



BELONGING



A Taking Nature Black/U.S. Forest Service Photo eBook

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Black Americans in Nature

Belonging: The Black Americans in Nature Photography Project is a joint project of the United States Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program and Nature Forward's (formerly the Audubon Naturalist Society) Taking Nature Black Conference (TNB).

We Speak of Emerald Grass (A Collage Poem of excerpts from the *Belonging* Essays by Taking Nature Black Chairwoman Caroline Brewer)

*Emerald grass and tall, elegant trees
I take us to the woods; I was in the woods
a gentle wind blows, leaves dance;
everything dances, sip from her raindrops;
I can cry in the rain
outdoors is not confined
I'm conscious of nature's profound cycles,
the chorus of songbirds
I think about the little girl
my grandparents
my elders; they have not left us
Those who carried and will carry me
We are all collective consciousness*

*Some things have to die
Seeing kids take back what they learn in the garden
Makes me think of my daughters
I grew up playing in the woods,
running with my friends and my dogs
Climbing trees and seeing things from up high,
Makes me feel like fresh air
The chance to look at something new
I smell nature and see birds
I resemble a bird in flight
Black people have been in intimate communion with nature since Time Immemorial
Blackness is peaceful, serene, beautiful and deserving of free movement
We find repair as we reclaim these spaces
I'm trying to pass on the same enjoyment of nature to my sons, as my father did for me
I sense my great grandfather is watching over me
I move, breathe, pray and reflect
I love observing the changes in seasons
People can show up in nature however they want to,
like the little kid exploring the woods in Mississippi
When (nature) sang to me in its thousand voices,
I joined it with mine;
I came home.*

FOREWORD

Belonging. When I think about the work that has been skillfully designed and beautifully presented in this compilation of Black Americans and nature portraits, I think about an overflow. I think about this work as an overflow of inspiration and affirmation pouring forth into our consciousness in a way that will leave an indelible mark, like a new river, long fed by streams, flowing into the oceans of time.

When I chose to study urban forestry, I had never seen a Black woman professional forester. Not because there wasn't one. Certainly if I had dug through the shelves of my local library, I might have found one—but none were in the pages of my science or history books. The images of forestry professionals, overall, were limited and lacked diversity in so many ways. *Belonging* reminds me of the audacity it takes to believe you can be something or someone, even though you haven't seen it or haven't been acknowledged for your potential.

Belonging is an appreciation, a holding up to the light, of those who have been on these hills, trails, paths and creek beds long before they were given names or parcel numbers. And it's an appreciation of those who are showing up now. *Belonging* is a visual invitation for the next generation of diverse conservation stewards to bring their full identity as they explore nature. *Belonging* is also purposeful in a way that makes this urban forester proud and delighted to have played a role in supporting its birth. In many of the images, if not most, the parks, streams and greenspaces are steps or short drives from where these men, women and families live, work, or attend school.

That's as it should be. We all deserve equitable access to greenspace, and these images are the most amazing reminders of not only what I do in public service and how it shows up, but of my "Why?". Why I do what I do. The answer is that exploring, protecting, and connecting with our precious environment is not the exclusive province or privilege of any single race or culture. *Belonging* is fresh testament to that.

Kudos and deepest appreciation to Belonging Project Director and e-Book Editor Caroline Brewer, the Chairwoman of Nature Forward's Taking Nature Black Conference (TNB); our four exquisitely talented visual artists, Benjamin Israel, Staff Photographer and Videographer for Nature Forward, Myron Fields, and Cheriss May; and Gabriela Franco Pena, Graphic Designer of the Belonging e-Book; and to all 40 people who made time to share their stories and favorite nature spaces with us and the world. We will always treasure your gifts to this work.

Beatra Wilson, Assistant Director for Urban and Community Forestry Program, U.S. Forest Service

Editor's Note

by Caroline Brewer, Chairwoman, Nature Forward's Taking Nature Black Conference



Photo by Cheriss May

Our History

The history of African-descended people is a history of belonging to nature. To paraphrase an old spiritual text, we live, move, and have our being in nature. We have always known and celebrated that. From nature we came and from her we shall return. It is with that understanding that we launched *Belonging*: The Black Americans in Nature Photography Project.

Belonging seeks to address the near invisibility of Black Americans in nature photos and publications generally available on the Internet, and other forms of mass media. It aligns with the goals of the Taking Nature Black Conference to elevate the presence, contributions, and unique stories of Black Americans in the environment.

Belonging confronts the dangerous and offensive narrative that Black Americans don't belong in outdoor spaces as birders, observers, farmers, scientists, or recreationalists – that we haven't always belonged.

Belonging seeks to inspire healing and move forward conversations about the harsh realities of life in this land now called the United States, where almost all of the separation of Black and Indigenous people from vast nature spaces came as a result of racist and terrorist actions. Sadly, such actions continue to this day. (I invite you to check out Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The Case for Reparations*, for a little background.)

One African American Woman's Story

Speaking of reparations, *Belonging* has inspired Dr. Karen Wilson-Ama'-Echefu to reflect on her own personal history of belonging. She writes, "Now I am part of the *Belonging* Project with the invitation to consider where it is that I belong. The Africans, the Indigenous, and the Irish share space within me and I feel that somehow I should claim them all. It is the African, however, that has claimed me. So I went to Africa.

I have been struck by the beauty of the red earth of Igbo-land, and told that it belonged to me; I have now crossed the Niger River and blessed its muddy bosom numerous times; and I have eaten mangoes that have fallen off our village trees. But I cannot find the Blues. I am a child of Africa in transformation, Africa's diaspora daughter, and I know where I belong."

Travels

Our photographers took the first portrait for *Belonging* in July 2021 and the final portrait in February 2022. They traveled to 22 nature spaces. They came away changed.

Amidst the capital region's crosshatch of highways and roads, against the specter of continual "development," breathtaking, natural, serene oases, were revealed by our kind and generous portrait subjects.

The photographers traveled to ponds, streams, rivers, city parks, county parks, national parks, trails, a river walk, a farm, a rain garden, a nature sanctuary, and islands. The farthest they traveled was Forest Hill Park, Richmond, VA; the nearest, a mere walk from one photographer's home to the Sligo Creek Trail, in Takoma Park, MD.

On their journeys, our photographers met environmental justice advocates, community organizers, government officials, educators, artists, a riverkeeper, a landscaper, an entomologist, and adorable children.

They met people going to bat for nature spaces and for the communities of the metro region. The photographers spoke of their gratitude of being able to take portraits of these noteworthy Black Americans on the land they adore in this first-of-its-kind book. This journey, they tell me, will long stay with them.

Gratitude

As the chairwoman of **Nature Forward's** Taking Nature Black Conference, *Belonging's* project director, it has been my distinct pleasure and honor to work with the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program, the 39 other Black American women, men, and children who agreed to be portrait subjects and the distinguished photographers and other professionals who have made *Belonging* possible.

Join me in my heartfelt appreciation for them for their outstanding contributions to this work and our cause.



BELONGING

MAP OF PLACES IN THE BOOK





Photo by Myron Fields

Yolanda “Yogi” Ackles
Senior Member,
Kankouran West African Dance Company
🌿 **Woodend Sanctuary** 🌿

I am a nature child. So were my great-grandmothers. I tune into my spiritual power and presence instantly when surrounded by nature -- the trees, leaves, birds, winds, and series of sounds. I had the blessing of being in the presence of my maternal great-grandmothers during early childhood.

