



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter June 2019



Ellen X. Silverberg photo

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Celebrate Breewood Tributary Restoration June 8

Join with our friends from government and community organizations to celebrate the completion of Breewood Tributary's dramatic restoration on Saturday, June 8, from 10 am to 12:30 pm. The event includes expert-led tours of the project, refreshments, free plants for your yard, and a chance to win a rain barrel.

The event starts at the parking lot of Northwood Presbyterian Church, located at

1200 University Boulevard West, on the south side of University between Sligo Creek Parkway and Arcola Avenue. The parking lot adjoins Breewood Neighborhood Park.

Tours led by staff from the county's Department of Environmental Protection will visit the tributary streambed and riparian plantings, roadside rain gardens in the Breewood Manor neighborhood, a large bioretention installation at the end of Breewood Road, and the pervious pavement at University Towers Condominium.



The massive erosion of Breewood Tributary (below) before the stream bed restoration work was completed (above) (DEP photos)



Tours will visit the restored creek bed and riparian zone, stormwater bioswales, roadside rain gardens, and the permeable pavements at University Towers.

All of these efforts have brought life back to the Breewood Tributary after it suffered for decades from severe erosion, pollution, and declining wildlife habitat. The tributary drains about 50 acres on either side of University Boulevard and joins Sligo Creek after

crossing under the Parkway.

The stream's amazing comeback is thanks to the collaborative efforts of Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the State of Maryland, Montgomery Parks, University Towers, Northwood Presbyterian Church, watershed conservation groups, and Breewood Manor residents.

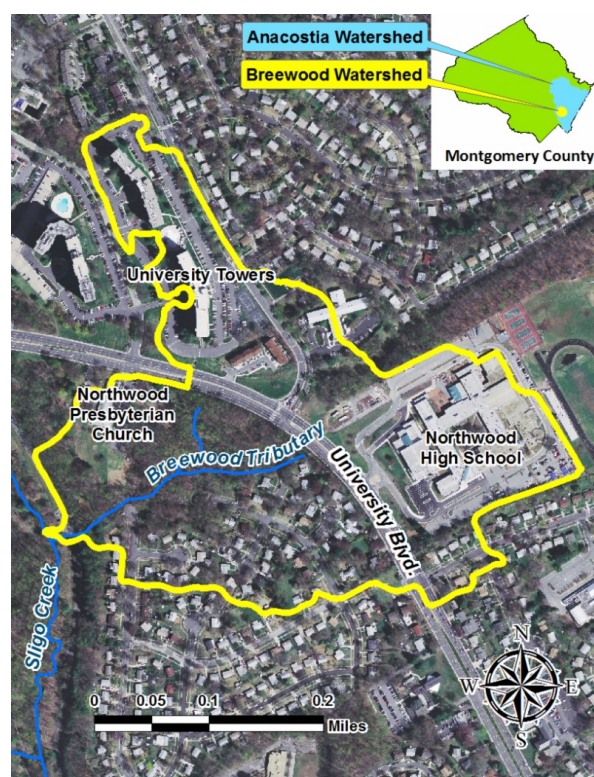
In 2009, Montgomery County selected the Breewood Tributary for watershed restoration in order to meet state requirements. Housing and commercial development from the 1950s had not incorporated the stormwater management practices commonly used today.

As a result, uncontrolled storm water flows caused massive erosion, exposed sewer lines, increased water pollution and fish blockages, and degraded the overall habitat.

The county completed its assessment of the tributary in 2011, created a design plan and held public meetings in 2012, finalized the designs in 2014, and completed the stream channel construction and plantings in 2015.

A series of rain gardens and bioswales along the neighborhood roads was completed in 2014. Finally, in 2017, the county completed large bioretention projects at the end of Breewood Road and in the parking lots of the Presbyterian church and University Towers. Since then, the plants in these installations have grown out, established effective root systems to absorb rain water, and matured into visually appealing arrays.

For more information, contact stormwater@fosc.org.



