



# LITTLE FALLS WATERSHED ALLIANCE

EDUCATION - ACTION - STEWARDSHIP

## 2017 Annual Report



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

# Little Falls Watershed Alliance

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- ❑ Little Falls Watershed Alliance is an environmental stewardship group, founded in 2008 by a group of neighbors committed to protecting the fragile natural environment of the Little Falls and Willett Branches and surrounding Little Falls watershed. Our mission is to ensure that the natural spaces in our area persist for generations to come. We strive to bring neighbors together in order to build awareness, improve the natural habitat, protect our community's natural heritage, and enhance the community's enjoyment of our creeks and wooded areas.
- ❑ From our first meeting, we have grown to over 2,000 members and engaged more than 4,000 volunteers in over 600 work days and other activities. Our volunteers have logged over 8,700 hours of service to the watershed.
- ❑ As stewards, we are committed to restoring the water quality, natural habitat and ecological well-being of the Little Falls Watershed. We focus on trash abatement, habitat restoration, and stormwater management.
- ❑ As advocates, we speak up for the needs of our parks and natural areas, and we advocate for clean water laws that are fair and enforced consistently.
- ❑ As educators, we work with neighbors, school groups, local businesses and other community members to educate through classroom activities, festivals, community work days and outreach events.

# Where Are We?



- 9.5 square miles in Lower Montgomery County and Upper NW DC
- Three Creeks –
  - Little Falls Branch
  - Willett Branch
  - Minnehaha Branch
- Three Main Parks:
  - Little Falls Stream Valley Park
  - Capital Crescent Trail
  - C&O Canal



# Stewardship - Community Work Days: Watershed Clean-up

- Ninth year
- Three locations in the watershed
- 34 volunteers; 1,200 pounds of trash
- Partner with Montgomery Parks, Alice Ferguson Foundation, and local garden club and citizens associations





# Stewardship - Community Work Days: Trash Removal



**Top Cleaning Group,  
Three-Time Winner  
Keep Montgomery County  
Beautiful Program**

- ❑ Partnership with Montgomery Parks and Montgomery County DOT
- ❑ Every second Saturday
- ❑ 200 volunteers; 500 hours
- ❑ 2,940 pounds of trash
- ❑ 47 bags of recyclables



# Stewardship - Community Work Days: Invasive Weed Removal

- ❑ 26 work days in 6 locations in the Little Falls Stream Valley Park
- ❑ Remove non-native invasive plants
- ❑ Partnership with Montgomery Parks
- ❑ 222 volunteers; over 400 hours





# Stewardship - Habitat Restoration: Norwood Meadow

- ❑ Partnership with Montgomery Parks.
- ❑ First meadow installed in a County park outside of Brookside Gardens.
- ❑ Community planting days have installed over 3,000 native grasses and wildflowers.
- ❑ Grant from Whole Foods paid for soil preparation.
- ❑ In sixth year.





# Stewardship - Habitat Restoration: Westbrook ES Meadow

- ❑ Partnership with Montgomery Parks and Westbrook Elementary School (MCPS).
- ❑ Students from the elementary school grew trees and plants from seeds.
- ❑ Local neighbors maintain meadow.
- ❑ In tenth year.





