

ROCK CREEK CURRENT

A PUBLICATION OF ROCK CREEK CONSERVANCY

FALL 2023

What it Means to Protect Rock Creek

Fall is a time of transformation in Rock Creek, with leaves changing various shades of green, gold, and rust; the forest floor becomes scattered with leaves that crunch beneath your feet.

But beneath this stunning façade lies a fragile ecosystem, in urgent need of our care. Rock Creek's forests provide cleaner air, abundant shade, habitat for native animals and plants, and a place for respite and recreation. **But each day, the stress of climate change and invasive plants threaten the health of the watershed.**

Rock Creek Conservancy is working to preserve the environmental health of the parklands and watershed, all while creating spaces for community. You, our dedicated supporters, are the heartbeat of our mission, the ones who make it possible for Rock Creek to thrive.

People-Powered Restoration

Your commitment helps rally more than 4,000 volunteers who, together, have already removed nearly 34,000 pounds of litter and reclaimed 200,000 square feet of Rock Creek's parklands this year. These vibrant events allow communities across diverse neighborhoods to unite in purpose.



Saving our Forests

The resilience of Rock Creek's forests depends on you. With Rock Creek Park, we are crafting a Forest Resilience Framework that combats climate change and invasive intrusions. We look forward to the implementation of the framework in early 2024.

Creating Community

Our hard-working staff and volunteers (your friends and neighbors) restore and nurture our "mini-oasis" sites throughout the park. These special green spaces are part of larger-scale restoration efforts that increase access and foster a sense of community. With each Summer in the Parks celebration and each Race, History, and Rock Creek discussion, we are strengthening our bonds.

Carter Barron Alliance

Excitement and momentum are growing for the restoration of the Carter Barron Amphitheater, an historic 4,200-seat outdoor amphitheater within the parklands. The Alliance continues to build a community of support, keeping close the values preservation and inclusion. You may have already enjoyed this area through one of our Summer in the Parks events, or through volunteer events at the new mini-oasis site nearby.

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

(so far!) *As of September 12, 2023



4,000+

Volunteers engaged in people-powered restoration



34,000

lbs of trash removed



200,000

Square feet of forest restored



20

RC3 student volunteers



6

Race, History, and Rock Creek events hosted



10

Summer in the Parks events

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rockcreekconservancy.org



Scan with your phone to give right away — do your part to preserve our shared backyard!



Exploring a Rich History—and Future!

Our Race, History, and Rock Creek series has encompassed challenging conversations, joyful celebrations, and inspiring stories of Rock Creek's past and future. With help from the bright minds of Jackson-Reed High School students, we examined the displacement of Black residents from the once-thriving neighborhood, Reno City, to make room for Fort Reno Park. These conversations have allowed us to confront and examine the past and work towards our mission of increased equity of access and

inclusivity in the parklands. We also found joy in the rich history of the Carter Barron Amphitheater, one of the first integrated performance venues in the city. With legendary performances by jazz icons including Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald, the Amphitheater played a pivotal role in the evolution of jazz music in DC!

For recordings of these programs, visit rockcreekconservancy.org/uncovering-our-history. And check our calendar for upcoming programs!

Top 3 Invasive Species to Watch Out For This Fall:

Your commitment safeguards our shared backyard. By staying informed about invasive plants, you can protect our fragile forest ecosystem from harm. Here are just a few examples of invasive plants that our volunteers remove during the annual Weed Wrangle:

1. Winged burning bush: This plant's beauty is one of the main reasons it's still being planted today. It turns a bright red color in the fall.

2. Oriental bittersweet: A vine with bright red berries, often used in holiday wreaths and greenery.

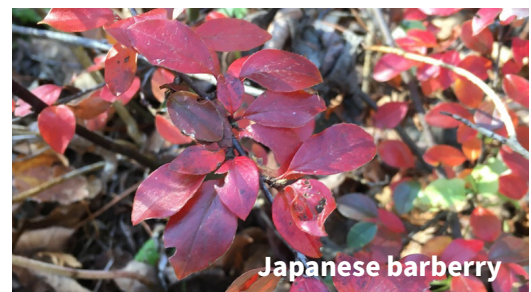
3. Japanese barberry: A popular landscaping plant due to its fall color, this plant is not only invasive, but creates a perfect microenvironment that ticks thrive in!



Winged burning bush



Oriental bittersweet



Japanese barberry

In the Spotlight: Stream Team Leaders



Meet Jonas, one of our Stream Team Leaders, who hosts clean ups, conducts outreach, and helps educate neighbors on the best way to care for the watershed. Jonas and his organization, Blue Planet Scuba, have been leaders since 2013.

“We became Stream Team Leaders because we wanted to prevent plastics from ending up in the

ocean by catching them in our local waterways before they make their way downstream. They’re also a chance for us to educate our terrestrial volunteer friends about the effects we have on the ocean planet through our actions on land.”

