

SHENANDOAH SAW-WHET

ISSUE # 1 1: WINTER
2022/2023

A NEWSLETTER OF THE *SHENANDOAH CHAPTER* OF THE VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS PROGRAM.

OUR NEWSLETTER IS NAMED IN HONOR OF THE NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL — A SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY.

IN THIS EDITION

President's Message

Page 2

Ellen Schwalenstocker Profile

Page 3

Famous Naturalists

Page 4

Bluebird Trail Opportunities

Page 5

Importance of Prairies

Page 6

Photo Stories

Page 11

Places of Note

Page 14

FROM THE EDITOR

BY TIM KOPPENHAVER

As some of you may know, I'm on a quest to visit 100 Nature Conservancy sponsored preserves before I turn 60. Through that quest, I've been fortunate to have visited several prairies. The tallgrass prairie in Kansas and the Kissimmee prairie in Florida are examples of these stunning ecosystems that are some of my favorite preserves visited. Locally, the Cowbane Prairie in Stuarts Draft is an easily accessible place to enjoy a prairie experience.

Prairies are a vital refuge in a world of declining biodiversity. In this edition of the Saw-whet, you'll find an article providing a bit more detail regarding the importance of prairies.

Also in this edition is a Member Profile of our chapter's current Secretary **Ellen Schwalenstocker**. Her dedication to our chapter is inspiring and comes from a very strong and impressive background which is detailed in her profile.

In an earlier newsletter, **Kevin Bowman** was the subject of our Member Profile. He too has an impressive profile. As most know by now, Kevin has accepted a new position as Park Manager at Sweet Run State Park. We wish him all the best and thank him for his years of service as chapter advisor.

Lastly, our newsletter is always open to input from members. If you are interested in writing an article or submitting photos, media recommendations, or any other worthy content, please send your ideas to tkopp1201@gmail.com.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY MARY BETH YARBROUGH

In January 2022, three new officers began their terms on the Shenandoah Chapter VMN Board of Directors (BOD): **Rebecca Harriett** as Vice President; **Susan Galbraith** as Treasurer, and me as President. **Ellen Schwalenstocker** continued into her second year as Secretary, providing continuity and institutional memory via her excellent minutes and detailed involvement with Chapter document revisions. This team of officers, supported by our other seasoned Board members, look back over the year with a great sense of satisfaction. It has been a year of learning, and a time to be impressed by the breadth of talented volunteers and projects. I feel fortunate to work with these dedicated board members and volunteers, and to be a part of this Chapter.

In 2022, each Committee Chair and Project manager submitted goals (see Better Impact files). December is the time for all to review progress towards their 2022 goals, and the creation of their 2023 goals. All leads are encouraged to provide a summary of accomplishments towards goals (for posting to Better Impact, and to help develop our Chapter's Annual Report). A suggested format can be found in the BI files.

Some of the first tasks undertaken by the Board in 2022 included Chapter goal setting, and creation of an annual budget. We are pleased that these, and other, Board's goals set were met:

1. Engage members through strong teaming, communication, membership activities.

ACCOMPLISHED: 1) Teaming: project and committee teams met, and six of 15 (written) reports were submitted and posted to Better Impact, so that chapter members can be easily updated on progress; one project provided two updates, a goal for all! 2) Communication: Each of the board members and project leads participated in meetings with Pres/VP in January-February; follow-up discussions and communications were held on as-needed basis throughout the year. 3) Activities: June 21 and Chapter Picnic social gatherings took place with great attendance; members were invited to a meet and greet of the Spring training class; several board and committee social opportunities were held.

