

WINTER 2025

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y



**Be the Change
Nature Forward Needs Your Support—
now more than ever!**



ON THE COVER

Photo of Northern Cardinal by Jane Gamble

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY

Winter 2025

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

L I S A A L E X A N D E R

**A sliver of pink sunset
peers down through the canopy.**

**For a moment, brief and
hopeful, I can see the
sunrise of another day,**

Excerpt from *Sunlight Through Trees* by C.W. Bryan

The Sunrise of Another Day

Nature Forward and its mission work have been going strong for 127 years. We can chalk up that amazing longevity to the dedication and generosity of our members, volunteers, Board, and staff through the decades. Our ability to successfully pass the torch to new leaders and new generations makes our enduring legacy possible. And that's why I feel so optimistic. Even in the face of tubulent times, I am confident the sunset of my career will mark the sunrise of a new chapter in the amazing trajectory of Nature Forward and its service to people and nature in the Capital Region.



In this, my farewell column, I'll start with a heartfelt THANK YOU, to you, our wonderful members and supporters. What a joy it has been to work with Nature Forward's energized community. Fond memories I treasure include restoration planting days, Birdathon adventures, exploring nature with GreenKids students and summer campers, deer drives, and discovering the joys of identifying benthic macroinvertebrates – especially the charming water penny and the awesome hellgrammite!

I am proud to have fought alongside our champions of Ten Mile Creek and filled the National mall with our members during the March for Science. Immersing myself in our Taking Nature Black and Naturally Latinos Conferences profoundly changed my views on environmentalism and steeled my resolve to promote Nature for All. Welcoming people of all abilities to enjoy nature in a restored and accessible Woodend Sanctuary has made life at our headquarters endlessly richer and more rewarding. Our authentic outreach and partnership with diverse communities across the region has broadened my understanding of and appreciation for all the ways people in our region connect with and treasure the natural world.

My time at Nature Forward has given me the chance to work with a world class staff who bring talent and passion to our mission and vision. And that's why I'm delighted that one of our own, Deputy Director for Programs Alison Bidwell Pearce, will assume the role of Executive Director when I ride off into the sunset at the end of 2024. Alison is smart, strategic, and ambitious. I know her leadership will mark a sunrise that will take Nature Forward to new heights – growing our base of supporters and ensuring that our mission pillars of education, conservation, and restoration join forces to amplify our impact.

I am counting on you, my friends, to give generously this year end to support Nature Forward's outstanding mission work and put the wind in the sails of our new, energetic Executive Director, Alison Bidwell Pearce. I look forward to seeing all the progress our beloved organization will make in the years ahead. And I will hope to meet you out in nature where I'll spend much of my retirement time.

Together we are giving nature in our community the promise of a new day. Thank you for joining me in this wonderful work. Nature needs us more than ever now!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Alexander". The signature is fluid and cursive.



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Field Trips to Front Office: Meet Alison Bidwell Pearce, PhD



If you visited Woodend Nature Sanctuary back in 2005, you might have spotted part-time naturalist Alison Bidwell Pearce making funny faces and greeting children arriving on school buses for field trips.

“I was the one waving at them in the windows,” Alison laughs. “I knew I had to catch their attention before they even got off the bus.”

Upon arriving in the DC region as the mother of a newborn and a recent California transplant with a PhD in Ecological Anthropology from Stanford University, Alison began looking for her community. Nature Forward (then Audubon Naturalist Society) provided a connection to her “tribe”—kindred nature lovers who, as she describes them, “bend down to investigate tiny plants growing in the cracks of the sidewalk, gently relocate spiders outside, and whose eyes dart skyward as birds pass overhead.”

Today, nearly two decades after that cross country move, Alison’s passion for nature and community is among the many qualities she will bring to her new role as Nature Forward’s next Executive Director. Selected unanimously from a field of 65 candidates in a national search, Alison will assume leadership of our 127-year-old organization in January 2025, succeeding Executive Director Lisa Alexander. Under Lisa’s decade-long tenure, Nature Forward underwent transformative change, including its historic name change and the expansion of signature programs like GreenKids that delivers free environmental education to more than 15,000 public school students annually. Alison says she’s excited about the opportunity to build on that momentum.

“What we’re trying to accomplish is huge and varied. Nature Forward needs to bring more people and more supporters to join our work for nature and amplify our impact,” Alison explains. “My vision is that we will achieve the kind of reach and recognition in the DC region that we deserve, given our long history and impressive accomplishments.”



Alison planting trees with volunteers as Restoration Director

Alison brings a unique combination of academic expertise and hands-on experience to her new role. Her career began as a Peace Corps agroforestry volunteer in El Salvador, followed by graduate research on conservation values among indigenous communities in Panama and ranchers in Montana. At Nature Forward, she progressed from part-time Naturalist to Volunteer Manager to Director of Restoration, where she spearheaded completion of the \$4-million Nature For All campaign to enhance wildlife habitat and ecosystems at Woodend Nature Sanctuary.

As Deputy Director for Programs, Alison currently oversees five mission departments with combined annual budgets of nearly \$2 million. Under her guidance, the organization secured its largest-ever grant to partner with urban

continued on page 18

Be the Change

Nature Forward Needs Your Support — now more than ever!

As we approach the end of the year amid big changes in the metro DC area – and across our nation – we need to ask you to take one minute to make a difference for our local environment. We are at a critical moment for nature’s future, and we cannot afford to back down from the challenges ahead.

Nature has no political party. That’s why we must push through the noise that comes with any new administration and ensure that our voice remains strong, unified and clear. The natural world MUST NOT take a back seat! Nature Forward is committed, and we know you are, too! We must act now, with urgency and resolve, to protect our precious environment.

Your year-end gift to Nature Forward is absolutely critical to ensure we can continue to educate elected leaders, local communities, and our future nature stewards about

the importance of protecting our natural world. From ensuring cleaner waterways to making nature more accessible to people of all backgrounds and abilities, your support is absolutely critical.

Just look at a few things we accomplished in 2024 with your help!

- Trained 205 DC residents on how to prepare for and mitigate flooding due to climate change
- Engaged 320 residents in Prince George’s County in our work to monitor and protect local clean water
- Led the charge to curb negative environmental impacts from rampant data center construction across the DMV
- Pushed legislation to ensure HOAs in Virginia to allow native plantings in their communities
- Provided free environmental education to more than 15,000 public school students across the region
 - Planted 172 trees and understory pollinator gardens in low-income Justice40 neighborhoods in DC, MD, and VA and delivered grant-supported native plant kits to 148 homes in the Anacostia watershed
 - Launched the region’s first-ever State of Streams report card to spotlight threats to local water quality in the Capital Region and hold decision makers to task



Your support ensures that we continue to build on our core value of Nature for All by delivering scholarships for Camp Woodend

summer campers, field trips for children with disabilities, nature experiences for veterans, and new programs for families in our wheelchair-accessible Nature Play Space at Woodend Sanctuary.

Stand with us to ensure nature is a priority. We can't do this wonderful mission work without your support. Please don't delay. Make your very best year-end gift today to keep this important nature education, restoration, advocacy, and community outreach going strong. It takes all of us working together to ensure that Nature Forward is ready to grow and meet the challenges of preserving nature in these changing times.

Please make a donation by visiting <https://natureforward.org/appeal/>.



It takes all of us working together to ensure that Nature Forward is ready to grow and meet the challenges of preserving nature in these challenging times.

—CORINNA FISK,
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR



Scan the QR Code to give a year-end gift today.

Taking Nature Black 2025: Reclamation & Resilience

by Lydia Lawrence

Reclamation and Resilience are two words that seem to define my journey and that of many other Black practitioners in the environmental space. When I started my advocacy work several years ago, I felt like I was engaged in a constant battle to Reclaim my Nature birthright and that battle wasn't unique to

me. I spent hours writing statements and crafting arguments to traditional environmental organizations and boards on why committing resources to create space for Black and Brown communities to engage with nature in their own ways should be integrated into everything they do. Conversely, I was spending just as many hours educating Black-led, social justice organizations on why climate change and the environment are social justice issues that often have the greatest impacts on us as a Black community.

Despite these struggles, it was the small moments and many acts of kindness that built my Resilience. The mentorship, belief, and friendship of the only other Black environmental advocate in Fairfax County helped me persevere against the many obstacles and adversities that I encountered as I tried to build Fairfax County's NAACP's first Environmental and Climate Justice Committee. Friends and allies resurrected me during the times they spoke out against systemic injustices when I lacked the strength to speak out for myself. My heart filled with joy the first time I taught paddleboard lessons to members of Outdoor Afro. And books by Black writers such as Carolyn Finney, Dorceta Taylor, and Isabel Wilkerson articulated for me the racially broken systems that created the environmental injustices our community continues to fight.

I don't remember how I stumbled upon Nature Forward's Taking Nature Black Conference. I think I was so hungry for community that I simply searched for "Black Environmental Conferences in DC." That search led me to a video of a Community of Black Environmentalists celebrating Nature with a drum circle; I had found Taking Nature Black. During the COVID shutdown, the 2021 Taking Nature Black: Call and Response conference ran for five days online. I was so excited to bask in that space of community—even if only virtually—that I took that entire week off from work to attend the conference. It was worth it!

