

WHAT DOES RESILIENCE LOOK LIKE? A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM.

BY: **GAIL FARMER**

We typically use the front page of the newsletter to highlight on-the-ground conservation programs and projects. However, this year is anything but typical and I want to use this space to highlight how our staff have stewarded your dollars and shepherded our mission during a very tough time.

2020 has been a challenging year by any measure and the word I keep hearing is resilience, the ability to recover quickly from difficulties. The question is, what makes an organization resilient? 2020 has taught me that a key ingredient for resilience is a high performing team. The pandemic had already demonstrated our team's ability to pivot, collaborate, and innovate in the face of change and uncertainty. Tropical Storm Isaias put them to the test once again.

The prevailing wisdom about flooding at the Four Mills Barn was that it occurred during hurricanes, typically after several days of intense rainfall, and that the Barn begins to flood when stream gauge height reaches 13'. The Barn

was prepared to handle 3" of floodwaters, and according to a longtime staff member, this exceeded our past high water mark. Isaias broke all the rules. The Barn flooded within hours of the storm's arrival, the property began flooding before stream volumes reached 13', and 10" of water entered the first floor.

For the second time this year, our team faced an unprecedented crisis and they responded quickly, courageously, and with thought and care towards our mission, our community, and each other. Conservation staff came in before the storm and moved all of the toxic liquids from the floor of the garage and placed them out of reach of any potential flood waters, preventing a toxic spill as part of the outfall of the flood. They also moved our two vehicles to higher ground, saving us tens of thousands of dollars in replacement vehicles. I was receiving emails and texts from staff, volunteers, neighbors and board members with real-time status-reports and photographs of the trails, the Barn, our Evans-Mumbower Mill, and a stream restoration site. These reports were critical to helping us prioritize our response. Staff from our



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

engagement team had the presence of mind to see this storm as an opportunity to talk about stormwater management and they sent a press release to area media outlets before the 5 o'clock news cycle. Thanks to their quick thinking, I was speaking with an Inquirer reporter that night and two more reporters the next day.

By 5:00pm the flood waters receded and a small group of staff headed over to the Barn to assess the damage. We knew we needed to get the remaining water (2-3") out of the building as quickly as possible to reduce damages. So for the next three hours we swept the water out of the barn, cleaned the silt off the floors, moved all of the wet furniture

(See "Resilience," page 2)



PHOTO: JAMIE STEWART

RESILIENCE



PHOTO: GAIL FARMER

Flooding at Four Mills Barn.

and files outdoors and set-up fans to run overnight. This effort most certainly saved the organization critical dollars that are much better spent on our mission.

At a time when it would have been understandable for staff to simply watch the crisis unfold from their home offices, our team took action and centered their response around this unspoken question “what can we do to protect and advance our mission in the face of this crisis?” When a whole team is operating from this point of view, recovery begins the moment the crisis begins.

Our team’s unity, commitment, and accountability to a shared goal, our mission, has been the indispensable fuel sustaining our recovery from every challenge we have faced. When it comes to resilience, dollars are often necessary but a high performing team is priceless.

Another key ingredient of resilience is community. As soon as our friends and supporters got word of the flood, we were gifted with incredible support. Fans and dehumidifiers were loaned to us, generous offers of help, and critical donations came pouring in. Thank you for joining us in our flood response, recovery, and resilience efforts. To learn more about our flood resilience plan, visit the News section of WissahickonTrails.org.

Dear Friends & Supporters,

2020 has been an unforgettable year, and I want to share some of the ways that the events of this year have created positive change and growth for Wissahickon Trails.

When the novel coronavirus caused us to close our offices and cancel our programs and events, our team quickly pivoted to virtual engagement. Their creativity and innovation with this effort paid off. Our virtual programming has been successful beyond what we hoped for. Registrations for our virtual programming have been off the charts, and this surge of registrations has brought 81 first-time participants to us and 31 first-time supporters. Before the pandemic, we had not considered virtual programming as part of our tool kit for engaging the community. Because of the pandemic, we have learned that virtual programming can add significant value and it will continue to be a part of our engagement opportunities into the future.

