

Tysons Forest Community Task Force Report

March 24, 2024



**Recommendations for
Enhancing and Preserving
Tysons Forest**



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Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Announcement: Formation of the Tysons Forest Task Force – 07.25.2023

As the Board is aware, Tysons is planned as Fairfax County's urban center. Immediately to the west of existing and planned development in the Hunter Mill portion of Tysons is a stream valley that includes Old Courthouse Spring Branch. Also included in this stream valley is Raglan Road Park and other Fairfax County Park Authority property which contain more than 40 acres of forested land. This green corridor is of great value to nearby residents, local businesses, visitors to the area, and the numerous flora and fauna that make this stream valley their home. Unlike many areas of Fairfax County, land along the stream valley is owned by a variety of property owners including but not limited to the Park Authority. For the Board's awareness, I am creating a community-led Task Force with representatives of property owners and other community partners to develop high-level strategies for the preservation and enhancement of the stream valley. The Task Force will provide a forum for discussion and recommended action to maximize the ecological benefits of this green corridor while maintaining appropriate access by us humans. I appreciate the Park Authority's active interest and participation in this effort and look forward to sharing the task force findings and recommendations as this important community work moves forward.

Walter L. Alcorn, Hunter Mill District Supervisor



Task Force Members, Advisors, Supporters, Expert Speakers

- **Community residents.** Jack Russell (Chairperson), Aja Chaker, Donna Smith, Frank Torre, Dragan Momcilovic, Dave Fullerton, Anh Fullerton, Amira Wali, Ahmed Koura, Dev Mani, Dean Manson, Gloria Runyon, Dee Dee Carter, Sandi Rothman, Paul O'Mara, Bret Leslie, Ian Smith (former Tysons resident)
- **Local building owners, commercial tenants, business owners.** Kevin Berman (Berman Enterprises), Susan Russell (IT Concepts), Chris Esposito (Esri), Amy Johnson (COO, IT Concepts retired) - wrote letter of support, Peg Hillman (President, Day & Night Printing) – wrote letter of support
- **Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Fairfax County Park Authority, Stream Restoration team, Wastewater team and third-party contractors (e.g., Dominion Energy).** Executive Sponsor of the TFCTF - Supervisor Walter Alcorn, Hunter Mill District, Amanda Lowe, Hunter Mill Staff Aide, Jai Cole, Park Authority Executive Director, John Burke, Park Authority, Devin Pharr, Providence District Staff Aide, Danielle Sette (Stream Restoration), Ken Trinh (Stream Restoration), Aaron George (Stream Restoration), Meskerem Eshetu (Wastewater team), Tom Grala (Wastewater team), Yolanda Green (Dominion Energy)
- **Nonprofits.** Dr. Jane Goodall (Jane Goodall Institute) – wrote letter of support, Libby Lyons (Audubon Society), Colleen Hawkinson (Tysons Community Alliance)



Project's Guiding Principles

- Formulate a flora / fauna enhancement strategy that maximizes the ecological benefits of the Tysons Forest corridor and thus, make Tysons Forest sustainable and emerald green forever.
- Develop a human / wildlife coexistence that enhances the experiences of both.
- Respect the needs and ideas of all stakeholders --- community residents, business owners, Fairfax County Park Authority (and related), wildlife nonprofits, and contractors doing work in the corridor as well as the animal inhabitants of Tysons Forest.
- Build a legion of future **green champions** by encouraging youth to immerse themselves in volunteer experiences in Tysons Forest.
- Capture “lessons learned” as a model for other urban forests.



Task Force's Research Process

- Seven workshops, three trail walks, numerous presentations by experts and twenty small group meetings – September 2023 to February 2024.
- Input was gathered from expert guest speakers and forest stakeholders.
- Created an idea funnel.
- Discussed an array of solutions.
- Identified possible fixes.
- Made recommendations.



Tysons Forest Corridor Snapshot

- Tysons, Virginia is a Washington DC beltway community with approximately 25,000 permanent residents and a daytime worker population > 100,000.
- The **Tysons Forest Corridor** is a 65-acre urban forest in Tysons, VA. The Corridor is a narrow strip of land stretching southeast to northwest between Gosnell Road and the Dulles Toll Road (Rt. 267) and is bisected by a fifteen-foot-wide stream.
- The Corridor land is owned by multiple entities --- Park Authority, Board of Supervisors, commercial building owners and private homeowners.
- The largest portions of land are centered in three Fairfax County parks – Ashgrove Historic House (14 acres), Old Courthouse Spring Branch Stream Valley Park (33 acres), Ragland Road (11 acres).
- .