My Conference Co-chair, Jamoni Overby, and I chose the theme "Reclamation & Resilience" for the Taking Nature Black 2025 Conference. In recent years, we've seen unprecedented attacks on Black rights and environmental protections. As we've watched our rights and protections eroded, we've simultaneously seen climate records broken in heat, hurricanes, fires, and flooding. More than ever, we must build Resilience in our



Lydia Lawrence



Jamoni Overby

Communities and in ourselves. But we must do this in a way that honors our culture, our legacies, and our ancestral connection to the Earth. For this, we must Reclaim the narrative that fighting for our environment belongs to only one race or culture, We must Reclaim lost histories of how the Black community has always been here in environmental spaces and often times, has led the fight. Generations of the Black diaspora have led the way in protecting Mother Earth. It is time we Reclaim our inheritance.

Jamoni and I are excited to give you a sneak peek at our speakers and panels that will bring Taking Nature Black 2025 to life. We are so delighted to welcome Reverend Lennox Yearwood Jr. to share all the unique ways that our community is showing up to fight against climate change and environmental injustice. He will lead a fireside chat with his friend, and our frequent Taking Nature Black partner, Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali. Reverend Yearwood has led the charge in persuading Black celebrities to use their platforms to get people engaged in climate advocacy in a way that is unique to our Culture.

Reverend Yearwood's organization, The Hip Hop Caucus, has made multiple documentaries telling the story of Black Resilience in the face of climate change. We are thrilled to host a private screening of their latest documentary, *Underwater Projects*. Narrated by comedy legend Wanda Sykes, *Underwater Projects* tells the story of Black communities facing the challenges of flooding in Norfolk, Virginia, and how they are building community Resilience. We will also discuss the ways communities in the DC-Baltimore region are building climate resilience. Venerated community champion Dennis Chestnut, along with flood resilience leaders from across the region, will share the ways they're engaging their neighbors in protecting themselves from the worst impacts of flooding.

Taking Nature Black would be incomplete without uplifting our spirits through a focus on our own personal mental health and Resilience. We are excited to welcome Dr. Jylana Sheats, an Associate Director for the Aspen Institute's Science & Society program, and a faculty member at Tulane University. Dr. Sheats will speak about her extensive work and collaboration with the Climate Mental Health Network to address the mental health consequences of climate change through community engagement. Throughout our conference, we will highlight the poetry and prose of local students from the Anacostia watershed, who engaged with Nature for the first time through a project called *Through My Anacostia Eyes*, led by past TNB Chair and author, Caroline Brewer, and conference favorite and DC native, Xavier Brown. Our Nature field trips will bring back Conference favorites, Tykee James and Maria-Elena Montero, to lead a bird walk. We will also feature virtual yoga led by Prince George's County native, Keona Gardner, so that every Taking Nature Black attendee can participate in nurturing their own wellness no matter where they are.

Nature Forward Marketing and Communications Director Vince Robinson coined a slogan for Taking Nature Black 2025: **Best.Conference.Ever!** Every time we host Taking Nature Black, we find new ways to pack more inspiration, more community, and more magic into every minute of programming. In a time of fear and dire prospects, Taking Nature Black is the oasis that enables us to Reclaim our power and build our personal Resilience so that we can do the work of building community Resilience.

So come be a part of the Taking Nature Black Movement today. Become a conference sponsor or buy a ticket! Tell your friends and family to come! But do it soon because tickets are limited, and we anticipate them selling out. However you choose to be a part of the conference, you will be welcome at Nature Forward's Taking Nature Black 2025: Reclamation & Resilience. Until then, we challenge you to take radically good care of yourself and your community and to continue doing the work that will be celebrated at TNB25. Jamoni and I look forward to seeing you there! Learn more at natureforward.org/taking-nature-black.



Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr.



Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali



Dr. Jylana Sheats

The Power of Partnerships

by Jamoni Overby

DC neighborhoods face increasing threats from climate change, especially rising flood risks. For Black communities, these environmental issues often intersect with historic inequalities in access to resources, information, and representation. One of the most effective ways Nature Forward helps address these challenges is through partnerships. Nature Forward’s partnerships create the collective power needed to engage and educate community members, amplify their voices to decisionmakers, and advocate for sustainable solutions to climate-driven environmental issues including flooding.

This year, in partnership with Ward 7 Resilience Hub Community Coalition (W7RHCC), The Green Scheme, and Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), Nature Forward received funding to conduct flooding outreach to DC residents in Wards 7 & 8. Together, we created a program called “Rise Above: Building Floodwise Communities.” By intentionally partnering with community-focused organizations, Nature Forward was able to educate community members about flooding while strengthening our partners’ impact and knowledge base. “Rise Above” provided residents with multiple ways to engage with the issue of flooding. We offered workshops that focused on flooding basics, flood resilience, and flood insurance. Thanks to the combined creativity of project partners, we delivered learning opportunities on flooding topics in a variety of formats ranging from an in-depth workshop series to quick, kid-friendly workshops. In addition, Nature Forward’s DC Advocate Jamoni Overby helped lead a well-attended “flood walk” that highlighted neighborhood history in relation to flooding.

With W7RHCC, we delivered a total of 13 workshops—both in-person and virtual. Our first workshop in Ward 7 at the Faunteroy Center had 9 attendees, and participation grew from there. At our final workshop in Ward 7 at Cesar Chavez Public Charter School, we welcomed more than 50 participants. This growth in attendance stemmed from the

“Our partnership with Nature Forward amplified our impact, providing both technical expertise and environmental solutions to address flood risks, while WIN’s grassroots approach connected those resources to the families who needed them most.”

—SIDRA SIDDIQUI,
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER



Nature Forward’s DC Advocate, Jamoni Overby, leading a floodwalk along Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave in Ward 7.

practical and engaging content we presented in the workshops. Word spread! Community members who attended our workshops told their neighbors. Our participants became our best champions for the Floodwise project.

Knocking on people's doors was critical to attracting Ward 7 & 8 residents to our educational sessions. WIN joined forces with Nature Forward to increase flood resilience as part of their work to promote healthy housing. By combining their focus on home repair resources with flood resiliency resources, WIN and Nature Forward teamed up with families to find solutions to current water issues and build resiliency to prevent future harm. Community Organizer Sidra Siddiqui shared, "Our partnership with Nature Forward amplified our impact, providing both technical expertise and environmental solutions to address flood risks, while WIN's grassroots approach connected those resources to the families who needed them most." Thanks to WIN's help, we reached more than 200 residents through door-knocking.

Young peoples' voices are often left out of climate conversations. But not this time! Nature Forward worked closely with our partners at The Green Scheme (TGS) to connect students of all ages to flood education. TGS engaged more than 450 youth in flood education and flood readiness so that the young people could advocate for themselves and educate their families. Nature Forward's GreenKids program is helping expand water education for kids as well. Starting in November, GreenKids began delivering 4th grade watershed lessons to hundreds of students in DCPS schools including Handley Elementary School in Ward 8 and Kimball Elementary School in Ward 7. We're counting on children and youth to be messengers who bring home water awareness to their families who might otherwise be unaware of flood risks in their neighborhood.

Throughout the Floodwise project, Nature Forward's partnerships with local organizations and advocacy groups have helped our government partner and funder, the DC Department of Energy and Environment, connect residents to District programs including FloodSmart Homes, RiverSmart Homes, and RiverSmart Communities, all of which help residents install green infrastructure and other stormwater management practices. We've also connected residents seeking flood insurance to the DC Department of Securities, Insurances, and Banking.

Zandra Chestnut, a leader from W7RHCC, told us, "My senior citizen neighbor just had her yard measured for stormwater management...this was a result of attending our Floodwise Community workshops...She was very thankful for the information and is looking forward to having her home protected from flood waters that have plagued her basement for years." Zandra's experience echoes the many responses Nature Forward has received. We are happy to inspire and connect DC residents with all types of water management resources.



Jamoni Overby leading a class on flood insurance at the Cesar Chavez Public Charter School.

The power of partnerships is that when we are united, we can address systemic challenges facing the communities most negatively impacted by climate change. Nature Forward knows that by working together with other organizations, we can ensure that community members have the resources and knowledge they need to protect themselves and their families AND that they are equipped to advocate for long-term solutions that create safer, more resilient neighborhoods for generations to come. Read more on our upcoming blog post at natureforward.org/conservation.

MD

Nature Forward’s new Maryland Conservation Advocate, Angie McCarthy, has hit the ground running. In her first three months on the job, Angie has been working full-steam ahead on two major bills.

Prince George’s County’s CB52 makes it easier for data centers to be developed in the County by skipping community input. Should CB52 pass, the public will not have access to a proposed data center’s needs for energy, sewer, water, and other public amenities. The Prince George’s County Council is creating a by-right situation for data centers. By-right creates an accelerated approval process without input from the public or planning experts who can ensure development in Prince George’s County meets community health and environmental standards. On November 19, Nature Forward’s Angie McCarthy joined other advocates to testify against CB52 and stand up for public input and the community process. The Council unanimously voted to hold on the bill before taking it up again next legislative session. Thank you for your engagement; together, we sent 230 emails to the Prince George’s County Council!

