

WINTER 2026

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y

**Standing Up for Nature
and Community:**
Celebrating victories and facing
challenges together!



ON THE COVER
Photo by Ben Israel

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY
Winter 2026

MANAGING EDITOR
Vince Robinson

SENIOR EDITOR
Pam Oves

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Ben Israel

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NATURE FORWARD HEADQUARTERS/
WOODEND SANCTUARY
301-652-9188
natureforward.org
contact@natureforward.org


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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ALISON PEARCE

I write this column on a day when temperatures abruptly plummeted into the thirties. The sassafras trees outside the window, aglow in canary yellow yesterday, stand naked in the wind. A dozen chipmunks scamper urgently through a sea of oak and tulip tree leaves, tiny heads popping up here and there like seals in a harbor, busy collecting acorns before even colder days arrive. Dark-eyed juncos have returned from Canada with their expanded families, flashing bright white tail feathers in flights from meadow edge to forest floor. All sure signs that the calendar year is coming to a close.

In these final weeks of 2025, I took some time to reflect—with a warm cup of tea in hand—on all that our Nature Forward community accomplished this year. I could not be prouder of our talented and hard-working staff who brought so much joy to people, while also standing up for the protection of nature. Look on page 6 for my top ten highlights of Nature Forward’s work during the first year of my tenure as Executive Director. None of this would have been possible without the support of our members, donors, and volunteers. I am deeply grateful to each of you for standing with us, ensuring that the good work continues regardless of politics, stock market returns, or any other fluctuation in our society. Your commitment to nature—and ours—is as constant as the tide, as reliable as the wax and wane of the moon.



Of course, we all have room for growth, like a tree that can’t help but lay down another ring of wood with each passing year. So, I’m also thinking about 2026 resolutions for the good of my community, my family and myself. Here are my top three. What are yours?

- 1. Get Out There:** As much as I love my new job, it has meant even more hours sitting at a desk. I resolve to take more walks among trees, birds, and sky. Being in nature is good for my health and keeps me connected to Nature Forward’s purpose. Do you want to get out there, too? Check out pages 22-27 for upcoming opportunities to be in nature with us!
- 2. Show Up For Others:** The health of our community, and of our environmental movement, depends upon the strength of our networks and relationships. I resolve to reach out to organizations and communities facing hardships. Do you want to help Nature Forward nurture our community partnerships? Find out about volunteering on page 21.
- 3. Stand Up For Nature:** I like to focus on the good, but lately there are many policy moves and funding cuts that are just plain bad for nature. I resolve not to be silent on these critical issues. Do you want to use your voice for nature? Subscribe to Nature Forward’s Action Network (see page 13).

Thank you for making Nature Forward part of your life in 2025 and I look forward to a New Year of nature discovery and protection together! Wishing you and yours every happiness this holiday season.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Pearce'.



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE CAPITAL REGION



PLEASE PLAN TO JOIN US FOR



THURSDAY, MARCH 26
Virtual/Online

FRIDAY, MARCH 27
In Person • Silver Spring, MD

SATURDAY, MARCH 28
Outdoor Nature Experiences

Learn more and see updates at
natureforward.org/naturally-latinos



Alison's Top Ten

by Alison Pearce, PhD
Executive Director, Nature Forward

It's been almost one year since I stepped into the role of Executive Director. Coming into this position, I knew I was inheriting a legacy built on more than 128 years of passion for protecting nature and inspiring people. What I couldn't yet know was how much energy, generosity, and heart our Nature Forward community would bring to every challenge. Despite tightening federal budgets and increased attacks on environmental protections, we are more committed than ever to championing nature and people.

Although big obstacles still lie ahead, I'm grateful for what we've accomplished together so far, and I'm excited about what we will achieve in the future.

Here are ten things that made me most proud in this first year of working side by side with you.

10. Planting Hope, One Tree at a Time

Nothing grounded my first year, quite literally, like joining our Restoration Team in planting trees and native plants

both at Woodend Nature Sanctuary and in communities across the region. Staff and volunteers added more than 500 native trees and shrubs to Woodend, transforming our home base into an even richer haven for birds, pollinators, and wildlife.

Beyond Woodend, we created more than 40,000 square feet of conservation landscaping with native plants in the Anacostia watershed. Under our five-year Treecosystems initiative, we planted 862 native trees and thousands of understory plants in Justice40 neighborhoods across Maryland. In these highly urbanized communities with sparse green canopy, every new tree represents habitat for wildlife, cleaner air, and a stronger connection between people and nature.

9. Standing Up for Environmental Protections and Funding

Through advocacy and community mobilization, we helped pass a plastic bag ban in Montgomery County, supported mandatory labeling of invasive plants in

Virginia, and advanced a bottle bill in DC to reduce litter and boost recycling.

When budget cuts threatened to slash environmental programs across the region, our Conservation team worked with coalitions of activists to help restore \$41,000,000 that had been cut from environmental programs in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. These victories represent the kind of persistent effort that creates lasting change.





8. Empowering Communities Through Science

Our network of 230 stream-monitoring volunteers conducted more than 500 stream visits and contributed nearly volunteer 2,000 hours tracking local water quality. These community scientists collect data that inform restoration priorities and hold polluters accountable, and prove that science, community, and stewardship are inseparable.

7. Staying True to our Vision of Inclusion

Our Taking Nature Black conference in March attracted 579 attendees from 30 states. Themed “Reclamation and Resilience,” this successful conference uplifted and celebrated environmental professionals of color at exactly the moment when environmental justice work was being devalued in national politics.

6. Training Environmental Ambassadors In Their Communities

Our “Menos Basura, Más Vida (Less Trash, More Life)” program trained 20 environmental ambassadors from the Latino community along the Route 1 corridor to spearhead litter reduction and stream health efforts in their neighborhoods. In Wards 7 and 8, our DC advocate engaged more than 900 residents through flood resilience workshops and door-to-door outreach. And our restoration experts provided training in Spanish to 40 community members on maintaining rain gardens and conservation landscapes. This is environmental justice in action.

5. Cultivating Tomorrow’s Nature Stewards

Camp Woodend provided a record-breaking 76 weeks of scholarships to campers from low-income households. Seeing children who had never caught a frog light up with excitement as they explored Woodend’s pond is pure joy! Every child deserves that magic.

And I am so proud of our Nature Preschool staff who earned Level One status with the Maryland Excels program. Our teachers went above and beyond earning a collective 195 continuing education credits, well above the requirements of the Maryland Office of Child Care.

continued on page 20

Stand up for Nature and Community Today

and a matching gift will **DOUBLE** your impact

by Corinna Fisk, Director of Development

Earlier this fall, our Restoration Team gathered with dozens of families at the CASA Multicultural Center in Langley Park to plant a rain garden. While children painted picnic tables, adults worked the soil. At one point during the event, a local woman stood up and explained how rain gardens protect our watersheds.

Here's what made her words so special: this beautiful, factual explanation, delivered entirely in Spanish, came not from a Nature Forward staffer but from a neighborhood resident who had learned, who cared, and who was now teaching others.

That's the power of the community that we're building together.

That's why when I think about what makes this organization so special and resilient, I think about our Nature Forward community. Our passionate Nature Forward members, donors, volunteers, staff, and supporters are the foundation of the incredible accomplishments we can all be proud of in 2025. We are a community of people who refuse to let national politics determine what happens in our own backyards, along our streams, and in our neighborhood parks.

But there is still so much more to do. Right now, you have the power to protect and restore nature right here at home. By making a tax-deductible year-end gift to Nature Forward, you can ensure that our local environment continues to thrive. And in another wonderful example of community, **thanks to a generous Nature Forward member, every donation to our Year-End Appeal will be matched—dollar for dollar—up to \$10,000. That means your gift today will have DOUBLE the impact, if you act now!**

It's not an easy time to live in the DC metro region. Federal budget cuts, attacks on environmental protections, and the daily weight of political tension are real. But here's what I've learned this year: even in challenging times, we can still come together to make a positive and lasting difference for people, wildlife, and the future of our natural spaces and communities. The resolve and support of people like you helps grow our community of people of all ages and backgrounds who learn about, enjoy, and protect the nature world. **Please make the very best year-end gift you can today and together we'll keep nature accessible and thriving for everyone.**

Thank you for being part of a powerful coalition of nature lovers that is actively building an even larger and more diverse community of people who treasure the natural world and work to preserve it. We are a community that shows up for nature and for each other, especially in challenging seasons.