During the social unrest that followed the death of George Floyd, we listened closely to the stories of Black and brown birders, naturalists, scientists, and hikers to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which systemic and individual racism negatively impacts their experience of the outdoors and their participation in conservation. It has been well documented* that the conservation movement in the US is dominated by white, upper-middle class Americans. Although 29% of the workforce in the sciences and engineering are people of color, non-white minorities do not exceed 16% of staff at environmental organizations nationwide. Statistics for board of directors at environmental nonprofits are even worse. In most cases, the demographics of the local community are not reflected in the demographics of environmental organizations.

The country is becoming increasingly diverse, it is estimated that by 2045, minority groups will constitute the majority of the population. If we don’t do something differently now, that diversity gap in conservation is only going to widen, and to the detriment of our mission. Therefore, it is essential to our long-term viability and mission-success that we do better at engaging people of color in our organization and mission. Our board and our staff have committed ourselves to this work as a strategic priority. We are asking ourselves: What needs to change? How should we be doing things differently? We know that this work towards racial equity and inclusion is challenging and we appreciate that it is a long-term effort. We are excited about this work because we recognize that investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion is an investment in the strength of our mission today, tomorrow, and into the future.

2020 is a year of change and challenges, but by asking the right questions and centering our response on the strength of our mission, change and challenges are transformed into growth and wisdom.

*Taylor, D. (2014). *The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.



Staff during a Zoom call.

We recognize that investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion is an investment in the strength of our mission today, tomorrow, and into the future.

Gail Farmer



PROJECT UPDATES

Bridge at Briar Hill Preserve

BY: **JANIS LEHRER**



Thanks to donations from more than 50 trail users and a matching gift from Horseways, we raised adequate funds for a new footbridge across one of the creek crossings at Briar Hill Preserve in Ambler. Volunteers and staff completed the bridge this August, which means the bridge is ready and waiting for you to visit!

Briar Hill Preserve—and the adjacent Cheston Family Preserve at Briar Hill—is located

next to Whitpain Township's Prophecy Creek Park. The trails at Briar Hill are forested and shady, which makes this a great hike for a warmer day. Wildlife is abundant here, and you can see and hear a variety of bird species, amphibians, butterflies, and red foxes.

Briar Hill Preserve is a living testament to what a community can accomplish when working together. Since 1981, Wissahickon Trails has been working with individuals and community partners to protect the area along Prophecy Creek. Thanks to these collective efforts, Briar Hill is part of a 200-acre contiguous stretch of open space along Prophecy Creek. Owing to this protected open space, the Prophecy Creek is the healthiest tributary to the Wissahickon.

Stream Smart House Calls Berm Installation

BY: **LINDSAY BLANTON**

Last fall, our Stream Smart program installed its first big project with homeowners who live next to the Sandy Run headwaters in Abington.

Landscape designer, NativeScapes, created two beautiful rain gardens and a large bioswale through two neighboring yards, which soaks up runoff from over an acre of suburban area, and manages over 1,500,000 gallons of stormwater per year! If you are a Roychester Park neighbor, visit streamsmarthousecalls.org to learn more.



New Website & Trail Finding Tools

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**



In April, we launched our new website and trail finding tools. The focus of the website is to connect people with the land and waterways of the Wissahickon. There are many ways to create a connection, such as visiting a preserve, volunteering, donating, making your yard wildlife and rainwater friendly and so much more. Additionally, you will find new and improved trail finding tools. On our homepage, we created an interactive map to help find the right preserve for you. On our preserve pages, we offer preserve highlights, how to access the preserve, downloadable maps, and a Google Map.

10 New Trail Maps

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

We're thrilled to share that a new set of preserve maps is ready to hit the trails! We now have downloadable and printer-friendly maps for the Green Ribbon Trail, Armentrout Preserve, Briar Hill & Cheston Preserve, Camp Woods, Crossways Preserve, Dodsworth Run Preserve, Four Mills Nature Reserve, Penllyn Natural Area, Piszek Preserve, and Willow Lake Farm.



Through conversations and surveys from the past several years, it was identified that creating new trail maps is a top priority for our community. Providing tools to access and enjoy these protected lands is at the heart of our mission.