Let’s all get behind Montgomery County’s BYO-Bag Bill that prohibits retail establishments from providing plastic bags, with exceptions for pharmacies and SNAP/WIC recipients. Under the BYO Bag Bill, county retailers can provide paper bags with a ten-cent tax. More to come on this issue, stay tuned!

Sept 2024: Community members and staff from Fairfax County’s Solid Waste Department conducted a litter survey of Audubon Estates to better understand the types of trash being found in the neighborhood.



VA

Less Trash, More Life / Menos Basura, Más Vidas

Nature Forward has teamed up with Defensores de la Cuenca (Defenders of the Watershed) and Fairfax County’s Solid Waste Department to bring together 19 community members from the mobile home community of Audubon Estates (located in eastern Fairfax County). Residents are part of a ten-month program to reduce litter in their community and in Little Hunting Creek.

Starting this past summer, in meetings organized by Nature Forward, Defensores, and Fairfax County, neighborhood residents began observing and discussing specific community litter issues. The partnership has presented

additional litter reduction topics including a deep dive into the world of recycling, how the county processes trash, and how our public drinking water is cleaned and made safe. By building trust in the quality of water coming from water pipes in peoples’ homes, we hope to reduce consumption of single-use water bottles.

This winter, community members will apply what they’ve learned and work together to initiate a community-led project aimed at reducing neighborhood litter through engagement, education, and action.



Angie speaking to a group of Chesapeake Bay Foundation Stewards on the commonsense guardrails we need for data centers; including plenty of community notice and opportunities for engagement.

Stream Science

Water Quality Monitoring Update Fall 2024

Nature Forward community science volunteers monitored 27 stream sites in Washington DC, and Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Howard Counties in October and early November. More than 190 volunteers dedicated 575 hours conducting aquatic macroinvertebrate surveys to check on the health of our local streams.

Sidwell Friends teacher Emily Boyer serves as Nature Forward’s team leader for the Reservation 630 site, near Peirce Mill in Rock Creek Park. Emily brought three colleagues and 42 students to this tributary of Rock Creek in DC for a combined stream monitoring and field class experience.

Many of our volunteers monitor streams located in popular parks. That gives representatives of Nature Forward the chance to greet people and discuss the importance of stream health and monitoring. Working with partners helps Nature Forward promote clean streams and local watershed groups, including Little Falls Watershed Alliance, Seneca Creek Watershed Partners, Rock Creek Conservancy, Friends of Sligo Creek, Friends of Cabin John Creek, Neighbors of Northwest Branch and others.

In October, our partners the Langley Park Civic Association and Neighbors of Northwest Branch, helped bring 60 visitors to observe and work with our stream monitors along Northwest Branch near Adelphi Mill in Prince George’s County. Talk about the power of partnerships! Nature Forward’s volunteers completed their community science tasks while enthusiastically engaging with community members and helping them see the hidden life in local streams. We are grateful to our stream ambassadors who share their experience and knowledge in Spanish, English, and other languages.

In earlier issues of the Quarterly, we’ve highlighted Nature Forward volunteers who reported incidents that may negatively impact water quality and stream health. In response to one of our reports on dams created by park visitors, Prince George’s Parks removed the dams and placed a “Do Not Move Rocks” sign. Nature Forward’s monitors have already spoken with more than 100 park users about the new sign, explaining how the dams damaged critical habitat that is home to the aquatic macroinvertebrates that play an important role in stream health.



Northwest Branch, Langley Park. Photo by Angie McCarthy



Visit our Water Quality Monitoring page to learn more:
<https://natureforward.org/water-quality-monitoring>

Kids unplug and play at Woodend Sanctuary

Unplug and Explore at Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Did you know playing in nature helps children with:

- cognitive development (creativity and problem solving)
- emotional growth (stress reduction and self-confidence)
- socialization (cooperation and self-awareness)

SCAN TO FIND FAMILY PROGRAMS



To find programs and events that connect your family to nature, visit natureforward.org.



Birthday Parties at Woodend

Explore Woodend Nature Sanctuary with a naturalist for nature-themed activities and games all outdoors!

Learn more at natureforward.org/birthday-parties

Farewell Denis and Congratulations to Brenna



Youth Programs Director, **Denis Perez**, and her husband, Enrique, had a joyful addition to their family in February. Denis took some time at home with baby Sabina, visiting Woodend often and leaving summer camp 2024 in the capable hands of her colleague, Brenna Houck. Now, Denis, Enrique, and Sabina will be moving to New Mexico. We will miss them and hope they visit often. And we're excited to announce the promotion of **Brenna Houck** to be our new Youth Programs Director!



Preschool Open House

Thank you for considering the Nature Preschool at Woodend as a place to nurture your child's love for learning! We would love to invite you to our **Winter Open House on Friday, February 21 from 10 am-12 pm**. You will hear about our school's approach to nature-based education, get a peek at our indoor classrooms, meet our wonderful teachers, hike around the Nature Sanctuary, and leave with the information you need to enroll for the 2025-2026 school year. REGISTER at <https://tinyurl.com/NP-WinterOpenHouse>.

Can't make it Friday morning? Please email our Nature Preschool Director, Rose Brusaferrro, to schedule a 30-minute tour of our program at Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Email rose.brusaferrro@natureforward.org or call 301-652-8108.

Reserve your child's space now!



Grades
K-5

Days Off Nature Camps

ENJOY THE WONDERS OF WOODEND



1 Individual Days Off Camps (8:45 am - 5 pm)

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

Monday, March 31, 2025

Enjoy full days of outdoor nature adventures including activities like catching frogs, learning about pollinators, playing classic camp games, building forts and more.

2 Spring Break Camp (8:45 am - 3 pm)

Monday, April 14 to Thursday, April 17, 2025

Explore the wonders of Spring with a four-day camp at our Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Extended camp option available until 5:00.

See more about our days off programs at natureforward.org/day-off-camps
Nature Forward members receive special pricing on all programs



Grades
K-12

CAMP WOODEND 2025

ENJOY THE WONDERS OF WOODEND



Mid-December - Camp Catalog Releases
January 23 at 10:00 - Registration Opens

Save
these
Dates!



See more about our summer camp programs at natureforward.org/camp-woodend
Nature Forward members receive special pricing on all programs

2025 Summer Camp Dates: June 16–August 15

Nature Forward Loves its Volunteers!

This fall, Nature Forward hosted a volunteer appreciation event to celebrate the hundreds of hours that volunteers give us every year. Folks brought treats to share, including homemade cookies and garden-fresh tomatoes. Volunteers were able to participate in forest and garden walks, try their hand at papermaking, and experiment with nature journaling. Volunteers and staff caught up with old friends and met new faces—the day was such a success that we will definitely make this a recurring event!





Meet Alison Bidwell Pearce

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communities in planting 1,000 native trees and pollinator gardens across the DC region. These achievements reflect her commitment to helping all people strengthen their connections to the natural world.

"I envision a day when a Nature Forward member is as likely to live in Ward 8 as in Kensington, as likely to speak Spanish or Amharic as English, as likely to travel by bus, metro, or bike as by car, and can fully participate in our programs regardless of any disability," she explains. "For both people and wildlife to thrive, we must tap into every part of our human community—harness all of their energy and learn from all experiences."

Looking ahead, Alison embraces the advice of one of her mentors about the need for Nature Forward to assert itself—"to be big, not humble" about its achievements and potential. "We certainly want to recognize the work of dedicated partners and the importance of other advocates in the environmental space but we shouldn't be shy about talking about our accomplishments," she says. "Nature Forward is ambitious about the future. Welcoming more, diverse communities into this movement will help us do even more for nature and people."

With climate change and biodiversity loss presenting unprecedented challenges locally, nationally, and globally, Alison touts Nature Forward's crucial role in building a more sustainable and equitable future. That's why she remains committed to breaking down barriers that have historically limited participation by some communities in the environmental movement.

Embodying the optimism and determination that have been the hallmarks of her journey from academic to part-time naturalist to organizational leader, Alison brings to the work the same creative spirit of nature connection and inspiration that prompted her to make funny faces for arriving schoolchildren.

"Together, we will achieve new ways of belonging in ecosystems that are not only sustainable but also just, equitable, hopeful, and joyful."



Alison meeting a leaf bug at a Woodend After Dark event

We are excited by Alison's strategic thinking, coupled with her passion for environmental education and conservation.

—NANCY VOIT, BOARD PRESIDENT



Alison and Lisa with Doug Tallamy of the University of Delaware

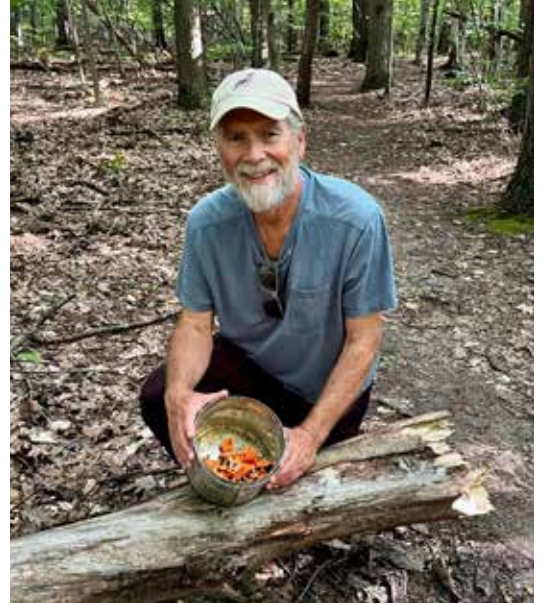
Volunteer Spotlight: John Kough

In each issue of the *Nature Forward Quarterly*, we like to highlight a volunteer. Some have been volunteering for decades and some have recently joined our ranks. This time, we'd like you all to meet John Kough! John has been working with Bradley Simpson plant trees around Woodend—he is a relatively new volunteer, but not new to Nature Forward!