Nature needs you. Our community needs you. As federal funding tightens, grants become more competitive and environmental challenges grow, your renewed support is more critical than ever. Please stand up for nature with your most generous year-end gift today at give.natureforward.org/yearend2025 and watch your impact double.





"I support Nature Forward annually through the year-end appeal as a way to give back for all that nature has given my family. Nature Forward is a wonderful asset to our community, and I want to see the organization's positive work continue for generations to come."

— NATURE FORWARD MEMBER



Scan now to put your gift to work immediately!

Or visit give.natureforward.org/yearend2025



Maximize Your Impact to Give Back to Nature

Before 2025 comes to a close, we invite you to make a meaningful gift to Nature Forward through your Donor-Advised Fund (DAF). Your generosity helps protect local habitats, educate current and future environmental stewards, and advocate for nature across the DC region.



Giving through a DAF is simple, impactful, and tax-efficient. If you've already established a DAF, please consider recommending a grant to Nature Forward today. If not, it's a great time to explore how a DAF can help you plan your philanthropy with flexibility and purpose.

Here's what you need to know:

- Legal Name: Nature Forward, Inc.
- Tax ID (EIN): 53-0233715
- Address: 8940 Jones Mill Rd
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
- Website: natureforward.org

To ensure your gift is credited correctly, please let us know once your contribution is initiated.

Need help or have questions?

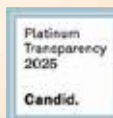
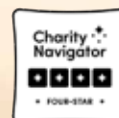
Reach out to Corinna Fisk, Development Director

Email: corinna.fisk@natureforward.org

Phone: (301) 652-1089

Your support makes all the difference

Make your DAF gift by December 31 to receive 2025 tax benefits and help us start 2026 strong with nature at the heart of everything we do.





Leave a Legacy for Nature

Your passion for nature can live on for generations

By including Nature Forward in your estate plans, you help protect habitats, educate future environmental stewards, and advocate for a healthier planet –work that will endure because of your foresight and generosity.

Legacy members enjoy exclusive benefits and experiences

- A Legacy Pin to wear proudly
- Invitations to Nature Forays and special field experiences
- Access to donor recognition events and opportunities to meet our Executive Director and leadership team
- And more ways to connect deeply with the mission you love



Creating your conservation legacy is easier than you think

A simple bequest in your will or naming Nature Forward as a beneficiary of your retirement plan can make a lasting impact.

Please visit natureforward.org/ways-to-give to learn more, or contact Corinna Fisk, Development Director at corinna.fisk@natureforward.org | (301) 652-1089

Together, we can ensure nature's future



DC's Environmental Progress Under Attack

by Jamoni Overby, DC Conservation Advocate

For decades, DC experienced environmental harm due to federal interference. Prior to Home Rule, DC's Anacostia and Potomac watersheds were treated as dumping grounds for federal facilities. The Washington Navy Yard contaminated the river with stormwater runoff; hazardous chemicals such as PCBs and pesticides leached into the water from federal facilities such as Poplar Point; and the federal government's negligent sewage management led to billions of gallons of raw sewage being dumped into both the Potomac and the Anacostia Rivers. With the passage of Home Rule in 1973, DC was finally empowered to stop this pollution by granting DC self-governance with Congressional oversight. DC residents were able to elect a mayor and city council that worked to establish policies and funds that helped the land heal and protected DC residents from future pollution. While environmental progress has ebbed and flowed, Home Rule has been a pivotal part of protecting DC's land and people.

In this last year, DC's Home Rule has been threatened like never before. First, Congress passed a continuing resolution that forced DC to cut \$1 billion from its taxpayer-funded budget. This drastic cut resulted in significant funding loss for DC's Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) and a raiding of environmental funds meant to promote sustainable energy, clean rivers, and green infrastructure. The loss of these environmental programs even threatens DC's ability to meet the standards of its MS4 permit under the Clean Water Act.

This loss of funding has also created strong pressure to attract new business development while sacrificing its communities and natural resources. When a law passed in December 2024 granting the District the authority to redevelop RFK stadium in Ward 7, the Washington Commanders, supported by Mayor Muriel Bowser, campaigned for the stadium and its



Nature Forward's Community Flood Walk in Ward 7 along Watts Branch during Building Flood Wise Communities Project in 2024 formerly funded by DOEE.

surrounding land (180 acres) to be redeveloped by the football team. Instead of respecting the public process to find the best development for critical land along the Anacostia River, the Commanders set an arbitrary deadline of July 15, 2025, for DC to approve its redevelopment plans. When DC's public process extended beyond the July 15th deadline, President Trump publicly stated that he would intervene to help the Commanders secure the deal and that, "ultimately we [the federal government] control that; the federal government ultimately controls it [the land]." The President's input on RFK redevelopment was a subtle reminder that residents' rights and the principles of democracy are treated as optional when it comes to the nation's capital. The Commanders have now secured a signed deal that lacks sustainable standards, such as making the stadium a zero-waste campus, protecting green space in the construction process, and adequate care and consideration for the water quality and wildlife in and around the Anacostia River.

The next bold reminder of federal power in DC was the deployment of the National Guard. The presence of the National Guard represents more than a military intrusion; it's a direct signal that DC's authority can be suspended at will and that its resources can be diverted to federal priorities. The deployment costs approximately \$1 million a day. At a time when DC has canceled funding for water quality monitoring, environmental education, and green infrastructure, it should not be expending resources toward security measures that treat residents as threats rather than neighbors.

These budgetary choices cut to the heart of belonging, stability, and dignity. Climate justice and efforts to address environmental racism require consistent funding and accountability to the people most affected. Lack of autonomy leaves Washingtonians with even less say over how their neighborhoods adapt to climate change. The result is a city less prepared for extreme heat, flooding, and other environmental hazards. If the Council and residents lose decision-making power, DC risks becoming a case study in how democracy, racial justice, and climate resilience are intertwined and how quickly all three can be rolled back when local control is replaced by federal power.


Come learn more and join us for Nature Forward's January 2026 Conservation Cafe, DC's Environmental Progress Under Attack, a virtual panel discussion examining the major changes in DC and limitations to environmental progress. One year into the current administration, learn how the city's unique lack of statehood has impacted critical progress toward a greener, more equitable city is under threat from weakened oversight, pro-business agendas, and budget cuts that overshadow community and climate priorities.

"While environmental progress has ebbed and flowed, Home Rule has been a pivotal part of protecting DC's land and people."

— JAMONI OVERBY

Action Alerts


If you'd like to keep up with DC advocacy issues, sign up for Nature Forward's Action Alert now at <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/nature-forward>.



DC'S ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS UNDER ATTACK


Weakened oversight, budget cuts, and pro-business agendas that overshadow community and climate priorities threaten critical progress toward a greener, more equitable city.


Join Nature Forward for a timely discussion about how DC's unique lack of statehood and ongoing attacks on Home Rule hurt our environment and communities.



Steve Saari DC Dept. of Energy & Environment (DOEE)
Vanessa Batters-Thompson DC Appleseed
Sebrina Rhodes Empower DC
Jonathan Champion DOEE


RSVP HERE





CONSERVATION CAFÉ
THURSDAY, JANUARY 15 • 7PM

Online via



zoom

Connecting People to Nature in their Communities

Nature Forward works to reach families in their communities—near where they live, work, and go to school—and connect them to nearby nature through engaging, hands-on activities and trainings. Check out photos of the experiences and projects we are working on with community leaders, partner organizations, and of course, empowered residents. Learn more about these programs at natureforward.org/community-outreach.