My maternal grandmother’s mother lived with us until I was eight and I often visited my great-grandmother on my father’s side during that time. My maternal great-grandmother was half American Indian and half African American, and formerly enslaved. She conducted full moon rituals and collected herbs and grasses, and loved berries and grapes. My other great-grandmother had a chicken coop and garden in her backyard, and supplied the neighborhood with catfish caught on her fishing outings. My memories, precious memories, of these women always have the backdrop of emerald grass and tall, elegant trees. I didn’t realize how much of their essence I carried with me until I started to write about this photo shoot, taken in the big meadow and hemlock grove, for *Belonging*.

Grounded and energized, calm, inspired and fulfilled is what I become when I am around nature. Unabashed, free, safe, and at home is how I feel when I move with dance in nature. The magic happens when I take off my shoes, though, and feel the cool ground beneath my feet. Being a nature child, I, of course, did this photo shoot barefoot.



Photo by Myron Fields



Photos by Myron Fields



Mustafa Santiago Ali, PhD
Vice President of Environmental Justice,
Climate, and Community Revitalization,
National Wildlife Federation
Anacostia Park

For 10,000 years, the Nacotchtanks lived in harmony with the air, water, and land now known as Anacostia. Those Indigenous brothers and sisters understood the beauty and majesty of the natural world and honored it every day.

Today, Anacostia Park, where I visit so often, is a space in a historic African American community where people come together to learn, play, pray, and celebrate culture.

I am one of them, ritually embracing nature along the Anacostia as nature has always embraced and been a refuge for me, providing a place to escape, to grow closer to the Creator, express myself, and meditate on deep connections to the past and present.

Mother Nature invites us to be who we are, without judgment or question.

Nature doesn't care if we are Black or White, rich or poor, straight or gay. She invites us to sip from her raindrops, bathe in her sunlight, and get lost in her moonbeams. In nature, all things are possible. Whether we are lounging in urban parks or exploring primordial forests, nature invites us to rediscover ourselves on silent breezes that whisper welcome home, where we, Black and beautiful, and all people in between, belong.



Caroline Brewer
Taking Nature Black Chairwoman,
Children’s Book Author
🌿 **Woodend Sanctuary** 🌿

Often, when I’m outside, I think about the little girl, caressed by happiness, because of the grasshoppers, bees, butterflies, and fireflies that inhabit the nooks and crannies of her young world. I think about how she would mimic their unbound natures by skipping, hopping, dancing, and running with the wind as if she had wings. I was that little girl and, back then, outside was light. Outside was energy, soft kisses, like the sweetest thing I’d ever known.

Growing up in northern Indiana, where I had recurring access to the region’s parks, campgrounds, and fields, I always felt that I belonged. Mother Nature winked as I climbed neighborhood cherry trees and loaded up paper bags of bittersweet deliciousness. She cushioned me as I would lie on grass marveling at her sparkling gems in the night sky. She smiled lovingly as I helped Mama pick tomatoes and collard greens from her vegetable garden.

And yet, deep inside my childhood bliss was ignorance of how my family ended up in the basket of white bread called the Midwest. Turns out, they ran. My maternal grandfather took off first, then my eldest uncles, then grandma, with the rest of their children. Uncle Johnnie was a baby. Mama was 9, cold-heartedly forced to abandon her favorite playmate, Cousin Liz. All this running from the red clay dirt of Selma, Alabama was because elements of the Klan threatened to kill my grandfather.

As a child, outdoors was freedom. Intoxicating freedom. It was birth and rebirth, resonating somatically, like a song. Like the song of my African ancestors. So when I’m outside, sometimes weighted by the brutality and sorrow of Black Americans and the Indigenous on this land, I must carry the breath and memory of that little girl and her ancestors with me. They understand that, like the lilies of the field, we are worthy of the shine of the sun. They understand that we’ve got to water the truth, the way forests water themselves, the way leaves are the “eyes” of trees, the way trees breathe, so that we can too. Yeah, that’s the way we’ve got to water the truth, so that we who dance in the noonday sun, pregnant with our rich history, will nurture the sweetest thing we’ve ever known, and our belonging to it.



From left: Nasya Carter and Caroline Brewer

Photo by Cheriss May



Photos by Cheriss May



Bryony Mittman and Samara Mittman
 ~~~~~ Woodend Sanctuary ~~~~~

When I'm outside, I'm not as serious as I usually am. I feel like I'm free from all work. I get excited having the chance to look at something new. -Bryony Mittman, age 12 (Top photo)

When I'm outside, I like when my legs and feet move. I feel happy and excited and joyful because I smell nature and see birds and hear the wind blowing like music. -Samara Mittman, age 8 (Bottom photo)

**Acacia Mittman, Kayden Carter,  
 and Nasya Carter**  
 ~~~~~ Woodend Sanctuary ~~~~~

I like running with my friends and my dogs, when I am outside. When I am outside, I feel happy and sad at the same time. Sad because my dad is away [deployed] and he can't play with us right now. -Acacia Mittman, age 6 (Top photo, left)

I like climbing trees and seeing things from up high and jumping off the tree. I like to play being the king, using the stick as a staff. I like using sticks as a microphone to sing and dance. I like pretending to be an elephant with a long trunk. I like using the stick to make music. -Kayden Carter, age 5 (Bottom photo)

Being outside makes me feel like fresh air, because I can feel the breeze and freshness of the air. I like looking and touching different leaves on the trees. I like playing with sticks, and being in the mud drawing pictures and stirring the mud. I like looking at different flowers. -Nasya Carter, age 6 (Top photo, right)





Photos by Myron Fields

Karen Campblin
President, Fairfax County NAACP
Environmental and Climate Justice Chair - Virginia State Conference NAACP
Huntley Meadows Park

The great outdoors can mean many things to me depending on what is going on in my life. But there is one thing I can always count on: the sense of stillness, serenity and calm I feel while walking among the trees. I listen to the leaves dance in the wind, songbirds tell their tales in the distance, and creatures scatter and scurry idly, or with intent.

Huntley Meadows Park is a natural oasis, and Fairfax County's largest park. It is simple to get to (depending on the time of day) and an easy place to enjoy acres of natural landscape, historic structures, and diverse wildlife. There are educational programs for adults and kiddos to learn how to be better stewards of nature.

I prefer to take in the silence of the forest, hiking either by myself or with friends and family. My main hiking buddy was my late brother, so I like to think that he is there with me as well.

I don't get out as much as I would like, but when I do, I tend to gravitate towards areas with a dense tree canopy and restore my energy reserves practicing shinrin-yoku-like (forest bathing) techniques. Forest bathing is an excellent exercise to ease away stress, disconnect from the pressures of reality, and reconnect with nature.

Being outdoors allows me to breathe freely and, for a brief moment in time, exhale.



*From left: Alfie Chambers and Angel Chinn
with their daughters
Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area
Photo by Benjamin Israel*



*Alfie Chambers carrying
her daughter Matilda Machioli-Chambers*

Alfie Chambers
CEO of Temple X Schools
Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area

In these woods, at this point in our evolution, I am on sacred territory. To be here often is to be going beyond the encouraged mediocrity.