John says, “My family has been walking around Woodend and purchasing birdseed for 30 plus years. When I retired I decided to volunteer and naturally fell in with the habitat restoration activities. I have been a volunteer for a year now. I most like the physical activity of planting and weed removal in the woods. I least like being tangled by rose bushes and blackberry canes but that’s part of the charm.”

John enjoys hiking, biking, birding, foraging for mushrooms, and gardening. He also enjoys a good game of pickleball being of that age group. His favorite restaurants are Raku and Kadhai. He currently only has a granddog, Stevie, a Pomeranian.

Thank you for all your help, John!



Serenella Linares leads our current Master Naturalist class on a hunt for mushrooms at Woodend Sanctuary this fall

Embrace the Winter World with Nature Forward

Wild places are closer than you think®

From field trips to Natural History Field Studies and Nature Travel, adults can find a wide variety of opportunities to learn about and experience nature led by regional naturalists.

Adult Nature Programs

Online Registration for Adult Programs

Sign up at natureforward.org/nature-classes

All changes/cancellations/transfers must be handled through the Environmental Education office. Questions? Call Pam at 301-652-1851 or email pam.oves@natureforward.org

SCAN TO REGISTER



Winter Birding by the Bay

Tuesday, December 10 (8-10:30 am)

Leader: Paul Pisano

Location: Occoquan Bay NWR, VA

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46



In the deceptively quiet season of winter, a flurry of bird activity can be found! From foraging flocks of sparrows, chickadees, and titmice to the colorful nuptial plumage of winter

waterfowl, there's plenty to delight in when birding in winter. Enjoy the tinkling glass song of a Winter Wren or the energetic musical jumble of a Ruby-Crowned Kinglet along parks and greenways throughout the DC Region, guided by passionate birders who love all things avian. Avid birders, bird-enthusiasts, and bird-curious people of all knowledge levels warmly welcome.

Welcome to the World of Winter Trees

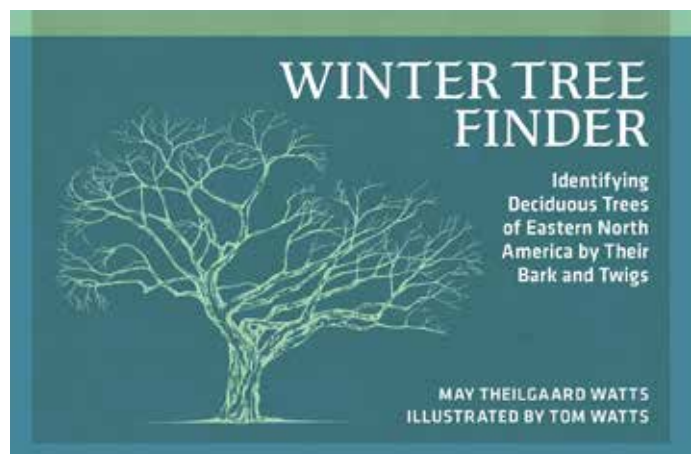
Monday, December 16 (1-4 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Location: Boundary Bridge at Rock Creek Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Ever wanted to know what type of tree you were looking at and despaired because there were no leaves? Never fear, help is here! Join Habitat Manager Bradley Simpson for a winter stroll at Boundary Bridge in Rock Creek Park. On this walk, we'll enjoy December along the creek and learn how to approach identifying trees when their branches are mostly bare. Trails are mostly flat and natural surface, which may be muddy and/or slippery.



Solstice Celebration Hike

Friday, December 20 (12-4:30 pm)

Leaders: Stephanie Mason and Genevieve Wall

Location: Widewater to Great Falls, MD along the C&O Canal

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

The first day of winter is arriving. Whether you call this astronomical event the shortest day—or the longest night—of the year, it's a good occasion to pause the bustle of daily life and join fellow nature lovers on a hike in a beautiful place! Our outing starts at the Widewater area along the C&O Canal Towpath and will move upriver to Great Falls. Here we'll traverse the bridges out to the Great Falls Overlook—and after enjoying the drama and din of the Falls, we'll retrace our steps back to Widewater. As daylight fades on our return walk downriver, we'll look and listen for wildlife activity—primarily birds—as they settle in for the longest night of the year. Expect a round trip of nearly 4 miles on the natural surface towpath at a pace faster than our usual naturalist's shuffle.



The 82nd Annual Washington, DC Christmas Bird Count

Join us on December 14, when Nature Forward will conduct its 82nd Annual Christmas Bird Count. The 15-mile diameter count circle encompasses most of the District and parts of Virginia and Maryland. So, no matter where you live in or around the district, there is a spot for you to count. Novices and intermediate level birders will be placed with experts, so don't feel reluctant to volunteer because of your skill level. This is a learning experience, too!

If you want to learn more about the DC Christmas Bird Count or sign up as a participant, contact the Compiler, Larry Cartwright, at prowarbler@verizon.net or 571-359-2395. You may also contact Nature Forward through Pam Oves at Pam.Oves@natureforward.org.

Winter Walks Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

A: January 8 - Carderock

B: January 22 - Widewater

C: February 5 - Swain's Lock

D: February 19 - Violettes Lock

E: March 5 - Pennyfield Lock

F: March 19 - Riley's Lock

Leaders: Stephanie Mason (A, B, D, F) and Genevieve Wall (C, E)

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy these leisurely walks on the Towpath along close-in portions of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. We'll proceed at a "naturalists' shuffle" pace as we look and listen for over-wintering birds and other wildlife, practice winter botany skills, and enjoy the expansive views along the Potomac River that this season. While the Towpath is flat, it could be muddy or snow-covered. Our seasonal Wednesday walks will continue with Spring Saunters Along the Canal starting on April 2.

Divine Ducks: Winter Waterfowl Walk

Friday, January 10 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Liz Guertin

Location: Thomas Point Park, MD

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Tundra swans dancing, buffleheads diving, mergansers ducking! Maryland is host to over thirty species of migrating waterfowl in the winter months and it doesn't get better than Thomas Point Park, a small peninsula in Anne Arundel County that juts out into the Chesapeake Bay, birds on all sides. Join Master Naturalist, birding enthusiast, & photographer Liz Guertin for a winter walk along this wonderful spot for swans, ducks, and endless water views. We'll walk 1.5 miles at a slow pace for birdwatching on a mostly paved surface, small amounts on a natural surface trail.



Bufflehead/Wikipedia Commons

Winter Hike Series: River and Rocks

A. Sunday, January 12 (10 am-2 pm) Patuxent River Park, MD

B. Monday, February 17 (10 am-2 pm) Riverbend Park, VA

C. Sunday, March 2 (10 am-2 pm) C&O Canal, MD

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each hike: members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Take on two of your New Year's resolutions at once: spend more time outdoors exploring nature AND get more exercise by signing up for one or all of these winter hikes. This season's series begins in Prince George's County along the western shore of the Patuxent River where the Jug Bay Natural Area protects old field, forest, and freshwater tidal wetlands. We'll hike between 3-4 miles on mostly level trails which will be a mix of natural and paved surfaces. Our next two hikes visit the scenic bottomlands along the Potomac River. Hike B will use the natural surface Potomac Heritage Trail along the Virginia side of the River to move from Riverbend Park to Great Falls Park—and back—for a round trip of just over 3 miles. While basically flat, this trail may be muddy and slippery—and there is a small amount of rocky scrambling. We'll keep eyes and ears open for the earliest signs of spring as we hike upriver on the flat C&O Canal towpath from Pennyfield Lock near Potomac, MD to the end of Blockhouse Point Conservation Park. After enjoying this dramatic stretch of cedar-topped cliffs, we'll reverse course and hike back to Pennyfield for a round-trip of nearly 4 miles. On all three of these hikes, we will search for over-wintering birds and other wildlife, while practicing our winter botany skills and enjoying the open landscapes of the season. Hikes may be modified depending on weather and ground conditions, which could be muddy or snow-covered. *These hikes are designed to offer a natural history experience for persons who want to move farther and faster than the pace of most Nature Forward field trips. We will stop to observe and admire nature, but will keep a pace necessary to cover the distance stated.*

Reading Trees at Carderock

Wednesday, January 15 (10:30 am-1 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Carderock Recreation Area, MD

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

What can trees tell us about soil, rocks, and water? Trees have preferences for where they grow, and learning to read their habitats can unlock an encyclopedia of natural history information about the area's geology, hydrology, soil, and more. Over the course of the walk, leader Marney Bruce will show participants how to unpack meaning from the trees growing around them.

