



## Reston Association Committee Recommendations to Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force March 3, 2010

**Study Area:** Herndon-Monroe Station

**Committee:** Environment Advisory Committee

**Recommend to the Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force that Sunrise Valley Wetlands Nature Park be preserved in perpetuity and donated to the Reston Association for its continued use and management for benefit of the community.**

### Overview of Issues:

As a general statement, applicable to all future station areas, EAC reaffirms the goals set forth in its recommendation to the RA Board of January 2007 about future development, impervious surfaces and stormwater management. These are that

- All future development is designed so that no additional stormwater runoff is generated at that location.
- All infill development is designed to decrease stormwater runoff compared to existing levels at that location.
- No waivers to the stormwater runoff regulations of Fairfax County are granted.

An issue of primary concern to EAC is the protection of the Sunrise Valley Wetlands Natural Area that is situated within the ¼-mile radius of the future Herndon-Monroe station.

*History.* The Sunrise Valley Wetlands Natural Area is a federally-mandated mitigation site set up by Reston Land Corporation through a Conservation Covenant in July of 1994. Mitigation was required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for destruction of other wetland areas within Reston due to development. After the site was developed as a wetland, Reston Association was to take ownership and stewardship from Reston Land; this change was approved in 1999 by both the Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Dept. of Environmental Quality. However, this ownership transfer did not take place.

In 2002 a long-term lease agreement between Westerra (Reston Land's successor), Reston Arboretum LLC and RA was drafted but never signed. The land is currently owned by Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. Reston Association has had a long-standing interest in this property and has still fulfilled its part of the environmental maintenance agreement, while continuing to pursue a transfer of ownership with the new owners.

*Importance of the site.* Sunrise Valley Wetlands Natural Area is a unique wetlands area in Reston. Although it is a created site, it is exceedingly rich in wildlife, particularly bird species. There exists, within its relatively small 15.75-acre area, multiple ecosystems of open water, marsh and upland forest that attract a wide range of wildlife, including birds, turtles, frogs, dragonflies, butterflies and small and

large mammals. Reston Association staff regularly use the site for nature education programs and bird, dragonfly and butterfly counts. Tree and meadow planting projects have taken place there to increase native species.

The park is well-known and frequently visited by birders throughout Northern Virginia. Carol Hadlock, a member of Northern Virginia Audubon Society and a Master Naturalist, has done an extensive study of the flora and fauna of the park. In 1999 Carol undertook a study of the park's birdlife with the goal of compiling a checklist of the birds to be found there. In 4½ years of nearly weekly visits, Carol noted 122 species. Of those, 33 species had nested in the park during her visits. 18 species were warblers that dropped in during migration to rest and feed. Seven years later, the number of nesting species has dropped to 23, primarily because of development around the park. As a public access site, it is also a particularly pleasant spot for walking and quiet contemplation in an ever more urbanizing area.

### **Challenges & Solutions:**

- Because this environmentally-rich park is within the ¼-mile radius of the Herndon-Monroe station site it is vulnerable to degradation from the effects of adjacent development, both in the construction phase and later, from encroachment, increased run-off and pollution.
- Although the park is a federally-mandated mitigation site, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has the authority to lift that protection so the site could be in danger of being removed altogether and replaced with development.
- If the protection was lifted, mitigation would still be required at another site since the original requirement would not be voided.
- An EAC recommendation that RA pursue gaining ownership of the site was included in the Special Committee on Parks & Recreation Planning's report to the Board in July 2007. EAC would still like to see this occur as a way of protecting the Sunrise Valley Wetlands Natural Area and making it a unique addition to Reston's natural areas.

### **Other Opportunities:**

This Natural Area, that already exists, constitutes a singular enhancement for the mixed-use neighborhood that will develop around the Herndon-Monroe station. Current Reston residents have often stated the existence of natural areas and pathways as an important reason why they moved here. Protecting and preserving this natural area under RA ownership would allow both current and future residents access to a local natural area that will enrich their experience and make Reston a better place to live work and play.