Matilda is in her element when we are in any remaining natural ecosystem. The smell of the damp earth; the delight in a cold stream; the crunching of leaves under our feet or the sighting of birds of prey - when I feel the most uprooted, I take us to the woods. The point is to make the life and lives of our children more possible and richer. With all the tech, this is a spatial-spiritual experience at an ancient, organic pace. It's rehoming to the mind of a people who assumably navigated this terrain as their lives depended on it. We come here to never forget that memory. We come here to sharpen it.

Photo by Benjamin Israel



*From left: Yara Chinn-Ghaffarian
and Matilda Machioli-Chambers*

Photos by Benjamin Israel



From left: Angel Chinn and Yara Chinn-Ghaffarian

Photos by Benjamin Israel

Angel Chinn Dance Teacher

🌿 Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area 🌿

I have only been to Soldier's Delight a few times, to meet with my friend, Alfie, and have playdates with our daughters. I can't think of a better place for two toddlers to be able to run free and experience nature. I love the space because it feels raw. There are miles of trails, vast fields, and open skies, which allow us to breathe deeply and appreciate the land around us.

Anywhere in nature, I feel dance. Everything moves, therefore everything dances. There is nothing more liberating than dancing outside, where there are no walls or ceilings. Bare feet on the earth energizes, gives purpose, and intuitive steps. Outside, movement feels expansive. It is a true connection to source.

Because land was stolen from Indigenous peoples, and because we, African Americans, were ripped away from our native land, it is easy to understand why some of us have felt disconnected from nature. Our society has put value on technology and machines, and, therefore, less on the land that provides us with food, water, and materials for shelter. It is important for all people to reclaim their connection to nature because I believe it will improve our connections to ourselves, each other, and the land that supports us. It will improve our overall quality of life.





Photos by Benjamin Israel

Christian Dorisca
Communications Professional and Wellness Influencer
🌿 **Dora Kelley Nature Park** 🌿

I experience poetry in the natural world when a gentle wind blows and the leaves rustle; when a squirrel, fox, or deer scampers by in a flash of sight and subtle sound; when a bird’s chirp breaks the silence; when the water in a creek rushes over stacked rocks smoothing them, soothing my senses; when children squeal upon discovering their new favorite toy - a rock, bug, or leaf; when someone’s on a run on the trail and I can hear the rhythm of their approach; when a branch falls and I become more conscious of nature’s profound cycle of birth, life, death, and regeneration.

It’s important for Black Americans to be shown in nature to unfold for ourselves and others another aspect of our humanity, and our belonging anywhere and everywhere on this earth, but, particularly, in these United States.





Photos by Benjamin Israel



Jerome Ford
Assistant Director,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Manassas Battlefield Park

I loved the old bottomland hardwood forests. I take a trip to this park about twice a month.

When I am outside, it reinforces my ability to remain calm and to be patient. Both are required to enjoy nature and wildlife. When I'm outside, I think about my grandparents because they were the ones who taught us how to live with the land. It was clear to them that we did not control the land, but had to live in harmony with it.

Being outside makes me feel free and connected to all living things. I see myself as a part of nature's community, serving a known and, sometimes, unknown role. I feel that I am where I am supposed to be, when I am outside. Paradise for me is when I am walking through an old forest. A balanced forest is always teeming with an abundance of wildlife. Such a balancing of various lives is difficult, if not impossible, for humans to replicate.

I view this nature portraits project as a recognition. We are recognizing that Black Americans have always loved the land and embraced it as a provider of life, food, shelter, comfort and protection. To speak of it as an expansion could imply that Black Americans have just been invited to the potluck dinner party. Fact is, we arrived early with one of the first dishes.



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Jaren Hill Lockridge
Director of the Well at Oxon Run aka The Woman at The Well
 🌿 Oxon Cove Park 🌿

Oxon Run Creek flows through the heart of the great Ward 8 in D.C., and ultimately empties into the Chesapeake Bay. They connect at Oxon Cove, a little known natural gem right outside Chocolate City. It's a meeting place for nature.

I was born in Memphis, Tennessee at the top of the Mississippi Delta. My blood is rich 'cuz it's mixed with Mississippi dirt. Being a mother of daughters, I've carried my grandchildren in my womb, and when I'm outside, I think about those who carried and will carry me.

I love being outside because it just feels good all over. My melanated skin loves the sun and the feelings of its rays.

My ears delight in the sound of rain. My nose thrills at the smell of freshly moved dirt and the soft scent of flowers. My taste buds love the greens my grandma makes and the juices from a fresh watermelon. Nature recharges me.

Outside, I am in my most natural state... free. Free to grow, I love feeling of dirt on my hands. Free to move, I love the feeling of a good breeze. Free to radiate like the sun and be a reflection of its power. I grew up with the image of myself as a rose pushing through the cracks of concrete. I want my children to grow up in their mother's garden, in good soil.





Photos by Myron Fields



Tykee James
President, DC Audubon Society
 Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens

When I'm outside, I think about different ways to answer the question, "How did we get here?" Whether that question is about a rare bird in a tree, a tree in the park, a park in the neighborhood, a neighborhood in the city, or anywhere there are people on the continent, the answers will take you on a journey. And thinking about this question helps me think about what to do next.

Outdoors, I can find music in the chorus of songbirds and relate it to smelling a really good dish. Certain bird calls stand out among trees the same way certain spices stand out on a plate. Going outside can feel liberating, but my enthusiasm is dampened as I hear and learn about the harming of Black people by the hands and systems of past and present white supremacy.

Any change to society's idea of what "people and nature" looks like will be a direct outcome of our investments and strategies to challenge and change the role of power in society.

Going outside has been part of my people's heritage from the very beginning. #BlackBirdersWeek reminds us that the Black experience is about joy, pride, resistance, strength, and style every day of the year and forevermore. Ultimately, outdoor activities, such as birding, should be open-ended opportunities that take you places physically and philosophically. I'm further developing what the principles of B.I.R.D.ing (Beginner-minded, Inclusive, Reflective, and Deliberate) mean to me and how they can show up for everyone on freedombirders.org.



From left: Hakeem and Jawara Kasimu-Graham and Dominique Graham



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Jawara Kasimu-Graham
Founder and Former Head of
George Washington Carver
Outdoor School
Rock Creek Park

I hike in Rock Creek Park every Sunday I'm in D.C., a place I've called home since 1964. My son, Hakeem, and I, go out two Sundays a month, and we pretty much do the same five-mile trail. Hakeem almost grew up in Rock Creek Park. That's where he learned to ride his bike and where he and Dominique, my grandson, grew into becoming pathfinders, senior campers, for my former outdoor school, the George Washington Carver Outdoor School. Carver is the person who taught me that nature is where science and the sacred converge.

We took the children for free on outdoor trips, overnight camping trips to places like Catocin, Shenandoah, beaches in Delaware.

Our kids, as many as 50, were from ages 7 to 19, and we mentored them to be junior leaders. We were invited in 1990 to the Great Outdoor Games in Lake Placid, New York, sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management, and I was able to take the kids.

When I'm outdoors, I think about my ancestors. My philosophy is that of Breathe - the song by Sweet Honey in the Rock - that I'm walking among my elders. They haven't left. They're just taking on a different form, and we have to recognize that. When we had the outdoor school, I used to say that I'm using the children to go outside to play. Now that we don't have it, I just say, I'm going outside to play.