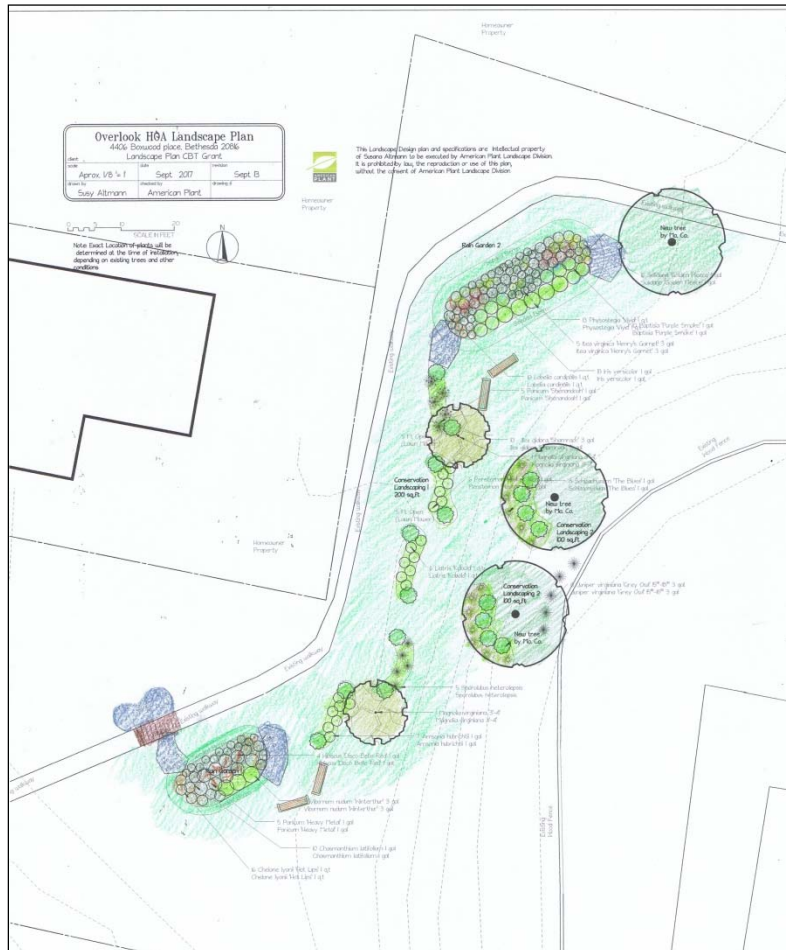
# Stewardship - Habitat Restoration: Green Acres Meadow

- ❑ Neighborhood led; Partnership with Department of Transportation.
- ❑ Phase Two completed: 200 native wild flowers and grasses planted with help of community members and local Elementary School Environmental club.





# Stewardship - Stormwater Management: Overlook HOA



With \$48,000 grant from Montgomery County and the Chesapeake Bay Trust :

- ❑ Produced a stormwater management plan for the Overlook community to be used as road map going forward with landscaping and repaving projects. Expectation is that the plan will be implemented over several years. When implemented in its entirety, the HOA will have reduced its stormwater pollution load by more than 30%.
- ❑ Installed two demonstration-sized raingardens connected by conservation landscaping.
- ❑ Conducted two community meetings to educate the neighbors about the importance of stormwater management and what they can do on their property to mitigate run-off and improve the health of the watershed and Chesapeake Bay.

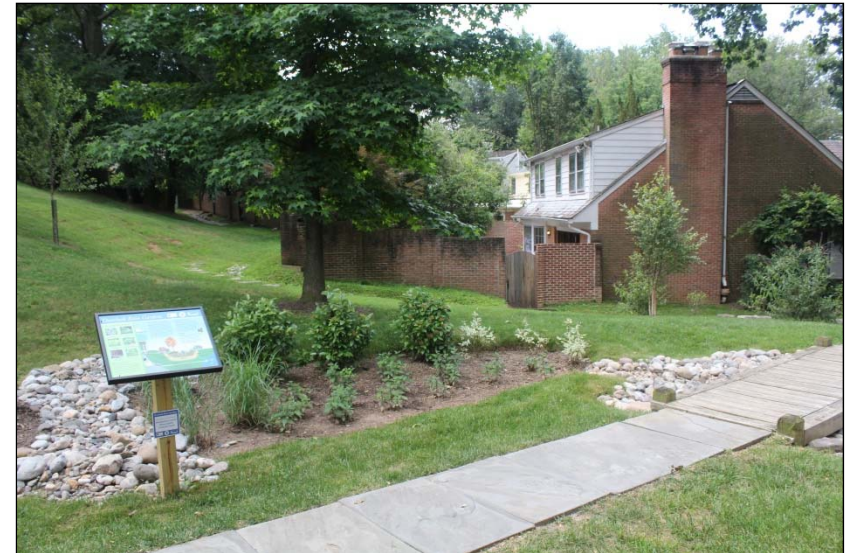


# Stewardship - Stormwater Management: Overlook HOA

Before



After



## Overlook Rain Gardens

Little Falls Watershed Alliance | CBRTRUST

### Can You Spot These Plants?

 Early Ridge Asclepias 'Purple Smoke'	 Blackberry Amorpha rubricolor
 Wildflower Asclepias	 Blackberry Amorpha 'Henry's Garnet'
 Cardinal Flower Lobelia cardinalis	 Wildflower Chromolaena latifolium