2. Support, improve, strategically prepare members in administrative functions of the chapter.

ACCOMPLISHED: Support: although no "trial roles" or co-chairs were formally established in 2022, several committees engaged new members; approximately three members attended BOD meetings; guidelines for member attendance at BOD meetings added to HB; 2) Recruit and prepare: discussions were held throughout the year with members about future BOD positions; Members were informed in the Fall newsletter of chapter administrative needs through 2023 and encouraged to inquire; the nominations committee identified individuals for officer and committee vacancies; the Education Committee has established a mentorship program to begin in 2023. Chapter planning/goal setting: Chapter Goals, Budget created for 2022; revised Handbook and Bylaws approved; 5-Year Audit completed; draft MOA with Sky Meadows created.

The Board is happy to report 2022 was a good year for our Chapter! We look forward to sharing the Annual Report in early January with a full accounting of our Chapter's accomplishments. We are happy that three officers will continue in their roles for a second year, and our outgoing Secretary Ellen Schwalenstocker will be succeeded by **Hilary Sortor**. We also look forward to seeing more of you attending a Board meeting in 2023. Everyone's role in the future of our Chapter is important!

MEMBER PROFILE – ELLEN SCHWALENSTOCKER

Imagine the call of a loon echoing across a quiet, glass-smooth lake in the Adirondacks. On the porch of a rustic cabin beside that lake sits **Ellen Schalenstocker** enjoying her annual trip to the area - an area near where she grew up in Rochester, New York. Imagine also, Ellen floating in a kayak on that lake, or similar ones nearby, during her time in the Adirondacks. The Adirondacks are a special place to Ellen. As a kid, her family took camping trips there where her love of the outdoors was born.

From Indiana University, Ellen obtained a bachelor's degree in biology with intentions of pursuing the field of ecology through graduate studies. However, she fell into a career in health care, eventually gravitating to the social sciences. Ultimately, she obtained an MBA from University of Rochester and a PhD from George Washington University. Her career took her into multiple health care settings, including an academic medical center, managed care and, lastly, the Children's Hospital Association in Washington DC, where she focused on healthcare quality research and policy.

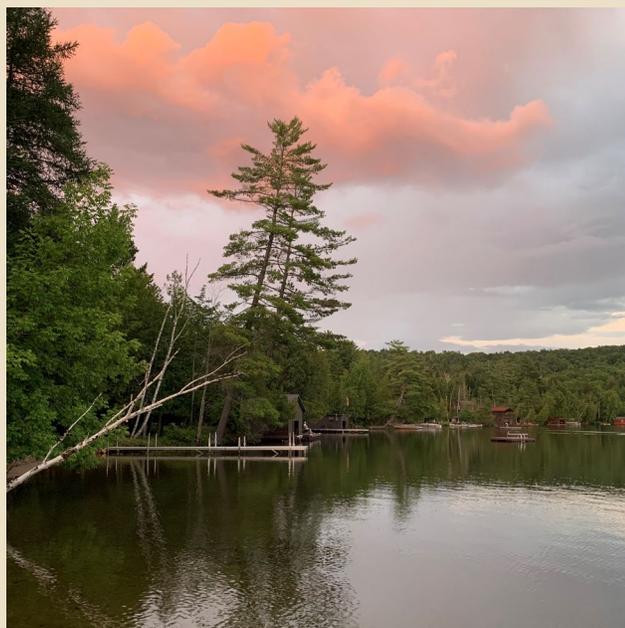
Upon retirement, Ellen and her husband moved to the Shenandoah Valley, in part to stay near their adult children. For Ellen, it was a return to a mountain landscape that she so loved. Shortly after the move, Ellen attended the Blandy Garden Fair where she was first introduced to the Virginia Master Naturalist program. She found the enthusiasm of **Debi Fischetti** and **Michelle Fontaine** captivating which motivated her to join the Shenandoah Chapter... and provided a second chance to pursue her interest in ecology again.

Ellen found the basic training and overall scope of the VMN program fascinating, but especially so regarding topics related to mountains, freshwater ecology, native plants, and land use. She feels that so much of what the VMN program teaches could positively influence and impact the public's day-to-day decisions. Knowing of our area's amazing but delicate biodiversity or the impact of invasive species, for instance, could help citizens make better landscaping choices or inspire recycling participation.