Winter Birding at Blackwater Refuge

Saturday, January 18 (9 am-4:45 pm, with optional owling until 5:30 pm)

Leader: Mark England

Location: Blackwater NWR, MD

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

The wetland habitats of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge are a premier birding destination on Maryland's Eastern Shore near Cambridge. Waterfowl are the signature birds of the Refuge—and the best viewing months are November through February. Wintering species include Tundra Swans, Canada and Snow Geese, and more than 20 species of ducks. Bald Eagles are abundant here and the refuge's woodlands harbor owls, towhees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, woodcock, and turkeys year-round. Our birding day will begin at 9 am along the Choptank River waterfront in Cambridge, before moving on to the Refuge for explorations along the Refuge's Wildlife Drive. The leader is likely to stay out until darkness falls depending on the weather and the interests of the group. Limited to 10 participants. NOTE: There will be times when participants will be asked to consolidate into fewer cars to provide for safe and productive stops along the Wildlife Drive.

Woodend Walks and Tours

Family Walks in the Woods

Saturdays: 12/7, 1/4, 2/1, 3/1 (9-10 am)

Members \$12 a family; nonmembers \$20 a family

Join expert naturalists on a leisurely walk through the habitats at Woodend. Explore the wonders of trees, meadows, streams, insects, birds, and everything Woodend has to offer! Limited to 10 families. Only register one adult when signing up.

Bilingual Walks: 1/18, 2/15, 3/15 (9:30-10:30 am)

Members \$12 a family; nonmembers \$20 a family

Explora la maravilla de la naturaleza—los árboles, pájaros, insectos y todo lo que Woodend nos ofrece, con uno de nuestros naturalistas. Solo registre un adulto al inscribirse.

Saturday Morning Bird Walk

Saturdays: 12/14, 1/11, 2/8, 3/8 (9-10 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Join enthusiastic birders at Woodend to learn birding basics. You will learn binocular basics and how to identify common birds as well as explore the wonders of migration. Second person FREE.

Winter Birding Series

A: Saturday, January 25 (Len Bisson): Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center, 9-11:30 am

B: Monday, January 27 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon): Kenilworth, 8:30-11 am

C: Saturday, February 8 (Mark England): Oaks Landfill, 3:30-6 pm

D: Friday, February 14 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon): Rock Creek Park, 8-10:30 am

E: Monday, February 24 (Paul Pisano): National Arboretum, 8:15-10:45 am

F: Sunday, March 9 (Len Bisson): Hughes Hollow, 8-10:30 am

G: Saturday, March 15 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon): Lake Artemesia, 8:30-11 am

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Winter might seem quiet and serene, but you'll be amazed by how vibrant the season can be with leaf litter, lakes, and shrubs alive with the sights and sounds of winter birds. From the tinkling notes of a Winter Wren to the lively songs of a Ruby-Crowned Kinglet, each walk promises moments that will surprise and inspire everyone from the newly bird-curious to occasional birders to seasoned bird lovers. Expert guides will lead our explorations in parks and greenways throughout the DMV to track foraging sparrows and chickadees, and marvel at the stunning colors of winter waterfowl. Register now for shared nature experiences that are sure to excite! Avid birders, bird-enthusiasts, and bird-curious people of all knowledge levels warmly welcome.

Grappling with Gulls: Intro to Gull ID

Thursday, January 30 (7-9 pm) – Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Saturday, February 1 (7:30 am-5 pm) – Depart from Woodend Nature Sanctuary, carpool to Northeast MD

Leader: Paul Pisano

Members \$48; nonmembers \$68

Lecture only members \$24; nonmembers \$32

The variable plumages of gulls frustrate many observers, yet their behavior often allows careful and studied observation. This foray, designed for beginning and mid-level birders, will study the gulls that most commonly occur in the mid-Atlantic region. Thursday's lecture will use slides to teach about plumages and other identification aids, while Saturday's field trip by carpool will take us to Northeast MD where the birds can be studied at length. For Saturday's field trip, we will meet at Woodend and carpool together to sites in Northeast Maryland. The group will have the opportunity to go out to lunch at a restaurant together. More specific instructions for the field trip will be shared at the lecture.

Fire in February

Sunday, February 16 (2-4:30 pm)

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Lighting and tending fires is an ancestral human practice. In this two hour workshop, we'll learn about fire-by-friction, explore different fire structures and techniques, and learn how to read a landscape and the plant life within it to understand where to find fire-ready materials even in adverse weather conditions. This workshop will take place outdoors, and warm clothing will be vital. Expect hands-on building of fire structures, teamwork, and problem-solving as we feed our central fire!

What's Happening in February?

Friday, February 21 (10:30 am-1 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Carderock Recreation Area, MD

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Though we still have a month of astronomical winter ahead of us, depending on the year, it may start to feel like spring: the air temperature may have warmed, insects may be stirring in the leaf litter, and wood frogs and spring peepers may have already started calling. As the days lengthen, the season starts to shift in the plants as well. On this visit to Carderock, we will observe the plants around us and watch for the signs of late winter waking into spring in the buds and emergent ephemerals we may find.

Woodcock Watch

Saturday, March 1 (5-7:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Location: Boyds, MD

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

In his Sand County Almanac, conservationist Aldo Leopold described the mating display of the American Woodcock as a "sky dance." Announcing its presence with nasal "peents," the male woodcock ascends high in the sky at dusk. To the accompaniment of a constant twittering, it circles, then plummets back to earth in a series of zigzag movements, wings whistling. On this field program to a natural area in upper Montgomery County, we'll hope to be lucky enough to catch a performance of this seasonal drama.

Botanical Gems of Blockhouse Point

Thursday, March 13 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Blockhouse Point

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Designated one of the "Best Natural Areas" in M-NCPPC Parks, the 630-acre Blockhouse Point Conservation Park contains a variety of habitats: from upland forests to floodplain forests to rock outcrops to streams and wetlands. As we enter meteorological spring, some trees may be bare while others are budding or even blooming, and ephemeral wildflowers may be emerging from the leaf litter. Botanist Carole Bergmann will lead the group as we explore the park and observe the biodiversity of plant life focusing on seasonal aspects and ecological niches. Expect a couple mile hike on natural surface trails, with some rocky and uneven terrain with uphill and downhill stretches.

Vernal Equinox: Forests and Wildflowers

Thursday, March 20 (10:30 am-1 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Rock Creek Park

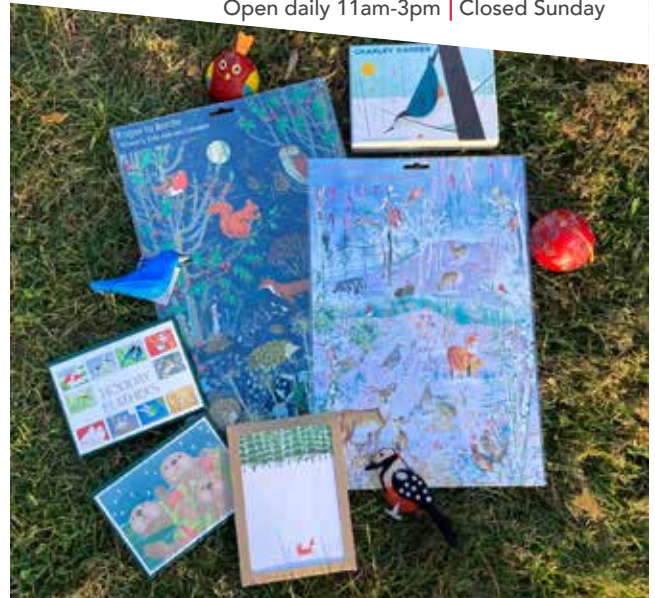
Members \$33; nonmembers \$46



The Vernal Equinox is the moment in which day and night are of equal length. This is the tipping point between astronomical winter and spring: from here on out, spring is full steam ahead. On this walk, we will experience this transition with the 2.5 mile Rapids Bridge Loop in Rock Creek Park. We will begin walking through winter woods, but when we get closer to Rapids Bridge along Rock Creek, the spring ephemerals put on quite a display. These short-lived blooms take advantage of the early spring: temperatures have warmed and days have lengthened, but the trees overhead have not yet shaded out the sun with new leaf growth. Enjoy this ephemeral moment of transition out in nature!

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Woodend Shines in New Social Media Series

If you follow Nature Forward on Facebook or Instagram, then you probably are already familiar with the question we ask each week: What's at Woodend this Wednesday?

This popular series, featuring multiple images of Woodend Nature Sanctuary, has been around for about two years.

And now, the department behind those posts is expanding into another day of the week with a new feature called Monday Morning Meanderings. The series, launched by the restoration department in September, gives viewers an

opportunity to learn more about the 40-acre property. So far, reels have been done on Woodend's stormwater management and green infrastructure plans, the ecological importance of meadows, and our stream restoration.

Woodend is the star of the Monday Morning Meandering series, created by Woodend Habitat Manager Bradley Simpson. The person you see each week is Tori Carr, Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Member. The program places young adults (ages 18-25) with nonprofit organizations or government agencies for a full-time, one-year term of stipend-supported service in the environmental field. Tori graduated in May from William & Mary with bachelor's degrees in environmental science and government.