Jamoni Overby served as a panelist for the Office of People’s Council inaugural Water Summit. Entitled, “Greener Blocks, Cleaner Water – Conservation, Restoration & Protection.”



Angie McCarthy was joined by more than 40 community members to clear and label the stormdrains in the neighborhoods around the Langley Park community center.



Renee Grebe participated in Braddock District’s Third Annual Climate Action Conference (in Fairfax County) with the theme “Teaming Up to Restore and Protect Healthy Waterways.”

Stream Science

This past October, Nature Forward community scientists monitored 26 stream sites in Washington DC, and Montgomery, Prince George's, and Howard Counties. Over 150 volunteers dedicated 650 hours to aquatic macroinvertebrate surveys to check on the health of our local streams.

Streams are monitored by teams of volunteers. Each team has a team leader (or, in some cases, two co-leaders) and team members.

Team leaders play a critical role in our volunteer-driven program. They are responsible for:

- scheduling and managing the monitoring sessions
- bringing the equipment
- determining which areas of the 75-meter stream reach will be sampled
- deploying their teams to catch aquatic macroinvertebrates ("macros")
- managing the picking of macros from collection pans
- counting and identifying 100 macros
- recording the data in the field. In addition to sampling macros, the team leader ensures that pH and air and water temperatures are recorded, and habitat assessments are completed.
- cleaning equipment
- inputting the data into an online form and communicating results to their teams

Team members are responsible for:

- assisting with set up and breakdown of streamside stations
- stepping into streams to collect stream macroinvertebrates with d-nets. Most team members work in pairs while collecting.
- bringing the collection bins holding stream water, macros and debris to streamside stations where they will find and pick (with spoons and pipettes) macros from the bins
- assisting with recording data

Team members are not responsible for identifying benthic macroinvertebrates. Many enjoy the challenge of trying to figure out which are mayflies, stoneflies, damsel or dragonflies, caddisflies, crane flies, or other critters! And our team leaders are wonderful instructors who enthusiastically discuss ID as their team members peer at macros through microscopes.

Please visit the WQM webpage for more information and to view our WQM map and data. You can download the free Creek Critters app to see photos of many of our common aquatic macros.



We welcome new volunteers and have a particular need for people who'd like to train as team leaders.



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.

Nature Preschool Update: Local Connection, Global Reach

At the end of September, Acorns, Saplings, and Oaks settled in to the 40-acre campus at Woodend, enjoying the last signs of summer as the fall equinox gently ushered in a new season. They encountered bugs in the meadow, millipedes on the forest floor, fungi on the fringes of the tree line, frogs and dragonflies at the pond, and Monarch caterpillars enjoying milkweed in the native garden.

Estela Romero, a Monarch biologist and educator from the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in Mexico, was visiting Woodend at the time to give an evening presentation to our adult members at Nature Forward. She and Elizabeth Wolf stopped by Nature Preschool before the event to tell us how we could participate in the Symbolic Migration project. Our teachers excitedly asked questions and grew inspiration for ways we could instill a sense of care for wildflower pollinators in the children. Our Saplings and Oaks decorated class butterflies to send to schools in Central Mexico where monarchs overwinter. Both classes spent the next two weeks studying the lifecycle of monarchs, mapping migrations on maps, searching for caterpillars and chrysalises, playing pollinator games, and dressing up in butterfly wings.

“Our school is part of a nature sanctuary full of animal habitats like the pond and the forest. We grow milkweed and get to see monarch caterpillars and butterflies,” wrote the Oaks class. Our packets were mailed off in mid-October, and we will hear back from the students in Mexico who received our letters at the end of March!

If you know of a family that values biodiversity for the natural world and early childhood experiences that expand their world, Nature Preschool may be the place for them! Please contact our Nature Preschool Director, Rose Brusafferro, to schedule a 30-minute tour of our program at Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Email rose.brusafferro@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)

- Friday, March 20, 2026
- Wednesday, April 15, 2026

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

2 Winter Mini-Camp (8:45 am - 5 pm)

Monday February 16 - Tuesday February 17, 2026

Join us for a two-day camp full of winter outdoor fun at Woodend Sanctuary! Hike through the forest to find winter wildlife, get creatively crafty, play games, huddle around a bonfire, and build friendships. It's two days of the Camp Woodend experience, now in winter!

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

Monday, March 30 - Thursday, April 2 2026

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



Scan the QR code to find your child's days off adventure or visit natureforward.org/day-off-camps/

And we invite you to visit our Woodend Nature Sanctuary in Chevy Chase, MD, with meadow, forest, and stream habitats, an accessible trail, and a Nature Play Space for children of all abilities. Free and open to the public every day from dawn to dusk!



COMING SOON!



2026 Nature Summer Camps For Grades K-12

Camp Catalog - Registration begins January 22, 2026



Woodend Nature Sanctuary, Chevy Chase, MD



Become a member today for special pricing

Help the Earth & Earn a GS Journey!



Reserve your scout's space now!

Girl Scout Events at Woodend

1 January Journey-in-2-days for Junior & C/S/A Scouts

Monday, January 19, 2025 and (9 am - 4 pm both days)
Monday, January 26, 2025

Dig deep into environmental issues on day 1, then team up with other scouts on day 2 to develop Take Action projects to make the Earth a better place!

Juniors (Gr 4-5) Get Moving with Energy Journey

Cadettes (Gr 6-8) Breathe! Air Quality Journey

Seniors & Ambassadors (Gr 9-12) Environmental Justice Journey



2 Earth Day Citizen Science Journey (all levels)

Monday, April 6, 2025 (9 am - 4 pm)

Help our Earth by contributing your observations to science!

Scouts will explore outdoors with our Naturalists

in Daisy, Brownie, Junior and C/S/A groups,

and complete the Citizen Science Journey at their level.

These are drop-off programs. Scouts bring snack, lunch, and gear for being outdoors.

Register at natureforward.org/day-off-camps and click on filter for Scouts

Stream Doctors for a Day

Clarksburg High School (MD) students got to be stream doctors on a beautiful autumn day! For most of these 450 students, it was the first time that they knew the name of their local stream: Little Seneca Creek. It is not every day that students go on a field trip to assess the health of their local stream. GreenKids has been supporting high school biology classes in Montgomery County to conduct some local, hands-on science. We studied aquatic macroinvertebrates; their presence or absence tells us a lot about the conditions of the water. It was wonderful to see high schoolers engaged, smiling, using microscopes, and fully enjoying learning.





Alison's Top Ten

continued from page 7

4. Promoting Green Culture in Public Schools

Now celebrating its 20th year, our GreenKids program reached more than 12,000 public school students across 71 schools this year. Our environmental educators helped 5 schools meet the rigorous standards to become certified as Maryland Green Schools. GreenKids also provided professional training to 266 classroom teachers to help them inspire the next generation of environmental advocates.

3. Leading on Data Center Reform

The devastating impacts of data center development on our land and water is increasing viewed as today's most pressing environmental issue. Our Conservation Team stepped up as leaders on this issue by launching the Maryland Data Center Reform Coalition and educating nearly 13,000 people about the impacts data centers have on land use, habitat, air and water quality, energy, and more. In collaboration with other advocates, we won stronger zoning in Fairfax County, VA, and a pause on data center development in Prince George's County, MD.

2. Living our "Nature for All" Credo

"Nature for All" was not just a capital campaign slogan. Now that our big projects to create a wheelchair-accessible trail and play space at Woodend are complete, Nature Forward is committed to working with partners to bring visitors of all abilities to the sanctuary including tailored lessons this year for 77 students in classrooms for children with disabilities. I get so much pleasure every day greeting visitors along the trail using wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers. We continue to plan and implement accessibility upgrades at Woodend on all scales.

1. Proving That Collaboration Makes Everything Possible For Nature

Thanks to you, my first year as Executive Director has been filled with hope, resilience, and deep gratitude. In a time of uncertainty, Nature Forward's community stood strong alongside our Staff and Board. You provided the resources to make all of the above possible. Thank you for your trust in us and your dedication to our mission.