A few years ago, Ellen's organizational skills were noted and she was asked to serve our chapter as Secretary. It's a role she has handled extremely well, and all chapter members should be grateful for Ellen's conscientious contributions. Her two-year term is ending soon but she still will be providing administrative support to our chapter via membership on our Education and Membership Committees and continuing to help with Better Impact management. However, Ellen is also looking forward to more active content in her next chapter of chapter volunteering.

Ellen is also considering joining her husband's hiking group which will get her out more into the nature she's spent a lifetime loving. She's also especially fond of the amazing resource of Shenandoah National Park. Or perhaps she'll next be seen volunteering at a pollinator plot or a bluebird trail.

When asked what she likes most about the VMN program, Ellen quickly points to the people. Both in our existing membership and in the applicants she reviews for upcoming training classes, she finds so much diversity. People arrive at the VMN program from such varied backgrounds. And that's exactly what Ellen has brought to our chapter as well. Her strong education and career, diverse skills, attention to detail, and intellect has added so much richness to our membership, and we are grateful for all she has done so far and what she will continue to contribute.



Kiawassa Lake,
Adirondack Mtns, NY

By Ellen
Schwalenstocker

FAMOUS NATURALISTS

FREEMAN TILDEN

The 1957 book *Interpreting Our Heritage* by **Freeman Tilden** was one of the first publications addressing natural history interpretation and set the National Park Service standard for years to come, remaining a viable reference even in today's interpretive endeavors.

"Heritage interpretation is an educational activity," he wrote, "which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."

Within his book, he proposed six principles of interpretation:

1. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but *provocation*.
2. Interpretation that does not relate to the *personality* or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
3. Information is not Interpretation. Interpretation is *revelation* based upon information.
4. Interpretation is an *art* whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a *whole* rather than a part.
6. Interpretation addressed to *children* should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach.

Freeman Tilden was born in 1883 in Massachusetts. His writing career began as a book reviewer for his father's newspaper. Later, he worked as a reporter in Boston, New York, and Charleston. As a novelist and playwright, he traveled around the world, but in the early 1940s, tired of writing fiction, he began to write about the national parks. *The National Parks: What They Mean to You and Me* was published in 1951 and publisher Alfred Knopf called it "the best book ever written" on the parks.

Tilden worked all over the United States with the National Park Service to improve their staff's abilities of interpreting to visitors and was widely revered as a teacher, mentor, and philosopher. His impact on the National Park Service and on the field of interpretation remains strong and relevant to this day.

This quote from *Interpreting our Heritage* amplifies the importance of Naturalists everywhere; "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection."

BLUEBIRD TRAIL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

By Margaret Wester

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer for the bluebird trails in our chapter's region, there are several bluebird trails with many opportunities. This includes opportunities such as bluebird monitoring, nest box construction, installation and maintenance plus helping with managerial duties such as checking over the trail log books, extra nest box checking for problem areas and data entry. Each bluebird trail has a manager that oversees all operations of the bluebird trails and coordinates with volunteers. To volunteer for a trail, you must contact the trail manager.

Below is a listing of the bluebird trails in our region with the managers names and contact information:

Sky Meadows State Park Bluebird Trail - a project of VMN Shenandoah Chapter.
Manager: *Margaret Wester*, contact margaretwester@hotmail.com

Blandy Bluebird Trail - a project of Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, NSVAS.
Manager: *Kaycee Lichliter*, contact kayceelichliter@hotmail.com

Seven Bends State Park Bluebird Trail - a project of Friends of Seven Bends State Park and Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. Manager: *Kaycee Lichliter*, contact kayceelichliter@hotmail.com

Shenandoah River "Andy Guest" State Park Bluebird Trail - a project of Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, NSVAS. Manager: *Lee Bowen*, contact lbowen@ramseytruevalue.com

Volunteer hours for all these bluebird trails is approved for VA Master Naturalists and should be entered under the "bluebird monitoring" category. Contact Alex Newhart for any further instruction on entering hours.