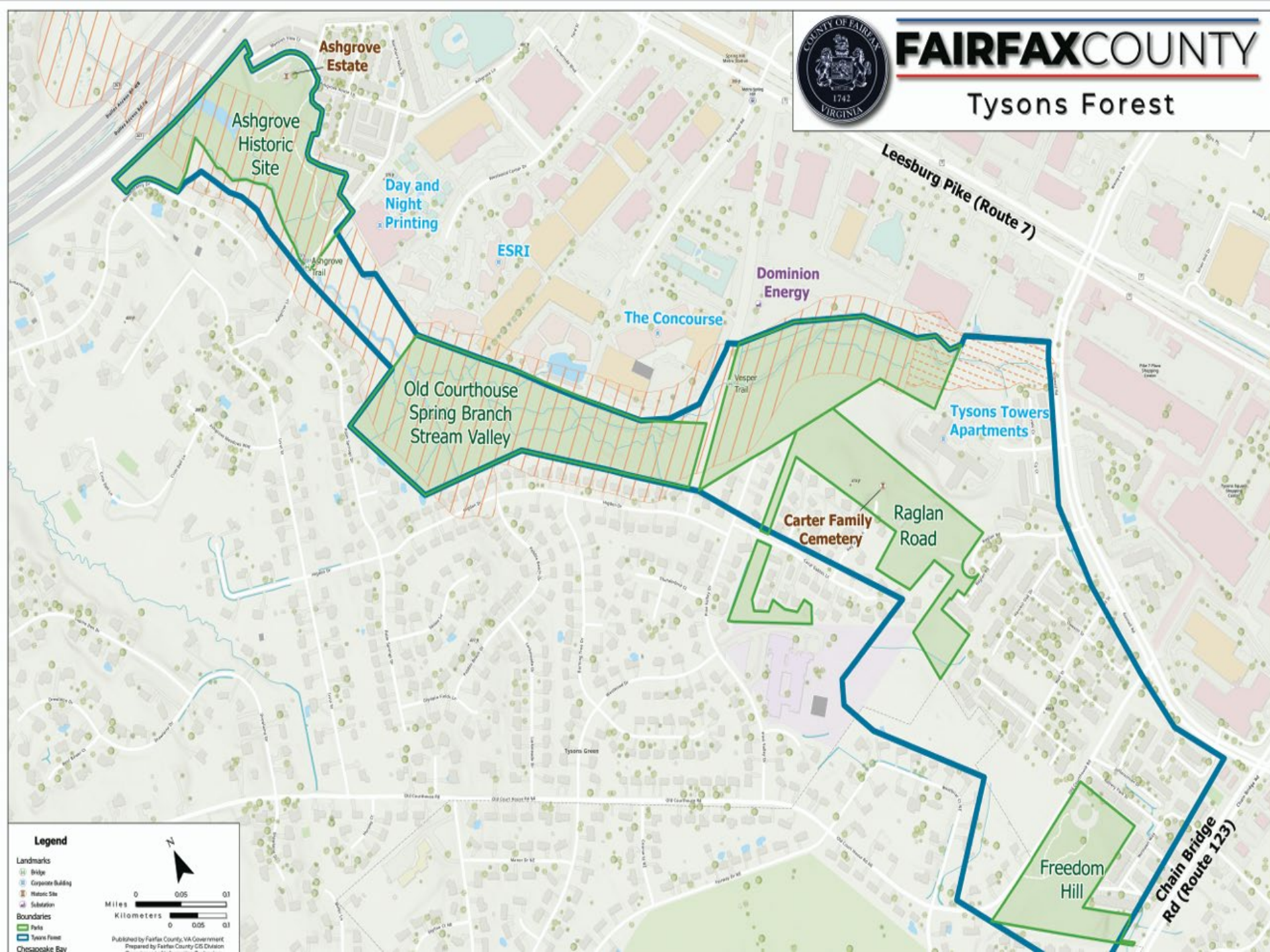
Tyson's Forest Corridor Snapshot (con't)