Photos by Myron Fields

Lydia Lawrence
Fairfax NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Chair,
Potomac Riverkeeper Network JEDI Chair
❖❖❖ **Seneca Regional Park** ❖❖❖

I grew up playing in the woods and hiking with my family. As I emerged into adulthood, life tried to disrupt that relationship through homelessness and abusive relationships. It's hard to recognize any connection to the outdoors when you're struggling for housing and food. Over time, I was able to create a relatively more secure space, and I began my journey back to the outdoors.

It started with long walks in my neighborhood that eventually led to parks and trails. I then discovered Seneca Tract and would hike for hours there in all seasons. I eventually found my way to paddle-boarding on the river and fell in love with the Potomac and all of its riparian zone.

I started spending multiple days a week on the river and in the woods. The Potomac was my muse for poetry for many years. Much of my writing is still based in nature. Every hour on the Potomac brought healing and strength back to me, both mentally and emotionally. I finally had time to process all my broken pieces and rebuild myself into something better and stronger. Even today, the river and the forest are my sanctuary, church, refuge.

A narrative has been created that Black people don't engage outdoors. Black people have a long history of connection to the outdoors, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. It is important for us to reclaim this narrative.





Photos by Benjamin Israel

Stefan Lockridge
Student
🌿 **Oxon Run Park** 🌿

The thing I like about The Well is that it is where the Ward 8 Water Watchers are based.

The thing I love about myself is my determination, because I like a challenge. And the thing I like about outside is how it's not confined and I love that because I like to explore.

The person I think about when I'm outside is my mom because she helped me join the Ward 8 Water Watchers.

When I'm outside, I hear birds, I feel the fresh air, I taste the wind, and I touch the air. Being outside makes me feel relaxed because I can explore freely.



Photos by Benjamin Israel



Kevin Lukusa Mukhono
Photographer
 Sligo Creek Trail

The Sligo Creek Trail feels like home to me. It's a 10-minute walk from where I live, and it's been part of my life for a long time.

In high school, I ran track, but suffered an injury in my senior year. I had to leave the team. Sligo Creek Trail is where I went to exercise during my recovery. It was great. I would see the same people out there, running, walking. That motivated me. I love the calmness of Sligo Creek Trail, the harmony of it. It's relaxing there.

I love listening to music when I'm outside. When I'm outside, I think about situations in my life. I am able to reflect better. In this way, it helps me manage my anxieties. I get closer to solutions. I'm from Kenya. I moved to the U.S. when I was 16, but my favorite season is winter! It's beautiful. I love snow and I like the clean, fresh air.

I've been taking photos since I was seven years old. I got a film camera then and whenever I took family photos, everyone said they were the best photos.

Photography has been my thing ever since. I love looking at people and capturing their inner emotions in a frame. What you can't see otherwise. Deep down, we are all collective consciousness. Color should not differentiate us. If we can all come together, we can get beyond where we are right now.

In this way, I am excited for these photos to get out there and show that this bond with nature is universal. We are all one.



Photo by Myron Fields

Chancee Lundy
CEO of Lundy Legacy
Rain Garden in Northwest D.C.

Nature is all around us and I want people to know that small outdoor spaces can be just as fulfilling and rewarding as the larger spaces. These spaces may exist in neighborhoods but aren't recognized because we are taught that you have to go somewhere to enjoy outdoors. This triangle park in D.C. serves a dual purpose - a place to help reduce urban flooding by managing stormwater and a place where neighbors can sit, reflect, play, and connect. This park was a project that I worked on at my former company, Nspiregreen, and is a reminder that enjoying nature comes in many forms.

When I am outside, my senses are heightened. I'm able to block out the distractions and focus on nature in its consistent but ever-changing, ways.

For example, looking at the leaves fall and seeing the changes of color reminds me that some things have to die to make room for the new.

Being outside makes me think of family. I grew up in a small town where I walked to school, to visit friends, and to run errands. My cousins and I played outside, games like kickball, or picking plums and berries to fill our tummies, until the street lights came on. When I think of family bonding, enjoying our community outside was our favorite thing to do.

Being outside makes me feel at peace. Even when there is chaos all around, looking at all of God's creation brings peace.





Photos by Benjamin Israel

Jerome Nesbitt
Deputy Director at The Green Scheme
 Oxon Run Park

I enjoy the peace and quiet of Oxon Run Park. It's a great place to think and unwind. In warmer months, I visit frequently. Located along Oxon Run in SE Washington, DC, Oxon Run Park will soon be the new home of The Green Scheme and our Code Green Program, our after-school and summer program that gets kids excited about gardening.

Since The Green Scheme's founding in 2011, we have worked extensively in Ward 8 communities. We are now working on partnering with the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, DC Greens, Friends of Oxon Run, Soul of the City, and community members around The Well at Oxon Run, an urban farm and community wellness space set to open in 2022.

The Well will give us the ability to service more community members and schools by bringing environmental and food justice education to their backyard. This brings me a great sense of pride, both personally and professionally, being a native Washingtonian with kids of my own. Hopefully, this project and those that are similar can help new generations live more sustainable lives. Being outside seeing new life and growth always makes me think of my daughters and new chapters of growth in life. I think it's very important to show people of color in nature, enjoying nature, to debunk the idea that they have no appreciation for or interest in outdoor spaces and the amenities that the spaces provide.



Jamoni Overby
D.C. Conservation Advocate,
Nature Forward



Anacostia River Walk Park

When I am outside, feeling is first. When I enter into the embrace of the outdoors, and inhale my first breath of fresh air, it feels like a burden has been lifted. I love that, immediately, I feel free of obligation and concerns. I feel grounded. When I'm outside, there is no question, I feel connected to something bigger than myself. When I am outside, I can hear my feet rhythmically hitting the pavement while I'm jump-roping, a favorite form of exercise and play that has followed me into adulthood. When I am outside, barefoot, I feel the textures of the grass and leaves. I hear them crunch beneath my fast, and sometimes careless, steps trying to get to where I have the best view of the river. When I am outside, I hear melodies of laughter and I feel community.

Emphasizing Black people in nature is a reminder of our historic, generations-long connection to the environment. Farming, healing, sustainability, and conservation are rooted in every Black American's ancestry and experiences. As we make decisions about land use, we need to remember everyone who might possibly be affected and make way for them at the table. Blackness is peaceful, serene, beautiful and deserving of free movement like every other one of God's creatures. When you see us, you are experiencing nothing more natural.



Photo by Myron Fields



Photo by Myron Fields



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Samuel Ramsey, PhD
Entomologist, Executive Director
at Ramsey Foundation

Kingman and Heritage Islands

Langston Hughes has known rivers. I've known Kingman and Heritage Islands, and I am eager to get to know it even better still.

When the 17-year periodical cicada emergence occurred in 2021, I visited several times each week. It was the perfect soundstage for the cicada symphony.

As an entomologist who studies pollinator health, I'm constantly encouraging people to consider the merits of rewilding their land for the benefit of the bees, beetles, and butterflies.

Kingman and Heritage Islands, "home to more than 100 species of birds, mammals, and other wildlife," according to their website, represents Washington, D.C.'s attempt to rewild a landscape in the midst urban sprawl.

So often when I'm at Kingman, walking, squatting, squinching, enveloped in its wild sides, I think about my father. Roosevelt Ramsey modeled curiosity by spending time with me watching nature documentaries, cracking open rocks to find crystals, catching frogs and hoping we had the know-how to raise them (we didn't always). Now that I'm a scientist, he says I'm his hero.

