During this season we also reflect on our many friends, without whom we simply could not do what we do. Thank you to everyone who give generously of their time and dollars.

The power of volunteers was especially evident during FOW’s forest management project in Houston Meadow (p. 15). Along with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR), they helped plant approximately 600 native trees! Without such intervention, invasive trees would eventually have taken over the site.

We were thrilled to be the beneficiary of $100,000, raised by the 2021 Philadelphia Fund Alliance at their annual gala. This truly transformative sum will go toward expanding FOW’s programs for high school students. Together with your amazing response on Giving Tuesday (p. 2) and support of the sixth annual All Trails Challenge (p. 5), we will be able to increase our field capacity in the park and continue making improvements that keep the forest and our watershed clean and beautiful.

Speaking of which, if you missed the first public meeting for the Master Restroom Plan in September, you can read a recap on p. 3, and attend the next one on February 16. This plan – and your opinion - will guide the pilot project for development of accessible and environmentally sound restrooms in the park.

In any season, exploring the Wissahickon’s rich history is a great activity. In our last Valley Talk of the fall, FOW’s Instagram Editor Brad Maule and I traced the park’s past through nearly 400 years of maps. Read more on p. 10. And enjoy 12 of the park’s landmarks anytime, anywhere, in our 2022 calendar, available free with an FOW membership.

Wishing you and yours the best of the season’s gifts and let’s continue to be great friends in 2022!

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
SAVE THE DATES

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY OF SERVICE JANUARY 17

9 A.M. - NOON

For the first time, FOW will be closing Lincoln Drive (the only main road that runs along the creek within Wissahickon Valley Park) from Wissahickon Avenue down to Ridge Avenue for a large-scale litter cleanup on this special day of service.

There will be two meeting locations—Historic Rittenhouse Town and Ridge Avenue—at both ends of the cleanup area, with two groups working toward each other on Lincoln Drive. Wear warm layers and help FOW make this often-travelled section of the park cleaner. Inclement weather cancels the event.

Participation requires preregistering for a meeting site here and signing the volunteer agreement and release before being allowed to join the cleanup. Gloves, trash bags, trash grabbers, and instructions will be provided.

2022 PUBLIC PROJECTS MEETING JANUARY 18

6 P.M.

Friends of the Wissahickon will host its annual Public Projects Meeting to share progress on its major projects over the past year and discuss upcoming projects for the upcoming year. Visit our website for more details and to register for this virtual event.

GIVING TUESDAY

Thanks to the generosity of our friends on Giving Tuesday 2021, FOW exceeded its $15,000 match. This means that next year, FOW will be able to devote more than $52,000 toward expanding capacity in the park, notably with our seasonal field crew members and new machinery and tools that will make an even bigger impact on service days. This is a huge boost to our $250,000 end of year fundraising goal so we can do even more to keep the Wissahickon healthy and our visitors happy. We truly could not do it without you!

PHILADELPHIA FUND ALLIANCE RAISES $100,000 TO SUPPORT FOW

Friends of the Wissahickon is thrilled to be the beneficiary of $100,000, raised by the 2021 Philadelphia Fund Alliance (PFA) Gala—a truly transformative sum that will go toward expanding FOW’s programs for high school students and increasing the impact of our stewardship of Wissahickon Valley Park. Since 2016, PFA has hosted an annual fundraiser to benefit a Greater Philadelphia charity and to celebrate the region’s deep roots in the registered funds, asset management, and alternatives industries. We thank them and the event’s sponsors for their extraordinary support toward making our ongoing work possible.

Our sincere gratitude goes out to: Aberdeen Standard Investments; BBD, LLP; Broadridge Financial Solutions, Inc.; Chenery Compliance Group; Deloitte & Touche LLP; EY; Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP; FilePoint; FS Investments; Glenmede Investment Management LP; Gregory FCA; KPMG LLP; Lovell Minnick Partners LLC; Macquarie Investment Management; Mondrian Investment Partners; Morgan Lewis; PwC; SEI Investments Company; Stradley Ronon; Tait Weller; and Troutman Pepper.

Thank you for being Friends of the Wissahickon!
A s year-round visitorship in the 1,800-acre Wissahickon Valley Park Year continues to increase, so does the need for operable facilities to accommodate this use. The Trust for Public Land estimates a park of the Wissahickon’s size should have approximately 25 restrooms, yet currently, there are just 11 total restrooms and 3 urinals, with only 6.5 toilets (urinals count as half toilets) open all year. The ongoing Restroom Master Plan is one of POF’s major strategic projects developed to address this problem.

The goal of this plan is to provide park accessibility to a greater number of users—from children to older adults—and to people with limited mobility, whose ability to visit or stay in the park depends on accessible facilities.

In partnership with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR), the plan is largely supported by funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which awarded POF a $75,000 grant in early fall that was matched dollar for dollar by a private donor. Such funding is a significant step toward making this costly project a reality.

The plan is the initial step of a longer process that will responsibly guide any future development regarding restrooms in the park.