But we can't let up. Your continued engagement as a member, supporter, donor, volunteer, staffer, advocate, or program participant ensures that Nature Forward can deliver outcomes that help people and wildlife thrive together, no matter how the political winds blow.

As this year ends, you'll be receiving our Year-End Appeal in the mail. I hope you'll respond with your most generous gift. Your tax-deductible contribution today will help protect nature for people and wildlife in the year ahead, ensuring we can continue this vital work in our communities.

I hope you can find a moment to give today at give.natureforward.org/yearend2025.

Thank you for standing with us — and for believing in the power of Nature for All. I can't wait to see what we'll grow together in 2026.

Volunteer Spotlight: Lynn J Rust, local artist and Nature Forward member

by Peihan Orestes, Volunteer Coordinator



Lynn J Rust is not only a long-time Nature Forward volunteer and Natural History Field Studies instructor, but also the very talented artist behind the PlaySpace's new mural!

On a beautiful fall morning last week, I was invited to visit Lynn at her studio in Silver Spring. Her house is tucked in a quiet neighborhood near Burnt Mills, backing right up to the Northwest Branch trail system. Lynn and her friend and business partner, Sherwood Mackel, took me on a magical tour through a house filled with art, memories, puns, and dogs (Koby and All-legra are the best tour guides!). Lynn's

whimsical surrealist paintings are inspired by her love for North Dakota, as well as her travels to places like Minnesota, Costa Rica, and the Northwest Passage—birds, flowers, and insects abound. In addition to Lynn's own work, there are paintings, photographs, and even furniture created by many talented members of her family.

All of this talent was nearly brought to a halt when Lynn's arthritis made it difficult for her to hold a paintbrush without pain, but Sherwood wasn't ready for her to give up. He was determined to find something that would make the narrow paintbrush handles easier for her to hold. In Lynn's basement, Sherwood drilled holes in plastic eggs, artificial fruit (grape was too small, apple was too big), rubber balls...nothing worked until he tried a golf ball. Eureka! Lynn could hold the paintbrush comfortably again! After more trial and error, they came up with a design that would fit in the hand comfortably and fit a range of tools. They wanted to share their creations with others and so their company, GRIPZ, LLC, was born!

Lynn's latest project is a large mural that will adorn the PlaySpace at Woodend. This four-paneled piece will feature a monarch butterfly and a painted bunting, created using the six colors found in the Nature Forward logo. We are very excited about the project and the chance to feature a local artist and friend of the outdoors!

To see more of Lynn's artwork, please visit Lynn J Rust Gallery & Studio on Facebook. GRIPZ can be found at gripz.biz.

For more information on volunteering with Nature Forward, visit natureforward.org/volunteer.

Bundle Up as We Explore all Things Winter

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

SCAN TO REGISTER

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



For the Nature Artist

Drawing Winter Weeds

Friday, January 30 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Jen Brown

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Nature's muted colors in winter are wonderfully rendered in tinted graphite. In this class we will focus on using water soluble tinted graphite pencils to sketch the subtle colors of winter weeds and seed pods. We will spend the first part of the class doing some exercises to become familiar with using the medium, then move on to creating a sketch book page of winter weeds. Note: this class will require purchasing a small set of tinted graphite pencils if you don't already have them, which cost between \$15.00 to \$30.00 depending on which set you purchase.



Nature Journaling

Sunday, March 8 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

When we go out into the world to experience nature, a field journal can be a handy tool to bring along. In

this workshop, Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall will guide participants through several interactive approaches to keeping a Nature Journal, with writing, sketching, phenology calendars, and more. If you're looking to stretch your creativity and deepen your connection to nature, this class is for you! Participants bring their own journal and writing implements. Expect to sit still for a while.

For the Birder

On the Prowl for Winter Waterfowl

Lecture: Thursday, December 4 (7-9:30 pm)

(Woodend Nature Sanctuary)

Field Trip: Saturday, December 6 (8-11:30 am)

(Gunner's Lake, MD)

Leaders: Mike Bowen & Anne Cianni

Lecture: members \$24; nonmembers \$32

Lecture and Field Trip: members \$49; nonmembers \$69

Early winter is the best time to search for and learn to ID overwintering waterfowl in our area. If you're ready to refresh your skills and learn for the first time, our leader Mike Bowen will offer a lecture at Woodend prior to the in-person field trip at Gunner's Lake in Germantown, MD, where a paved trail around the water allows for easy waterfowl watching with binoculars. While our focus will be waterfowl, we'll keep an eye open for all birdlife. All levels of birders welcome.

Winter Birding Series

Thursday, December 18 (Paul Pisano) – Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, 8:30-11 am (from Fall Birding Series)

A: Sunday, January 11 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon) – Gunner's Lake, 8:30-11 am

B: Sunday, January 25 (Paul Pisano) – National Arboretum, 8:30-11 am

C: Saturday, February 7 (Liz Guertin) – Thomas Point Park, 8:30-11 am

D: Saturday, February 21 (Len Bisson) – Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center, 9-11:30 am

E: Saturday, February 28 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon) – Lake Artemesia, 7:30-10 am

F: Saturday, March 7 (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon) – Riley's Lock, 7:30-10 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.

Winter Birding at Blackwater Refuge

Saturday, January 17 (9 am-4:45pm, with optional owling until 5:30 pm)

Leader: Mark England

Location: Blackwater NWR

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. 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.

Woodcock Watch

Saturday, March 21 (6:15-8:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

In his Sand County Almanac, conservationist Aldo Leopold described the dramatic mating display of the American Woodcock as a "sky dance." As dusk falls, the male flies into an open area and announces his presence with nasal "peents." When he finally lifts off the ground, his wings create a mechanical twitter as he circles upward high in the sky. As he plummets back to the ground in a series of zig-zag movements, he issues a lovely liquid warble... and then the aerial dance begins all over again. On this field program to a natural area in upper Montgomery County, MD, we'll hope to be lucky enough to catch a performance of this seasonal drama.

Spring Early Birds

Monday, March 23 (Paul Pisano) – Occoquan Bay NWR, 7:30-10 am

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Immerse yourself in the phenomenon of spring migration with these field programs at nearby parks. Our walks are aimed at beginning and intermediate birders for whom the spring pulse of bird activity can often be overwhelming. We'll search for both resident and migrating birds by sight and sound. As we develop skills for finding birds in the field, we'll also discuss the arrival sequence of spring travelers—and the departure of overwintering species.

For the Botanist

Welcome to the World of Winter Trees

Wednesday, December 10 (1-4 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Location: Sugarloaf Mountain

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

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 Sugarloaf Mountain. On this walk, we'll enjoy December along the trail and learn how to approach identifying trees when their branches are mostly bare.

Winter Weeds and Wildflowers

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

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Not all herbaceous plants disappear in the winter. Many persist as dried stalks and seed clusters creating lovely, dramatic forms throughout open landscapes. Join a naturalist for an indoor/outdoor introduction to winter weed and wildflower identification at our Woodend Sanctuary. We'll also investigate seed dispersal strategies and examine plant skeletons for signs of summer insect activity, such as insect galls, chrysalids, cocoons, and egg cases.

Botanical Gems—Vernal Equinox on the Potomac

Sunday, March 22 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Dickerson Conservation Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Spring is an exciting time along the Potomac River. Join retired County-wide Botanist/Forest Ecologist, Carole Bergmann, for an equinox hike to experience the "close of winter/beginning of spring" in one of Montgomery County's special Conservation Parks. We will search for whatever spring ephemerals, trees or shrubs are bursting into leaf or flower in this riverine floodplain habitat. We will also keep our ears and eyes open for amphibian and bird life and visit the largest known tree in Maryland (a sycamore), a co-champion Cottonwood, and numerous other giants. Expect to walk between 1.5 and 2 miles on natural surface trails or the towpath. No restrooms at this site.

