



Rock Creek CURRENT

SUMMER 2010

Trash Triumph: The Rock Creek Extreme Cleanup

IN APRIL, VOLUNTEERS SPREAD out the length of Rock Creek and found something different: significantly less trash in many locations. The second annual Friends of Rock Creek's Environment Extreme Cleanup was even bigger than the first, held just one year ago. There were more volunteers and more cleanup locations in both the District of Columbia and Montgomery County. Even with the expanded effort, people hauled out just 8 tons of loose trash, compared with the 29 tons collected last year.

Rock Creek Extreme Cleanup	2009	2010
Cleanup Locations	53	56
Volunteers	1,909	1,966
Bags of trash	2,513	2,526
Weight of non-bagged trash	29 tons	8 tons
Tires	168	142



Cleanup Leader Jean Simons checking trash bags at a site near the Rock Creek Park Maintenance Yard.

Numerous cleanup leaders reported that their sites were significantly cleaner than they had seen in the past, and two leaders even canceled their cleanups due to lack of trash. In many locations, volunteers were able to cover larger areas than ever before. Leader **Paul Harrison** expanded the scope of his Lake Needwood/Mill Creek area cleanup and still found less trash. Concerned about how little trash they saw, veteran leaders **Charles Andrews** and **Elin Quigley** tried to keep word of their annual Kensington area cleanup quiet, but

100 people turned out. They found trash to pick up, but less than in prior years.

The trash triumph is due in part due to removal of a lot of the vintage trash. In areas such as the Pinehurst section of Rock Creek Park, where FORCE has hauled out trash each April for several years, volunteers led by **John Burwell** found only trash accumulated over the past year. This year, **Steve Saari** took on a new site at 16th and Holly Streets, NW, in the District, where volunteers uncovered half-buried tires, a rusty box-spring mattress, and 1950s-era toiletries.

Many thanks to everyone who helped make this possible, including the cleanup leaders, the volunteers, **Lynn Vismara** with Montgomery County Parks and **Maggie Zadorozny** with the National Park Service, as well as to **REI** which provided funding to support the Extreme Cleanup. Special thanks to FORCE's **Eric Durland** who handled cleanup outreach and logistics and the **Alice Ferguson Foundation** for its Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, of which the Rock Creek Extreme Cleanup is a part.

Save the Date!

Celebrate the 5th Anniversary of Friends of Rock Creek's Environment

British Embassy

Thursday, October 28, 2010

Mark your calendar now and watch for details about this festive event!

Stream Team Leaders Needed!

FORCE is now recruiting leaders to adopt a segment of Rock Creek or one of its 30 tributaries. If you would like to help care for a section of creek or park near you, please email force@friendsofrockcreek.org.

Rock Creek Eco-Tour



ON SATURDAY, JUNE 5, FORCE and the Rotary Club of North Bethesda sponsored our first Rock Creek Eco-Tour. About 35 riders completed the 11-mile roundtrip bike tour along Rock Creek between Meadowbrook Park in Chevy Chase and Peirce Mill, visiting 10 sites along the way. FORCE President David Cottingham, FORCE Board and Rotary Club member Kevin Flynn and FORCE Executive Director Beth Mullin gave interpretive talks along the route, focusing on environmental and historical topics. These included:

- Sherrill Drive Gage: A US Geological Survey monitoring station which has been recording data since 1929.
- Milkhouse Ford: This creek crossing dates back to the early 1800s, when farms occupied both sides of the creek above Peirce Mill. Until the Military Road Bridge

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Did You Know?

Water bottles are a major component of Rock Creek litter, and plastic bottles in street gutters wash into the creek through the storm drain system each time it rains. These bottles can wash downstream or build up in trash "islands" that form behind trees or branches that fall across the creek. Please pick up plastic bottles lying in the gutter and carry a reusable stainless steel bottle instead of buying water in plastic bottles.

FORCE Comments on Draft Clean Water Act Permit

THIS SPRING, FORCE WORKED with a coalition of environmental organizations and watershed groups urging action to protect Rock Creek. EPA has issued a draft MS4 (Municipal Separated Storm Sewer System) permit to the District of Columbia. The final permit will regulate water entering Rock Creek and other waterways from the District's separated sewers (it does not cover the older combined sewers that empty into Rock Creek south of Porter Street).

The EPA permit is designed to tackle polluted runoff, a leading cause of pollution in Rock Creek, over the next five years. It calls for controls on land-disturbing development and redevelopment projects and improving water quality through "green" techniques that increase infiltration of rainwater, such as eco-friendly landscaping, green roofs, and permeable paving.

In June, FORCE sent a letter urging EPA to strengthen the permit to provide greater protection for Rock Creek. FORCE also signed a letter submitted to EPA by a broad coalition of environmental organizations and watershed groups asking for significant improvements in the final permit.



Runoff from roads, parking lots, and other hard surfaces "disappears" into the sewer system through gutters and drains that lead directly to creek outfalls, such as this one.