Bluebird training workshops will be held prior to the nesting season. Contact the specific trail manager for further information.



*Eastern Bluebird by Ken Slade
CC BY-NC 2.0*

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAIRIES

by Tim Koppenhaver

Sixty miles northeast of Dallas, Clymer Meadow Preserve is a 1,443-acre haven of natural history and a remnant of one of the world's most at-risk ecosystems – the open prairie. Not long ago, prairie (a.k.a. grassland, savannas & meadows) covered the Great Plains of North America, but now less than 1% remains intact.

Clymer Meadow is managed by **Brandon Belcher**, a Texas Master Naturalist and the pre-eminent Blackland prairie specialist in Texas whose job is to oversee this remnant by utilizing a variety of tactics. Prescribed burns and periodic mowing keep invasives out and allow the diversity of this prairie to flourish. Seed gathering and targeted disbursal helps spread and perpetuate the prairie. And the occasional use of chainsaws, chemicals, or bulldozers help eradicate invasives that have taken hold. All these efforts mimic the natural processes that used to occur when huge herds of Buffalo roamed, and lightning-ignited fires burned freely. It's hard, never-ending work but Brandon attends to his duties with boundless enthusiasm driven by an awareness of this ecosystem's importance.

The decline in our planet's biodiversity is well-known and has placed even more focus on the value of prairies. The number of insects is especially in decline - we've all heard about the *insect apocalypse*. But prairie remnants like Clymer are a push back and provide a safe-haven ecosystem for insects to thrive.

The value of prairies is gaining awareness as measured by the increasing number of conservation associations such as the Native Prairies Association of Texas, and locally, Virginia Working Landscapes. Many states have similar advocacy organizations.

The value of prairies is also finding its way into farming. In the Midwest, prairie strips are now being integrated into row-crop agriculture. Strips of prairie between crop rows increases pollinator profusion, reduces runoff, and holds nutrients. Prairies provide other environmental benefits as well. They act to clean water by carrying precipitation deep into roots which trap and filter both nutrients and sediment, and slow down soil erosion. Prairies are also excellent at carbon sequestration; they essentially are upside-down forests with three-fourths of their biomass underground, making them especially effective at containing carbon. And, of course, prairies provide recreational opportunities too. What birder doesn't love a flowering field in spring?



Clymer Meadow in Celeste, Texas by Tim Koppenhaver

But prairies aren't just solely associated with the Great Plains. They exist all over the world in varying forms – the pampas of South America, the steppe belt of Eurasia, the savannas of Africa, and the grasslands of the Australian Outback. On smaller scales, prairies also have history and existence in nearly every region of Virginia.

Along the coastal barrier islands, a 10,000-acre underwater eelgrass meadow is being managed by a variety of public and private entities. Reaching toward the light, the grass captures carbon storing it in roots on the ocean floor. The grass also provides shelter to a rich aquatic biodiversity and anchors the sediment against the eroding tide.

In the Piedmont, prior to European settlement, extensive grasslands and savannas existed. Many were maintained by frequent burning, either by Native Americans or lightning-started fires. Remnants of the Piedmont prairie can now be found at Fort Pickett and Quantico Marine Bases where frequent ordnance-triggered fires continue to keep the prairie intact.

In the Shenandoah Valley, much of the land used for crops, hay, and grazing today was once prairie before the arrival of European colonists in the 17th century. It was not as we know it today. Like the Piedmont, Native Americans used fire here also to manage the landscape by creating patches of open fields to attract bison and elk, which in turn, also attracted the now-extirpated red wolf.

Statewide on a smaller scale, pockets of prairie can be found under power lines which are subject to regular mowing. And on an even smaller scale there are Riverscour prairies – strips of land routinely scoured bare by flooding. Like prairie strips, these pockets provide a valuable refuge for pollinators.

