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Prince William conservation forum to focus on closed public lands

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Posted: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 5:22 pm | Updated: 3:58 pm, Fri Nov 16, 2012.

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According to the Prince William Conservation Alliance, if it's public land, it should be open to the public.

"Public Access to Public Places" is the topic of the conservation group's 2011 Conservation Forum, scheduled for Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the McCoart Administration Building.

Discussion at the forum will focus on the Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge in Woodbridge, Dove's Landing, located along the Occoquan River, and Lake Manassas in Manassas, three publicly owned properties that are currently closed to the public.

Congressman Gerald E. "Gerry" Connolly, D-11th, is one of the featured speakers at the forum and will discuss efforts to open the 325-acre Featherstone refuge to the public.

"We can open this refuge to the public today with virtually no improvements. It is the public's land and the Fish and Wildlife Service concedes that public use is compatible with the protection of wildlife at Featherstone," Connolly said in a statement. "While future improvements for public access to the refuge are welcomed, Featherstone can be accessed safely right now. We need to open Featherstone so Northern Virginians can enjoy this beautiful spot on the Potomac."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a draft conservation plan in January, which recommended opening Featherstone to the public, if "safe and legal public access" can be secured.

MANASSAS, VA

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Clear Humidity: 34%
50° Winds: SSW at 6mph
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The federal government acquired the land that makes up the Featherstone Refuge in the 1970s, but it has never been open to the public.

Speakers at the conservation forum will also talk about Dove's Landing, a 225-acre property on the Occoquan River which Prince William County has owned since 1996, and Lake Manassas, an 800-acre lake owned by Manassas which has been closed to the public for several years.

In addition to Connolly, speakers include Rob Hartwell, chairman of the Elizabeth Hartwell Environmental Education Fund, Mike Kane, a land conservation officer with the Piedmont Environmental Council and Chairman of the Washington Smart Growth Alliance Conservation Program and Charlie Grymes, chairman of the Prince William Conservation Alliance.

The program is sponsored by the Prince William Conservation Alliance, Prince William Wildflower Society, Piedmont Environmental Council, Northern Virginia Bird Club, Sierra Club, Audubon Society of Northern Virginia and Audubon Naturalist Society.

Staff writer Amanda Stewart can be reached at 703-530-3908.

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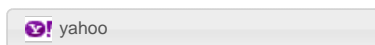
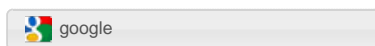
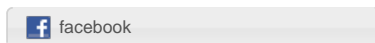
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