This initiative to update our maps was made possible by the generosity of 88 donors from our community and funding from Merck & Co., Inc.

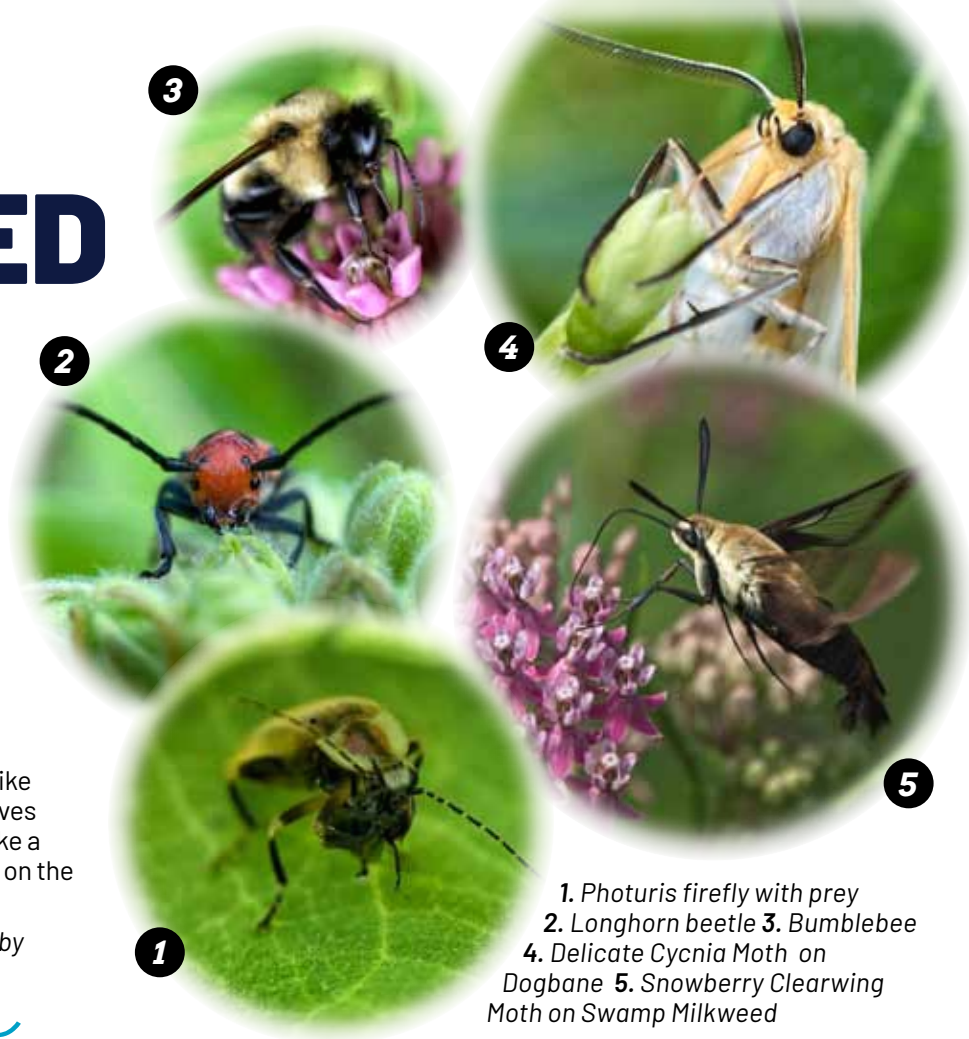
You can find these maps on each of our preserve pages on our website under "Find Your Trail".

IN THE MILKWEED PATCH

BY: KRISTY MORLEY

Milkweed isn't just for monarchs! Milkweed patches support a large cast of fascinating characters. Some, like the bumblebee or the clearwing moth, visit the flowers of the milkweeds for nectar or to collect pollen for food. By visiting other flowers, they help pollinate the flowers, to ensure seeds are produced for the next generation of plants. Others, like the longhorn beetle eat the leaves, stems or seeds of the milkweed, and some are drawn to the abundance of available prey, like the Photuris firefly. They use the milkweed leaves as cover to find their unsuspecting targets. Take a look at a milkweed patch next time you are out on the trails, you never know what you might find!

All photos were taken at Crossways Preserve by Kristy Morley.



1. Photuris firefly with prey
2. Longhorn beetle 3. Bumblebee
4. Delicate Cynia Moth on Dogbane 5. Snowberry Clearwing Moth on Swamp Milkweed

HERE COMES THE RAIN AGAIN FIGHTING STORMWATER ONE CONSERVATION PROJECT AT A TIME

Excerpt of an article written in partnership with Friends of the Wissahickon for the Weavers Way Co-op Shuttle

With more frequent, significant rain events, like this summer's Hurricane Isaias, a well-functioning watershed is vitally important. Watersheds capture, store, and slowly release

rainfall into a body of water, such as a creek, stream, or river. Continuous development within the 64-square-mile area of the Wissahickon Watershed in Montgomery and Philadelphia counties exponentially increases surface runoff and overland flow. This increased flow we see during and after storm events erodes the streambanks throughout the watershed, adding sediment and pollution to the Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries.

To address the impact of this growing challenge, Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) and Wissahickon Trails continue to work with our regional partners and invest millions of dollars in capital improvements throughout the Wissahickon watershed.

For example, Wissahickon Trails is spearheading the Wissahickon Headwaters Stream and Riparian Restoration Project which will restore

and stabilize the stream channel and reconnecting it with its floodplain along 1,775 linear feet of the Wissahickon Creek in the PECO Right-of-Way power line corridor. Working with PECO on the project, as well as partners Upper Gwynedd Township and Merck, Wissahickon Trails will be able to turn this property along a highly eroded stretch of the Creek into an actual floodplain, which will slow down the force of the water and allow it to percolate into the ground, catching it where it hits, instead of flowing downstream. Flood tolerant plantings will be installed, which, over time, will look and work as a functioning ecosystem.

Visit wissahickontrails.org/news to read the full article and learn more about FOW's capital improvements downstream.



Headwaters Restoration Site.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT: ALLISON WOLF

PHOTO: ALLISON WOLF

BY: **ANNA MARCHINI**

Allison Wolf is a local real estate agent whose business was affected during the first few months of the pandemic. As someone who enjoyed our trail system for many years, this new found time allowed her to get on the trails five days per week as a "salvation during those early days". Allison, a professed bird nerd, ventured out and explored parts of the trails she never had before and took advantage of the different times of day she had available. "The evenings have been a spectacular time to be hiking because you can catch an amazing sunset," Allison told us.

Naturally civic-minded, Allison understands the value of giving back to your community. Not only is Allison a long-time donor to Wissahickon Trails, she makes a donation in honor of new homeowners so that they, too, can explore what's in their own backyards. "Everyone is busy and may not know about Wissahickon Trails. I'm happy to share something that I'm so passionate about with new people and see them get involved."

NATURE, ALWAYS AVAILABLE



PHOTO: BARBARA FRANKL



PHOTO: MARGARET ROHDE



PHOTO: LAUREN BATEMAN



PHOTO: GAIL FARMER

BY: **ANNA MARCHINI**

When we saw the trail counter results we were surprised, but not shocked, to learn that hundreds of people were exploring the trails every day during the heart of the COVID-19 shut down. Open space was the only safe and available activity for months, and our trails and preserves were there to provide visitors with the experience they needed. We heard from people expressing their gratitude to be able to "get outside and breathe some fresh air" or "step away from my computer during the day".

With the increase in visitors, our trails and preserves required additional resources to maintain safe conditions. We converted our in-person programming to virtual, allowing more people to learn about butterflies, bird song and native plants. Our mission never wavered as we engaged more people to care about the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

We will keep adapting to changes, turning challenges into opportunities whenever possible. We can do this thanks to the support of our donors who recognize the value of the land and water that make this region so special. Be part of the community that values our natural areas and make a one-time or monthly donation at wissahickontrails.org/support.

FALL ON OUR PRESERVES

PHOTOS & ARTICLE BY: **KRISTY MORLEY**

Fall is an exciting time on our trails and preserves. Migrating birds and butterflies stop by to fuel up for their continued journey south. Some resident species become more visible as they seek out safe hiding places for the coming winter. Here are some things you might see on our trails and preserves this fall:



Goldenrod – An important fall blooming nectar plant for migrating butterflies like monarchs and painted lady's.



Common Buckeye – Like it's more famous cousin the monarch, buckeyes also migrate, and the fall brings increasing numbers as they travel through our area to warmer southern states for the winter.



Barred Owl – As the leaves fall, it becomes easier to spot roosting owls. Owls also become more vocal in late fall as they begin defending their breeding territories.



American Toad – Searching for the perfect spot to dig a burrow in which to spend the winter.



White-throated Sparrow – Although they breed in northern PA, the arrival of these migrants to our area means fall is here and winter is just around the corner.



Woolly bear caterpillar – After finding a safe hiding spot, these caterpillars produce cryoprotectant and will freeze solid to survive the winter.



Milkweed seeds – Plants of all kinds begin seed dispersal to ensure the next generation of flowers will bloom.

OUR COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF COVID-19



PHOTO: JENN BILGER

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

On March 13, 2020 the world changed. The future became uncertain. Figuring out next steps became nearly impossible. At Wissahickon Trails, we are beyond grateful for the strength and support of our community. You were there with us every step of the way as we navigated the new normal.

When state and federal parks closed, we were able to stay open, because we are entirely funded by the generosity of individuals, local businesses, and grants. Keeping the trails open when folks—ourselves included—needed them the most, meant the world to us.

When we updated our trail rules to include wearing masks, you made that change with us. Because staying safe on the trail meant we could keep them open.

When our calendar of events went virtual, you signed up in numbers we had never seen before.

When we had to postpone volunteer activities. Folks started (or continued) to bring a bag with them on hikes. Cleaning up litter and keeping the Wissahickon a beautiful place to connect with nature.

Even though we have had to be distant, we have never felt closer to our community. Thank you.



PHOTO: ERIN LANDIS

RECOGNIZING YEARS OF SERVICE

BY: **MADALYN NEFF**

Wissahickon Trails' Board of Directors is comprised of a group of dedicated volunteers, each bringing a different perspective and expertise that helps the organization grow and position itself for the future. This summer, two board members, William F. MacDonald, Jr. and Kimberly Woods, completed their service on the board.



William F. MacDonald, Jr. tirelessly donated time and resources to Wissahickon Trails. He served as the board treasurer, chaired the Development Committee and Finance Committee, and was

a member of the Conservation Committee, Gala Committee, and Branding Advisory Committee. His active leadership helped to grow and strengthen the organization.



Kimberly Woods served on the board and the governance committee. During her tenure, she steadfastly supported the organization despite a demanding professional schedule. We are grateful for her service and support throughout the years.

Board service is one of the toughest volunteer roles of all, and we appreciate all that William and Kimberly contributed to Wissahickon Trails.

OUR MISSION

We inspire and engage diverse communities of people to protect, steward, and enjoy the land and waterways of the Wissahickon Valley.

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EVANS-MUMBOWER MILL: NEARLY 300 YEARS OF HISTORY

BY: **STEVE BLUBAUGH**

Near the gentle headwaters of the Wissahickon Creek sits a monument to the industrial revolution in America. Located at the junction of Swedesford and Township Line Roads in Upper Gwynedd, the Evans-Mumbower Mill is a wonderful example of an 18th century automated water mill.

The site of the Evans-Mumbower Mill was part of an original land grant received by Thomas Evans in 1698. His grandson, Abraham, built a saw mill there in 1744. The current structure was built in 1835 by John and Elisa Keefe, who placed a name stone in the front wall.

Henry Mumbower bought the mill in 1856 and worked it until his death in 1892. He was noted in his obituary as an honest miller and a most excellent and popular citizen. His son, David, ran the mill until it's closing in 1930.

Wissahickon Trails took ownership of the abandoned, near-collapsing mill in



1987. Restoration was made possible thanks to the dedicated efforts of Wissahickon Trails, many volunteers, and a generous gift from John and Claire Betz.

Today, we hold monthly open houses where the public can experience the sights and sounds of falling water powering the 2,500-pound grindstones. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the 2020 season was postponed. When we are able to safely reopen, we encourage you to visit and share in this unique piece of local history.

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