Though most of the prairie in Virginia has disappeared, various entities protect notable remnants in or near our chapter territory providing naturalists wonderful opportunities for up-close inspections of this vital ecosystem:

Big Meadows near milepost 51 on Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park is a 190-acre mountain top grassy plain laced with hiking trails. It's the largest open space in the park which attracts an amazing variety of plants and animals.



Big Meadow in Autumn by Tim Koppenhaver

Piedmont Memorial Overlook adjoins Sky Meadows State Park and is a 50-acre parcel managed by the Piedmont Environmental Council. It's an active demonstration site for landowners interested in viewing habitat restoration practices and hosts a native meadow, tree and shrub plantings, and a small pine savannah.

Cowbane Natural Area Preserve in Stuarts Draft is a state-managed example of wet & mesic prairies once common in the Shenandoah Valley. For an up-close look, contact property steward Tyler Urgo at the Virginia DCR.

Making Trash Bloom at the Shenandoah County landfill is a Sustainability Matters' initiative repurposing dead land by planting native pollinator and wildlife habitat at the county landfill. Sustainability Matters is also working with the City of Winchester to plant a native meadow/prairie in Jim Barnett Park.

Spring House Farms – Like Brandon Belcher in Texas, our chapter territory is home to similar passionate prairie preservationists – **Jeff & Ali Carithers**. The Carithers bought seventy-two acres near Maurertown in the late 1990s and have been managing it as open prairie since 2002. Jeff was inspired by his father who restored three acres of Iowa land back into prairie. And after the Carithers' Maurertown neighbor informed them that the Shenandoah Valley was once prairie, they became inspired to convert their own land.

To get started, they utilized help from the USDA's Wildlife Habitat Incentive and Conservation Reserve Enhancement programs for streamside tree planting and prairie seed supplies. After years of cycling through prescribed burns, mowing, seed spreading, and a lot of hard work their prairie has fully matured. As Jeff now claims, "it's a giant bird feeder". In addition to attracting woodcock, gold finches and a wide variety of other bird species, there's been a notable increase in deer, bobcat, & turtle populations. Some prairie perennials are now poised to perpetuate for a hundred years and return this small slice of the valley to what it once was.

Emily Dickenson once wrote, *to make a prairie it takes one clover and one bee*. But certainly, the Carithers, Brandon Belcher, and others dedicated to bringing the prairie back know it takes much more. Their efforts and motivations though, are driven by an understanding and appreciation for the vital importance of these beautiful refuges.



Spring House Farms, Maurertown, VA by Jeff Carithers

CONTINUING EDUCATION

DID YOU KNOW... 60% of land in the U.S. is privately held and that 90% of endangered species spend part of their annual cycle on private land? Find out more by watching the “*Human Dimensions of Conservation*” webinar available at the Virginia Working Landscapes website.



VMNs are required to accumulate eight hours per year of continuing education training. You can find continuing education webinars at the VMN website:



BETTER IMPACT TIP

Our chapter maintains a **document library** in Better Impact. This library contains such things as our Chapter Bylaws, Chapter Operating Handbook, the VMN State Volunteer Policy Handbook as the chapters yearly goals and budget. In addition, you will find project and committee reports, the chapter newsletter and minutes from our board and chapter meetings. You can access the library by logging in to Better Impact, then scroll down until you see the Files section on the right-hand side of the page. Click the See All Files button to enter the library.



If you're not already doing so, please consider joining our Chapter's Facebook Group:

www.facebook.com/groups/518874388134005

A lot of great resources and member interactions are shared here.

As are some great photos.