For the Nature-Lover Generalist

Midweek Meanders Along the Canal

Wednesday, December 3 (10 am-12:30 pm) Great Falls, MD

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy this late-fall stroll on a relatively close-in portion of the C&O Canal's historic towpath, which see less foot and bicycle traffic on weekdays than weekends. The focus of these naturalist-led walks will be the rich natural history of the varied habitats along the Potomac River and the Canal. We'll proceed at a "naturalist's shuffle" pace, stopping often to observe and enjoy seasonal plant and animal life, including birds, fall wildflowers, fruits, and foliage, butterflies, snakes, turtles—and whatever else we might find. The towpath is flat, but could be muddy and/or uneven.

Solstice Celebration Hike

Friday, December 19 (12-4:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

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.



Photo by Rita Bergmann

 [facebook.com/
gonatureforward](https://facebook.com/gonatureforward)

Winter Walks Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

Section A: January 7 - Carderock

Section B: January 21 - Widewater

Section C: February 4 - Swain's Lock

Section D: February 18 - Violettes Lock

Section E: March 18 - Riley's Lock

Leaders: Stephanie Mason (A,B,C,D) and Genevieve Wall (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 provides. While the Towpath is flat, it could be muddy or snow-covered—and access to the Towpath at Riley's Lock involves either climbing a set of stairs or a fairly steep slope. Our seasonal Wednesday walks will continue with Spring Saunters Along the Canal starting on April 1—no fooling.



Walking the Winter Woods and Wetlands

(10 am-1 pm)

Section A. Saturday, January 24: Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, DC

Section B. Friday, February 13: Huntley Meadows Park, VA

Section C: Sunday, March 1: Governor Bridge Natural Area, MD

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Winter is often considered the quiet season, but there is still lots to look and listen for in the natural world despite the chilly temperatures. On these naturalist-led walks, we'll work to cover up to 2.5 miles on mostly level natural surface trails and/or boardwalk. Along the way, we'll keep eyes and ears open for winter wildlife and the plant communities that support them—all the while discussing their strategies for winter survival. All three destinations are local parks which protect both wetlands and woodlands.



Photo by NPS

Presidents' Day Hike on the Canal: Swain's Lock to Great Falls Loop

Monday, February 16 (10 am-2:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Got the day off? Join us for this mid-February holiday hike. We'll head downriver along the C&O Canal Towpath from Swain's Lock to Great Falls to enjoy views from the islands made accessible by boardwalks. We'll retrace our steps along the Towpath back to our cars at Swain's for a total hike of 4.6 miles. As we pass by floodplain forests and wetlands, we'll keep our eyes and ears open for winter birds and other active wildlife while practicing our winter botany skill. Our leader is even willing to promise an early sign or two of spring's tiptoeing forward.

Harriet Tubman: History, Heroism, and Nature Knowledge

Wednesday, March 11 (10 am-3 pm)

Leaders: Alex Green, Lisa Green, Genevieve Wall

Location: Cambridge, MD

Members: \$75; nonmembers \$95

Join Alex and Lisa Green from Harriet Tubman Tours and Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall on an early spring exploration of Maryland's eastern shore—where Harriet Tubman's keenly developed skills as a naturalist helped keep her and her passengers on the Underground Railroad safe. In this tour, you'll learn a blend of Harriet Tubman's life history, and explore some questions—how do you keep warm on a cold night when smoke from a fire could reveal your location? What plants are useful, edibly or medicinally, and where can they be found? How do you stay aware of human and animal movements? On this trip, we'll caravan together to a series of sites that will enrich your understanding of Harriet Tubman's life and legacy—as a hero of the underground railroad, a force for freedom, and a naturalist with deep knowledge of the land around her.

Nature Notes from Genevieve's Journal: Winter

by Genevieve Wall, Senior Naturalist

Welcome to Nature Notes! Those who have met me on Adult Forays know I keep a nature journal. I find the habit sharpens my observations, connects me to the rhythms of nature, and brings me joy. In this column, I'll share some notes from the pages of my nature journal, in hopes that it may inspire you to connect with nature this season.

Last December, on the shortest day of the year, Stephanie Mason and I gathered with a Nature Forward group to make an annual pilgrimage to Great Falls. I've grown to cherish this annual visit to the "drama and din" of the waterfalls, as Stephanie so aptly describes it. There's no better way to celebrate the winter solstice than with great company in the great outdoors!

On this day, our travels to the trailhead were shrouded with a wintery mix that dashed snowflakes over the road and onto our reddened cheeks. The powdery flakes faded fast to pricks of water dotting our scarves and gloves. Cold air bit into our lungs as we meandered up the towpath to the boardwalk overlooking powerful side-channels of the Potomac. The roar of the river humbles; a memory from childhood stirs of how even six inches of raging water once held me powerless. I breathe in the crisp air and breathe out gratitude for the respect I learned that day.

At the overlook at last, we drink in the falls in silence. But the silence doesn't last long; a cheery chorus of whistling kinglets, chickadees, and titmice descend to raid the sycamores and juniper. Spellbound, we study their nimble feet as they bob beneath the delicate twigs. One little kinglet dangles upside down as he gobbles cone after cone off the juniper. The bluish cast of the berrylike cones provides a perfect backdrop to the spot of golden feathers at the top of his head. I marvel at this golden-crowned kinglet; a tiny being under 10 grams, who, through the ingenuity of evolution and a mighty metabolism, can survive much more bitter cold than what we face today.

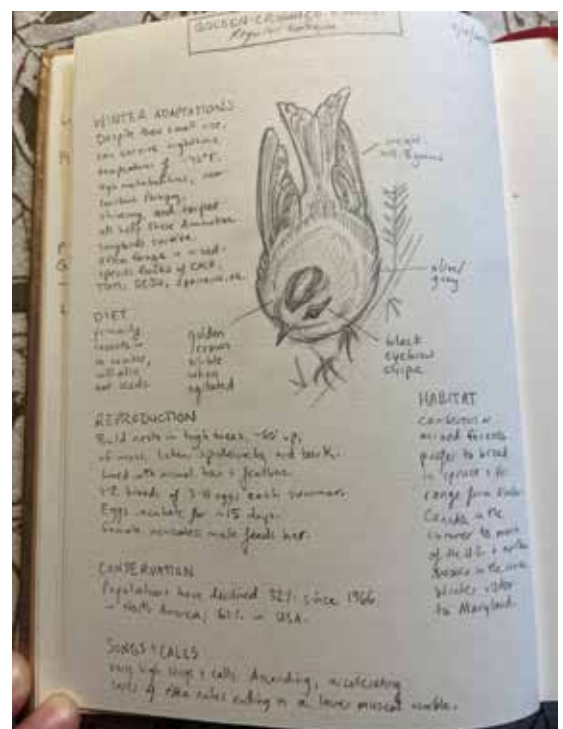
That night, as I drift between sleep and wake, the kinglet returns to me: bright joy against a bleak winter sky. Not altogether alert, I'm gripped by an urge to write. I turn over, scribble a few lines, and – succumb to sleep.

In the morning, I wake after the longest night of the year and read:

you are loved
the way the north wind loves
the beech trees
Their leaf-chatter warms
this winter world

a kinglet
greet each harsh gust
with gaiety
at his crown
a little
flame

at his heart
a furnace
blazing
summer



Woodend Walks and Tours

Family Programs: Come Explore Woodend with your Family this Winter!

First Saturday of every month: 12/6, 1/3, 2/7, 3/7 (9-10 am)

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

Come explore Woodend with your Family this Fall! 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.

Saturday Morning Bird Walk

Second Saturday of every month: 12/13, 1/10, 2/14, 3/14 (8-9 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16. Second person FREE

Join enthusiastic birders at Woodend to learn birding basics and explore bird life at Woodend. One will learn binocular basics and how to identify common birds as well as explore the wonders of migration.

Winter Tree Tour at Woodend

Friday, December 12 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Join Bradley Simpson, our Habitat Manager, for a winter walk around Woodend's forest and lawns to learn about both native and introduced trees and the story behind them. Master winter identification strategies for 20 species, visit county "champion" trees, and learn why these trees provide important wildlife habitat and ecosystem services in our urban region.



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

Birds of the World

NATH7195 1.5 CEUs

Class night and time: Thursdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: January 15-February 12

Lectures via zoom

Field trip date: Saturday, February 7 (10 am-2 pm): National Zoo in Washington, DC

Instructor: Gemma Radko

Members \$180, nonmembers \$230

Our planet is home to an incredible number and variety of birds. The most current estimate recognizes more than 11,000 different bird species. In this five-week class, we will highlight notable bird families from each continent, including birds you might encounter on a Nature Forward Nature Travel experience. You'll also learn about the origins of bird diversity, bird conservation challenges around the world, birding hotspots, and more. Our field trip to the National Zoo will give you a firsthand look at many representatives of the bird families that we discuss in class. Buckle up for a wide-ranging trip!



Photo by Jerry Thompson

Weather and Climate

NATH7140, 3 CEUs

Class night and time: Tuesdays, 7-9 pm

Class meetings: February 3-April 7

Lectures via zoom

Three Field Trip dates: Sterling Field Support Center; Tour of a TV station weather center in the DC area; Tour/presentation of weather shown on a 3D sphere of the globe; and/or Tour of National Weather Service field office in Sterling, VA. Dates/Times TBA but likely to be on Fridays.

Instructor: Randall Bass

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

What is the difference between weather and climate? 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 you an in-depth, yet simple to understand overview of weather and climate. We'll examine the basics of atmospheric science: how the sun, oceans, and the orientation of the Earth drive weather; and principles of weather forecasting and weather measurements. Other sessions include winter weather, severe weather, aviation weather, fire weather, and even space weather. Impacts of weather on sectors such as agriculture, aviation, and other areas will be discussed, as well as weather safety and preparation. Our examination of climate will discuss longer-range phenomena, from months to years; climatologies of the area; and an overview of climate change.

COMING IN FEBRUARY

Details on spring NHFS classes, open for registration in late winter, at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Freshwater Ecosystems

Cathy Wiss

Chesapeake Bay Ecosystems

Terry McTigue

Naturalist Tools for Community Science

Ana Ka'ahanui

Winter Tree Identification

NATH7147, 1.5 CEUs

Class night and time: Wednesdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: January 28-February 25

Lectures via zoom

Three field Trips: Patuxent River Park - Jug Bay Natural Area: Saturday, January 31 (10 am-1 pm); Woodend Sanctuary: Saturday, February 14 (10 am-1 pm); Sugarloaf Mountain: Saturday, February 21 (10 am-1 pm)

Instructor: Bradley Simpson, Nature Forward Habitat Manager
Members \$240 members; nonmembers \$290

During this winter course, students will learn how to identify trees and other woody plants in winter when there are no leaves to rely on. We will learn how to use twigs, buds, bark, and fruit to identify species throughout winter. During our field trips, students will begin to understand the diversity of features, especially bark, that trees possess. By the end of the course, students will have an arsenal of tools to use when identifying trees in the cold months of winter.



Director of Education Maggie Crawford presents Angela Gilder with a Certificate of Accomplishment at the Annual Meeting at Woodend on October 23. Congratulations to Angela on completing her studies in the Natural History Field Studies program! Not pictured: Megan Carroll, who also earned her Certificate of Accomplishment this year.

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.

The Magic of Peru – From the Manu Road to Machu Picchu: A Nature Tour with Conservation Highlights

October 9-19, 2026

Leaders: Paul Pisano and local guide

Cost: TBA

The Manu Biosphere Reserve is one of the most diverse places on Earth and is home to some of the most important conservation efforts in the world. Here Spectacled Bears, Quetzals, Antpittas, Andean Guans, and Cock-of-the-Rocks still live unmolested, along with a myriad of Tanagers and Flycatchers. Journey with Nature Forward to explore the magical Manu Road, from the cloud forests around Wayqecha Biological Station to lowland rainforest of Manu Biologde, and several places in between. At the Manu Biologde, site of the Manu Biological Station, we'll visit a living laboratory and home of community-based conservation efforts at the intersection of lowland rainforest and mid-elevation Andes. It's just one of several conservation activities that we'll learn about on this tour. We finish the trip with a must-see visit to Machu Picchu, one of the most magical places on Earth. Tour starts and ends in Cusco. Stay tuned for a webinar in January before registration opens to learn if this trip is a good fit for you! Email pam.oves@natureforward.org if you are interested in receiving more info about the trip when available.



Dear friends:

Peru is a country so rich in nature and history that it's impossible to see it all in one trip. Deciding where to go and what to see can be a challenge. I'm happy to invite you to join Nature Forward and Conservación Amazónica on this expedition to two of the most famous sites in the country – the Manu Road and Machu Picchu. If you've been wanting to visit Peru but have been putting it off, I hope this invitation is the nudge you need to explore the country's magical riches. On this tour you'll go from the highest reaches of the Andes Mountains to the Amazonian lowlands of southern Peru – exploring several distinct ecosystems along the way while also learning about ongoing conservation efforts. Even if you've been before, you'll surely see something new on this trip. The tour begins and ends in Cusco, and the first half will consist of driving the Manu Road, which, according to Victor

Emanuel, "is the best road I've ever gone birding on, in terms of the variety of habitats and birds." From there we will travel down the Sacred Valley of the Urubamba River and visit the famous Machu Picchu.

Peru is home to more than 1,800 species of birds, including some of the most beautiful and spectacular in the world. It's also the home of the oldest known civilization in the Americas, dating back to 3500 BCE. These pre-Inca communities flourished for millennia, and many centuries later Peru became the center of the Inca empire – the largest empire in pre-Columbian America. We've developed an itinerary that explores this nature and history, while also incorporating conservation highlights. These areas continue to be vital travel destinations because they have been protected and conserved, and we'll have a chance to learn about some of these innovative conservation efforts that are protecting them, learning from them, and enabling the people who live there to prosper.

I hope this invitation has spurred your desire to see these magical wonders of Peru, and I look forward to sharing this sensational experience with Nature Forward members.

*Sincerely,
Paul Pisano*

The Mystical Migration of the Monarch

This trip is full, but email pam.oves@natureforward.org to be added to the waitlist.

February 17-23, 2026

Leaders: Mark Garland & in-country guide – with visits from Estela Romero!

Cost: \$4,025 (single supplement \$475)

The sight of overwintering monarchs clustered together among the trees in Northern Mexico is one not easily forgotten. Each year, hundreds of millions of Monarchs fly across the Gulf and reach their overwintering grounds in the high volcanic mountains across the southern end of the central Mexican plateau. These high-altitude forests offer incredible opportunities to come face-to-face with mindboggling quantities of monarch butterflies in the fir forests and streams. On this trip, you'll explore multiple Monarch sanctuaries, and marvel at the incredible lives of these butterflies, while also enjoying the mountains, birds, flora, Aztec architecture, cuisine, and more! Some of the bird species that can be found in these habitats are Red Warblers, White-eared Hummingbirds, Striped Sparrows, and the Black-vented Oriole. When we descend from the Monarch sanctuaries, we'll enjoy the region's rivers, waterfalls, and subtropical forests—including an afternoon at a relaxing hot spring, perfect for decompressing after our hikes in the mountains. Mark Garland returns to lead this trip, and the group will be visited by fifth-generation Anganguero resident, monarch educator, and storyteller Estela Romero.

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

This trip is full, but email pam.oves@natureforward.org to be added to the waitlist.

March 5-17, 2026

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & in-country guide Eddie Recio

Cost: \$5,375 (single supplement is \$1,000, with limited availability)

For well over 20 years, Stephanie Mason has led popular Nature Forward travel trips to this small tropical wonderland with amazing plant and animal diversity. Costa Rica's colorful birds—from the glimmering hummingbirds to the rainbow-hued tanagers to the large, comical Toucans—will turn any nature enthusiast into a bird lover. Our trip explores Caribbean lowland rain forest, southern Pacific foothills, and other protected wildlands.

Iceland: Landscapes, Puffins, and Legends Beneath the Solar Eclipse

August 3-13, 2026

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Cost: \$13,995 (single supplement \$2,395)

Iceland is famous for its unique scenery: it is the "land of fire and ice," where volcanoes and glaciers have carved paths across the landscape, where breathtaking waterfalls plunge off of cliffs, where scrappy wildflowers and berry bushes take advantage of the short summers, where pelagic birds gather in large numbers, and where—even in August—there is a chance to faintly glimpse northern lights shimmering overhead. Experience the raw, roaring power of the falls; the lush landscapes at Þingvellir, where placid surface waters hide a separating fault line 200 meters deep; the deep blue silence in the heart of an ice cave; the cacophony of gregarious puffin colonies; and the rhythmic ejections of water and steam from powerful geysirs. Our adventure is timed so that we will be in the path of totality for the solar eclipse on August 12. Join Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall on this trip of a lifetime!

Registration open!



Moving Forward Together Through Change and Challenge

Annual membership meeting celebrates achievements, prepares for future

In a time of political turmoil and mounting environmental concerns, Nature Forward's mission work is increasingly important for nature and people across our region. Attendees of the organization's October 23rd Annual Membership Meeting heard that message loud and clear during an evening that celebrated recent accomplishments and examined the challenges ahead, including the explosive growth of data centers.

"Times like these make Nature Forward's work more vital and rewarding than ever," said Executive Director Alison Pearce, "We can all celebrate great progress in our mission to preserve and restore habitat, advance sound environmental policies, and provide essential opportunities for children and adults to learn, play, and recharge their spirits in nature." You can learn more about some of the achievements Alison shared with members by viewing our Annual Report at natureforward.org/annual-report.

The environmental and climate impacts of data centers were the focus of an eye-opening special presentation by Nature Forward Conservation Director Lydia Lawrence and Conservation Advocates Renee Grebe and Angie McCarthy. Northern Virginia currently has the largest concentration of data centers in the world, and these massive, energy-hungry developments are now eyeing Maryland. Lydia and her team discussed the dangers to land, water, and people by unregulated data center expansion, and urged members to stay informed and active on the issue.

Nature Forward members unanimously re-elected Board members Sarah Davidson, Bill McGrath, and Jo Doumbia, and approved new Board members Danielle Brigida, Bre'Anna Brooks, and Bonnie Weaver. The meeting recognized departing Board members Diane Wood, Abel Olivo, Hughey Newsome, and outgoing Board President Nancy Voit for their years of dedicated service.

"When I first joined the Board, Nature Forward was in the middle of a campaign which set a new course to make Nature For All a reality," Nancy explained, highlighting accomplishments that included restoring Woodend's forest and meadow habitats, building an interactive Nature Play Space, a historic name change, and the selection of a new Executive Director.

The journey of Nature Forward's newest Natural History Field Studies (NHFS) graduate demonstrates the impact of organization's all-ages education programs. Nature Forward Education Director Maggie Crawford introduced Angela Gildner to Annual Meeting attendees. After enrolling her daughter at Camp Woodend, Angela learned about the Master Naturalist program. At that point, she started taking classes and eventually completed a specialized program of study in the NHFS program.

"If you have any interest in learning about the natural world, there is a course out there for you," Angela says.

Sally Winthrop was named Nature Forward's Volunteer of the Year recognizing her extensive contributions to water quality monitoring and numerous other programs. In a touching moment, Chief Operating Officer Amy Ritsko-Warren presented Bjorn Busk with the first-ever Nature Forward Staff Recognition award, celebrating his 25 years as a Nature Forward employee.

Nearing the end of her first year as Executive Director, Alison Pearce said she's excited about what the Nature Forward community will continue to accomplish together.

"I look forward to another year of working toward greener and more sustainable communities while also finding new ways to connect people with the natural world."



Top row: Executive Director Alison Pearce (left), Board Secretary Sarah Davidson (fifth on right), and Governance Chair Jo Doumbia (far right) welcome newly sworn-in Board members Bonnie Weaver, Danielle Brigida, and Bre'Anna Brooks. Middle row: Nature Forward conservation staff Angie McCarthy, Renee Grebe, and Lydia Lawrence discuss data centers. Sarah Davidson and Alison Pearce thank outgoing Board member Diane Wood (second from left) and outgoing President Nancy Voit (right). Bottom row: Volunteer Coordinator Peihan Orestes presents Sally Winthrop with the "2025 Volunteer of the Year" award. COO Amy Ritko-Warren recognizes Property Manager Bjorn Busk's 25 years of employment at Nature Forward.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Need we say more?



See more wedding photos at <https://woodendsanctuary.org/weddings/>
For availability and details, call (301) 450-1407
or email beatriz.engel@natureforward.org

Photos by Mcarterphotos.com

woodendsanctuary.org

GIFTS FOR ALL AT WOODEND NATURE SHOP

Open daily 11am-3pm | Closed Sunday



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Adaptive Management at Woodend

by Bradley Simpson, Habitat Manager

As our stream restoration turns four, we are so grateful for the many funders and donors who made it possible. This project has been greatly successful in many ways such as by reducing pollutants that leave our property and travel downstream to Rock Creek, providing better habitat for amphibians at Woodend, reducing erosion, and stabilizing our stream banks. Despite these successes, all ecological restoration projects require ongoing management in order to function at their best. This year we were lucky to receive funding from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources that recognizes this—their Adaptive Management grant program specifically provides support for the upkeep of projects they funded!

This additional funding has enabled us to enhance and manage our stream restoration corridor through continued invasive species management and supplemental plantings. On the invasive species management side, we began with intensive control of lesser celandine in February. In May, we transitioned our focus to the larger woody invasive vines and shrubs, such as porcelain berry, multiflora rose, and wineberry, which tend to establish in disturbed areas. In late July, we tackled the Japanese stiltgrass and lespedeza populations that were dominating the herbaceous layer within the unfenced portion of Woodend's stream project. Finally, in October, we set out to control wisteria along the stream corridor. All of these management actions were done in partnership with Empire Landscaping, a contractor that also helped with the installation of the original stream restoration project.

Following invasive species management, native plants were added to fill in the space from the removed non-native individuals. Within the unfenced portion of the stream, the dying Japanese stiltgrass was raked away so that we could spread over 50 pounds of native seed mix specific to riparian areas. Along the stream corridor in the main section of Woodend, over 2,050 wildflower plugs were planted. The species chosen, great blue lobelia, cardinal flower, swamp milkweed, white turtlehead, golden alexander, and tall meadow rue, were seeded during the original project. Unfortunately, these species can have mixed germination rates and did not sprout very well from our original seed mix. As a result, we used the funds from this grant program to plant these species using plugs instead of seeds. They were planted with help from our dedicated volunteers, MD DNR staff, and visiting Maryland Climate Corps members.

We will be applying for additional funding from this grant program to continue our invasive species management efforts and to increase our shrub diversity along the stream corridor. Keep an eye out next spring to see all our new plants sprouting by the stream!



MD DNR staff from the Watershed and Climate Services division joined Nature Forward to help plant wildflower plugs funded by their grant program.