At a virtual public meeting in September hosted by FOW, Rosa Mannion, landscape architect from project consultant NV5, explained “all the complicated things that are brought to bear in a watershed park of this size located in a city to come up with a roadmap for going forward.” The long list of factors being evaluated includes existing facilities, park terrain limitations, ADA accessibility, flood plain implications, sewer and utility availability, zoning codes, stewardship, and, of course, cost and maintenance.

Mannion also shared proposed options for restroom locations, as well as current data FOW has collected from park-user counters and responses to the community-wide survey gathered throughout the summer. Mannion noted that most respondents favored future potential restrooms close to parking lots.

### Existing & Potential Restroom Locations

- 7 - Existing Women’s Toilets
- 5 - Existing Men’s Toilets
- 3 - Existing Unisex Toilets
- 5 - Existing Urinals
- 15 - EXISTING TOILETS AND URINALS
- 14 - Potential Tier One Unisex Toilets
- 5 - Potential Tier Two Unisex Toilets
- 19 - POTENTIAL TOILETS
  - 7 existing toilets open year-round (1 at Kitchen’s Lane, 2 at WEC, and 2 women’s and 2 men’s (+2 urinals) in the Valley Green Inn public restrooms)
  - All potential facilities can be open year-round, accommodate ADA access, and include baby changing stations.
  - Potential facility locations with a water utility nearby may accommodate water filling stations.
which corresponds with user counts, and that the top three preferred amenities were handwashing sinks, water fountains or water bottle-filling stations, and accessible restrooms.

“However, when it comes to restroom facility type preferences, no one size fits all,” she said. “But overall, everyone wants clean, open, and accessible restrooms.”

The Restroom Master Plan process is ongoing. Rank your preferences on the six proposed restroom facility locations in the park by visiting this site, which also provides the opportunity to add comments. So far, preferences are trending toward the higher-use areas at the southern end of the park, such as the Valley Green Inn warming shed near Forbidden Drive (voted #1 in a real-time poll taken at the meeting), the Valley Green Road upper parking lot, and Ten Box at Lincoln Drive.

Mannion stressed that public meetings are a key component in the master planning process of this pilot project. Mark your calendar to join us at a follow-up virtual meeting on February 16, 2022, at 6 p.m. for updates on the draft master plan, which is expected by spring 2022, and another opportunity for public comment. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter or visit FOW’s website. For any questions about the project, contact Pauline Berkowitz, capital projects coordinator at berkowitz@fow.org.

In addition to updates and next steps, Rosa Mannion fielded questions that will help shape the installation of new restroom facilities in the Wissahickon. Here are a few of the questions with her responses:

**Is there a problem having too many bathrooms?**

“We are looking at balancing where we see the value of adding amenities, both to improve the visitor experience as well as the landscape. A major limiting factor is not wanting to disturb too much landscape, if any at all, that could create new impervious locations. And in trying to limit human impact in the park, we’re looking at a much longer time horizon to achieve full restroom outfitting.

**Why are portable toilets not being considered?**

“Portable toilets need frequent servicing. During the park’s high-use season, which has expanded to about six months of the year, the toilets should be cleaned once daily, which is expensive and not really feasible, considering the large landscape that needs to be covered. It’s not like with a special event where you can line up a row of toilets in one location. Portable toilets are always part of the equation, but this master plan is focused on permanent amenities.”

**Speaking of maintenance, how does it figure into the master plan?**

“We are first evaluating several types of facilities and materials that best meet our diverse needs, and then we will review them in terms of the frequency and cost of maintenance required.”

**Survey Results: Favored Locations**

- **Favored Future Potential Restroom Locations: all near parking areas**
  - Valley Green Inn - 57.3%
  - Bells Mill - 43.5%
  - Northwestern Avenue - 40.7%
  - Ten Box/Rittenhouse Town - 40.6%

- The Blue Stone Bridge is showing high 2021 visitor counts (it did not have a counter in 2011) and correlates with the preference for the Ten Box/Rittenhouse area.
They ran, walked, hiked, pedaled, and rode to complete the sixth annual All Trails Challenge (ATC), covering more than 4,400 miles, and most of them were repeat Challengers.

To all the Challengers and supporters, thank you for making the sixth ATC another success. Your contributions make a profound impact on FOW’s abilities to sustain our special urban oasis for current and future generations.

The ATC is just one of the ways you can make a difference in the park. Your support directly helps improve the trails on which you hike, bike, and ride, not just during the ATC but all year long.

**Thank you to our sponsors:**

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**ATC BY THE NUMBERS**

Total money raised

$27,226

Total number of Challengers and donors

464

(including 9 Wissahero solo stewards)

Total miles completed

4,419.61

Challengers Completing All 50 Miles:

39

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Thank you to our sponsors:
In a virtual awards ceremony on December 2, FOW recognized the top ATC Challengers and fundraisers, and announced the lucky winners of some surprise prizes.

**Top individual fundraiser:**
Mary Henry, who raised a total of $2,500. After moving to Philadelphia in 2020, joining FOW and the ATC was one of the first things she did. This is her second year as a Challenger.

