK THE WISSAHICKON



## GREEN RIBBON TRAIL RACE



A Member of the Tokio Marine Group