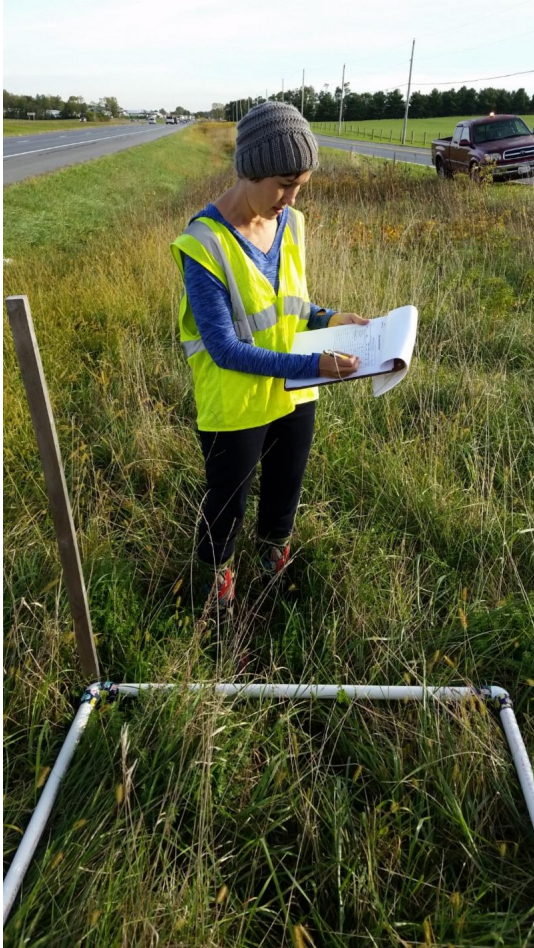
The Breewood Tributary drains an area of about 50 acres on either side of University Blvd. DEP map)

Learn About Yard and Roadside Mowing for Pollinators June 25

Hear about the latest research on increasing pollinator habitat through reduced mowing along our roadways, and in your own yard, when entomologist Lisa Kuder speaks on Tuesday, June 25, at 7:30 pm.

Her talk takes place at the Silver Spring Civic Building on Ellsworth Drive. Come at 7:15 to meet and socialize with other Sligo residents.

Her three-year study of six different



Entomologist Lisa Kuder collects data at one of her roadside study plots in Maryland.

Her work with SHA and her outreach activities with local residents give her a unique perspective on the issues around sustainable alternatives to frequently mowed turf grass. Along these lines, Lisa is leading efforts to commercialize a region-appropriate, urban meadow sod for the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

For more information, contact naturalhistory@fosc.org

study plots along Maryland Routes 15 and 194 shows that even minor changes to mowing schedules can greatly benefit pollinators. Some of the lessons learned apply to better managing our yards for bees and butterflies.

Lisa is a PhD candidate at the University of Maryland who recently completed a three-year study with the State Highway Administration (SHA) examining the impact of reduced roadside mowing and selective herbicide applications on populations of bees and pollinator-friendly plants. Her study took place along state roads in Frederick and Carroll counties and measured bee abundance and diversity, nesting opportunities, and potential contamination of nectar and pollen by roadside pollutants.

At each of her sites, Kuder compared control plots of closely cropped sod to locations managed under one of two vegetation management regimes: a single annual mow in fall and no mowing with selective herbicide application



These native Lyre-leaf Sages bloomed along Sligo Creek Parkway with a pause in mowing in 2017. (Wilpers photo)

FOSC Opposes Beltway Expansion

On May 1, the board of the Friends of Sligo Creek sent a letter opposing Beltway expansion to the Maryland State Board of Public Works, a three-member body consisting of Treasurer Nancy Kopp, Comptroller Peter Franchot, and Governor Larry Hogan. The letter states as follows (and can also be read [here](#)):

Since 2001, Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC) has worked as a volunteer conservation organization with our now almost 2000 people, and with government partners to protect, improve, and appreciate the ecological health of Sligo Creek, the park and its watershed. After careful consideration, we feel the need to state our strong opposition to the current options for expansion to Route 495, the Beltway. Three main concerns drove our decision, informed by decades of experience and a record of successful stewardship programs in the Sligo Creek watershed:

Stormwater and Air Pollution

The Beltway is already a major contributor to stormwater pollution in the region's watersheds, particularly creeks and small streams. Vastly increased pavement will inevitably strain all the existing stormwater mitigation projects and efforts downstream, likely overwhelming them as we suffer from more severe storms. As so much of this rushing stormwater now plows directly into Rock Creek, Sligo Creek, and Northwest Branch, there's no room for error. We have strongly urged that the entire Beltway get stormwater mitigation if any changes are made to it; the current scenario is much more dire. A 'double-deck' lane solution will make capturing stormwater much more difficult and expensive with difficult to estimate costs.

