



ROCK CREEK  
CONSERVANCY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

# KEEPING URBAN GREEN



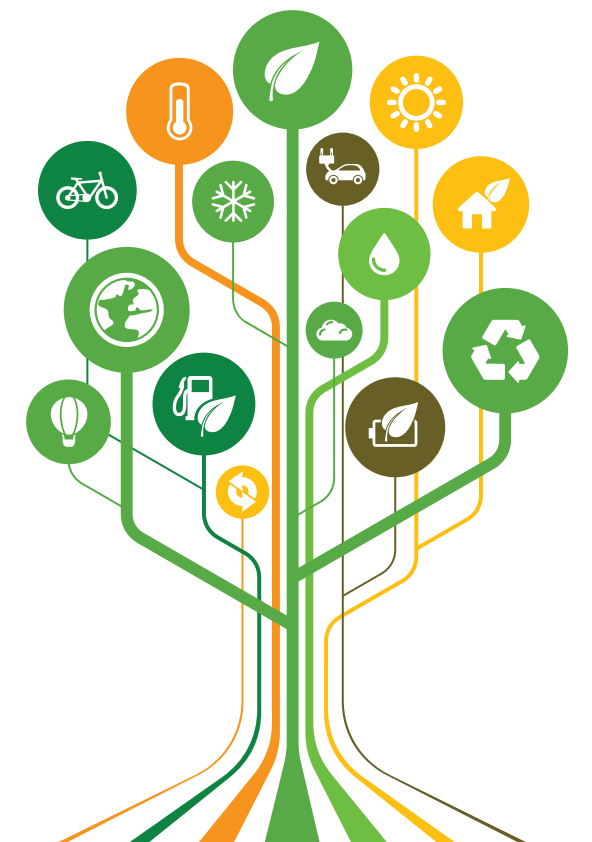
Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.

In **Rock Creek Park**, one can see a winding river valley and its tributaries, enclosed and guarded by forest-covered hills...a spreading oak in an open field....a wooded ravine carpeted with ferns...a bit of grassy meadow...woodland flowers.

– **Olmsted Brothers**, Report on Rock Creek Park, 1918

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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS



## FORWARD

Remarkably, many of the features noted in the Olmsted Brothers' 1918 Report on Rock Creek Park—the winding rivers, woodland flowers, tall trees—can still be seen today. But the 33 miles that Rock Creek traverses before it meets the Potomac flows through areas with pollution, trash, erosion, and other stresses that degrade natural vistas and habitats.

Rock Creek Conservancy is a growing community of individuals and organizations who understand the value and protection of natural spaces in an increasingly urbanized setting. Established in 2005 by a small group of citizens concerned about the quality of water in Rock Creek, we have continually expanded our efforts. For example:

- In 2015, in collaboration with the National Park Service, we helped Rock Creek (national) Park celebrate its 125th anniversary. As part of that celebration, we commissioned and presented to the National Park Service a plan of action to revitalize the Park for the next 125 years. We have committed to provide resources to help support a joint vision.
- We have planted and protected trees, managed non-native invasive plants, and conserved wildlife habitat.
- We have worked to improve park trails and community access to expand and enhance enjoyment.
- We are engaging a growing number of volunteers and have established a program for youth conservation.
- We have continued to advocate for clean water by supporting legislative and regulatory action.

Our second strategic plan contains an ambitious agenda, one we realize will take significantly more resources than in the past. As the primary philanthropic partner to Rock Creek (national) Park, success will depend heavily on collaboration with the National Park Service as both entities work to protect priority resources and enhance the visitor experience. Additional governmental partners at the federal, state, and local levels and the support from funders and volunteers will also assist us in accomplishing our goals.

As we continue to expand as an organization and strengthen our efforts, we have established metrics to ensure we continue to be good stewards of the contributions we receive. Our designation by the Catalogue for Philanthropy as a Best Small Charity in Washington for 2015/2016 and a clean audit in the past year are external recognitions that attest to our credibility.

We hope you will join us.

Scott Siff, Board President

Matthew Fleischer, Executive Director

## MISSION

Restore Rock Creek and its parklands as a natural oasis for all people to appreciate and protect.

### Meaning behind the Mission Statement

#### Restore:

Return to an earlier condition.

**Rock Creek and its parklands:** The water and lands in the Rock Creek watershed, which includes nearly 5,000 acres along with an additional nearly 2,000 federally owned acres administered by the National Park Service.

#### Appreciate:

To admire, enjoy, treasure, value, and invest in.



#### A natural oasis:

A healthy environment of land, air, and water, surrounded by a largely urban setting, which supports diverse and mostly native plants and wildlife (ecosystem).