### What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is designed to capture and filter rain water that flows off hard surfaces like roadways, driveways, parking lots, rooftops, and even lawns. A shallow basin is planted with deep-rooted native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs that filter and absorb stormwater runoff. Their extensive root systems filter rain water by removing pollutants - such as oil, pet waste, heavy metals, and fertilizers. The clean water soaks into the ground and eventually reaches the Little Falls Branch, the Potomac River, and finally, the Chesapeake Bay.

### Our Rain Gardens

Overlook has two rain gardens connected by beds of native plants. They collect the water running down the hill from the pool deck and parking lot and filter it back into the ground so that it doesn't go into the storm drain. Our gardens treat over one acre of rain water runoff and remove more than 70% of the phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment that are causing pollution from this area.

### Benefits

A rain garden's main benefits are preventing flooding and keeping pollution out of our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. They are also a beautiful addition to any park, home, or yard. Information about how you can build a rain garden and get a rebate is available from Montgomery County RainScapes at [RainScapes.org](http://RainScapes.org).

### Why Plant Natives?

Natives are well adapted to local conditions and require very little care once they are established. Their deep roots help maintain water quality and prevent erosion. But most important, our native birds, butterflies, and other insects depend on native plants for food; non-native plants provide no nutritional benefits. Can you spot butterflies, moths and bees in our rain gardens?

### THE ALTERNATIVE

Without a rain garden, runoff produced when it rains picks up oil and other pollutants from our streets and sidewalks. This toxic mix of pollutants then pours into our streams and rivers endangering fish and other wildlife.



# Education and Outreach: Creek Critter Days

- ❑ Free family event to hunt for Macro-invertebrates.
- ❑ Educates on stream health and engages public in stream ecology and understanding the need for clean water.
- ❑ Spring and Fall events lead by our stream monitoring team were attended by over 60 children and adults
- ❑ Partnership with Audubon Naturalist Society





# Education and Outreach: Sidwell Friends

- ❑ Educational program on issues effecting the watershed developed for the Sidwell Friends Elementary School Second Grade to complement their science curriculum.
- ❑ Led two programs – one in the spring and one in the fall. The programs include a classroom lesson on the importance of native plants followed by a work day to remove invasive plants in the Little Falls Park.





# Education and Outreach: Creek Monitoring

- ❑ **Benthic Macro-Invertebrate Monitoring:**
  - Monitor Little Falls Branch four times a year
  - 11 person teamed trained to capture and identify macro-invertebrates living on the bottom of the creek.
  - Report data to ANS and to MDE
- ❑ **Salt Level Monitoring:**
  - Test salt level in four locations as part of national study on impact of road salt on waterways.
  - Data is reported to Isaac Walton League



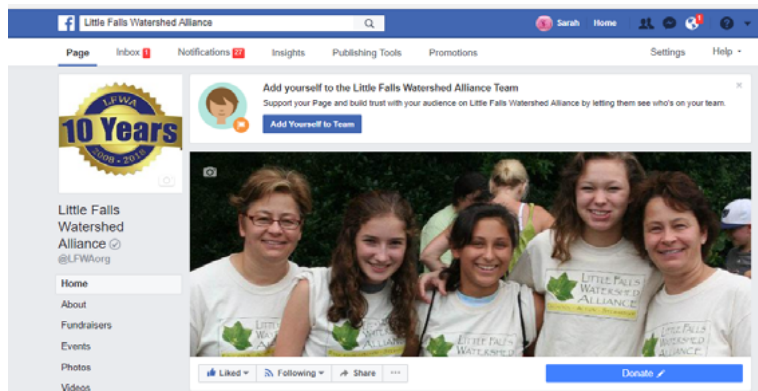
[www.iwla.org](http://www.iwla.org)



# Education and Outreach:

## Social Media, Community Events

- ❑ Publish monthly e-newsletter with information on environmental issues, native plants and events of interest. Newsletter is sent to 2,200 people on our mailing list.
- ❑ Speak to local garden clubs on issues facing the watershed
- ❑ Tabling at neighborhood events
- ❑ Educational events for cub scouts
- ❑ Active Facebook page with pictures of events and exchange of information on native plants, stormwater issues, events of interest.



June in the Watershed



**LITTLE FALLS  
WATERSHED  
ALLIANCE**  
www.LFWA.org



**Alice Ferguson Watershed Clean-up**  
Above and Below: It was snowing in April for the Alice Ferguson 28th Annual Potomac Watershed Clean-up, but that didn't stop our volunteers! Thank you to the dedicated crew that came out to clean the Willett and Little Falls Branches. And thank you to the crew that came out the next week (when the weather was much better) to finish the job. We removed 31 bags of trash, 13 of recycling with a total of 79 volunteer hours!

Visit our [Facebook](#) page for more pictures.

**CRITTER COUNT**  
Discover Who Lives in the Creek!  
Saturday, June 4  
1:00 to 3:00



Join us for a fun family activity identifying critters in the creek. We will have all the tools you need to capture and ID the macro-invertebrates that live in the water. Bring your smart phone as we will be using an app created by the Audubon Naturalist Society for this activity. We have smart phone covers so don't worry about it getting wet. And if you don't have a smart phone, we can pair you someone who does. We also have a few boots to lend!

**FREE!**  
Little Falls Stream Valley Park  
Little Falls Parkway and Massachusetts Ave, Bethesda

Pre-registration is required as space is limited.  
Visit our [website](#) to register.

**Clean the Creek, Clean the Parkway**  
Saturday, June 11, 10:00 to 12:00

Join us to clean the parkway and the Little Falls Branch between River Road and Mass Avenue. Meet at the gravel parking lot at intersection of Mass Avenue and Little Falls Parkway.

We have gloves and boots to share. Pre-approved for MCPS SSL hours. Visit our [website](#) for more information.



## Advocacy:

# Local Development; MS4 Permit

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The health of the watershed is effected by development and permitting regulations at both the state and local levels. It is important to our mission that we work to ensure that regulations and decisions are made in such a way that the needs of the environment are met.

### **Development:**

We committed to closely monitoring development in the watershed and advocating for the strongest application of environmental standards. We are review and comment on all stages of development and meet frequently with the developers and the planning staff. We testify both to the Planning board regarding local development.

- Equity One Development of Westbard. Testified for maintaining a 100-foot buffer in all new building. Join legal action against Equity One. This 29-acre redevelopment of the Westbard Shopping Center and surrounding properties was put on hold when Regency Centers acquired Equity One in October 2017. (Regency Center abandon the project in March 2018 and decided to re-develop the area property by property.)
- Westbard Self Storage: Worked with planning staff and developer to ensure that 100% of the stormwater was treated on-site and that the building did not extend into the 100 foot stream buffer. Pleased to announce that the first piece of land has been dedicated for the Willett Stream Valley Park.

### **Montgomery County MS4 Stormwater Permit:**

LFWA is an active member of Montgomery County Stormwater Partners and works closely with State and County governments on development and implementation of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit for the County. Application of the permit is critical to controlling stormwater run-off, the fastest growing source of pollution for our urban area.



## Advocacy:

# Willett Branch Stream Valley Park

Successfully advocated for a new park and naturalization of the Willett Branch for the Westbard area.

- ❑ Requested and participated in monthly stakeholder meetings to plan park and make sure it adhered to the strictest environmental standards.
- ❑ Had regular meetings with Montgomery Parks and Planning Staff to review progress on new park.
- ❑ Lead 3 community walks down the Willett Branch to educate on the need for the new park.





## Advocacy:

# Willett Branch Stream Valley Park

## History of the River Road Community

- History committee formed in 2016 continued to research the history of the River Road community to inform the public of the post and pre civil war history of the area so that this history could be honored in the new park.
- Presented their findings at four public meetings.
- Published an article on the history of the African American Community in the 2017 Fall issue of *Washington History Magazine*.



## Tracing a Bethesda, Maryland, African American Community and Its Contested Cemetery

BY DAVID KATHAN, AMY RISPIN, AND L. PAIGE WHITLEY

River Road is the approximately 18-mile artery that historically connected Tenleytown in Northwest Washington, D.C., to Seneca, Maryland. The relatively short portion that runs northwest from its beginning at Wisconsin Avenue NW to Little Falls Parkway in Maryland is lined with low-scale residential buildings. A mile beyond Western Avenue, the boundary between Washington and Montgomery County, Maryland, the houses give way to a combination of commercial structures, gas stations, two high-rise apartment buildings, and a tall radio tower. The Capital Crescent Trail, a hiker-biker trail on the abandoned Georgetown Branch of the B&O Railroad right-of-way, passes overhead. Known today as Westbard, this area of everyday suburban commercial activity was once home to a small community of African American families. In 2017 none of those families and their descendants remain, yet evidence of their community lingers in the form of Macedonia Baptist Church on River Road and Clipper Lane.

What cannot be seen is another remnant, the historic River Road Moses Cemetery. Named after the African American benevolent society that established it nearby in 1911, the cemetery became a subject of controversy in recent years when historians for Montgomery County and community

activists (including the authors of this essay) began researching its history. Using historic maps and records, they discovered that the cemetery lay under a parking lot next to Westwood Tower Apartments, located opposite the Westwood Shopping Center off Westbard Avenue, which was developed in the 1960s during a burst of commercial construction. Yet no one knows what happened to the cemetery or whether the bodies still remain interred therein.

The mystery of the Moses Cemetery is the latest chapter in the story of the River Road community, which has its roots in the first European and African settlement in the area more than three centuries ago. An examination of this community through land deeds, oral accounts, maps, and other primary documents uncovers networks of family, work, faith, and mutual support that bound the residents to each other and to the land, as well as to other African American communities nearby. This article traces the origins of the River Road community and how it developed and flourished after the turn of the 20th century and then, with intensified commercial development in the 1950s and 1960s, dwindled until only the "Little Church on the Hill" and the mystery of the community's cemetery remain.

A modest house, presumed to have been a slave cabin, once was home to African American workers on River Road. From the end of the Civil War through suburban development of the 1950s, a small African American community thrived in what was working-class Bethesda.

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# Partners in Stewardship

**Over 30 community partners support our efforts including:**

George Washington Freshman Experience, Accenture, Wedding Wire, Spark Post, Abt Consulting, Mover Moms, Outdoor Illumination, Audubon Naturalist Society, Sidwell Friends Lower School, Cub Scout Pack 256, Montgomery Parks, UCG, DSG, Westland Middle School, the Democratic National Committee, Ledo's Pizza, Westmoreland Church, St. Dunstan's Church, Westmoreland Hills Garden Club, the Citizen's Coordinating Council of Friendship Heights, the Chevy Chase Garden Club, and Young Ambassadors for Community Service (YACS) Programme.





# 2017 Expenses

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Fund Raising	\$532
Management and Administration	\$8,068
Advocacy	\$323
Education and Outreach	\$4,055
Overlook	\$40,526
Stewardship	\$8,028
Total	\$61,532

# Board of Directors

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- Mikel Moore, Vice President\*
- Jonathan Breul, Treasurer\*
- Sara Robinson, Secretary\*
- Wendy Cohen
- George Wyeth
- Maurie Kathan\*\*
- Dan Dozier\*\*
- Suzanne Richman\*\*

\* Returning officers

\*\* Retiring directors



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