When I'm outside, I also think about how Black Americans live each day among monuments to slavery. So much abuse happened to us and to Indigenous people in the green spaces in which people are now twirling in wedding dresses and swaying in hammocks.

We find repair as we reclaim these spaces and give them new meaning, the kind of meaning they held before they were gnarled by human pride and prejudice, the kind of meaning they reflected when our ancestors, like Langston Hughes, knew rivers.







Photo by Benjamin Israel

From left: Queen Shabazz with her son,
Melchisedek Shabazz

Queen Shabazz
United Parents Against Lead and the Virginia
Environmental Justice Collaborative
🌿 **Forest Hill Park** 🌿

When I’m outside, being touched by the sun, I feel free, free to be me and to not care about time, or to-do lists. I indulge my whims and cradle myself in tranquil thoughts. I love that I can breathe easier and release. I love that I can cry in the rain and run through a thunderstorm.

Being outside often triggers thoughts about my ancestors, especially when I am barefoot. They speak to me and provide guidance. When outside looking upward, under the moon and stars, I wonder who else is looking at the same star? I wonder did my kinfolk of long ago walk these same grounds, as they laid a path for me. Sometimes, too, when I pass certain trees, I shiver with dark thoughts that, perhaps, someone hanged there. I try to shake the images of “strange fruit,” but those images, that history, too, are also a part of being outdoors in Virginia.

Belonging is helping us to share the critical history that Black Americans are the farmers who have fed many generations. We are watermen, the cowboys, the boat makers, the herbalists, the cotton pickers, the tobacco harvesters who labored sunrise to sunset for small wages or without recompense. I think of those ancestors who paid the ultimate sacrifice so that I can be outside, unchained and free. We will not be omitted or erased.

Melchisedek Shabazz
Graduating Senior,
Norfolk State University
🌿 **Graphic Designer** 🌿

I love being outside because I feel free and connected to the universe and all its elements. When I’m skate-boarding, I love to feel the wind against my skin and hair. I resemble a bird in flight. When I’m outside, my mind roams and all my worries fade away. I get my best inspiration for art while outside. Concepts and ideas seem to flow to me effortlessly. Everything just seems to make sense. It’s important for Black Americans to be seen in nature because I believe human beings were meant to live in harmony with nature, just like our ancestors did.



Photos by Benjamin Israel



Alex Smith
Founder of Division Street Landscaping
❖❖❖ **BLISS Meadows** ❖❖❖

The only place I have ever felt like I belonged was in the woods. Growing up, while other kids were on the playground, I was in the woods scooping up clutches of frog eggs. I would take them home and watch them hatch. Then watch them transform. I was fascinated by things like this. So fascinated that I would start to create little forests inside of jars and bowls. From there, I graduated to small clear containers that I found in the trash behind the neighborhood corner store. I would recreate the environment that I saw in the woods for my toads, frogs, newts and salamanders. I still do this ‘til this day. On the island in my kitchen, there is a fish tank that I rescued from an apartment clean-out. The stones are from the creek down the street from my house. The hide-out is this gnarly branch that I found in a client’s backyard. The frog inside came from a pond that I worked on.

As an adult, I don’t have as much time as I did as a child to play in the woods, but I always take a piece of the forest with me. It’s my place. It’s where I belong. In reality, it’s not only that Black people have a connection with nature today. It’s that, as the original people on this planet, we have always been one with nature.

Lex Sturdivant
Wellness/Athletic Director
Billy Goat Trail - C&O Canal

I remember growing up in Maryland outside of DC, and playing in our backyard with acorns, sticks, and pine tree branches. I always made little games for myself. I enjoyed being outside. The fresh air and sunlight felt good.

After doing my homework, all I wanted to do was dash out the house, down the trail that was nearby, and go to the creek and skip rocks. I was fascinated by how the rocks skipped against the water. Still am.

I’ve always had a sense of peace being outside and, now as a father, I’m trying to pass on the same enjoyment of nature to my sons, the way my father did for me. It bothers me when my kids are spending a lot of time inside on their devices. When my sons get outdoors, they enjoy snowball fights in the winter, jumping in airy leaf piles in the fall, being on the beach in the summer, and playing in the rain. Together, we love biking, nature walks, and fishing. Alex especially likes fishing and observing wildlife. Climbing trees is TJ’s favorite thing to do. He says it’s kind of like being in a video game.



From left: Alex, Lex, and T.J. Sturdivant

Photo by Benjamin Israel.



Photos by Benjamin Israel





Photos by Myron Fields

Elaine Tutman
Retired, Environmental Health Inspector
Jones Farm (Home of Fred and Elaine Tutman)

I have spent most of my 86 years in or about the location of the photo shoot. As a child, these were the woods that I played in, carved names on a birch tree the day President Franklin Roosevelt died in 1945 (the tree is still there).

I dug black clay from the creek bed for making pottery bowls and had the thrill of finding Indian arrowheads thousands of years old. I hunted squirrel with my grandfather, helped to plant tobacco, fed chickens, milked cows. I shared these memories with our photographer. When I walk this land breathing clean air and soaking up bird song and country sounds, it inspires me to be a good steward of the farm that has been in my family since 1925.

Black people have been in intimate communion with nature since Time Immemorial – our hands in the soil, smelling the earthy aroma, conserving, preserving, appreciating its worth to the Spirit as well as the bountiful food harvests which nourish the body.

In the 1960s, we lived in two countries on the African continent, one just below, one just above the equator where days are 12 hours each day and night. It was discombobulating. On this farm, I know exactly where the sun rises and sets in the four seasons. This is what home feels like- deep roots and connection to the place.





Photo by Myron Fields



Photo by Myron Fields

Fred Tutman
Patuxent Riverkeeper
🌿 **Jones Farm (Home of Fred and Elaine Tutman)** 🌿

The Jones Farm, a short walk from the Patuxent River, is my ancestral home, a place of endless wonders. It is a place where I feel I have real belonging. Memories from each part of my lifespan resonate so clearly here for me, among the trees, open fields, forests and vistas; the places I once built, including tree-houses as boy, fields I plowed and helped cultivate, fences I erected, barns I repaired. My sweat and labor have merged with the land. I recall so many lessons taught to me by ancestors who loved, both me, as well as every inch of this place. I feel fortunate to have a tangible heritage of this sort.

When outdoors, my mind floats. I just “exist” outside. Ideas and inspiration flow through me as I walk through tall grass with the foliage slapping against my legs, my feet absorbing the shape of the earth. Other times, while riding a tractor down narrow rows of crops, or while cutting brush, a song wells up inside of me in tune with the steady drone of the tractor’s engine. There is something soothing and methodical about working the soil by hand or with equipment. I imagine my ancestors persevering down these same lanes employing horses and mules.

When outdoors, I feel centered, as though the earth and I are in symbiosis, partnership. I feel, at times, the earth is testing, measuring and assessing me. I am often applying my comparably frail physical strength to the sheer power represented in my surroundings. I see the effects of great storms, lightning strikes, past hurricanes and floods.

The earth is epic! I am humbled, and made more conscious of a connection that is intimate, personal. I sense my great grandfather is watching over me, and I feel reassured to be in the embrace of land he fought for and struggled on. I try to live up to what he would have expected of me on grounds that were as much a part of him as his powerful hands.