- The perimeter of the forest corridors comprised of nine office buildings, five homeowner associations, two daycare centers, two auto dealerships, two hotels, a steakhouse, a coffeehouse, a nursing home, a technical community college, a strip shopping center and a gas station. *Note: new high density housing projects will add fifteen hundred or more residents on the forest's edge.*
- Notables: AOL was founded on the forest's edge in the 1990's. The Jane Goodall Institute was located on the forest's edge for many years (until the pandemic hit). Day & Night Printing, a family-run business, has been on the edge of the forest since 1981. Esri, an international geo-mapping company, has regional offices adjacent to the forest. IT Concepts was founded here and now has 400+ employees. Konica Minolta and Dominos Pizza have regional sales offices on the forest's edge.
- Tyson's Forest has been rich in wildlife over the years. It is home to birds (migratory birds are declining), bees (declining), butterflies (declining), deer, red and grey foxes, skunks, opossum, raccoons, squirrels, chipmunks, frogs, snakes, minnows and small fish. Occasional (rare) visitors include beaver, coyote, bobcat and bear.



FAIRFAX COUNTY

Tysons Forest



Legend

Landmarks

- Bridge
- Corporate Building
- Historic Site
- Substation

Boundaries

- Parks
- Tysons Forest
- Chesapeake Bay

Miles 0 0.005 0.01

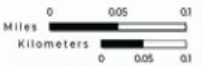
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Published by Fairfax County, VA Government
Prepared by Fairfax County GIS Division



Legend

- Landmarks**
 - Bridge
 - Corporate Building
 - Historic Site
 - Substation
- Boundaries**
 - Parcels
 - Parks
 - Tysons Forest
- Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas**
 - 1983 SP46



Published by Fairfax County, VA Government
Prepared by Fairfax County GIS Division
Department of Information Technology
Corrections or additions should be
brought to the attention of the above agency



Recommendations



Tyson's Forest Has Endured Many Challenges, The Largest Choice Looms Daily

Tyson's, Virginia is undergoing significant infrastructure build out as it grows. Nearby, a majestic urban forest stands tall in the emerging skyline of buildings. The tree canopy, for a variety of factors (some uncontrollable), has declined approximately 20-25% in the past five years. Replenishment efforts are ad hoc and are not outpacing tree canopy shrinkage. It is time to act. Two questions define our challenge. Do we want to build a beautiful city? Or do we want to save a prized urban forest?

We must do both.

Included on the following pages are 24 action items, grouped in 7 key areas, which will enhance the green future of Tyson's Forest.





1. Deliver a Promise of Coexistence

- A. Recognize the 65-acre forested corridor, which stretches from Gosnell Road to the Dulles Toll Road officially as **Tysons Forest** and brand the area with wayfinding signage.

- B. Issue a “pledge of protection” for the Tysons Forest corridor which places the utmost value on forest health and biodiversity, establishes a workable coexistence between humans and wildlife and ensures native plants and trees are replenished. Enter the pledge into the Tysons Comprehensive Plan.
 - **DRAFT** - *Mature healthy tree canopy shall be valued and preserved in the Tysons Forest corridor. The forest shall be replenished continuously to maintain its vibrancy. Animal inhabitants of the forest deserve clean drinkable water, plentiful food sources, an abundant amount of ground cover and safe, protected structures for habitat and they shall be afforded such. A thriving green forest with a healthy biodiversity shall be valued equally with the building of a city.*





2. Replenish Tree Canopy and Augment Wildlife Habitat

- A. Plant 200 wire-guarded trees and seedlings annually to restore the tree canopy (i.e., 1,000 total by 2028).
- B. Identify distressed micro habitats (i.e., bald spots in the forest) and plant acres of native vegetation and wildflowers to fortify the forest floor.
- C. Plant dozens of evergreen seedlings on the edges of the forest to buffer wildlife from parking lots, walkers, etc.
- D. Identify invasive plant problem areas in the forest and work with Fairfax County experts and community volunteers to reduce invasive plant coverage by 50% or more by 2028.
- E. Do baseline counts for butterflies, birds, bees and frogs to measure biodiversity success in the future.





3. Revive an Old Woodland Trail

A. Review routing and design plans for the Ashgrove Trail Project planned to originate at the Ashgrove Trail and evaluate options for a continuous connection to the south to the Vesper Trail and would incorporate ideas such as:

- *This work would be subject to no tree canopy loss.*
- *Resurface 250-yard walking trail between Ashgrove House Trail and 1600 Spring Hill Road. Connect the path between 1600 Spring Hill Road and The Concourse Buildings with a 75-yard woodchip trail (by the office pond path). Design a wildlife learning trail with signage for birds, butterflies, bees, etc. on the 225-yard asphalt path behind The Concourse buildings.*
- *Add upgrades along the trail's edge --- a stream overlook, benches or boulders to sit on, bird feeders, a butterfly garden and historic landmarks.*



Note: the current asphalt walking path was built by corporations (e.g., AOL) thirty years ago.