**Top individual mileage:**
Bryce Poirot, with a total of 708.7 miles (that’s a lot of trips around the park!) and the second consecutive year that this avid runner covered the most miles.

**Top team fundraiser:**
Team Penn Charter with a total of $2,946. Volunteers from the school have also been very active volunteering in FOW cleanups over the year.

All individual ATC Challengers were entered into random drawings to win top prizes in categories based on dollars raised or mileage: They are:

- **$2,500 minimum raised:**
  Outdoor entertainment system
  Mary Henry

- **$1,000 minimum raised:**
  Fitbit Versa 2
  Cathy Schweiger

- **$500 minimum raised:**
  Outdoor portable game set
  Katherine Pistorius

- **50 miles completed:**
  Weekend stay at Skytop Lodge resort in the Poconos
  Lillian Haas
It was a glorious autumn in the park, and this brought hundreds of volunteers to help ensure that Wissahickon Valley Park stays clean and beautiful.

Our Saturday Volunteer Service Days had quite a few big events, including our second annual Trick-or-Trash Cleanup during which 45 volunteers (many in Halloween costume) removed over 20 bags of litter from the park. National Public Lands Day and Love Your Park fall events both focused on removing invasive vines from the edge of the forests. But the standout among our service days this past season was the 10 days we spent planting trees with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation at a ravine in the woods near Houston Meadow. More than 100 volunteers helped us plant over 600 trees! (Read more in From the Field on p. 15.)

FOW’s recurring weekday Volunteer Service Days have continued to chug along, providing a means for volunteers to steward the park in so many ways, including removing litter and graffiti, improving and cleaning trailheads and parking areas, and the tough, but important, work of cleaning out stormwater infrastructure. We’re so grateful for Crew Leader and longtime volunteer David Bower (2019 Volunteer of the Year), who has been leading his popular Wednesday morning service days all year.

The Structures Crew, our longest running volunteer corps, was especially active this fall. They spent a lot of time by Valley Green Inn repairing damage caused by Hurricane Ida, including the broken fence surrounding the grassy area in front of the inn. They also repaired broken and loose benches, replaced broken fence rails (110+) and posts (10) and rebuilt the stage behind the Wissahickon Environmental Center.

Crew Leaders spent a busy season co-leading all the Volunteer Service Days, planting trees at the Houston ravine, improving the trail system, and helping build a new trail reroute near Monastery Stables. Meanwhile, Trail Ambassadors continued to provide solid outreach and education to park users: staffing information tables and hiking shifts, and leading 20 guided walks this fall. FOW is currently recruiting for its next class of Crew Leaders and Trail Ambassadors. Training for both these programs will begin in late February and run through the end of March. Apply here by December 31.

Several school and corporate groups volunteered this autumn, including The Baldwin School, Episcopal Academy, Walter B. Saul High School, Dynamic Energy, and Reliance Standard Life Insurance. If you are interested in organizing a private service day for your school, company, or organization, learn more on FOW’s volunteer pages.

Even though volunteer activities slow down in the winter months, there are still many ways to get involved. Join our Volunteer Service Days, such as the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, or organize your own self-led cleanup through our Wissaheroes program. We appreciate your stewardship of the park, whatever the season!

Volunteer Recognition Night

Every December, FOW hosts a special night to thank the many volunteers who help us keep Wissahickon Valley Park clean and green, and celebrate their accomplishments. Having to again hold one of our favorite events virtually, along with the many challenges life has thrown at us in 2021, did not diminish the amazing work our volunteers. This year saw a resurgence of volunteers in the park as we slowly returned to some semblance of normality, with increased service days and a return of guided hikes.

Master of Ceremonies Shawn Green (a.k.a. FOW’s field stewardship director) took the virtual audience on a creative and informative “hike” through the park, stopping by the many places where volunteers made an impact and interviewing some of the volunteers along the way.

FOW Volunteers 2021: An Impressive List*

1,041+ individual volunteers
8,207.5+ volunteer hours
140+ Volunteer Service Days
13.7+ tons of litter removed
1,017 native plantings
6+ miles of trail improved
50 down trees removed
33 Trail Ambassador Walks & Talks (since June), with 488+ attendees

*As of December 7, 2021
FOW volunteers covered a lot of ground in 2021. Below are some specific highlights of the many jobs well-done:

Harper’s Meadow Area (a lot to show for a lot of work):
- Plants: 200 shrubs and trees and 200 plugs (pollinator plants)
- Invasive removal: 4,500 square feet
- Trailhead/sidewalk built
- Dewee’s Rock path created

Saturday Service Days (the backbone of FOW’s volunteer work for many years):
- Total Saturdays: 37 and growing, with approximately 16 to 60 volunteers participating each time
- Co-led by Crew Leaders with major assistance from Trail Ambassadors

Habitat Box Monitoring
- Andorra Meadow: 40 boxes
- Houston Meadow: 19 boxes
- Total people: 17 volunteers
- Shifts: 75 monitoring sessions in both meadows
  - Bird stats:
    - 8 eastern bluebird fledglings (their resurgence is an indication of a healthy meadow)
    - 53 house swallows
    - 5 Carolina chickadees
    - 86 house wrens

What were some of the most interesting things you saw on your monitoring sessions?
"Just watching the progression of birds from perfect eggs to naked, then fully featured birds ready to fledge. One summer day, the area was full of dragonflies and tree swallows. So much life and activity to see, and something different, with every visit."
—Kaitlyn Evans, Crew Leader and habitat box monitor

Monastery Stables
FOW volunteers:
- Removed 4,000 square feet of invasives
- Helped build a new 1,055-foot trail reroute

Volunteers at FOW’s Fall Love Your Park event remove invasive vines around the historic mansion at Monastery Stables.