Loss of Public Parkland

All of us benefit from parks in Montgomery County. Under the current plan, Rock Creek and its park in particular would be impacted. Sligo Creek Park would also lose land, particularly impacting its community public golf course. Growing density in Montgomery County means it needs its parks even more today. The terrible impacts would begin with construction and then continue with a massively expanded Beltway. Purchase of new green space and planting trees at remote locations are an unacceptable solution, and are not funded in this plan.

Poor Cost-Benefit Analysis

At its heart, the Beltway expansion is only aimed at addressing the congestion problems of a very few people and would do nothing for the vast majority of travelers. The current plan decrees a wholly inadequate set of 1950s solutions to 21st century problems, at great ultimate cost to the public. This is in no way worth the damage to our environment. We believe that there is no functional, financial, or environmental reason for this project, particularly when cheaper and more rational traffic efforts can and should be implemented.

We urge you to please oppose this project and vote against it.

Sincerely,
Board of Directors
Friends of Sligo Creek

For more information, email advocacy@fosc.org.

Three Oaks Neighborhood Completes Stormwater Project



A portion of the new stormwater management project in the Three Oaks neighborhood (M. Harrell photo)

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has certified the stormwater project funded by the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) in Sligo's Three Oaks neighborhood. The last CBT inspection took place in April and approval was granted with the submission of a final grant report on April 5.

Congratulations to Three Oaks Association residents Marion Harrell, Carol Boquist, and Katherine Payne; Kit Gage of FOSC; and all others who ushered this great effort to conclusion. The Three Oaks Association neighborhood is located on the east side of Sligo Creek Park, between Colesville Road and Piney Branch Road, on Three Oaks Drive.

The interpretive sign (below) is now on display near the conservation plantings, which are on the hillside next to the Seven Oaks Park and Playground. The sign provides

neighbors with information on the need for stormwater management, the methods of carrying it out, and the benefits to the local environment and the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park.

This project was made possible, in part, through a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, administered through the Montgomery County Water Quality Protection Fund, and with assistance from the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection and the Friends of Sligo Creek, as well as funds provided by the Three Oaks Homeowners Association. FOSC acted as fiscal agent for the grant and will function in the same way for a grant to the Carolyn Condominium Association in Silver Spring.

For more information, contact stormwater@fosc.org.

Stormwater

When rain water runs off our roofs, sidewalks, and streets, it carries dirt and pollutants down Three Oaks Drive—first into Sligo Creek, eventually reaching the Chesapeake Bay and the ocean. This runoff creates silt, erodes stream banks, and suffocates aquatic life.



Protecting Our Creek

With Conservation Landscaping

Three Oaks Homeowners Association partnered with the Friends of Sligo Creek to obtain a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to study and address stormwater issues in the Three Oaks community.

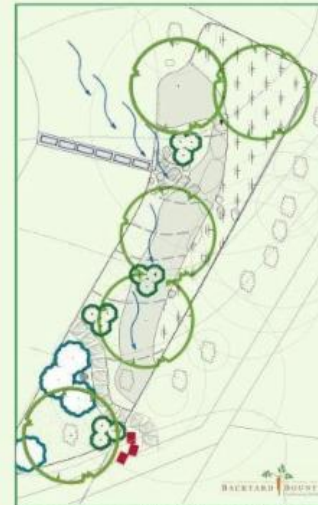
Construction of trench drain and garden

We had a trench drain built across the street to divert stormwater into the conservation landscape garden. The garden's shallow basin is configured with sections to slow down and spread out the water so it will infiltrate the soil.

Native plants

Nearly 500 native plants—trees, shrubs, grasses, and perennials—were planted in the garden. These deep-rooted native plants will filter and absorb the stormwater runoff, removing sediments and pollutants and recharging the water table.

Blooms on native plants attract bees and butterflies, and serve as an important seed source for birds.



Can you figure out the locations of the trees, shrubs, and plants in the garden?



Funding was provided through the Montgomery County Water Quality Protection Fund.



This interpretive sign was designed, constructed, and installed in Three Oaks through a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust.