"What I hope people take away from this series is how fun it is to learn about science. You don't have to be a scientist to learn and appreciate the natural world around us!" Tori said. "My favorite episodes have been the last two (the ones about witch hazel and phenology) because I've gotten a better idea of how to write a script, film, and edit them to be informative and to the point while also exciting to watch."



In addition to aiding Nature Forward's education and engagement efforts, Tori will gain experience with invasive species management, restoration plantings, habitat surveys, and wildlife monitoring over the course of her year at Woodend.

Natural History Field Studies

This unique continuing education program for adults offers a comprehensive and stimulating view of our region's natural history and conservation issues. Taught at the college freshman level, these evening courses are open to anyone 18 years of age or older—nature professionals and beginning enthusiasts alike. A Certificate of Accomplishment in Natural History is awarded to those choosing to complete a required curriculum of 39 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), but anyone can enroll in any class for the sheer pleasure of learning.

Classes are currently being offered via online Zoom sessions with in-person field trips. For a complete list of the classes in the NHFS program, plus instructor bios, visit natureforward.org/nhfs.

Online Registration for Natural History Field Studies

Sign up at natureforward.org/nhfs

Registration is handled completely online. Register at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Questions? Contact pam.oves@natureforward.org.



Required reading lists and instructor bios at natureforward.org/nhfs.

SCAN FOR REGISTRATION,
REQUIRED READING LISTS
AND INSTRUCTOR BIOS

Night Sky for Naturalists

NATH8200E, 1.5 CEUs

Class night and time: Mondays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: February 10-March 10

Lectures online via Zoom

Field trip dates: Friday, February 21 (Rain date February 28), 7-9 pm (Montgomery College Observatory in Rockville, MD); Friday, March 7, 7-9 pm (Montgomery College Planetarium, Takoma Park, MD).

Instructor: Carrie Fitzgerald

Members \$210, nonmembers \$260

Ever look up at the night sky and feel in awe of the cosmos and constellations? You're in good company. This course provides a basic introduction to astronomy that emphasizes an appreciation of Earth's relationship to the universe. Delve into topics like the celestial sphere, celestial navigation, motions of the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars, telescopes, timekeeping, phases, and motions of the Moon, tides, and eclipses. These astronomical phenomena are inextricably connected to the cycles of living beings as well. After this class, it won't just be awe you feel as you bask in starlight!

Required books: None

Recommended: Download the free planetarium software program Stellarium: <https://stellarium.org/>

COMING IN APRIL

Details on spring NHFS classes, which start in April, available in late fall at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Introduction to Ornithology

Gemma Radko

Introduction to Botany

Bradley Simpson

Spring Wildflower ID

Clare Walker



Weather and Climate

NATH7140E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Tuesdays, 7-9 pm

Class meetings: January 28-April 1

Lectures online via Zoom

Field trip dates: TBA

Instructor: Randall Bass

Members \$360, nonmembers \$410

What is the difference between weather and climate? A basic definition is weather describes the observed atmospheric conditions at a point in time, while climate is the average of the recorded atmospheric conditions over time. In other words, climate is what you expect, weather is what you get. This course will provide an in-depth, yet simple to understand overview of weather and climate. It will cover the basics of atmospheric science: how the sun, oceans, and even the orientation of the Earth drive weather; principles of weather forecasting and weather measurements; and even a session on space weather. Impacts of weather on sectors such as agriculture, aviation, and other areas will be discussed, as well as weather safety and preparation. Sessions on climate will describe longer-range phenomena, from months to years; climatologies of the area; and an overview on climate change.

Required books: None

Recommended books: None

Chemistry for Naturalists

NATH7129E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Thursdays, 5:30-7:30 pm

Class meetings: January 9-March 13

Lectures via zoom

Field trip dates: Saturday, February 15, 10 am-2 pm

(Jug Bay) (Rain date: Sunday, February 16, same time).

Saturday, March 8, 10 am-2 pm (Great Falls) (Rain date:

Sunday, March 9, same time).

Instructor: Sneh Patel

Members \$360, nonmembers \$410

Explore the chemical processes and cycles that shape our natural world. Students will learn fundamental chemistry concepts, including atoms, molecules, and chemical reactions, and apply them in real-world ecological systems. Topics covered will include Earth's systems, the water cycle, nutrient cycling, and the impact of human activity on these processes. Through lectures and hands-on field trips, we will gain a deeper understanding of the role of chemistry in supporting ecosystems and biodiversity, and better understand the intersection of chemistry and the environment.

Required books: None

Recommended: Chemistry in Context - Applying Chemistry to Society by American Chemical Society

Welcome Randall and Sneh!

We are thrilled to welcome two new instructors to our NHFS team: Randall Bass (Weather and Climate) and Sneh Patel (Chemistry for Naturalists). Read more about our instructors at natureforward.org/nhfs.



Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall presents Jennifer Crawford with the Certificate of Accomplishment for completing the NHFS program at the Annual Meeting on October 24. Lead GreenKids Educator Gina Ghertner also received the certificate. Congratulations to Jennifer and Gina for your hard work!

Nature Travel

Nature Forward's Travel program offers our members and friends opportunities to search for wildlife and explore the wonders of nature outside the mid-Atlantic region. Group size is typically limited to 12-14 people, and many trips fill early. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org for complete itineraries and registration information or visit natureforward.org/nature-travel.

Desert Wings: Birding through Arizona's Unique Habitats

September 22-30, 2025

Leaders: Liz Guertin and Jake Thompson

Cost: \$4,995

This autumn, come enjoy the wings wonders of fall migration in the stunning scenery of Arizona! As our group explores desert lowlands, mountain conifer forests, riparian wetlands, and the awe-inspiring cliffs of the Grand Canyon, we'll have the chance to encounter hundreds of species of migratory birds as they travel through flyways on their way south. It's an amazing annual journey, and on this trip, you'll be front and center through it under the guidance of local birder Jake Thompson, and Nature Forward representative, skilled photographer, and birding trip leader Liz Guertin. Stay tuned to our website for when registration opens!

NEW!!

Costa Rica: A Trove of Tropical Birds—and Much More

March 6-16, 2025

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & In-country guide Eddie Recio

Cost: \$4,675 (single supplement \$685)

If you wanted to venture out to Costa Rica with Stephanie this winter, it's not too late! There are two seats left in our March trip. Retired Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason has been leading this trip for over 20 years, and always finds something new to learn and love about Costa Rica. From the dazzling variety of plant and animal life, to the spectacular beauty of the scenery, to the friendliness and hospitality of local Costa Ricans, this is a trip worth experiencing for the first – or second or twentieth! – time. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org for an itinerary and registration packet.



Arctic Canada Expedition: Into the Northwest Passage

August 16-September 1, 2025

Leaders: Mark Garland and Martin Aldrich

Cost: \$10,872-\$21,747 per person depending on cabin
Charter and international flights extra

Into the Northwest Passage promises a high degree of adventure out in the Arctic, from Greenland westward – with chances to experience the Arctic environment with its unique ecology and breathtaking sights. This trip offers the chance to observe pelagic birds, dramatic fjords, icy glaciers, unique flora and fauna of the tundra, and more. In addition to the natural history, travelers will learn from Inuit cultural educators, historians, zoologists and geologists on board. To top it off, there's a new discount: the trip is 20% off until February 4! Visit our website at natureforward.org/nature-travel for all the details!



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Other Destinations We're Exploring

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pam.oves@natureforward.org.

Nature Forward Celebrates Growth and Charts Bold Future

Annual Meeting Highlights Expanding Impact Across Region

Nature Forward's 2024 Annual Meeting celebrated a year of remarkable achievements. Nature Forward members also got an opportunity to bid a fond farewell to longtime Executive Director Lisa Alexander. The event showcased the organization's continued growth and impact across the organization's three pillars of education, conservation, and restoration, as described by Board President Nancy Voit, who members approved to serve an additional term as President during FY25.

"Nature Forward. Our name, now two years old, fits like a glove," Nancy reflected. "Together, we are growing a brighter, greener future and taking nature forward!"

Nature Forward's accomplishments over FY24 demonstrated this momentum:

- * More than 15,000 local students and teachers participated in the GreenKids program
- * Camp Woodend provided 47 weeks of camp scholarships to local children
- * More than 200 DC residents received training in flood resilience
- * More than 300 Prince George's County residents engaged in clean water protection
- * The Naturally Latinos Conference attracted more than 330 participants and record sponsorship

Board Treasurer Hughey Newsome shared positive financial news, reporting that Nature Forward raised more than \$1.7 million in grants and contributions. The organization remains committed to efficient operations, directing 87% of every dollar to mission work.

A highlight of the evening was the recognition of Bill Kirwan as Volunteer of the Year. As a licensed architect with experience in historic properties, Kirwan provided crucial leadership in updating Woodend Mansion's tent to meet new safety codes while maintaining rental commitments that support our mission work.

The meeting also included a presentation by Dana Milbank, syndicated political columnist for *The Washington Post*, who shared his experiences in habitat restoration and training as a Master Naturalist (see box on page 31).

In her farewell remarks, Executive Director Lisa Alexander shared memorable moments from her 20-year tenure. "For me, the best thing about leading Nature Forward is each and every one of you," Lisa reflected. "I have had the privilege of working with a staff, Board, and community of members and supporters who are committed to doing good work in the world. What a joy!"



Deputy Director for Administration Amy Ritsko-Warren presents Bill Kirwan with the 2024 Volunteer of the Year award.

A familiar face will lead Nature Forward into the future. After an extensive national search, the Board announced that Deputy Director for Programs Alison Pearce will become the next Executive Director, effective January 2025. Alison's accomplishments include restoring habitats at Woodend Nature Sanctuary, expanding nature education programs, and securing major funding for a project to engage urban communities in planting 1,000 trees over the next five years. (Read more on page 5.)

"When that year-end request for funding arrives in your mailbox this year, please make sure to put the wind in the sails of our incoming Executive Director by giving generously," Treasurer Newsome urged. "Nature Forward will spend your gifts wisely on important mission work for people and nature right here in our beloved DC metro region. On behalf of our Board of Directors, THANK YOU all for your support."

Dana Milbank and his Farm

Washington Post political columnist Dana Milbank served up laughs, insight and optimism as the guest speaker at Nature Forward's Annual Meeting held on a beautiful fall night at Woodend Nature Sanctuary.

Well known and established in the political world, Milbank is now being praised for his writing about the natural world through his occasional series, "Milbank bought the farm." He told the audience that his column on Spring ephemerals was the Post's leading story in a 24-hour news cycle. Here's an excerpt from that widely read piece: "Spring ephemerals have been one of my happy discoveries as I've begun rehabilitating the neglected farm my wife and I bought in the Virginia Piedmont in 2022. Mostly, I've been discovering that everything I thought I knew about nature and gardening was wrong. In the case of these spring wildflowers, I realize that the knockout colors and fragrances I had associated with the natural world in my urban existence were, in fact, caricatures. In the wild, beauty is more subtle and more delicate — but it is also more satisfying."

Milbank joked about his tractor: "there are so many ways that thing can kill me;" talked about the thrill of seeing Goldenrod in bloom; and took audience questions. Nature Forward Northern Virginia Conservation Advocate Renee Grebe asked about one of our priority issues — Conservation Landscaping in HOAs in Virginia and how to get more Virginians to embrace native vegetation. Milbank said he doesn't necessarily think there's opposition to conservation landscaping, rather "people are unaware."

Milbank closed the evening by reflecting, "As I grow older, I find that this is true of life generally. It becomes clearer to me with each birthday that we are all spring ephemerals. We are here for just a short time. We sprout, we flower, we go to seed, we disappear. But, as the years race by, I am also learning to find beauty not just in bold colors but in subtler hues. The sublime is with us in every season, if we only pause long enough to take it in."



Staff members Lisa Goodnight, Alison Pearce, and Kristin Cook meet guest speaker Dana Milbank.



Lisa Alexander and former Nature Forward Executive Director Gerald Schneider enjoy catching up at the Annual Meeting.



Woodend Sanctuary & Mansion

woodendsanctuary.org

Social and
Corporate Events

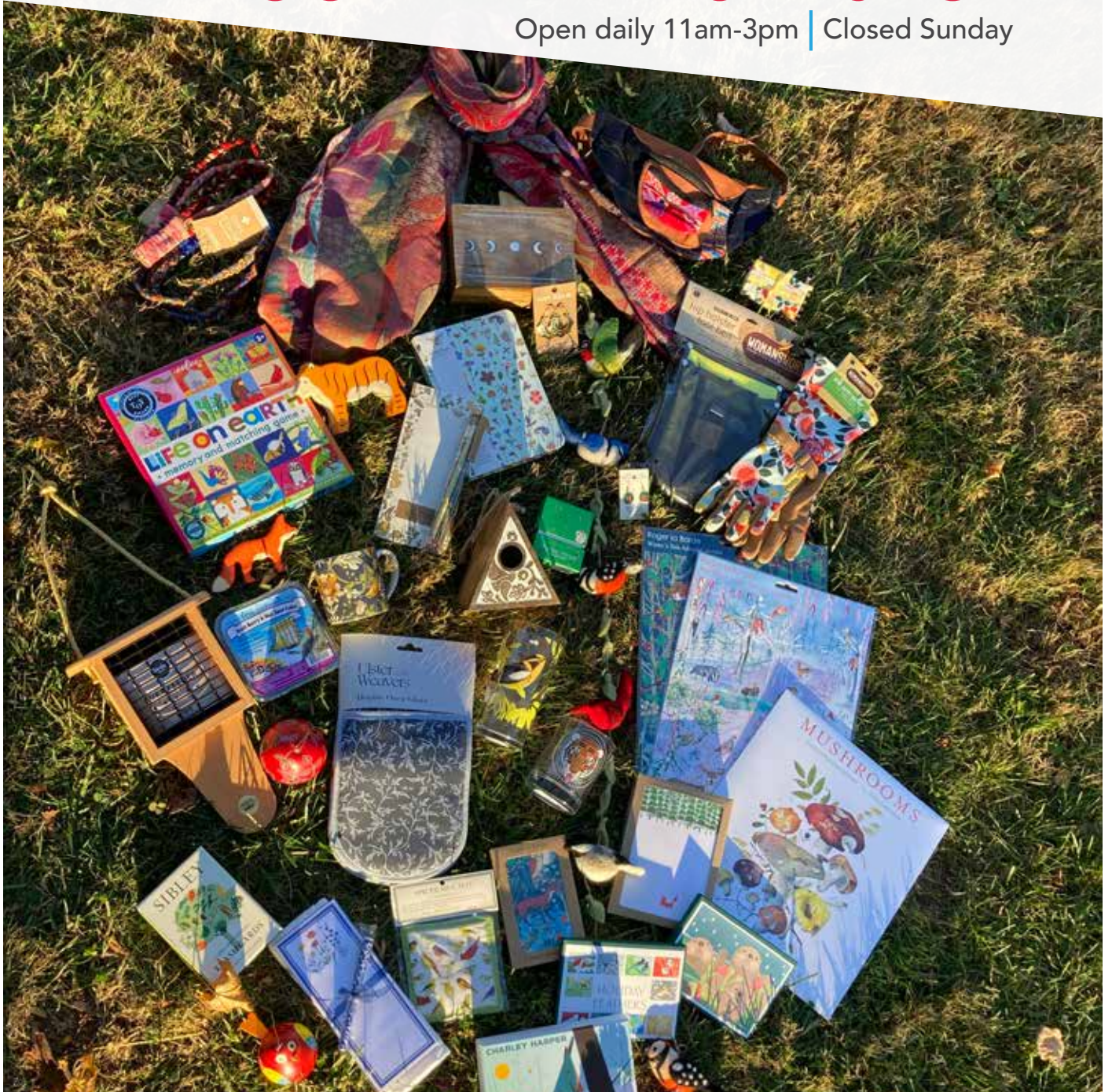
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BY NATURE FORWARD

Plantings Galore

This fall, Nature Forward's Restoration Department added more than 500 new trees and shrubs to Woodend's forest, wildflowers and grasses to the big meadow, and wetland wildflowers to the pond! We contracted with Empire Landscaping to plant 250 native wildflowers and grasses in the big meadow. We also planted pickerelweed and duck-potato in the pond and some of the stream's step-pools. In a restored forest edge between the preschool and new parking area, we added oaks, hickories, persimmon, sumac, viburnum, winterberry, and our native crabapple. This space was previously dominated by multiflora rose and bush honeysuckle. We planted sumacs and persimmon in a patch of wisteria that was treated by contractors last year. We also planted a variety of water-loving oaks (Shumard oak, swamp chestnut oak, and bur oak) along the stream on the unfenced 7-acre portion of Woodend, east of Jones Mill Road. We added seedlings of understory trees and shrubs throughout the forest including sweetbay magnolia, fringe tree, American hophornbeam, and highbush blueberry. Local high school volunteers from the organization Planting Shade helped plant understory seedlings. Our own staff and Nature Preschoolers were also involved in fall planting this year helping to add oak seedlings to the forest floor. These young oaks were grown from acorns that preschoolers from last year's Saplings class planted in Woodend's greenhouse.

The most important thing we can do for our forest is make sure there is a healthy ecosystem for future generations. This is why we plant hundreds of oaks and hickories each year.

—BRADLEY SIMPSON,
HABITAT MANAGER



The Oaks class helping the restoration team plant oak seedlings grown in the greenhouse at Woodend

Changes are Sprouting in Sligo

This fall, the Restoration Department completed the last deliveries for the Sligo Creek Garden Program. We worked with people living in the Sligo Creek Watershed, a sub-watershed of the Anacostia, to plant more native plants. Native plants provide habitat for wildlife, notably pollinators; reduce erosion; absorb pollutants; and slow stormwater during rain events. Turf lawns provide less habitat and do not slow or absorb as much stormwater as native perennials. When we experience large rain events, water, along with sediment, excess nutrients, and other pollutants go directly into storm sewers or streams instead of soaking in, being used by plants, or recharging the groundwater. This contributes to flooding and lower water quality. Additionally, lawns provide less food and shelter for native wildlife compared to native vegetation.

Over the course of 2023 and 2024, Restoration staff and volunteers delivered 225 pollinator garden kits to people in the Sligo Creek Watershed, which includes Silver Spring, parts of Takoma Park, and surrounding areas. They received 50 deer-resistant native plants to replace 50 square feet of turfgrass lawn. The species of plants differed depending on if the kits were planted in shady or sunny locations. The species also varied by season, but all were deer-resistant, hardy perennials.

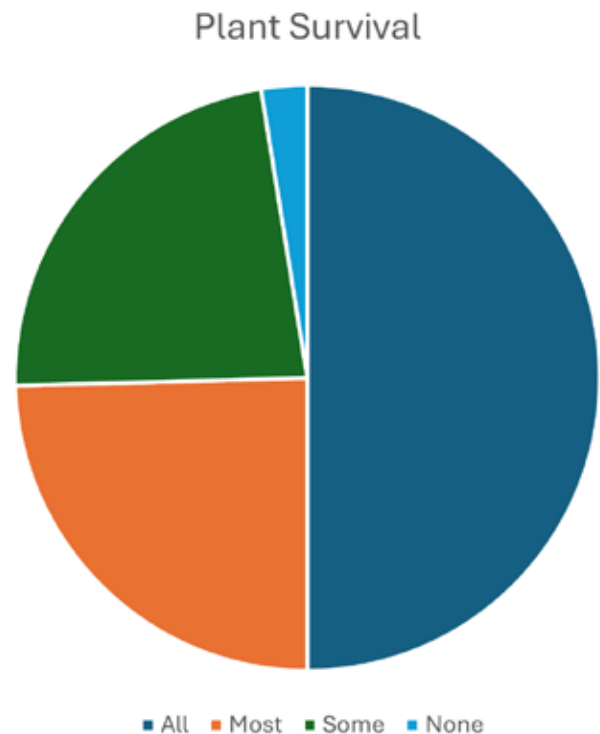
Recipients of the kits planted and maintained their own gardens. The Restoration Department followed up with field and self-reported surveys to see how the 2023 and Spring 2024 kits performed. We asked kit recipients how their gardens turned out and we asked about their overall satisfaction with the program. We also wanted to know whether their garden was visible from the street or in the backyard. 70 of our 150 households respond to the online survey, which we supplemented with a field survey that engaged 150 households to assess plant survival and erosion. The biggest challenge reported in the online survey was summer's drought conditions.

Of the kits surveyed, most had great survival rates. 50% had all their plants survive. 25% had most survive. 23% had some survive, and only 2% had none survive. The past few months have been hot with little rain, so it is great news that so many of our garden kits have survived! Most kits effectively minimized erosion as well with 88% of gardens without visible erosion. Fall 2024 kits have not been surveyed yet because they were delivered in October. We hope to survey those next summer.

This project was a partnership with Friends of Sligo Creek and was supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. While this program has come to a successful end, we are happy to share that we received funding for a similar program in the Northwest and Northeast Branches of the Anacostia to continue to plant native plants to manage stormwater and improve habitat value!

"My four year old requested less grass to encourage wildlife to come after she watched an episode of Nature Cat on PBS and I was excited to learn about this program the day after she made her request!"

—SLIGO CREEK RESIDENT



Plant survival for all surveyed kits (front and back yards)

Autumn Lights

Thank you for to all who attended our Autumn Lights cocktail party and fundraiser on November 16. The warm and festive evening at Woodend Mansion featured live music, delicious hors d'oeuvres, desserts, festive toasts, and exciting bidding in the silent auction. You helped us raise over \$23,000 to support Nature Forward's critical mission work in the Capital Region! Thank you all for purchasing tickets, making donations, bidding, and selling items in our silent auction, and shopping at Woodend Nature Shop. We also could not have done it without our event sponsors' generosity. A huge thank you to the sponsors listed on the back cover, and to all individuals who donated to our silent auction.







Welcome Angie

In August, **Angie McCarthy** joined Nature Forward's Conservation team as the Maryland Conservation Advocate. Her target areas are Maryland state level politics, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County. She is focused on responsible data center development and protecting forest canopy. Prior to Nature Forward, Angie had worked for New Columbia Solar, Montgomery County Council President Andrew Friedson, and M&T Bank. She has a degree in environmental science and geography from Middlebury College.



Welcome Amy

With more than 40 years' experience with teaching young children outdoors, **Amy Beam** brings a rich background from her time with the Montgomery Montessori Institute to the Saplings classroom. She has served as Vice President on the Board of the Association for Nature-based Education (ANBE), and she trains teachers in adventurous play theory and practice in ANBE's Nature Based Teacher Certification each summer. In 2015, she won the Margaret O'Neill Early Childhood Educator Award, and she was featured in the PBS documentary, "Mother Nature's Child."



Welcome Marie

We welcome naturalist extraordinaire, **Marie Jones**, to the Preschool teaching team this year. Marie divvies up her talents across nearly every environmental education program at Nature Forward, and this year we are lucky to have her join Preschool as the Acorns teacher. Marie will be leading four Acorns classes from Fall through Spring, while assisting in the Oaks classroom until Winter. Our children and teachers have learned so much about nature from her in the past, and we are excited to spend an entire school year observing the changing seasons together.



Welcome Maggie

Coming to us from a public school in Portland, Maine, **Maggie McDow** spent her college years deeply involved in the outdoor leadership program at Hamilton College. Maggie is a Wilderness First responder and has experience leading outdoor adventure camps, backpacking trips, and sea kayaking excursions. She has extensive training in facilitating community building for children and adults. She loves the connections that people make with one another and the planet when we explore new environments.

Welcome Jack



Jack Thibault has been a part of the Nature Forward community since he joined Camp Woodend as a second grader in 2010! At camp, he grew a love of nature and returned every summer, eventually reaching the position of Camp Facilitator. Now that he's graduated college with a degree in environmental science, he's thrilled to work year-round as Nature Forward's Youth Programs Naturalist. When he's not at Woodend, Jack loves to go to Rock Creek, make art, and watch movies.

Memorial and Tribute Contributions

AUGUST 2024 - OCTOBER 2024

IN HONOR OF:

Lisa Alexander

Lynn Rust; Laurence and Natalie Dickter; Rebecca Barclay; Bonnie VanDorn; Christine Burris; Kathy Rushing; Gretchen Schwartz

Jane McClintock

Morris McClintock

Marie Plubell

Ann Marie Plubell

IN MEMORY OF:

Doron Antrim

Jill Hsu

Judith Campbell Bird

Julia L Wurglitz

Stephen Jones

Liz Blair Jones

Don Messersmith

Katherine S Tippett; Heidi Cordero

Gilbert Sward

Mila Becker

Don Tippett

Katherine S Tippett

Diane Hoffman

Longtime Nature Forward member and Board member, Diane Hoffman, passed away peacefully in August. Diane was the former Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District and a consummate leader. Diane was so impactful that she was asked to serve four terms (12 years) on the Nature Board of Directors. Diane's intellect and deep commitment to community service left a lasting legacy. She had a special talent for setting up organizations for success by focusing on good governance. Diane brought good humor, pragmatism, and a laser focus on continuous improvement to non-profits across the country. And she was a kind and thoughtful mentor to her fellow Board members and the staff of Nature Forward. Diane will always be admired and fondly remembered by the Nature Forward community.

Registration Information

Education programs are held at Woodend, Nature Forward's 40-acre Headquarters, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, unless otherwise noted. All education programs except Nature Travel have online registration. You will be notified immediately if the program is full; otherwise, confirmation letters, with directions, will be emailed 1-2 weeks before the scheduled program.

Lectures are held at our Woodend Sanctuary, and field trip transportation is by private vehicle or carpool unless otherwise noted. Most programs are limited to 12 participants and also have a minimum enrollment, so early registration is important to ensure that programs run. Unless noted, weekend adult foray program fees do not include meals or lodging.

Because our programs rely on registration fees for funding, we have adopted this policy:

- Cancellations must be made at least six working days before the beginning of the program to be eligible for a credit to your account, less a \$5 administrative fee.
- If an adult foray is canceled by Nature Forward due to low enrollment, you will receive a full refund. If a weather-related concern or another issue outside of our control forces a cancellation, you will receive a full credit to your account.

- Nature travel programs have different cancellation policies, explained on the information sheet sent on request.

Nature Forward is committed to addressing problems when they occur. Program participants are encouraged to bring problems or concerns of any kind directly to the staff member in charge of the program. Staff members will try to resolve the problem immediately or as soon as reasonably possible. If staff is unable to do so, they are expected to bring the problem to the attention of their immediate supervisor or member of the Senior Management Team, who will take responsibility for seeking a resolution. Program participants are welcome to bring unresolved problems or concerns to the attention of the Executive Director. The Executive Director's decision on resolution of the problem is final.

COVID Policy for Adult Programs

Please stay home if you are sick. Nature Forward follows CDC guidelines for isolation and masking after a positive COVID test. Policies are subject to change.

Our Commitment to Each Other

Nature Forward is committed to ensuring that every person is welcome, safe, and treated with respect in all of our spaces and programs. All representatives of Nature Forward, visitors, and program participants will act with kindness and respect in their dealings with people of all identities and backgrounds.

Do you participate in the National Capital Area CFC?

The easiest way to support Nature Forward is to designate Nature Forward 75493 in the 2024 Combined Federal Campaign under EarthShare Mid-Atlantic.



nature forward

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Michael Gresalfi Art