Volunteers at Trick-or-Trash 2021 picked up 400 pounds of litter.
Photo: Melody Faber

Bells Mill Road Cleanup (where FOW was able to close the entire road to clear the considerable trash that gathers along this road traveling through the entire park):

2nd Annual Trick-or-Trash Cleanup:
- 3 Locations: Bells Mill, Valley Green, Historic Rittenhouse Town
- 45 volunteers picked up 400 pounds of litter

Wissaheroes:
- 275 people
- 118 cleanup shifts
- Total trash removed: 5,000+ pounds from roadsides, creek, forest

What made you decide to be a Wissahero?
"I was inspired by Brad Maule’s One Man’s Trash exhibit at the Fairmount Water Works in 2015. During the height of the pandemic, the park became my gym and picking up trash my exercise. ‘Litter-obics’ I call it."
—Melissa Omer

Trail Ambassadors (the outreach wing of our volunteer corps):
- Trail Shifts:
  - 52 TAs
  - 237 trail & outreach shifts
  - 600+ volunteer hours
  - 790 park visitors engaged

What are some of the interactions you’ve had while doing trail shifts?
"A few of us started a bike patrol. We’d meet at Valley Green Inn and travel Forbidden Drive, handing out trash bags and reminding people about the dangers of swimming in the park. When a cyclist fell off her bike, we were there to clean her up and get her and her bike back to her car. It was a nice experience to know we could help."
—Amy Yuter, Trail Ambassador, who logged more than 252+ hours this year

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: DAVE STEHMAN

After volunteering with FOW for several years, Dave became a Crew Leader in 2020. In 2021, he truly stepped up his game, becoming the hands-down most active and dedicated volunteer of the year, putting in over 600 hours of service! In between co-leading our Volunteer Service Days on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, without fail, Dave also stewarded the park with solo litter cleanups. In his devotion to and love for the park, he is always reliable and willing to get dirty, and he volunteers with a cheerful spirit and smile on his face.

None of these achievements would be possible without our mighty volunteers. They are the heart and soul of the park. FOW is grateful for their hard work, dedication to the Wissahickon, and overall joy and goodwill they bring to everything they do.
Remembering a Special Friend:  

RICHARD BERMAN

Funny, warm, joyful. These are just some of the qualities that people will remember about FOW’s dear friend Richard Berman, who passed away in October. He was also a foundational member of the FOW community.

Richard was a microbiologist for the state of Pennsylvania, but he was also devoted to Wissahickon Valley Park. A member of FOW’s Board of Directors from 2003 to 2013, he served as secretary for nine years and on various committees, including Conservation, Wildlife, and Outreach. He also co-developed FOW’s modern version of the Map of the Wissahickon.

Richard was also a long-standing member of the Structures Crew, during and after his board service, working on restoring many of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) guardhouses and other park structures. For his many contributions, FOW recognized him in 2019 with the inaugural Ed Stainton Award for Exceptional Volunteer Service.

Beyond the significant work he accomplished, Richard was loved by all.

“He was so much fun; he always had a joke or funny story. He brought joy, a sense of fun and delight, and hard work to the organization,” said Ruffian Tittmann, FOW’s Executive Director. She fondly recalls how he would frequently stop by the office to say hello, and every New Year would bring a tin of delicious cookies to share with the staff.

Other FOW community members shared similar memories about Richard:

“Rich was part of the FOW Board of Directors, who intentionally transformed the organization from a small, all-volunteer group into one of Philadelphia’s strongest open space and environmental organizations. His leadership—as longtime secretary, and as a leader in the environmental education and volunteer work of FOW—was always warm, accepting, open, and welcoming, infusing Friends of the Wissahickon with the unique character that it possesses today. He was a pleasure to work beside and learn from, and he is greatly missed by the many friends and colleagues he cultivated in his long and joyful life.”

Maura McCarthy, Former FOW Executive Director

“Rich Berman was a funny guy, and this can easily be seen in a couple of oft-used quotes. On the way to a work detail in the park, Rich would say, ‘Can we stop at Dunkin’ Donuts for a donut and coffee?’ Or, one that was used frequently on me: ‘I taught you everything I know and still you know nothing.’ A good man, a good guy, and one who will be missed by all.”

Buzz Wemple, FOW Structures Crew Member

“Rich volunteered at the Tree House for many years, doing a variety of things, including building birdhouses, benches, plant presses, and anything else needed for our education programs. Besides his skills, he always brought laughter and humor to the Tree House—whether he came to volunteer or just to visit while walking with his wife, Mary. The value of work he did as a volunteer is matched by the value of his friendship, the lessons we all learned from his determination, and the generosity of his spirit.”

Trish Fries, Former Wissahickon Environmental Center Environmental Education Program Specialist

Richard is survived by his daughter Barbara. Donations in his name may be made to FOW or the American Society for Microbiology.
For FOW’s final Valley Talk of the year in November, Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann sat down with our Instagram Editor Brad Maule to take a journey through Wissahickon Valley Park’s past. Brad, who has been obsessed with maps since childhood, guided attendees through nearly 400 years of maps of the Wissahickon Valley, tracing the story of how the Wissahickon Creek and the park around it became what they are today.

While travelled and used by the Lenape for thousands of years, the Wissahickon Creek appears to have first appeared on a map in 1688, as part of surveyor Thomas Holme’s chart of the Philadelphia area for William Penn. Though still relatively undeveloped during the 1700s, maps from the early nineteenth century begin to show the rapid industrial development of the Valley, with familiar names and locations popping up, including the Kitchens, Magargee, and Livezey mills. Major roads through the Wissahickon existed at what is now Wissahickon Avenue and at Livezey Lane, but the valley’s terrain remained an obstacle between Roxborough and Germantown until the creation of the Wissahickon Turnpike (what is now Forbidden Drive) in the 1850s.

The earliest maps also had some surprises in store! On Holme’s map, the Wissahickon is labeled as Whitpane’s Creek, a name that didn’t stick during the colonial period. While the Wissahickon is often seen as the boundary between Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Roxborough, for much of the nineteenth century, the Wissahickon was split between the two along the township line (meaning that areas like Rittenhouse Town were counted as part of Roxborough.) And well-known Bells Mill Road had a previous identity as Paul’s Mill Road, and before that, was known as Thorp’s Lane.

A GROWING PARK
The Fairmount Park Commission produced the first official map of Wissahickon Valley Park in 1868–right after it had acquired the first parcels of land in the Wissahickon Valley to protect Philadelphia’s drinking water supply from industrial pollution. At this time, the park only consisted of land directly along the creek, but as industry and farming in the Wissahickon Valley became less profitable, the long, snakey park began to significantly expand toward the boundaries of today. Land was incorporated from grand estates, like those of George Thomas of Thomas Mansion, and railroad magnate Henry Houston, whose contributions to the city included Houston Meadow and the former Andorra Nursery—and all was reflected in new updates to maps of the park for visitors from Philadelphia and farther afield.

Map highlights from this period include one of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition (held in Fairmount Park) that features the Valley of the Wissahickon, as well as columns in the Philadelphia Inquirer that discuss bicycle excursions travellers could take out to Rittenhouse Town and along the then-pedestrian Lincoln and Forbidden Drives.

FOW MAPS AND MORE
Though Friends of the Wissahickon was founded in 1924, the first FOW map they found is dated 1946, and incorporates drawings of futuristic transportation from the beginnings of the atomic age! Thanks to a committed FOW maps committee responsible for the designs, the maps shared a similar layout dictated by the length of Wissahickon Valley Park (a shape that requires a long, narrow map). Changes came in 2013, with a new diagonal design of the Valley that FOW still uses today, and the beginnings of our improved park signage system designed to easily orient visitors at standardized trailhead kiosks.

Maule and Tittmann completed the evening with the digital FOW Map App – the latest, free version of these beloved guides (and one that can also be accessed offline in the park), as well as varied designs from FOW’s partners and local artists. But there’s sure to be more maps of the Wissahickon in the future. As Brad noted, “Maps are where art and science intersect. You can look at the same thing a hundred different ways, and it will still be the same thing, but have a hundred different narratives.”

Here’s to more stories and maps of the park to come!

Missed the Valley Talk? Head over to FOW’s YouTube channel to watch the recording of this virtual event.

Noah Kulak is FOW’s communications coordinator.
So often, in our rush to get where we are going and warm up, we hustle past the subtle beauty of winter. Up at the Tree House, and throughout the Wissahickon and our neighborhoods, there is a natural masterpiece waiting to be noticed with every glance.

At the Wissahickon Environmental Center, we believe that there is “no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.” This has been proven true on many occasions, whether we’ve been prepared or unprepared for different types of weather while out on adventures. That said, in the winter, it doesn’t cost much to bundle up. The most important part of your outdoor wardrobe is warm socks and waterproof shoes or boots. With warm, dry feet, you can focus your attention on nature.

Early-morning frost can be annoying when you have it scrape it off car windows, but it is also beautiful. Frosted windows may annoy us, but have you ever noticed that the pattern of those icy crystals outline grasses, branches, and fallen leaves?

In the afternoon sun, look up and admire all the twists and turns of the tree branches as they cross branches on the other trees around them. In the absence of leaves, you may see a migrating bird perched on a branch, a bald-faced hornet nest, or some of the tree’s fruits that have not yet let go.

In the winter, not everything has gone dormant or departed for warm adventures. Focus your eye on the leaf litter and look for things that move. On a warmer day, the camouflaged squirrel or chipmunk may scurry through the leaves and over logs. Look through the trees, and perhaps you’ll catch a glimpse of a flicker of white from the tail of a deer. Listen for the song of the white-throated sparrow (oh-sweet-Canada-Canada), the whistle of the northern cardinal (cheer, cheer, cheer), or the call of the blue jay (jaay-jaay-jaay). Watch the activity of these and other birds, such as the dark-eyed junco, as they gather at bird feeders.

A snowy day is my favorite time to hike in the woods and the meadow. The snow absorbs sounds, so even on the street, the world seems almost silent. And the blanket of snow makes everything look brand-new. This is the perfect time to take a second look at the trees as they are outlined in white. Look down as you are hiking and see the tracks of the other animals who hiked there too. This is when you can see evidence of our nocturnal neighbors, such as the fox, coyote, and raccoon.

Up at the Treehouse, one of our favorite winter programs is the full moon hike. This hike starts with a group gathered around a fire, roasting marshmallows and catching up on the New Year. Then we hike by the light of the full moon along the Teal Trail until we come to the top, where it meets the Red Trail, and we can see the moon rising above the trees. One of my favorite “spooky trees” resides at this point: a very large cucumber magnolia (Magnolia acuminata) with its signature bumps along its trunk.

We continue the hike through the forest, with the moon casting shadows on our backs. It is here that we sometimes hear the hoo-h’HOO-hoo-hoo of the great horned owl and, on occasion, the haunting trill of the screech owl or the startling bark of the fox. Not to worry though; they won’t hurt us. It is mating season and these calls are for a potential mate.

Soon we come to the meadow, which opens up for a dramatic welcome, and we meet the moon in full again. The winter sky is often the most clear, and despite the twinkle of the antennae farm in the distance, stars and planets can be seen with the naked eye.

It is here that I often pause to take it all in—the cold air, the bright moon, the open beauty of the meadow—another winter in the Wissahickon.

Christina Moresi, M.Ed., is an Environmental Education Planner at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.

Photo credit: Christina Moresi
January

WINTER OWLS FOR HOMESCHOOLERS
Tuesday, January 11 | 11 – 3 p.m.
In this indoor/outdoor program, learn about the special adaptations of owls: their eyes for seeing in the dark, their feathers for silent flight, and their sharp talons for catching prey. Dissect an owl pellet, and once evening falls, take a short moonlit hike to listen for owls. 2nd grade & up.
$5 per child, per lesson.

WINTER BIRDS WITH MARTIN SELZER
(Houston Meadow, 900 Graykin Lane)
Saturday, January 15 | 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.
Meet local birder Martin Selzer for an approximately two-hour walk to observe wintering birds in the meadow.
Pre-registration is requested.

KIDS EXPLORE: WINTER WONDERLAND
Saturday, January 15 | 10 a.m. – Noon
Bundle up the kids and bring them out into the forest this winter to discover what is still active during the cold winter months.
Ages 5-12. Drop-off optional.

WINTER WILDLIFE WALK
Saturday, January 15 | 10 a.m. – Noon
Hike the woods this winter to discover what is still active during the cold winter months. Bundle up; it’s cold outside!
Adults & teens.

CAMPFIRE COOKING
Saturday, January 15 | 1 – 3 p.m.
Enjoy the warm campfire on a cold winter’s day and make your own lunch cooked on an open fire. Learn some new recipes to try on your next camping trip.
$5 per person.

TREE HOUSE TOTS
Thursday, January 20 | 11 p.m.
Ages 3-5. Parents stay with their child.

ANDORRA “NURSERY”
Thursday, January 20 | 10 a.m.
Bring your little one for an hour of discovery at the Tree House. Each month we will explore a new topic that celebrates the season. Ages 12-36 months. Parents stay with their child.
$5.00 per child, per lesson.

February

SUGAR SATURDAY! (FAMILY TREE TAPPING)
Saturday, February 5 | 9 a.m. & 11 a.m.
All ages

SUGARING FOR HOMESCHOOLERS
Tuesday, February 8 | 11 a.m.
It’s that sweet time of year when we venture out into the forest to find our very special sugar maple trees. There we will learn how a tree is tapped to collect sap, and then return to the Tree House to witness the process of sap to syrup and have a sweet snack.
2nd grade & up.

FULL WOLF MOON HIKE
Wednesday, February 16 | 5 – 7 p.m.
Hike by the light of the full moon and enjoy the peaceful sounds of the quiet winter forest. Discover the tree silhouettes against the moonlit sky, listen to the sounds of nocturnal animals, or maybe hear the hoot of an owl. Warm up around the campfire, and roast marshmallows.
Adults & teens only.

ANDORRA “NURSERY”
Thursday, February 17 | 10 a.m.
Ages 12-36 months.

TREE HOUSE TOTS
Thursday, February 17 | 10 a.m.
Bring your little one for an hour of discovery at the Tree House. Each month we will explore a new topic that celebrates the season. Parents stay with their child.
Ages 3-5. $5.00 per child, per lesson.

WINTER BIRDS WITH MARTIN SELZER
(TREE HOUSE)
Saturday, February 19 | 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.
Meet local birder Martin Selzer for an approximately two-hour walk to observe wintering birds along Forbidden Drive and in Andorra and Harper’s Meadows.
Pre-registration is requested.

MAPLE SUGAR DAY ON FORBIDDEN DRIVE
Saturday, February 26 | 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Join us on Forbidden Drive (near Northwestern Ave.) for our annual Maple Sugar Day. There will be ongoing maple sugaring demonstrations, pancakes with real maple syrup, a taste test of different pancake toppings, and freshly made maple candy to taste. Pennsylvania Maple Syrup products will be available for purchase (cash only).
All ages. NO registration necessary. Free.

March

WOODCOCK WALK (HOUSTON PLAYGROUND)
Wednesday, March 9 | 5:30 p.m. (until dark)
Meet local birder Martin Selzer at Houston Playground to listen and watch for woodcocks, affectionately called timberdoodles.
Pre-registration is requested.

ANDORRA “NURSERY”
Thursday, March 17 | 10 a.m.
Ages 12-36 months.

TREE HOUSE TOTS
Thursday, March 17 | 1 p.m.
Bring your little one for an hour of discovery at the Tree House. Each month we will explore a new topic that celebrates the season. Parents stay with their child.
Ages 3-5. $5.00 per child, per lesson.

SUGAR MOON HIKE
Friday, March 18 | 7 p.m.
Hike by the light of the full moon and discover the tree silhouettes against the moonlit sky. Maybe hear the hoot of an owl and warm up around the campfire.
Adults Only. Space is limited.

TWILIGHT TOAD WALK
Saturday, March 22 | 6 pm
The toads are waking up and heading for the water looking for a mate. If the weather cooperates, and it’s been a warm wet month, we should be able to hear them calling. Join us for a search for toads and other signs of spring.
All Ages. Space is limited. Free.
Cousins on a nature investigation adventure in the snow.

Photo credit: Nicole Zapata

The Wissahickon and I have been friends going on 10 years—roughly the age of my oldest child. In the beginning, I approached the park with trepidation, feeling self-conscious for not knowing where to park, in which direction to walk, or what to bring. But I wanted to be “in nature” and expose my new baby to this oasis spread out near our semi-urban home.

My son was the buffer to my nervousness in getting out there and not feeling out of place. So I went, armed with baby carrier, snacks, and a plan to bail if it didn’t go well. And over the past decade, my relationship with the park has evolved in many ways.

We are now regular visitors to the Wissahickon, having explored many parts, yet so little of the whole. We traded out the carrier for bikes, met up with friends, dipped our feet in the pools, briefly homeschooled outside, explored new trails and repeated familiar ones, lost afternoons, and quickly recharged during an overscheduled weekend.

With my youngest now in kindergarten, I recently took a rare solo hike with only my dog along. As I walked a one-mile loop that I had never hiked before—parking at Bells Mill and walking down Forbidden Drive, turning right to climb up the hill and back to where I started—I realized that I have my kids to thank for so much of my relationship with the Wissahickon and nature.

Most meaningful lately has been the ability to get out in winter and enjoy the cold air. I would take them out for fresh air, desperate to get out of the house. We started out frazzled, wrapped in snow clothes, sometimes with friends. We never walked far but always returned better than when we left. Without their bottled-up winter energy, I may never have discovered the joy of a winter hike.

When they were little and going to nature preschool, they taught me how to identify the fallen leaves of the tulip poplar, sassafras and sweet gum trees. As they grow older and forget their tree knowledge, I retell them what they first taught me. We’ve looked for ice to break with rocks, romped in the snow, dipped candles at the Tree House, visited Woodland Santa, helped plant the Food Forest, gone on winter-birthday scavenger hunts, brought and eaten winter picnics of bread, cheese, and hot chocolate, and marveled at the changes in the park.

Now our family brings friends when they visit from out of town. Or we give each other a break and take one kid solo to fix their mood, the way being under the trees only can. Even though it’s a little less inviting to bundle up and get out of a warm house when it’s cold, we discovered that when the cold and tree-cleaned air fills our lungs, it feels like magic. The trees take the Wissahickon from a shaded, somewhat noisy escape from the heat in summer, to a cold, leafless open sky in winter. Everything is quieter. The creek can be a little louder. And we always leave happier.

We developed this relationship over time by carefully taking in the gifts of the Wissahickon. Remembering to leave no trace, we join in on cleanups, support FOW whenever we can, and continue learning from all the park has to offer.

Nicole Zapata is a Weavers Way Co-op working member. Weavers Way Co-op members earn working member credit by volunteering for FOW.
HABITAT MONITORING: WINTER

FOW’s community-based science program continues this winter. Take a look at the map and photos below to help guide your habitat monitoring and consult FOW's habitat monitoring page on our website for more details and instructions.

SPECIES SCAVENGER HUNT

What lives in Wissahickon Valley Park? Help us find out!