Anacostia Community Greening Rain Garden Installation

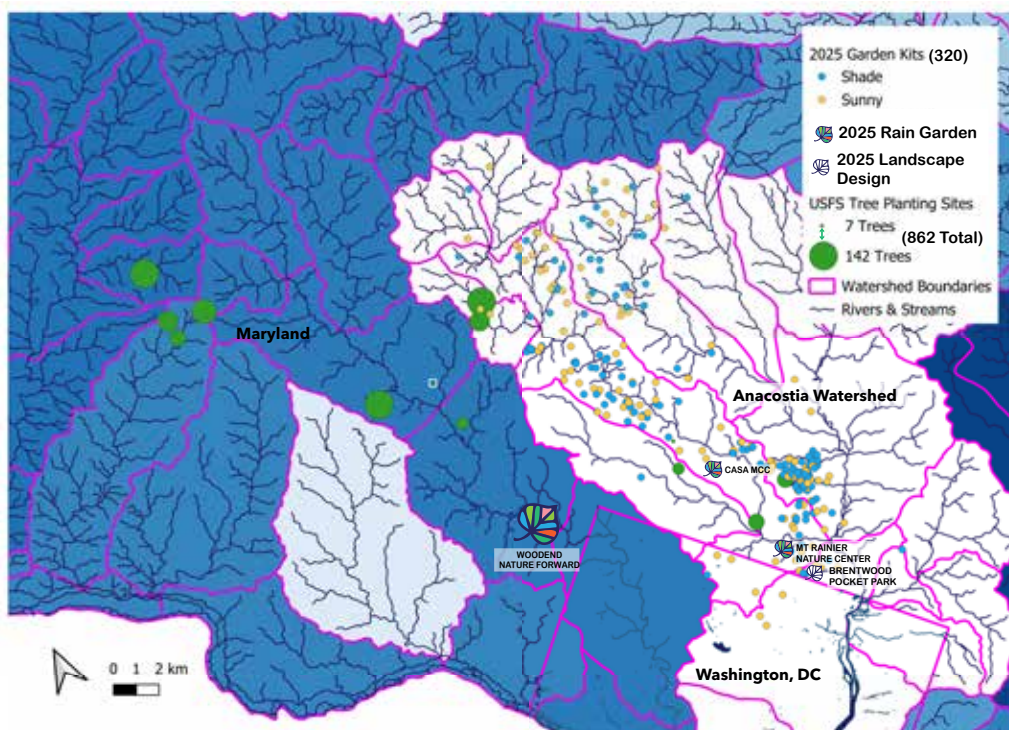
by Alice Sturm, Director of Restoration

Thanks to funding from the US Forest Service, NFWF Small Watershed Grant Program, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and the Esther A. and Joseph Klingenstein Fund, the Restoration Team was able to install two rain gardens, distribute 320 pollinator garden kits, and facilitate five trainings for landscape professionals in the Anacostia Watershed this year—installing a total of 20,000 square feet of conservation landscaping in this watershed alone.

Our Anacostia Community Greening work is aimed at improving water quality throughout the Anacostia watershed, with a focus on the Northwest and the Northeast Branch subwatersheds. These areas were largely developed before contemporary stormwater regulations, so we work with institutions and residences to install retrofits and other infiltration-enhancing practices to improve both habitat value and water quality.

One of our partners this year, CASA, collaborated with us in install a rain garden and a community garden and gathering space at their Multicultural Center in Langley Park. Community and staff members, including the resident committee, the teen after school program, and trainees in their landscaper co-op program, were engaged in the design process and in education on what constitutes a conservation landscape and the purpose of a rain garden. For the installation of the landscaping itself, we used grant funding to hire Swamp Rose Coop (an existing worker-owned landscape co-op based in Silver Spring) to complete the installation, while CASA's trainee co-op members observed, assisted, and participated in a bilingual training to learn site grading, reading a design drawing, and planting techniques. Other workshops covered maintaining rain gardens, general conservation landscaping techniques, sustainable landscaping best practices, forestry, and invasive plant species management.

But it wasn't all work and no play! In addition to the professional trainees, lots of children, teens, and adults from Langley Park came out to help plant pollinator plants adjacent to their community vegetable garden, learn about the



new rain garden and the new native edible plants we installed (Highbush Blueberries and Paw Paws), and paint some stump seating, picnic tables, and a plant-and-insect inspired mural on an electric box. The evening ended with a delicious potluck dinner put on by CASA, testimonials from community members, and a presentation of gardening tools so that the co-op members are ready to maintain their new landscape. We look forward to working with more partners across the Anacostia watershed in the year to come!



Congrats Tori

In September, **Tori Carr** joined our staff full-time as our Audience Engagement Coordinator after her year-long term as our Chesapeake Conservation & Climate Corps Member where she assisted in invasive plant removal and native plant restoration at Woodend, environmental education, and social media management. Tori grew up in Virginia and recently graduated from William & Mary with a B.A. in Environmental Science and Government. Her love of nature was instilled from countless hours spent on the Chesapeake Bay, and she spent two years in college studying seagrass ecology of the Bay and its tributaries. In this new role, Tori is looking forward to engaging audiences creatively through social media and in-person through tabling events and walks and tours of Woodend.



Welcome Leo

Leo Pugliese is the new Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps member at Nature Forward, joining the Restoration department in August. He recently graduated from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry with a major in Conservation Biology and a minor in Environmental Policy and Communication. Having grown up in Kensington, MD, Leo has been coming to Woodend since preschool for camp and afterschool programs. He was also a summer camp intern in 2023 and is excited to be a part of the organization once again. Leo has been taking part in forest surveys, invasive species management, community outreach programs, and the Nature Preschool. He is looking forward to planning and implementing a restoration project of his own at Woodend.



Welcome Bella

Bella Gusman is a new Maryland Climate Corps member at Nature Forward, joining the restoration team. Bella graduated from the University of Maryland in May with a major in Environmental Science and Policy and a minor in Wildlife Ecology and Management. As a life-long resident of Frederick, she has had the Appalachian Mountains in her backyard and as a result, cultivated a love of the environment and being outdoors. In her free time, she loves to hike with her dog, go to the gym, and work on her car. At Nature Forward, Bella is responsible for contributing to the Restoration team. Tasks include invasive species removal, native species planting, forest surveys, and community outreach. Bella is very motivated about contributing to Nature Forward, especially when it comes to conservation, improving wildlife habitat, and restoring native species.



Welcome Esó

Esó Csikos is one of the new Maryland Climate Corps members at Nature Forward. She is finishing her undergraduate degree in General Biology at the University of Maryland. Her love for the outdoors has been fostered by spending summers in the Adirondacks, interning at Pope Farm Nursery, and devoting her free time to playing and coaching soccer. She is looking forward to learning a lot about macroinvertebrate sampling, conserving forest biodiversity, and thermophilic composting —to name a few!

Farewell Kasey

Kasey Greene has stepped away from her role as GreenKids Virginia Educator. Kasey has done an amazing job building relationships with schools in Loudoun County and delivering programs to students over the past two years. We wish her the best!

Memorial and Tribute Contributions

AUGUST-OCTOBER 2025

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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.

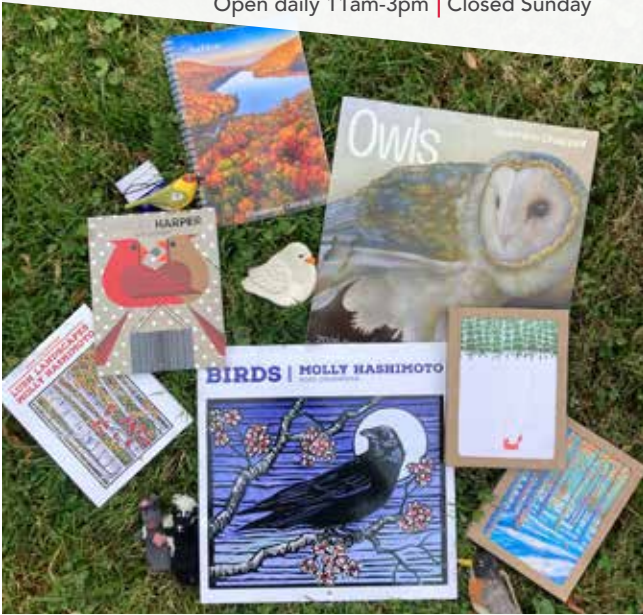
Nature Forward is committed to addressing problems when they occur. Program participants are encouraged to bring problems or concerns of any kind directly to the staff member in charge of the program. Staff members will try to resolve the problem immediately or as soon as reasonably possible. If staff 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.

Health Guidelines for Programs

Please stay home if you are sick. Nature Forward follows CDC guidelines for communicable diseases. Policies are subject to change.

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