60 Stone Ridge High Schoolers Remove Garlic Mustard

For the seventh straight year, sophomores from Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart devoted three hours of hard work this spring to removing non-native invasive plants from Sligo Creek Park.

Organized by our tireless invasives chair Jim Anderson (a certified Weed Warrior supervisor), about 60 Stone Ridge students came on April 24 and pulled garlic mustard from two needy sections of the park. Jim's group of about 30 focused on an area between Flora and Crosby Lanes and filled 50 bags. A second group of 28 students and two teachers filled another 36 bags, led by certified Weed Warrior supervisor Kathy Treat, near the Dennis Avenue recreation area. This is the fourth year Kathy has helped supervise these students.

Several other certified Weed Warrior supervisors volunteered to help with such a large group of students: Rita and Paul Marth, Ross Campbell, and Robert Servis, with assistance from Weed Warriors Terry Anderson and Bruce Sidwell and Montgomery Parks staff member Bob Servis

Thanks to these enthusiastic and hard-working students, their teachers, and all the volunteers from FOSC who made this such productive day in the Park. For more information on our invasives efforts, contact invasives@fosc.org.



One of the two groups of Stone Ridge School sophomores with their haul of garlic mustard on April 24 (K. Treat photo used by permission of Stone Ridge School)

Birders Find 33 Species



*Great Crested Flycatcher
(allaboutbirds.com)*

On May 19, a dozen or so eager birders joined trip leaders Mary Singer and David Blockstein for a fruitful and informative bird walk in Sligo Creek Park near Dallas Avenue, just south of the golf course.

The weather and the birds did not disappoint. Sunny skies and mild temperatures produced 33 species, either seen or heard, including many memorable sightings.

Perhaps the highlight was the pair of **Great Crested Flycatchers** (see photo) doing what they do best: snatching bugs on the wing and bringing them to their young inside a nest cavity in a large sycamore.

We did not have to travel far to spot the pair, as they have taken up residence close to the parking lot at Dallas Avenue. This species winters in southern

Mexico and along the coasts of Central America but summers with our more familiar residents.

That same sycamore is also home for a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, who most likely spend the whole year in that neighborhood.

Further upstream another flycatcher, an Eastern Phoebe, displayed its acrobatics from underneath the bridge at the southwest corner of the soccer field. With numerous short flights from its perch sticking out of the creek bank, our Phoebe slowly reduced the insect population.

Also by the soccer field bridge we spied a Song Sparrow feeding a young Brown-headed Cowbird. Wait! What? Yes, as an "obligate brood parasite" that has lost the ability to build its own nest, the female cowbird had laid her egg in the Song Sparrow nest and the sparrow unwittingly became the surrogate parent. The cowbird nestling was notably larger than the (possibly overworked) sparrow. But at least the sparrow had the pleasure of seeing and hearing the Belted Kingfisher that also patrols the creek in those parts.

Speaking of nests and nestlings, we saw the former but not the latter of a resident pair of Red-Shouldered Hawks. Darn.

Mary showed us the nest (again in a large sycamore) downstream from Dallas Ave. near the ball field at Brunett Ave. The nestling must have been snoozing, but we later saw one of its parents soaring high above (see photo below). Let's hope for a successful fledging.

In between the bookends of hawks' nest and kingfisher, we saw and heard a range of elusive wood warblers and other species. They tested our binocular skills and upper-register hearing, but now we all know they are out there to find and appreciate. Thanks again to Mary and David for bringing them into view.



Birders on May 19 tracking one down high in a Sligo tree (Campbell photo)

Our list for the day, in more or less chronological rather than ornithological order: Eastern Towhee, Downy Woodpecker, American Robin, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Gray Catbird, Tufted Titmouse, Chimney Swift, Northern Cardinal, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Goldfinch, Northern Parula, Red-eyed Vireo, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, Common Grackle, Blue Jay, American Crow, Great Crested



Flycatcher, American Redstart, Mallard, Cedar Waxwing, Song Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, Belted Kingfisher, Mourning Dove, House Sparrow, Carolina Wren, and Veery.

-- Ross Campbell

Soaring Red-shouldered Hawk
(allaboutbirds.com)

Need to Reach Us?

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Friends of Sligo Creek is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to protecting, improving, and appreciating the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed.