

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Banshee Reeks: Our Last Best Hope

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy member Anne Hocker wrote the following letter to the editors of local newspapers

A well-known radical thinker of earlier times noted: "For if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another might be lost, until the whole of things will vanish by piecemeal." This wild-eyed tree-hugger was Thomas Jefferson.

For the 18 years I have lived here, I have watched the piecemeal loss of wild and natural places in Loudoun County. Although growth was predicted, and perhaps inevitable, it has nonetheless destroyed many of the features that drew people to its beauty in the first place. It won't be too many years before a farm with woods, marshes, and open fields will be something depicted in a museum. There will be a few holdouts, of course, but their land will not be available for the public to walk on.

We have virtually no public land west of what is known as "eastern Loudoun" to keep intact for us and future generations to enjoy some quiet reflection, walk in the woods, sit by a stream, or wonder at the teeming life of the wetlands.

We have many ballfields, tennis courts, and associated high-intensity lights blazing up into the night sky, but little if any public land to simply enjoy because it is the way it is.

Organized softball, soccer, and other team sports are important for our youth, but they should be placed in the developments and towns where the players live. They should be part of the plan of the neighborhood, which includes schools, shopping, and transportation corridors.

When discussing public land, "active recreation" is the primary consideration. Some of us still consider a walk in the woods to be active recreation, but this quiet and solitude precludes walking around a ball field. Because Banshee Reeks does not include protective easements does not mean that it must be developed. A county administration with vision would plan for both needs, while realizing that the two uses cannot be effectively joined in the same parcel.

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*Recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country,
but of building receptivity into the still-unlovely human mind.*

– Aldo Leopold, "Sand County Almanac"

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible.

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A Word from the President

A Jewel Worth Preserving

Over the past year the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has been fortunate enough to lead several field trips to Banshee Reeks. Every one of our visits has included people who have never seen Banshee Reeks before and it is sheer pleasure to see the look of wonder and delight when they see its expanse for the first time. It has a mix of habitat from upland forests to Goose Creek. In between one finds meadows, ponds and wet forests, one of our area's most rapidly disappearing habitats. It is home to all kinds of flora and fauna. It is as fine and rich an example of Virginia's Piedmont as one can find. There is little doubt amongst us that Banshee Reeks is a jewel worth keeping.

We have watched kestrels on several occasions convince considerably larger red-tailed hawks to leave the vicinity of their nest. We have found numerous butterflies, caterpillars and wildflowers. On one trip we found otter tracks on a sand bar in the Goose Creek. On a planning visit before a November field trip we watched a northern harrier criss-cross a field covered in goldenrod as it hunted for its evening meal. In February on a forested slope we found the most impressive series of beaver ponds any of us had ever seen. Marching down that one slope are at least a dozen different beaver ponds. One evening, as we were driving out of what could become Loudoun County's premier park, if we are wise stewards, there was a *black bear*.

Loudoun County is a truly beautiful place, a place whose natural history and beauty is seriously endangered. Banshee Reeks is an absolutely delightful example of Loudoun's beauty, with its two miles of Goose Creek frontage, its open fields, and its hundreds of acres of mature forest. It is worth preserving as a natural state park. If we do not preserve it as it is today, if we build on it, future generations will be the poorer for not knowing it as it is today. Banshee Reeks needs to be kept as a natural park so future generations can learn from it.

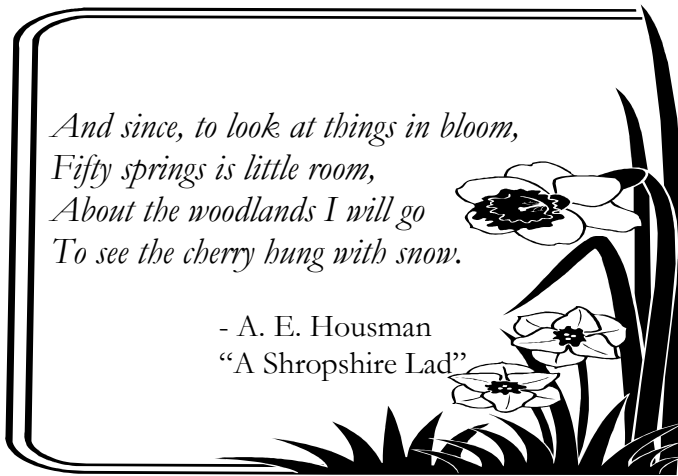
And Banshee Reeks gives us a special opportunity as the Dulles Wetlands border it and historic Oatlands almost does— attracting rare and uncommon birds. This gives the County an opportunity to preserve a significantly large amount of open space at its center. Except for a small naturalist center and a trail system, Banshee Reeks should be maintained in its current state. Tomorrow's residents and children should have the opportunity to visit this beautiful park and explore its wonders, to see how land can be kept healthy and plentiful.

(Continued on page 3)

A Word... Continued from page 2

Anne Arundel County has its Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary and Fairfax County has Huntley Meadows, its largest park. Both of these are natural parks; they attract thousands of visitors and hundreds of students on classroom visits every year. Someone, a long time ago, had the vision to set aside these places.

We hope that the residents and staff of Loudoun County will do the same with Banshee Reeks.



My Two Cents. . . .

I grew up in Montgomery County, Maryland — back then Gaithersburg was the *sticks* — with farms, fields and woodlands being the major, if not only, features of the land. Today, however, there is not one farm left. The roads have been improved — four lanes in each direction — allowing you to get to where you’re going even faster. Shopping malls abound, resplendent with parking lots as far as the eye can see. The little green space remaining has houses, townhouses, and apartments crowded on it — real tight-knit communities — you can get to know your neighbors without ever leaving the comfort of your living room. That’s the life... every imaginable convenience is just right around the corner.

Call us crazy, but my husband and I moved to Loudoun County to get away from the development that was taking place. And to be able to leave the frantic pace of urban/suburban living behind at the end of the day. Yet, once again we are faced with the same situation. The farms around us are being turned into housing developments; roads are being improved or added; and the few parcels of public land are being converted into recreational “Mecca’s” with ballfields, swimming pools, and parking lots.

I moved *out to the country* because I didn’t want these things in my backyard! Do you?

— Leslie McCasker

Speak Out, Conservancy Members!

All the members of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy are urged to write, call, e-mail, drop-in, and generally pester your supervisors, and Cindy Walsh (Parks and Recreation):

Government Center
1 Harrison Street
Leesburg, VA 20175
(703) 777-0204

*Speak out for saving this precious piece of habitat
before it’s too late!*

Our Last Best Hope — Continued from page 1

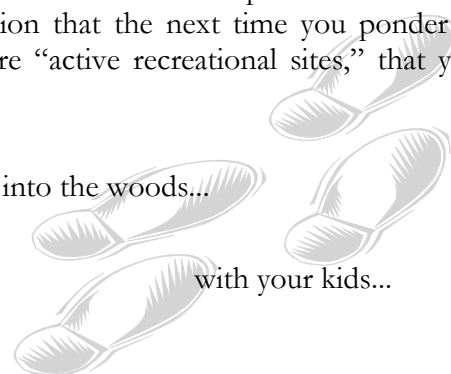
There are popular undeveloped parks in the Washington/Baltimore corridor, in which we are now included. Huntley Meadows is an oasis and draws thousands of visitors every year. Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary in Ann Arundel county in Maryland is another. In spite of the number of their visitors, they allow space and privacy without the distractions of yelling crowds, loudspeakers, and mercury vapor lights.

If we don’t act now, decisively, the opportunity will never come again to preserve this unique part of Loudoun’s legacy. Future acquisitions of land should be sought with ball fields and other public activities as their focus. Allow Banshee Reeks the dignity of remaining a natural place, where wildlife and environmental education can remind of us of a different world.

I would respectfully suggest to the County Supervisors and the Department of Parks and Recreation that the next time you ponder the need for more “active recreational sites,” that you take a hike...

into the woods...

with your kids...



Our Children Need More than Ballfields

From remarks made by Conservancy member Maria Ruth at the hearing on Banshee Reeks in May

On behalf of the mothers in Loudoun County, I urge the Department of Parks and Recreation to keep Banshee Reeks a natural park for children growing up here. Like many mothers - and fathers too - I am a devoted user of Parks & Rec facilities throughout the county. We enjoy the playgrounds, preschool, and classes at the community centers; we take walks and nature classes at Claude Moore Park; we play baseball and soccer on fields throughout the county; we have eagerly awaited the opening of the pool at Franklin Park. Parks & Rec places are happy, lively places for children.

But children need places where they can be silent. They need places where they can sit and listen to the sounds of nature, see the stars in a dark and unpolluted sky, watch a hawk or a caterpillar. They need wild places beyond the lines of ball fields, past the playground equipment, and beyond the reach of paved sidewalks and bike trails. Banshee Reeks can be such a place, especially for our young children.

My husband and I took our four- and six-year-old sons on the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's "Beavers at Banshee" in March. For three hours we walked along a small tributary of Goose Creek marveling at the beavers' work -- more than 15 dams and small ponds in a secluded woodland. My children (and most of the adults) had never seen anything like it. They are still talking about the dams, the ponds, the felled trees, the teeth-marks. At the end of the walk we all sat in stillness and silence, hoping to see one of the beavers emerge. But our mere presence, and the occasional whispered comment or footstep, were enough to

keep the shy beavers in their lodge. Imagine what impact ball fields and parking lots will have on the beavers and the other wildlife.

We have returned to Banshee Reeks with our children and their young friends. The children never fail to discover some treasure here - a clutch of Canada goose eggs in a downy nest, swarms of tadpoles at a pond's edge, salamanders, toads, fresh piles of chewed tree trunks. And they are transformed by their discoveries in this natural place. They become quiet, keen observers and respectful listeners.

I urge the Department of Parks and Recreation to show restraint as they plan the future of Banshee Reeks. Yes, it is important to learn the rules of soccer, how to take turns on the swings, what sportsmanship means — but not at Banshee Reeks. This should be the place to learn how the natural world works.

The existing home on the property could become a nature center to interpret Banshee Reeks for young children. In Leesburg, we have the wonderful Smithsonian Naturalist Center for scientific discovery — but it is not open to children under ten years old. Ten years old is too late. You must captivate children when they are much younger. You must show your infant the full moon. You must take your toddlers outside when it's dark — away from the lights of the towns and ball fields --- and turn their heads to the stars. You must take your preschoolers by the hand and lead them into the forest.

The children of Loudoun County need Banshee Reeks to learn these lessons and to feel that vital connection to all living things.

*One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.*

Did you know...

that only 1% of U.S.
land is protected as
wilderness



LOUDOUN STREAM MONITORING PROJECT

Classes and Programs

The water quality of Loudoun County's streams is integral to the well-being of local wildlife and can serve as an accurate indicator of overall ecosystem health. Most of Loudoun County's streams support diverse communities of aquatic life. Streams and their associated shoreline habitats provide shelter, forage, and movement corridors for local animals, and are also used by many of the migratory species that make their seasonal journeys across our landscape.

As our volunteer base grows, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, in partnership with the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS), the Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District (LSWCD) and the North Fork Goose Creek Watershed Project, plans to establish stream monitoring teams for every watershed in Loudoun County. This program is made possible, in part, by a grant to ANS from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, financed through sale of Chesapeake Bay license plates.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION I

Section 1: Tuesday, September 29 (7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) at the *Leesburg Safety Center*. Sign up required.

Section 2: Saturday, October 3 (10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.) at the *Smithsonian Naturalist Center*. Sign up required.

Benthic macro-invertebrates, those boneless creatures that live under flowing water, are important indicators of the health of a stream system. Learn how to identify the major groups of these organisms, including aquatic insects and crustaceans, to the taxonomic level of order (e.g. *Plecoptera* or stoneflies).

Note: The September 29 class will be classroom only, the class on February 21 will combine both classroom and field instruction, weather permitting. When registering, specify the session you are interested in and an alternate, if possible.

MONITORING PROTOCOL PRACTICUM

Saturday, November 7 (10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.) at the *Smithsonian Naturalist Center*. Sign up required.

Using the data collection protocol developed for the ANS Water Quality Monitoring Project, participants will learn how to gather abiotic data (temperature, pH, and several habitat assessments) and use a D-frame net to collect stream organisms. The practicum will be conducted at a stream in Loudoun County.

HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Saturday, November 14 (9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.) meet at the *LSWCD office*. Sign up required

The habitat surrounding a stream has a large effect on the health of the aquatic ecosystem. Learn to identify different habitat features affecting water quality. This class will be held at several streams in Loudoun County.

PROTECTING LOUDOUN'S STREAMS AND WATERWAYS

If you are interested in becoming a stream monitor, please fill in the following form and mail it to:

Stream Monitoring Project
c/o Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District Office
30-H Catoctin Circle, SE
Leesburg, VA 20175

or call: (703) 777-2075.