Jonas has seen lots of bottles, plastic bags, tennis balls and more in the creek—but the weirdest might have been a full rental scooter tossed in the creek! **Thank you to Jonas and Blue Planet Scuba for keeping our watershed clean and healthy.**

Your dedication to the health of our watershed empowers leaders like Jonas. Together we’re making a cleaner, healthier Rock Creek.

An Interview with Outgoing Rock Creek Park Superintendent, Julia Washburn



For more than six years, Julia Washburn, a DC native, served as the Rock Creek Park Superintendent, capping decades of service in the National Park Service.

While Julia retired in May, her leadership and commitment to restoration, equity, and inclusion will leave a lasting legacy—one we are continuously motivated by at the Conservancy!

What are your favorite places in Rock Creek?

I love being in the deep parts of the forest, where the beauty of nature surrounds me. I also enjoy the challenging trails and rock formations near Beach Drive.

What are some highlights of your time at Rock Creek Park?

Creating a more inclusive park by removing names of people with a racist legacy from memorials and trails, working towards the restoration of Carter Barron Amphitheater, creating a recreation space by closing Beach Drive to through traffic, and partnering with the Rock Creek Conservancy to develop a landscape-scale plan for forest restoration.

What advice do you have for young people (and those young at heart!):

The decisions you make, the choices you make, the actions you take, the things you advocate for—it all makes a difference. Make choices and spend time doing things that are good for the planet.

Is there anything you want to share with our Rock Creek Community?

A very warm and heartfelt THANK YOU to all who care so deeply about Rock Creek Park.

NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I often wax rhapsodic about the magic of Rock Creek, and the gifts it gives to all of us—the joy of bright wildflowers breaking the glumness of early spring, the chance to escape the heat in summer, the gorgeous colors and crisp air of fall... All this wonder would not be possible without YOUR care and stewardship.

I love to experience this wonder through the eyes of our Rock Creek Conservation Corps (RC3) students. Many of these young people tell me that they come to the job with an existential concern about climate change affecting our environment. Spending the summer making a tangible difference reminds them they can do something to help make their world a better place.

This issue of the *Current* details some of our last RC3 crew’s accomplishments. Educating the next generation of Rock Creek stewards is an important part of our work, paving the way for long-term protection of these parklands and the watershed, as outlined in our forest resilience framework.

Thank you to all of you who make it possible for us to provide these transformational experiences for young people, along with our day-to-day work protecting Rock Creek.

Thank you for caring for our shared backyard!



Happy Trails,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeanne Braha'.

Jeanne Braha
Executive Director

Young Rock Creek Stewards Made Huge Strides This Summer

We wrapped up another excellent year of stewardship with our Rock Creek Conservation Corps (RC3) crews! RC3 is a six-week summer youth employment opportunity—made possible by supporters like you!—that provides local high school students with their first job in conservation.



Braving the yellowjacket's sting and the relentless grip of invasive vines, our DC RC3 crew **cleared a jaw-dropping 3,950 square feet of invasive plants and rescued a dozen trees** from strangling vines in the Carter Barron Mini Oasis.

The Montgomery County RC3 crew persevered in the heat and humidity, **clearing 3,300 square feet of invasives, liberating four trees, and collecting 25+ bags of trash!**



Joining the RC3 crew provides an introduction to nature and conservation, but it goes beyond that—the experience empowers young people to make a connection with our environment. We now have more than 150 RC3 alum, and they are the next generation of Rock Creek stewards, and some of the best ambassadors for our parklands! **For a full glimpse of the crews' summer, check out their Instagram page @RockCreekRC3.**

Our 2023 Extreme Cleanup was a huge success!

Thank you volunteers for your tireless efforts to keep our park clean and enjoyable for all.



856
volunteers



8,456
pounds of
trash removed
from the parks.



30
events

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A donor-advised fund (DAF) provides you with the tax advantages and flexibility you need to provide support to the organizations and causes that are closest to your heart. To learn more, contact your financial institution or advisor today. If you already have a DAF, please consider recommending a one-time or even recurring grant to Rock Creek Conservancy. Your gift helps us protect the parklands now and in the future.

"Our Donor Advised Fund provides a convenient, flexible, and tax-efficient way to support charitable organizations and causes we care about - like Rock Creek Conservancy!"

*Tim and Karen Abrams,
Rock Creek Conservancy supporters*

ROCK CREEK WINS!

Rock Creek Conservancy has been honored with the prestigious **Hartzog Award** for outstanding innovation in engaging volunteers in the National Capital Region of the National Park Service.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our dedicated staff and volunteers. This honor is yours as much as it is ours—it shines as a tribute to your dedication and unwavering support. Each accomplishment is a step forward because of you.