NATURALIST RESOURCES OF NOTE

WILDFLOWER CALENDAR

Shenandoah National Park: www.nps.gov/shen/learn/nature/upload/WildflowerCalendar_Web.pdf

WHAT'S BLOOMING NOW

State Arboretum of Virginia: blandy.virginia.edu/arboretum/what-s-blooming-now

BUGWOOD **(NEW)**

Archive of high-quality educational presentations focused on species of economic concern. Presentations cover invasive species, forestry, agriculture, integrated pest management, plants, insects, diseases, fungi, wildlife, fire, and other natural resource issues, and are reviewed for content and quality. www.presents.bugwood.org

WILDLIFE VIEWING TIPS

Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries:
www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife-watching/respect-wildlife

PHENOLOGY VISUALIZATION TOOLS

From USA National Phenology Network:
<https://data.usanpn.org/vis-tool/#/>

IUCN RED LIST

IUCN's Red List of Ecosystems (RLE) is a global standard for assessing risks to ecosystems.
<https://iucnrle.org/>

NATURESERVE EXPLORER

Provides conservation status, taxonomy, distribution, and life history information for more than 95,000 plants and animals in the United States. <https://explorer.natureserve.org/>

ANSROP

Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs promotes awareness and citizen stewardship of natural resources through science-based education and service programs. <https://anrosp.wildapricot.org/>

CHAPTER PROJECTS OF NOTE

Sky Meadows: Sensory Trail, Outdoor Lab, Pollinator Plot and Bluebird Trails

Bluebird Trail at Blandy Experimental Farm

Lake Frederick Project

Blue Ridge Wildlife Center Volunteering

The Trails at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley

If interested in helping with these projects, please reach out to any of our chapter officers or committee chairs or email us at ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com

PHOTO STORIES

IMAGES CAPTURED BY SHENANDOAH CHAPTER VMNs ALONG WITH DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SPECIES, PHOTO TECHNIQUES, AND OTHER USEFUL TIPS & INFO.



ARTIST: Richard Stromberg

SUBJECT SPECIES: Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

LOCATION: Limberlost Trail, Shenandoah National Park



PHOTOGRAPHER: Richard Hayden

LOCATION: Lake Frederick Trail, Lake Frederick, VA

SPECIES: Star Chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*)

CAMERA: Nikon D7500 with Sigma 105mm F2.8 Macro lens

FAREWELL KEVIN BOWMAN

Thank you to Sky Meadows State Park Manager **Kevin Bowman** for his years as Chapter Advisor. Your thoughtful guidance has been invaluable.

Though we are sad to lose Kevin as our advisor, we are very happy for him as he accepts his new role as Park Manager at the newly created Sweet Run State Park in Hillsboro, Virginia. Congratulations Kevin!