4. Expand the Forest's Footprint

- A. Expand the acreage of the Park Authority with land acquired through proffers. Proffer opportunities could include land which currently overlaps resource protection areas. Develop a list of proffer options for developers which enumerate meaningful contributions to Tysons Forest.
- B. Encourage forest-adjacent homeowners and business owners to follow the ecological practices outlined in Fairfax County's Watch The Green Grow program and encourage usage of forest-friendly mosquito sprays and pesticides.
- C. Educate homeowners on the benefits (and fun) of pursuing a wildlife habitat certification for their property through the Audubon Society or the National Wildlife Federation. These certifications in a neighborhood may possibly enhance property values as future buyers seek green homes.



Note: B and C will provide a vital green buffer around Tysons Forest.



5. Maintain a Safe and Clean Forest

- A. Continue the current semi-annual trash cleanups. Ideally, hold one on Earth Day in April. Notes: set for April 22, 2024. Leverage the marketing firepower of CLEAN Fairfax and the Tysons Community Alliance to recruit volunteers (e.g., Scouts, elementary and high school students, etc.) for the green day events. Note. Jane Goodall has offered to activate the Langley chapter of Roots & Shoots.
- B. Engage employees in the Operation Stream Shield program for help with forest projects.
- C. Obtain commitment from forest-adjacent businesses to secure dumpster lids to curtail wind-blown debris. Similarly, require construction sites to mitigate run-off of mud, silt, harmful chemicals, etc. into the forest's streams. The forest animals deserve clean water to drink.
- D. Install trash cans along the walking trails.





6. Create **Green Champions** to Lead Us For Generations

- A. It is vital that youth in the community lead us. We must engage and encourage the **“green champions”** of the future and provide volunteer experiences for them now.
- B. Enlist the support of elementary / high schools and youth organizations in the forest caretaking process --- tree planting, seed sewing, bird / bee / butterfly / frog counting, trail ambassadors, etc.
- C. Recruit college students to drive website building and marketing analysis (conducting surveys, designing metrics).
- D. Include young people on future task force teams.





7. Teamwork, Structure, Funding, Communications

- A. Develop a communication plan for the release of the task force's recommendations: TFCTF celebration, BoS proclamation, Tysons Reporter press release, 1:1 meetings with HOA's, etc.
- B. Build a basic website and an event calendar for Tysons Forest.
- C. Short-term, set up a small work team to execute the task force's recommendations and identify sources of funding. Longer term, consider setting up Friends of Tysons Forest type of organization.
- D. Add a TFTF representative to the Hunter Mill Land Use Committee to offer guidance on forest-adjacent projects. Additionally, identify and map easements in or adjacent to Tysons Forest and engage with easement owners about their plans to use the easement which could affect Tysons Forest flora & fauna.
- E. Record "lessons learned" in the storybook of the TFCTF project for other urban forest project teams to use in the future.





“I do have hope. But if we want tree canopy, wildlife and biodiversity, we will have to stop depending on someone else to save the world. It is up to us – you and me – all of us.”

**Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, UN Messenger of Peace
(and her USA office was on the edge of Tysons Forest for years)**





Appendix



Challenges To Tysons Forest:

- 2012 – Proposed Route 267 Dulles Toll Road exit would have flattened the entire forest.
- 2018 – Historic rainfall in Northern Virginia washed away much of the natural habitat in the forest.
- 2019 - Vesper Trail / Bridge is highly valued by the community, but construction removed food sources / ground cover for wildlife. *Note: the wildlife habitat can be replanted easily.*
- 2020 - Stream Restoration Project (Phase 1) and Sewage Line projects punched sizeable holes in the tree canopy with 235 mature tree cuts. *Note: the Stream team altered plans mid-project and created wildlife habitat (inverted stumps).*





Challenges To Tysons Forest (con't):

- 2024 - Stream Restoration project (Phase 2) near Ashgrove House Trail Bridge. *Note: great collaboration between the community and the County stream restoration team reduced tree cuts by 50% and expanded the forest restoration footprint.*
- 2025 - Wastewater Conveyance Systems modification project near Gosnell Road. *Note: the Wastewater team is making design changes to minimize impact on the forest.*
- 2024-25 - Dominion Energy underground power line / large substation construction projects on Vesper Trail. *Note: Dominion Energy has been asked to expand their landscaping plan along the Vesper Trail and make it forest friendly.*
- 2024+ - two mega apartment projects will bring 1,500+ residents to the forest's edge.