Rock Creek *CURRENT*

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friendsofrockcreek.org

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The mission of FORCE, a non-profit organization, is to promote a healthy and sustainable Rock Creek watershed through conservation, education, and restoration.

FORCE Board

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Cleanup Spotlight: Fenwick Tributary

VETERAN CLEANUP LEADER CLIF GRANDY leads one of the largest Rock Creek Extreme Cleanup sites, the Fenwick Tributary of Rock Creek. Draining 1,200 acres inside the Capital Beltway near downtown Silver Spring, much of the creek is buried, including the legendary “Silver Spring,” from which the suburb gets its name. Two forks of the creek are above ground, flowing through two fingers of parkland at the northern edge of Rock Creek Park in Washington.

On Saturday, April 10, Clif mustered 100 volunteers to haul trash from the Fenwick area parkland. Cleanup participants included area residents, members of **St. Mark’s Church** on Capitol Hill, students from the **Wesley Theological Seminary** and the **University of Maryland**, and volunteers from Boy Scout Troop 1072 (**St. Andrew the Apostle Church**), Cub Scout Pack and Boy Scout Troup 24 (**Northminister Church**), as well as the Girl Scout Troop from **Grace Episcopal Church**.

Ward 4 Councilmember **Muriel Bowser** the D.C. Department of Public Works (DPW), the Maryland Department of Transportation, and the neighborhood associations of Shepherd Park and North Portal Estates also supported the cleanup.

Volunteers collected 300 bags of trash and 700 pounds of loose, unbagged trash. The haul included an impressive variety of items:

- Personal shopping carts
- Mattresses, sleeping bags, and pillows
- Car parts, including tires, batteries, mirrors, hubcaps, door, wheels, and oil containers
- Vintage cans and bottles, including a brown glass Clorox bottle
- Clothing, gloves, and shoes
- Lawn mowers, landscaping tools and plastic pots, including a weed whacker and gasoline can, both containing gas
- Plastic bags, food containers, beverage containers, foam cups, and wrappers
- Cable, wire, and fencing of various types
- A segment of clay sewer pipe
- Paper currency and coins
- Balls for every sport and game
- TV antennas and masts
- Rusted-out chassis of an old cathode ray television



- Metal folding chairs and plastic chairs
- Signs and signposts
- Carpeting and rugs
- Construction materials, including roofing, pipe, wood decking, and lumber
- Air compressor
- Electric double burner cook top

Clif has led cleanups at this site for four years, extending the area covered each year. Repeat volunteers were pleased to see that the area was cleaner this year. A lot of the older trash that has been there for years is now gone. One special focus this year was a shopping cart found four years ago. It had not been removed during past cleanups because it was almost completely buried with only one wheel showing. Using tools loaned by DPW, volunteers dug out the remains of the abandoned cart. Volunteers were also able to reach the DC/Maryland line at East-West Highway for the first time and removed much of the older trash there.

The volunteers kept up their tradition as FORCE’s most party-minded site while protecting the Rock Creek watershed; ample cool drinks and a large variety of snacks rewarded their hard work at the end of the day.

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- \$35 Individual Membership
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Blue False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*)

By Brett McNish

Brett McNish is a supervisory horticulturalist with Smithsonian Gardens, Washington, DC

Baptisia australis or Blue False Indigo is a hardy plant native to the great prairies of the Midwest and to the Piedmont region running from New Jersey to Georgia. It grows tall (3') and wide (2') with a dense bushy habit, and produces rich blue blooms in the late spring which develop into smoky black seedpods. As a member of the pea family (*Fabaceae*), the seedpods resemble peanuts in shape, but are not edible. It also has a rich cultural history as some Plains Indians used *Baptisia* as a medicinal plant and source of blue dye. Because of naturally occurring toxic compounds, or alkaloids, *Baptisia* is deer-resistant. The plant is also a host to the Wild Indigo Duskywing moth (*Erynnis baptisiae*) by providing a food source for its caterpillar. Recently, *Baptisia's* beauty has caught the eye of plant breeders. Wonderful new cultivars have been introduced to the market such as 'Starlight' which has violet-purple flowers, 'Twilight' that bears unusual and plentiful copper red and yellow blooms, and 'Purple Smoke' a hybrid with bold lavender blooms.



Blue False Indigo is featured at the FORCE RiverSmart Homes Demonstration Garden at the Chevy Chase Community Center, 5601 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC.



FORCE

PO Box 42680
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New FORCE Supporters

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was built during the Civil War era, it was the only public road crossing in the area.

- Boulder Bridge: Built in 1902, it is one of the oldest bridges in Rock Creek Park.
- Peirce Mill: The last extant 19th century gristmill in the District of Columbia, the mill is the principal relic of the Peirce Plantation. Built in the 1820s by Isaac Peirce, the mill operated commercially until 1897 when the wooden machinery failed and it was no longer economically feasible to produce flour.
- Fish Ladder: Opened in 2007, this concrete structure allows fish to navigate upstream past the dam at Peirce Mill to spawn. It is part of an effort to remove fish barriers throughout the creek.