



Prince William Conservation Alliance

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2010 in Review

This has been an extraordinary year for the Prince William Conservation Alliance! Thanks to the generous support from people like you, our programs continue to advance stewardship goals Countywide and served a record number of people in 2010.

Despite recent economic challenges, PWCA remains wholly committed to protecting our valuable natural areas, and creating exceptional education and stewardship opportunities. We cannot do it without you and are asking our supporters to help continue PWCA's important stewardship programs. Your donations directly support Prince William Conservation Alliance programs. Please keep reading for an overview of our activities and successes this year.

Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area

Merrimac Farm was permanently protected in January 2008 through a partnership between the Prince William Conservation Alliance, Marine Corps Base Quantico and the VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries. This unique partnership is used as a model for the Military Encroachment Partnering Program and we were honored to present information on this success at the Sustaining Military Readiness Conference.

This year we added approximately 200 feet of boardwalk through two floodplain wetlands along the Bluebell Trail. The boardwalks protect high quality natural areas from foot traffic and keep our feet dry and warm. We also produced a trail map, helping visitors make the most of their visit to Merrimac Farm.

After three years, PWCA wildlife surveys continue to improve our knowledge of resident species. We sponsor Wildlife Mapping workshops, compile species information and make this information available to the public on our website. We want everyone to have easy access to information about local flora and fauna... and many memorable wildlife watching experiences.

PWCA sponsors the Merrimac Farm Master Naturalist Program, which has provided a 50-hour training program to more than 30 Northern Virginia residents. We sponsor the annual Nokesville Christmas Bird Count for the Audubon Society's Nationwide citizen science event.

Annual Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm WMA – A New Community Tradition

Nearly 700 people enjoyed nature walks, examined frogs and turtles, and viewed paintings and photos from local artists at the Third Annual Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm. Interpretative tours led by PWCA members and supporting organizations covered a diversity of habitats and birding hotspots on the way to the floodplain, where Virginia Bluebells carpet the Cedar Run shoreline for more than one mile. The Fourth Annual Bluebell Festival is planned for April 10, 2010... mark your calendar now for this fun event!

Bluebird Trails

We are helping keep Bluebirds common and maintaining biodiversity at Merrimac Farm and Chinn Park. We have 11 nesting boxes at Chinn Park and 16 at Merrimac Farm. PWCA volunteers monitor the boxes to make sure all is well, track progress and record information about what's happening in each nesting box. This year, more than 50 new Bluebirds (and a few Chickadees) fledged from nesting boxes at these trails.

Community Forums

Last spring PWCA hosted a Conservation Forum, bringing together Federal, state and local decision makers to discuss the challenges and opportunities for preserving natural areas in Northern Virginia. Speakers included 11th District Congressman Gerry Connolly; PWC Supervisor Michael May; VA Land Conservation Foundation Director Robert Davenport; VA Land Conservation Coordinator Sarah Richardson; VA Outdoor Foundation Director Bob Lee.

A crowd of 75 interested and influential people attended, contributing information and ideas that created a lively community discussion. This Forum facilitated an open conversation that covered a variety of stakeholder interests. We plan to build on this noteworthy success by offering a similar program during the coming year to increase community dialogue.

1st Thursday Speaker Series

This popular program creates an opportunity for nature lovers to gather and learn more about a variety of topics ranging from black bears to global climate change and sustainable beekeeping. Topics for 2011 include Saving the Nighttime Environment with Milt Roney, Dark Skies Assoc. and an update on EPA mandates to save the Bay with Norm Goulet, NVRC Occoquan Program Manager.

Presentations for Community Groups

PWCA provides presentations on a range of topics, including Saving the Bay One Backyard at a Time, Nearby Nature – Discover Wildlife Close to Home, and The Shape of the Future in Northern Virginia. This year we met with more than 20 community groups throughout Northern Virginia and look forward to meeting with new groups in the coming year.

Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge

For the Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge, 2010 marks the 40th anniversary of public ownership with no public access. This year Prince William Conservation Alliance worked to create a partnership supporting public access to the Featherstone Refuge for wildlife-dependent recreation. Together with our partner organizations, we wrote a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expressing concern about current impacts and offering support for opening the refuge. This effort attracted the support of 11th District Congressman Gerry Connolly and created momentum for publication of the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), the first step to opening the refuge. Currently the draft CCP is scheduled for publication in January. We plan to follow through in support of opening the Featherstone to the public in a manner that protects the quality of this important natural area.

Community Engagement – The Long Game

Prince William Conservation Alliance supports community efforts to help protect our quality of life and build momentum to move the County into the 21st Century. Public parkland is a priority and we continue efforts to ensure that the quality of natural areas on Park Authority properties is preserved. Last year we acted quickly to address serious stormwater problems created during the construction of new ball fields at Hellwig Park as well as the Park Authority's proposal to use bonds approved by voters for parkland acquisition for development of an unnecessary back entrance to Hellwig Park.

When globally rare plant communities were discovered at Silver Lake Park, we initiated discussions between the School Board and the Park Authority in hopes these natural areas could be protected. Although the natural areas were discovered too late in the development process and were not protected, we carried this example to the

Community Engagement – The Long Game *(Cont'd)*

Environment Chapter update, where new policies recognize the importance of identifying unique resources early in the process.

We acted to preserve the Rural Crescent, including support for community opposition to the Avendale development proposal to remove 175 acres from this “protected” rural area, and plan to continue responding to current events in the coming year.

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Webpage, Blog and E-Newsletter

PWCA online publications provide up to date information and timely articles on nearby nature, local land use choices, and Federal, state and local conservation topics. Work and family keeps us busy, leaving little time to research current issues and opportunities. Our online resources provide people with a one-stop opportunity to learn about current issues and upcoming opportunities to create a bright future for local communities.

Chesapeake Bay TMDL – New Mandates to Save the Bay

After decades of empty promises, the EPA has finally established pollution “caps” for states that drain to the Bay. These “caps” limit the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment we can send into local waterways. The recent Environment Chapter update created a first opportunity for the County to start moving in the right direction. PWCA actively participated in this opportunity, working to strengthen standards that prevent pollution and create the positive framework needed for the County to achieve the new Federal goals.

Developers opposed our efforts and they were successful in removing some but not all of the stronger standards included in the draft plan, delaying implementation of new rules that will be needed to achieve the new EPA mandates. Meeting the new goals established by EPA will be a significant challenge in Prince William and we look forward to being leaders in that process.

It's been a good year!

We have had many successes and we are looking forward to exciting opportunities in the coming year. Prince William Conservation Alliance is able to continue our mission thanks to the generosity of our supporters.

Your generous donations help preserve our cherished resources, protecting land for present and future generations. Thank you for your thoughtful and substantial support of the Prince William Conservation Alliance. We wish you and your family a holiday season filled with joy and peace.