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

List the Classes and Dates you are interested in:

Class	1st Choice	2nd Choice

List the Stream you are interested in monitoring:

1st Choice	2nd Choice

If neither of those streams are available are you willing to help monitor a site designated by the Project? q Yes q No

Are you interested in being one of our Team Leaders? q Yes q No

Would you be interested in helping us with some of our administrative functions (typing, maintaining our database, or record-keeping)? q Yes q No

Banshee Reeks: *A Mother's-Eye View*

I have raised three children. I was lucky that most of the time I could raise them in the country. The country of south-central Pennsylvania three seasons of the year and, in the summer, Loudoun County. The old Loudoun County — just 20 years ago or so.

During the school year they played team sports. Back in those days team sports were school-sponsored and took place on school grounds. The lack of supervised public places to play organized ball games outside of school, year round, didn't bother parents or, apparently, warp my children or their friends, who would have been outraged at such adult intervention in their free months.

They were too busy. They messed around in the creek, constructed wilderness forts, caught sunfish and occasional bass, tried to tame orphan raccoons or squirrels and got bitten, collected butterflies and beetles and stones, built dams and watched them wash away, launched a raft on the pond and went bravely down with the ship, fell out of rickety tree-houses, brought me questionable snakes for

identification, pretended to be Crazy Horse or Davy Crockett, and learned the hard way that poison ivy has three pointed leaves.

Must we assume that all our children's best futures lie in the field of team sports and they need know nothing else?

If the children of Loudoun today have no place to learn what my children learned - if they must do nothing but kick or throw balls under adult supervision all through their childhood - then I am grieved for them, and grateful that my own were born earlier.

— Barbara Holland



*All the arts lose virtue
Against the essential reality
Of creatures going about their business among the equally
Earnest elements of nature.*

— Robinson Jeffers

!!

IF YOU'RE NOT A MEMBER, PLEASE JOIN US.

IF YOU ARE, PLEASE BRING A FRIEND.

Yes, I would like to join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and help keep the county a place where people and wildlife can live in harmony.

Name: _____
 Street: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

Membership Fees:

- q \$10 Student
- q \$20 Individual
- q \$30 Family
- q \$75 Corporate
- q \$200 Individual Lifetime
- q \$300 Family Lifetime
- q Additional Donation \$_____

Please mail to:

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
P.O. Box 2088
Purcellville, VA 20134-2088

Please make checks payable to The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Contributions are tax deductible.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

SNAKES: An Introduction to Our Local Snakes. **Thursday, September 24, 1998, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Liam McGranaghan will present a slide show on the snakes one is likely to see here, especially in the month of September. He will discuss these creatures that so many of us are both fascinated and frightened of and explain why they are a valuable part of the world around us.

IDENTIFYING TREES: Class and Field Trip. **Saturday, October 10, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center and Banshee Reeks.** Enjoy the Fall foliage as you learn how to identify our local trees near the peak of their autumn display with Carrie Blair, past president of the Piedmont Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society, Master Gardener and Tour Guide with the State Arboretum. After the class at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center we will visit Banshee Reeks to identify the trees we learned about that morning. Bring field guides, binoculars and lunch. *Sign up required - Call Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542.*

IDENTIFYING HAWKS: Class. **Thursday, October 29, 1998, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Liam McGranaghan, avid falconer and hawk bander, will describe how to identify the hawks we are likely to see during the field trip on Saturday. He will describe how you can identify a hawk from their field marks, their behavior and the calls they make.

IDENTIFYING HAWKS: Field Trip. **Saturday, October 31, 1998, 10:00 a.m. at Snicker's Gap.** Liam McGranaghan will help us identify hawks using the field marks we learned at the Rust Library. The parking lot at Snicker's Gap, where Route 7, crosses the Blue Ridge Mountains is the closest hawk watching count site in our area and depending on the weather we are likely to see several varieties of hawks as they migrate through. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will be responsible for keeping that day's count. *Sign up required - Call Phil Daley at 540-338-6528.*

TIMBER RATTLESNAKES. **Tuesday, November 17, 1998, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library.** Marty Martin, who has studied these fascinating creatures for years, will describe their natural history and explain why we should ensure their future. While the timber rattlesnake is poisonous, unlike some other rattlesnake species, it has a docile manner, and will seldom strike unless stepped on or directly provoked. *This program is co-sponsored by the Rust Library.*

And in December, join us as the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy participates in its second **Christmas Bird Count** on **Sunday, December 27, 1998.**