Challenges to Tysons Forest (con't): Butterflies, Bees, Birds Have Dwindled

- According to the “eye test” (anecdotal observations), butterflies, songbirds, bees and frogs have decreased in Tysons Forest in the last five years.
- *Note: better baseline counts via volunteers using apps (e.g., eBird, iNaturalists, FrogID, ButterflyCount, Pollinator, etc.) will quantify the gaps.*





Challenges to Tysons Forest (con't): Trash and Mud / Silt From Construction Sites, Dumpsters

Thousands of plastic bottles are retrieved from Tysons Forest's streams annually. Recently, mud from construction sites began to bleed into the forest's stream.





Challenges to Tysons Forest (con't): 1,500+ New Residents on the Forest's Edge in 2024-27



Sheraton Hotel Conversion
544 Apartment Units



The Exchange Twin Towers
516 Apartment Units



Resources – Fairfax County

- **Invasive Area Management Program:** Invasive plant assessment and management - [Invasive Management Area Program | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#). It is a community-based volunteer program designed to reduce destructive invasive plants on parklands. It includes habitat restoration.
- **Helping our Land Heal:** restore, repair and maintain high quality natural areas and park lands - [Helping Our Land Heal: Ecosystem Restoration | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#).
- **Watch the Green Grow:** land management adjacent to Park Authority property - [Watch the Green Grow | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#).
- **Wonder Wagon:** Mobile Nature Center program - [Wonder Wagon | Park Authority \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#)
Fairfax County Park Authority's mobile nature center designed to promote environmental and nature-based educational programs to underserved areas of Fairfax County.
- **Mastenbrook Grant Program:** Grants provide limited matching funds for projects in Fairfax County parks. [www. https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/mastenbrook-grants](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/mastenbrook-grants)



Resources – Fairfax County

- **Fairfax County Park Authority Friends Group:** Friends Groups serve the Park Authority by supporting, enhancing and advocating for Fairfax County parks, facilities and services. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/friends>
- **Operation Stream Shield (DPWES & OPEH):** Litter pickup services using local labor. [Operation Stream Shield | Public Works and Environmental Services \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/operation-stream-shield)
- **Fairfax County department of resources** schedules periodic native plant seedling sales. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/native-seedling-sale>
- **Urban Forest Management in Fairfax County -** <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/urban-forest-management-fairfax-county>
- **Find A Tree Planting Program -** <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/environment-energy-coordination/tree-planting-programs>
- **Tree Commission -** <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/trees/treecommission>



Resources – Other

- **Audubon Society of Northern Virginia Wildlife Sanctuary Program:** Provides information, on-site consultation and recommendations to help establish and nurture sustainable natural habitat in your backyard, neighborhood, school, church, park or business. <https://www.audubonva.org/wildlife-sanctuary-program>
- **National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Sanctuary Program:** Resources to turn your yard, balcony container garden, schoolyard, work landscape, or roadside greenspace into a certified wildlife habitat. <https://www.nwf.org/CERTIFY>
- **Roots & Shoots**, a program of The Jane Goodall Institute, provides the resources to encourage and motivate youth to take action on issues that matter most in their communities. <https://rootsandshoots.org/>
- **Tree Rescuer Program (Plant NOVA Trees):** Vine removal - [Tree Rescuers volunteer program | Plant NOVA Trees](#)
- **__Dominion Power** seedling giveaway to students: - www.projectplantit.com.



Resources – Other

- **How to make seed balls and grow wildflowers** article:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/home/2023/10/11/how-to-make-seed-bombs/>
- **Fairfax ReLeaf** a non-profit organization that encourages urban forestry conservation practices by individuals, private organizations, and state and local government. Visit the "Free Trees" page for information on spring and fall distributions.
<https://www.fairfaxreleaf.com/>
- **Plant Nova Natives** provides information on native trees and ground cover plants. Also provides a list of where to get low-cost or free native trees.
<https://www.plantnovatrees.org/free-or-low-cost>
- **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation** has a list of invasive plants and information on how to combat them. <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspdflist>
- **Climate Change article** - <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/17/us-east-trees-warming-hole-study-climate-crisis>