We, as Black people, have been unable to tell our stories because other people are so eager to tell them on our behalf. I prefer stories of liberation rather than of servitude. We have much richer and more expressive stories. We are resilient people, with a heritage of stewardship and reverence in natural spaces and places. Nature, I think, is infinite and we become infinite through our soulful transactions with her. When outdoors, I am certain of this.



Photo by Myron Fields



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Ronnie Webb
Executive Director of The Green Scheme
 Oxon Run Park

When I'm outside, I feel energized, free. Our photo shoot took place along Oxon Run as it passes behind THEARC, a combined cultural and social services campus in Washington, DC's Ward 8. Several of the photos were taken at THEARC Farm, the urban farm just in back of the main THEARC facility. I love that spot on Oxon Run because it's an actual space that we use to educate community members.

The Green Scheme was born out of my experience as a student at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, in Greensboro, NC. My major was agricultural economics, the business side. But Greensboro is in a rural area, so I was also able to see firsthand how food was produced. After college, when I returned to DC, I didn't see any of the resources to do farming like I had seen in Greensboro.

That inspired me to do projects around urban farming, health, and nutrition, but incorporating some sort of urban flair as well, making it cool to engage in this healthy, grow-your-own-food lifestyle.

We work across wards 5, 7, and 8 in DC. We do after-school programs at school gardens. We run campaigns for D.C.'s public schools regarding cafeteria food. We co-founded a coalition that addresses food procurement in prisons. I teach a nutrition entrepreneurship class at Ballou High School, which is just a few steps from Oxon Run Park. One of the most exciting things about my work is seeing kids take what they learn in the garden back to their households.



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Leslie Weldon
Chief Executive for Work Environment
and Performance, U.S. Forest Service
Watkins Park

I work for the U.S. Forest Service and have spent my career as a biologist caring for the nation's forested ecosystems and watersheds. I see myself as helping people connect with the wonders of creation. Whether I've lived in Washington State, Oregon, Montana or Maryland, I've always found favorite places where I could immerse myself in the gorgeous density and peace of a forest. These days, I look forward to indulging my senses on the less-crowded side of Watkins Park. Whether alone or with my spouse, I move, breathe, pray and reflect.

I love observing the changes in seasons by noticing the colors and movements of our abundant trees and wildflowers, and the intriguing motions of songbirds, eagles, great blue herons, foxes, wild turkeys, beavers, turtles, and frogs.

I even enjoy during summer noting the slow ascent of corn and soybeans from the ground toward the sky. On clear days and nights, I stand still and gaze adoringly at the clouds, stars and planets.



Being conscious enough to take note of sunrises and sunsets has created a rhythm to my daily life that I would sorely miss if it somehow were taken from me.

Searching for a way to slow down and find a bit of yourself? Make time for nature. It's a wonderful form of self-care that gives us something better than good. It gives us something priceless.



Photo by Benjamin Israel



Photo by Benjamin Israel

Beatra Wilson
Assistant Director for Urban
and Community Forestry Program,
U.S. Forest Service
🌿 **Watkins Park** 🌿

When I’m outside, I think about my family and my upbringing in Louisiana, where every congregating event was outdoors, because no one had enough gathering space indoors. Everything was cookout. It was a true community. As children, we could go from yard to yard and play and everyone took care of each other. Being there represented my earliest days of innocent exploring, picking blackberries and red berries.

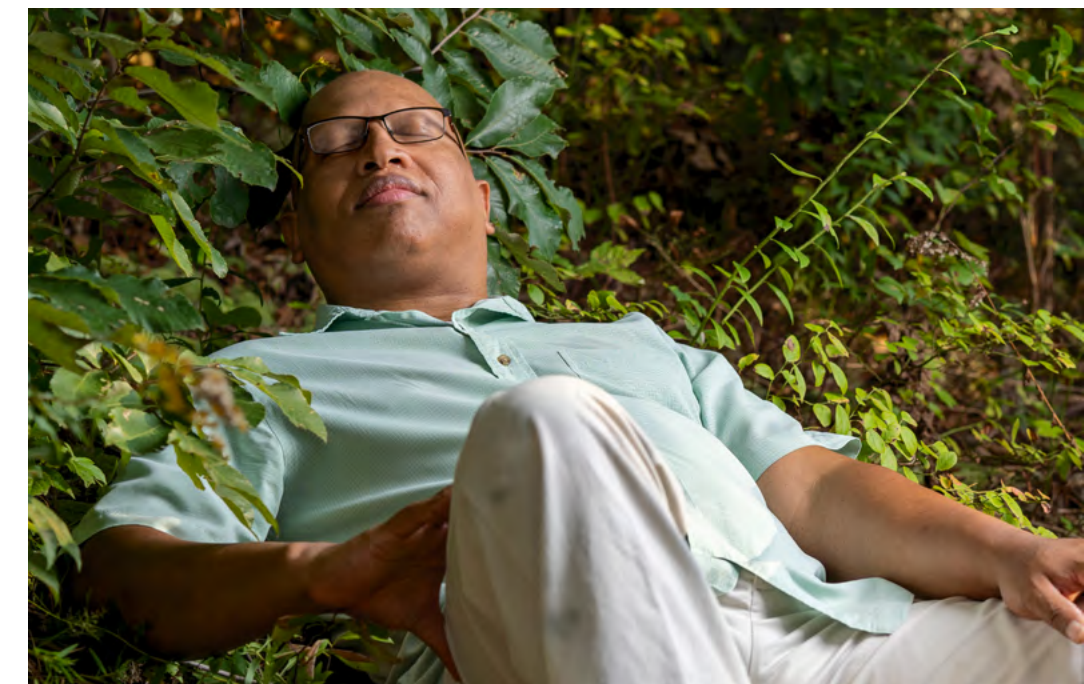
In my family’s yard, we had four pecan trees, and one fig tree. We always had a garden. From our spring garden, we harvested tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon, and six rows of sugar cane for a few seasons. From our fall/ winter garden, we grew turnips, collard greens and sweet potatoes. My mom had huge satsuma orange trees that bore us the fruit of seedless oranges, like cuties and halos. Our neighborhood was alive with vegetation.

I’ve been in this neighborhood for 13 years. Watkins Park is a natural habitat. It’s nothing for us to watch deer, groundhogs, racoons, and rabbits pop out and scurry around. And my kids love that there are so many butterflies. And for birders, it’s a safe, welcoming space.

Watkins Park is like our green Disney World. There are hiking and biking trails, multiple playgrounds, a small farm, but better than Disney, it’s free, funded by taxpayer dollars. It’s a reminder of why, in my work with the Forest Service, I go so hard on green spaces and equity sites. I have a responsibility to bring this kind of experience to as many Americans as possible. I love that people can show up in the outdoors however they want to and I have a responsibility to bring this kind of experience to as many Americans as possible.