#### For all people:

Where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and resources are accessible.

#### Protect:

Take care of and advocate for.

## VISION

Our vision for Rock Creek is that:



Native vitality will be restored and protected with substantial gains in water quality and health by 2030.



A vibrant culture of environmental stewardship will find diverse communities connected to and caring for Rock Creek.



Visitors to the parks will have enhanced experiences with the aid of physical and virtual improvements.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION



Our focus for the next five years is a targeted effort to protect and restore natural habitats in the Rock Creek watershed, with substantial gains in water quality and forest health, and to support and make significant improvements to physical and virtual infrastructure to make the parks accessible to more people. Although the National Park Service and the Montgomery County Department of Parks are the land managers, we aim to deepen the culture of environmental stewardship to ensure diverse communities are connected to and caring for Rock Creek.

To achieve our mission, we will partner with local and national groups, including the National Park Service, and other federal, state, and local governmental bodies. We are also boosting internal Board and staff capacity and building and strengthening ties to partner organizations to expand our reach. A series of measures are in place that will enable us to evaluate our progress.

Our second strategic plan identifies the significant challenges to Rock Creek, our accomplishments to date in meeting those challenges, our goals and objectives for the period ahead, and how we intend to meet those goals.

## CORE OPERATING VALUES

Rock Creek Conservancy uses the following values to guide how we work and develop relationships with our community, our partners, our employees, and our volunteers:

- **Stewardship:** We educate, advocate, and act to protect and preserve Rock Creek parks, forests, plants, creeks, and wildlife in collaboration with public and private landowners, residents and others throughout the watershed.
- **Leadership:** We focus on results and use our commitment, resources, and vision to make Rock Creek a healthy environment for the community and to inspire and support others doing the same. We build partnerships with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, institutions, community groups, and residents to work together to preserve Rock Creek, its parks and watershed, and the associated natural resources, wildlife, and cultural resources for present and future generations.
- **Involvement:** We encourage collaboration, respect for nature, and awareness through our advocacy, volunteer, and grassroots efforts.
- **Inclusion:** We seek to attract ALL people from all places as park users, to craft and implement solutions to park challenges, to eliminate all types of barriers, and to take personal pride in the results.
- **Trust:** We are determined and dedicated to maintaining a professionally managed and respected organization.

## CORE OPERATING VALUES





## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The beliefs we hold as truths that guide our work center on the health, well-being, and community involvement in Rock Creek, its parks, and its watershed.

- Rock Creek history connects the Washington metropolitan area's culture and community by offering everyone the opportunity to access nature, feel welcomed, and benefit from the peace that nature brings.
- Nature in an urban environment will significantly deteriorate unless it has the support of people who appreciate the delicate ecosystem and the choices we make to care for it.
- People will benefit and appreciate and learn from a healthy environment if they participate in making it that way because human wellbeing and environmental health are inextricably intertwined; you can't talk about one without the other.
- We must be optimistic about the possibility of change, encourage children to learn about the environment, and ensure that everyone has a sense of belonging that nature creates.
- We must honor the significant events in our country's development that are connected to Rock Creek and work to preserve and protect that history; in understanding our past, we help shape our future.



## GOALS & OBJECTIVES



### RESTORED & PROTECTED NATURAL HABITATS WITH SUBSTANTIAL GAIN IN WATER QUALITY AND FOREST HEALTH

#### OBJECTIVES

##### A) Publish a water quality report card for Rock Creek and its tributaries

- Identify best practices in water quality measurement, establish a water quality measuring program and take baseline readings.

##### B) Use green infrastructure to manage and reduce polluted runoff

- Assist with green infrastructure planning and installation throughout the watershed.

##### C) Plant and protect native understory and tree canopy

- Establish a nursery or partner with existing local native plant nurseries, develop inventory of native plants for restoration projects, work with partners to plant trees and other plants in targeted areas and prevent the destruction of existing trees.



#### OBJECTIVES

##### D) Support a healthy habitat for native wildlife species

- Establish partnerships with like-minded bird and wildlife organizations, as well as the community, to enhance the wildlife habitat.

##### E) Remove and control invasive exotic plants

- In cooperation with partners and volunteers, target areas for removal and prepare for restoration, identify additional invasive exotic plant species to be removed and develop a targeted chemical treatment program to support long-term success.

##### F) Initiate targeted streambank restoration and erosion control projects

- Evaluate and begin work on high-priority projects in the watershed in conjunction with relevant agencies.

##### G) Reduce the negative impact from the built environment and expand protected land

- Identify high-impact development projects, advocate for sustainable development and protect green space through conservation easement programs.

##### H) Monitor and influence public policy to assist in achieving all of the above

- Rally with like-minded coalitions and garner public support on projects that affect the watershed.
- Encourage constituents to advocate, through letter writing or other means, for the protection and preservation of Rock Creek and its parklands.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES



GOAL 2

ENHANCED VISITOR EXPERIENCE WITH PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL PARK IMPROVEMENTS (in collaboration with the National Park Service and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission)

OBJECTIVES

A) Support trail improvements

- Protect and enhance the trails within Rock Creek and its parklands and use previously collected baseline data to measure public perception on trails.

B) Install signage in and around parks to improve wayfinding

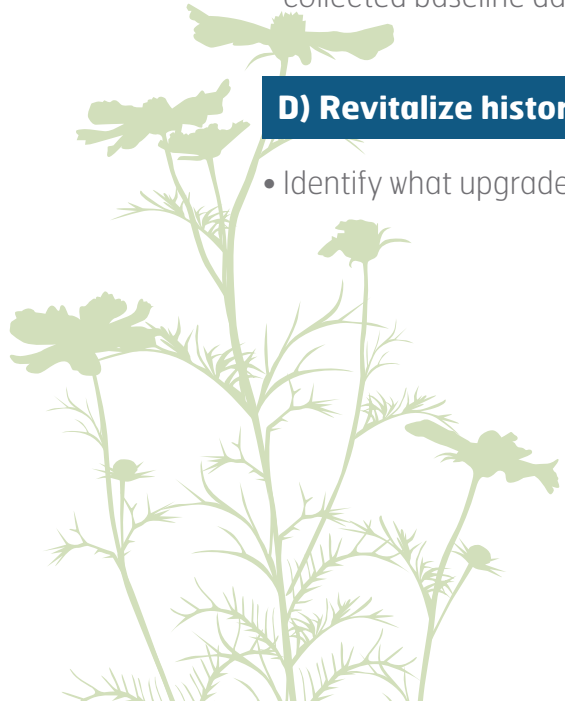
- In collaboration with the National Park Service, install signage within park boundaries; evaluate areas where signage is needed in neighborhoods or developments that border the park.

C) Improve access to and understanding of park resources

- Highlight underutilized and under-appreciated aspects of the park and use previously collected baseline data to evaluate public attitudes on park access.

D) Revitalize historic, cultural, recreational and educational resources

- Identify what upgrades are needed and what resources are necessary.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 3

A HEIGHTENED CULTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES CONNECTED TO AND CARING FOR ROCK CREEK

OBJECTIVES

A) Increase volunteer participation, roles, and responsibilities

- Expand our stewards program and develop Team Leaders across multiple generations, neighborhoods, and communities.

B) Expand Rock Creek Conservation Corps

- Prioritize youth engagement and establish six crews by 2018.

C) Develop and implement a preK-12 environmental education program aligned with local standards, which uses Rock Creek as a classroom

- Work in conjunction with the National Park Service, school districts, and individual schools to educate young learners about the watershed.

D) Promote the health and well-being benefits of connections with nature

- Collaborate with health professionals, community leaders, and the National Park Service to communicate the physical and mental benefits of Rock Creek and its parklands.

E) Reach a larger audience to enhance awareness, understanding, and engagement

- Proactively listen to park users to understand the perceptions and attitudes about Rock Creek and its importance to the community.





GOAL  
4

INCREASED ROCK CREEK CONSERVANCY INFRASTRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND FINANCIAL STRENGTH

OBJECTIVES

**A) Create a model for dynamic communications**

- Under the leadership of a communications specialist, enhance communication channels and develop marketing materials.

**B) Proactively advocate at multiple levels across a spectrum of issues that affect the Rock Creek watershed**

- Under the leadership of a policy and advocacy director, collaborate with elected and appointed officials, identify and attract working group experts, and map the organization's membership.

**C) Garner community support for meaningful financial contributions**

- Grow the organization's development department in order to better reach fundraising targets through innovative methods and improved donation platforms.

**D) Cultivate a network of partners to leverage strengths for meaningful impact**

- Leverage efforts by the Green Ribbon Panel to further develop partnerships and collaborate with groups that face similar urban park and watershed issues.

**E) Build structures, policies, and procedures that facilitate effective organizational growth**

- Perform a yearly financial audit to give supporters confidence in their donations; invest in staff and board by providing personal and professional development opportunities.



## Acknowledgments

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## Rock Creek Conservancy Board of Directors\*

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\*As of July 2016



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