2023 Officers Elected at Annual Meeting

President: Mary Beth Yarbrough

Vice President: Rebecca Harriett

Treasurer: Susan Galbraith

Secretary: Hilary Sortor

PLACES OF NOTE

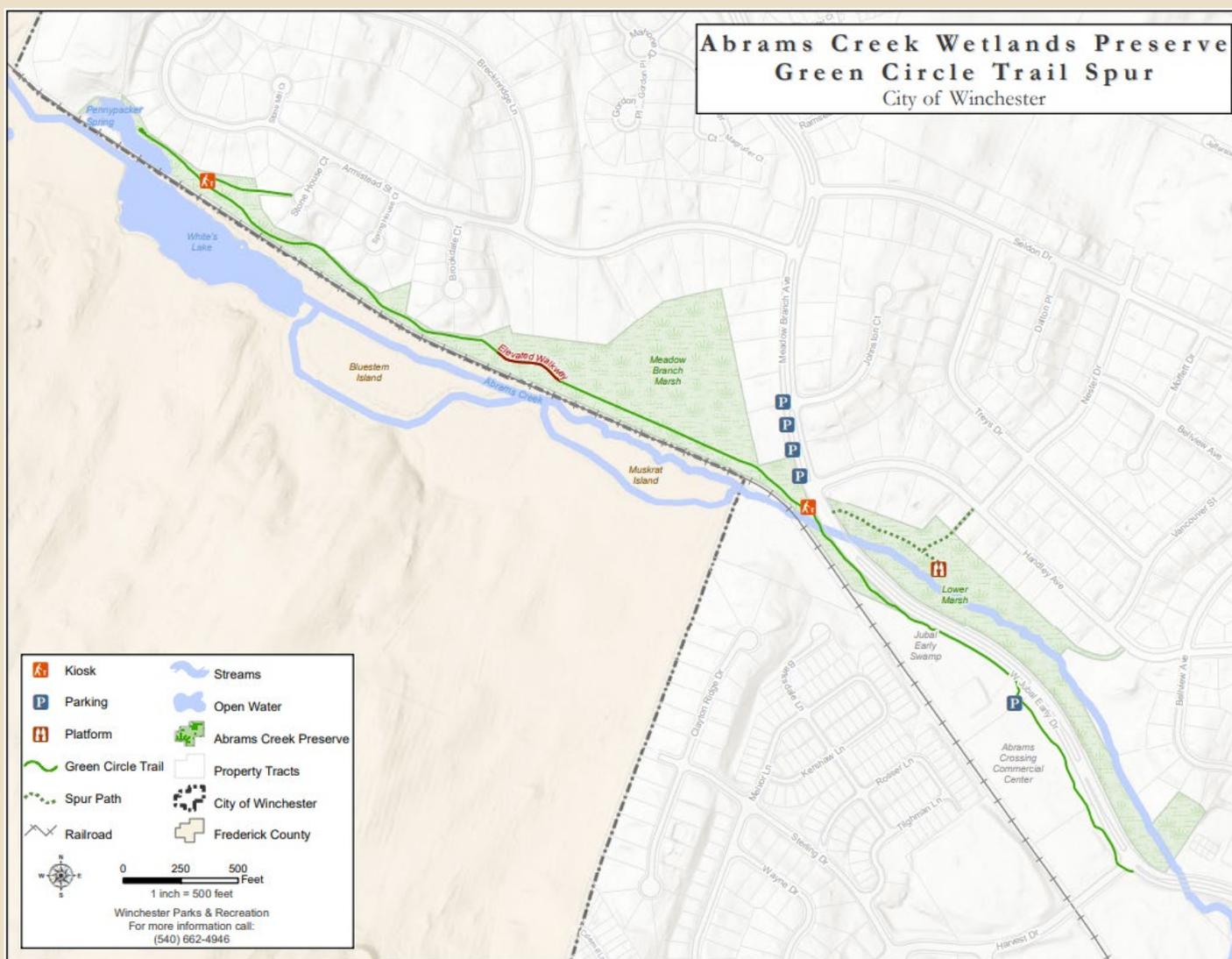
INTERESTING LOCATIONS TO VISIT IN OUR SHENANDOAH CHAPTER TERRITORY

ABRAMS CREEK WETLANDS PRESERVE

Overview

Twenty-five acre preserve with limestone-floored wetland and home to 300 plant species including some on Virginia’s Rare Plants List. The preserve’s variety of habitats attracts over 150 bird species including year-round residents, migrants, summer nesters, and winter visitors. The one-mile paved pathway is spur trail part of the City of Winchester’s Green Circle Trail.

Location





The Virginia Master Naturalist program and the Shenandoah Chapter are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

CONTACT US

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Chapter Email: ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com

President: Mary Beth Yarbrough

Vice President: Rebecca Harriett

Secretary: Hilary Sortor

Treasurer: Susan Galbraith

Education Committee Chair: *Rebecca Harriett*

Membership Committee: *Alex Newhart*

Volunteer Opportunities: *Michelle Fontaine*

Outreach Committee: *Tim Koppenhaver*

Program Committee: *Kelly Macoy*

Sky Meadows Outdoor Lab: *Ed Tobias*

Find us on Facebook by searching “Virginia Master Naturalists Shenandoah Chapter Group”