Photos by Benjamin Israel



Sacoby Wilson PhD
Professor, University of Maryland
School of Public Health,
Director, Center for Community Engagement,
Environmental Justice, and Health (CEEJH)
 Allen Pond Park

When I'm outside, I remember the fun times I had exploring the woods in Mississippi as a young kid. I would search for lost treasures, pick wild blackberries, and imagine that I was traveling through a fantasy world. As I have gotten older, my love for nature has only deepened. I still love to explore forests, visit parks, and enjoy the beauty of rivers, creeks, streams, bogs, and swamps. Being out in nature reminds me of how all things are connected from the tallest tree to the smallest insect hiding under rocks throughout my rock garden. My soul is awakened, particularly when I am growing food in the micro farm at my house. I love planting vegetable and herb seeds, talking to them, nurturing them, playing my favorite funk and soul music when I tend to them. Seeing butterflies flutter, bees buzz and all my other insect friends tending to the garden too brings me joy. Seeing collards, cabbage, strawberries, chard, corn, beans, watermelon, blackberries, blueberries, figs, tomatoes, peppers, rosemary, basil, eggplants, squash, muscadines, and all sorts of fruits, herbs, and vegetables grow, makes my heart soar. Being out in the garden is like communing with the All Mighty, the higher spirit, Mother Earth. I feel complete, I feel alive, I feel like me, like the little kid exploring the woods in Mississippi.



Photo by Benjamin Israel



Photos by Benjamin Israel

Karen Wilson-Ama'Echefu, PhD
Cultural Historian, Singer, Storyteller
 Fort Slocum Park



Well before I was born, any land my family had was taken for Jim Crow-rigged taxes designed to grab Black-owned land when the Great Migration drained the South of dark riches. I came out of that great, busted move.

So I am a New York City kid, a Harlem child, from what some call “the concrete jungle.” I never knew there was such a thing as an urban or community forest. The closest I came to a forest was the one, baby tree that was planted outside our apartment building.



I didn’t know enough to hope that it would provide us shade in summer, a spectacular show of color in the fall, the artwork of barren branches in winter, a sense of renewal in spring and a platform from which birds could serenade the drums and flutes that bathed us in Latin sonic love on blue summer evenings. All I knew was that it was life, it was ours, I loved it, and I wanted with all my heart to see it grow. Tragically, the tree was truncated in its infancy by a garbage truck that, backing up too far, ended its young life. I still mourn that tree.

Now I am part of the *Belonging project*, with the invitation to consider where it is that I belong. I found Fort Slocum Park wild with life and love, reaching out to touch and hold me as I walked through. I could only think this parkland was like that land on which my parents had grown, land that had been lost to me so long ago.

So when Fort Slocum reached out to me, I reached back; when it sang to me in its thousand voices, I joined it with mine. It drew me into itself and, for the first time, I came home.

PLACES IN THE BOOK

MARYLAND

Allen Pond Park p. 88

3330 Northview Dr, Bowie, MD 20716



This popular, 85-acre park in Bowie has so much to choose from, including an ice arena, amphitheater, walking and biking trail, fitness trail, picnic sites, playgrounds, as well as the 10-acre Allen Pond. Allen Pond and Whitemarsh Park are the two major parks in the city of Bowie. [Click here for website](#)

Bliss Meadows p. 64

5105 Plainfield Ave, Baltimore, MD 21206



This 10-acre land reclamation project in East Baltimore, started by Founder and Executive Director Atiya Wells, is fashioned from three contiguous properties and includes an urban farm with vegetable garden, orchard, goats, chickens and bee colonies. [Click here for website](#)

Jones Farm p. 70

17412 Nottingham Road, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
(Patuxent Riverkeeper)



The Jones Farm is the private farm of the Tutman family, held by the family for generations. Fred Tutman is CEO of the Patuxent Riverkeeper, a nonprofit headquartered on the banks for the Patuxent River. Their mission is to protect, preserve, and replenish the river. [Click here for website](#)

Oxon Cove Park (NPS*) p. 34

6411 Oxon Hill Road, Oxon Hill, MD 20745



At the mouth of Oxon Creek, Oxon Cove Park's 512 acres offer beautiful views of forest and fields, including a paved Hiker-Biker Trail, as well as the .3 mile Woodlot trail. Materials for Self-Guided Walking Tour for the Oxon Hill Farm available at the Visitor Center. [Click here for website](#)

Sligo Creek Trail p. 46

Montgomery County, MD and Prince George's County, MD



Popular among bicyclists, walkers, and joggers, this 10.2-mile hard surface trail travels through parkland in Montgomery County, and Prince George's County. Trail area contains some unpaved trails as well, along with 15 picnic areas. Trail crosses some busy streets. [Click here for website](#)

Soldiers Delight p. 22

Natural Environmental Area
5100 Deer Park Road, Owings Mills MD 21117



At 1,900 acres, this Natural Environmental Area managed by Maryland Department of Natural Resources is the largest remaining serpentine ecosystem in the eastern U.S. It is underlain by serpentinite, an oceanic rock. Enjoy views of grasslands and oak savanna while walking seven miles of marked hiking trails in this Baltimore County gem. [Click here for website](#)

Watkins Regional Park p. 80, 84

301 Watkins Park Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774



This park has plenty to offer kids and families, as well as hikers in search of a day in nature. Kids can enjoy Old Maryland Farm, miniature train and carousel rides, and Wizard of Oz-themed playground. Hikers can walk through agricultural area and forest. Camp sites available. [Click here for website](#)

Woodend Nature Sanctuary p. 6, 16

8940 Jones Mill Rd, Chevy Chase, MD 20815



Home to Nature Forward, the Woodend Nature Sanctuary features forest, stream, a restored meadow, and a native-plant garden, and connects with Rock Creek Park. A restoration completed in 2021 of the 40-acre sanctuary includes a stream made of step pools and dams and a wheelchair-accessible nature trail. Don't miss the Woodend Mansion, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. [Click here for website](#)

*(NPS) National Park Service

VIRGINIA

Billy Goat Trail - C&O Canal (NPS*) *p. 66*

11710 Macarthur Blvd, Potomac, MD 20854



Well-utilized 4.7-mile hiking trail between the C&O Canal and Potomac River. Beautiful views, rich with wildlife. Billy Goat Trail's three trail sections are connected by the towpath along C&O Canal. [Click here for website](#)

Dora Kelley Nature Park *p. 30*

5750 Sanger Ave., Alexandria, VA 22311



This 50-acre park consisting of floodplain, marsh, and oak-heath forest was founded in 1973. Located in the Homes Run Stream Valley Gorge, the park includes a one-mile-long nature trail running alongside Holmes Run. [Click here for website](#)

Forest Hill Park *p. 60*

1209 Admiral Street, Richmond, VA 23220



This park, listed in Virginia's Historic Register, has a rich, varied history, and features a picturesque lake, and numerous paths and trails. A partial wetland, the park is the location for summer Sunday concerts. [Click here for website](#)

Huntley Meadows Park *p. 20*

3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306



At 1,554 acres, this large park of meadow, woodland, and wetland holds miles of maintained and informal trails. Donated by the federal government to the citizens of Fairfax County in 1975, this is the largest park operated by the Fairfax County Park Authority. [Click here for website](#)

Manassas National Battlefield Park (NPS*) *p. 32*

12521 Lee Highway, Manassas, VA 20109



Each year, 700,000 people visit this national park, site of two major Civil War battles. At nearly 5,100 acres and with 40 miles of hiking trails, the park is popular with hikers and joggers. Walking tours available. [Click here for website](#)

Seneca Regional Park *p. 42*

101 Seneca Road, Great Falls VA 22066



Perfect for hikers, birders, and horseback riders, this park, located at the western edge of Great Falls, is named for nearby Seneca Falls, a 10-foot elevation drop in the Potomac River. Part of the Northern Virginia Regional Park system. Bisected by the Potomac National Heritage Trail. [Click here for website](#)

WASHINGTON D.C.

Anacostia Riverwalk Trail *p. 52*

Washington metropolitan area



Walkers, runners, cyclists and skaters can all enjoy this 20-mile trail, which provides a front-row seat for exploration of the wildlife along the Anacostia River. Connects with the Anacostia Tributary Trail System. Also known as the Anacostia River Trail. [Click here for website](#)

Anacostia Park *p. 12*

1900 Anacostia Drive, Washington, DC 20020



At more than 1200 acres in size, this park includes multiple sites. Parkgoers enjoy a roller skating rink, ballfields, picnicing, golf course, and magnificent views of the Anacostia River. Wetlands and woodlands provide habitat for osprey, bald eagles, foxes, muskrats, and more. [Click here for website](#)

Fort Slocum Park (NPS*) *p. 82*

5800 Kansas Ave NW, Washington, DC 20011



Location of one of seven temporary forts created for the Union Army's defense of the city of Washington, D.C. during the Civil War, this urban park is now managed by the National Park Service. Features a field, picnic area, trails, and dense woods. [Click here for website](#)

Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens (NPS*) *p. 36*

1550 Anacostia Ave. NE Washington, DC 20019



Located across the Anacostia River from National Arboretum, this national park features a boardwalk trail and is known for its water lilies and lotuses. The park also contains the Kenilworth Marsh and is a destination for birders. Part of National Park Service's Anacostia Park. [Click here for website](#)

Kingman & Heritage Islands Park *p. 56*

RFK Stadium Lot 6, 575 Oklahoma Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002



Man-made islands constructed from material from dredging the Anacostia River, Kingman Island and Heritage Island offer beautiful water views, opportunities for boating and hiking, and wildlife habitat. Managed by the National Park Service until 1995, the islands are now owned by the District of Columbia. [Click here for website](#)

Oxon Run Park *p. 44, 50, 78*

1200 Mississippi Ave SE, Washington, DC 20032



Located along Oxon Run in Washington, DC, SE, this 106-acre recreational park was created in 1971. Features amphitheater, playgrounds, sports fields and facilities, and 3.4 miles of trail. The Well, an urban farm and community wellness space, is set to open in 2022. [Click here for website](#)

Rain Garden at Kansas St NW, Ingraham St NW, and 3rd St NW *p. 48*

Brightwood Park neighborhood, Washington, DC, NW



This piece of land was transformed from a patch of grass into a rain garden as part of DC Water's "green infrastructure" plan to reduce stormwater overflow into Rock Creek. DC's design of diagonal avenues intersecting with the north-south and east-west streets created a number of triangular plots of land such as this one. [Click here for website](#)

Rock Creek Park (NPS*) *p. 40*

5200 Glover Rd, NW, Washington, DC 20015



The third U.S national park (1890), the park extends north-south in Washington DC's Northwest quadrant, and is favorite nature spot of many living in and near the nation's capital. Highlights include Horse Center, Peirce Mill, and over 32 miles of hiking trails and paths. [Click here for website](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our sincere and abiding appreciation to the leadership and staff of Nature Forward, including Executive Director Lisa Alexander, and to the U.S. Forest Service, chief among the leadership, Assistant Director for Urban and Community Forestry, Beattrra Wilson. We also are indebted to the planning committee of the Taking Nature Black Conference, and its Vice-Chairman, Fred Tutman, for, in some cases, being a part of this work as portrait subjects, and in all cases, kindly, energetically, and brilliantly supporting the work of the conference. Deep and abiding appreciation to this project's Director of Photography and Videography, Ben Israel, and Graphic Designer, Gabriela Paola Franco Peña, for their extraordinary commitment to working through every detail of this project to capture, edit, and display the most beautiful photographs possible, and to our two contract photographers for their time and breathtaking talents.

Nature Forward

Our Mission: Nature Forward inspires residents of the greater Washington, DC, region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education, and advocacy.
Our Vision: Nature Forward seeks to create a larger and more diverse community of people who treasure the natural world and work to preserve it.

The Taking Nature Black Conference:

Taking Nature Black is an event, an opportunity, a time to pause for the cause. It is a regional and national environmental lovefest disguised as a conference. It is a Black healing, welcoming, organizing, networking space bursting with leaders, speakers, creators, innovators, scientists, educators, musicians, artists, and entertainers telling their stories about everything from climate change to environmental justice and environmental joy.
Learn more here: www.anshome.org and here: www.anshome.org/taking-nature-black

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Urban and Community Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program is a technical, financial, and educational assistance program, delivering nature-based solutions to ensure a resilient and equitable tree canopy where more than 84 percent of Americans live. By working with our state partners and community tree groups, the program invests from the ground up in communities, improving more than 140 million acres of urban and community forest across the United States.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Learn more here:
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests/ucf>

USDA Forest Service
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Washington, DC 20250
Urban & Community Forestry Program
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests/ucf>

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS



Benjamin Israel

Benjamin Israel is Staff Videographer/Photographer for Nature Forward. His photos feature regularly in Nature Forward’s Naturalist Quarterly. Benjamin’s photography has also appeared in the *Washington Post*, *American Forests Magazine*, *Chesapeake Bay Magazine*, and *Bethesda Magazine*. For Nature Forward and Montgomery History, he directed the documentary film, “The Land of Woodend,” which centered on the environmental history of the Woodend Sanctuary in Chevy Chase, MD, where Nature Forward has its headquarters. The film explores the restoration of Woodend.

Cheriss May

Cheriss May is a lauded portrait and editorial photographer, and adjunct professor at Howard University. She’s published in *The New York Times*, *O Magazine*, on The White House website, the *Today Show*, and other publications. Cheriss has an exhibition, “Cheriss May Soul Connection”, showing across the country, and her work is featured in a permanent exhibit, “In Conversation: Visual Meditations on Black Masculinity”, at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. Cheriss is an advocate for inclusive storytelling, and is often commissioned to speak to organizations around the world, including Spotify, Adobe, Leica, the Center for Creative Photography, and the International Center of Photography.

Cherissmay.com



ABOUT THE DESIGNER



Myron Fields

Myron Fields is a photographer based in the Washington, DC area with a passion for storytelling. As Myron built clientele through his business, MFields Photography, he realized that his background in music and arts matched with his love for people gave him a unique perspective behind the lens. Myron is known to be a multicultural visionary whose style can be described as photojournalistic meets fine arts and fashion. Specializing in wedding photography, engagements, and portraiture, Myron has helped tell the stories of people from various cultures, races, and religions. Myron has been recognized for his work in places like *Munaluchi Bridal Magazine* and *The Knot* and plans to continue creating experiences for people that uplift and inspire through the power of photography.

mfieldsphotography.com

Gabriela Paola Franco Peña

Gabriela Paola Franco Peña is a Graphic and Motion Designer, Illustrator, and environmentalist, based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Gabriela focuses on the non-profit space. She has designed print graphics for the Massachusetts TPS Committee, Cipotes Unidos in Maryland, and Nature Forward. She has designed motion graphics for two Nature Forward conferences, the Taking Nature Black Conference and the Naturally Latinos Conference. Gabriela hopes to continue to channel her creativity into meaningful and powerful projects that inspire others.

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