FOW 2022 CALENDAR

Now Available

In 1964, Wissahickon Valley Park was named a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service. Inspired by this designation, FOW’s 2022 calendar is a collection of 12 landmark landscape photos from the Wissahickon. FOW members at the basic level and above receive this beautiful calendar free while supplies last. To become a member or renew your membership, click here.
FROM THE FIELD

Friends of the Wissahickon and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) have completed a large-scale planting of approximately 600 trees in Houston Meadow. About two years ago, PPR identified a 2.9-acre canopy gap located within a ravine separating the north and south sections of Houston Meadow. Since then, PPR and the Fairmount Park Conservancy have been preparing the area for planting and eradicating both woody and herbaceous invasive plants, such as Japanese Angelica Tree and Multiflora Rose. FOW assisted PPR with removing dead trees and arranging the woody debris onsite in the ravine to both provide erosion control and create small habitat piles for birds and small mammals.

The Houston ravine canopy gap planting is an example of the importance of urban forestry management. Without intervention, the site would be on course for domination by invasive trees, shrubs, and vines, ultimately diminishing the native wildlife habitat and biodiversity. FOW’s Ecological Land Management Plan (ELM) identifies Houston Meadow as one of the few first-rate habitats that are a high priority for ecological restoration and management. Therefore, it is equally important to ensure that the adjacent areas have a functional ecosystem with a diversity of native plant species.

With the tremendous help of volunteers from school and corporate groups, FOW planted over 500 Philadelphia-native trees from mid-October to mid-November. Various maples, sweet gums, sweetbay magnolia, and sassafras were among the roughly 50 varieties planted. These trees were sourced from PPR’s own Greenland Nursery with state grant funding from Treevitalize. PPR and FOW will continue to work in partnership to steward and monitor the site.

UPCOMING, FREE VIRTUAL AND/OR IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

For more information, visit http://www.letsgooutdoors.net/lgo-fow-community-engagement.html

Watershed Education Lessons
These lessons are best for third graders and up. They can be presented virtually or safely distanced in person.

General Watershed and Book-Based Lessons
Table-top model shows how pollution enters our waterways.

Drinking Water Treatment or Sewage Treatment
Learn how water from our rivers is cleaned and made safe for drinking, and how dirty water is cleaned and sent back to the river.

Story Times
It’s All About Water
Water-related stories for school children up to grade five.

Little Friends of the Wissahickon
For children in kindergarten through second grade. Participants receive a Certificate of Participation and a prize pack that includes copy of the Little Friends of the Wissahickon board book.

Community Programs for Everyone
These free, family-friendly programs offer a way to explore new parks/green spaces and engage in fun activities. Registration is requested but not required. An adult must attend with children.

Programs are offered from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the following Saturdays:

Jan. 8 - Hot Cocoa and Games
Feb. 19 - Snow Globes and Bingo

Urban Environmental Education Ambassadors
A field trip and education program for underrepresented seventh and eleventh graders in the Philadelphia Public School District. Caregivers or parents of students interested in applying for this program should complete this application.
There are several ways to make meaningful gifts to advance FOW’s mission.

**STOCK**
Consider giving a gift of stock. Our DTC # is 0062 and our Vanguard Brokerage Acct # is 23501307.

**JOIN FOW’S SUSTAINER PROGRAM**
Support ongoing stewardship through our monthly membership program (and receive a special thank-you gift) fow.org/sustainerprogram

**UNITED WAY DONATIONS**
Friends of the Wissahickon can receive donations through the United Way. If your employer offers United Way giving, and you would like to designate Friends of the Wissahickon as your beneficiary, please use our option code #9882.

**AMAZON SMILE**
If you shop on Amazon.com, use AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com) and select Friends of the Wissahickon as the nonprofit organization you would like to support. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5 percent of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to FOW.

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**SECURE THE WISSAHICKON’S FUTURE – MAKE IT PART OF YOUR LEGACY**
As a membership-based nonprofit, Friends of the Wissahickon depends on gifts and grants from individuals and organizations to continue important work throughout the Wissahickon Valley Park. One of the most transformational ways individuals can make a lasting contribution to FOW is through The 1924 Society.

The 1924 Society is a group of committed individuals who have included FOW in their will or have named FOW in their estate planning. Created by the late Albert Neff (1929–2005), a Philadelphia resident with a passion and love for the wilderness of the Wissahickon, The 1924 Society honors and recognizes the commitment of our friends to ensure that the Wissahickon Valley Park is here for generations to come.

Contributions from members of The 1924 Society make a lasting impact. Over the past decade, these friends have invested over $500,000 to help fulfill FOW’s ongoing stewardship mission in Wissahickon Valley Park. Support from these thoughtful individuals helps provide the robust educational programming and stewardship efforts needed to protect the water quality of the Wissahickon Creek and preserve the native habitat throughout the 1,800-acre park.

Members of The 1924 Society, who include FOW in their estate plans or will, receive a lifetime membership, invitations to special events, and advanced information about FOW programs and projects. Learn more about The 1924 Society at fow.org/1924society or contact Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org.
WORD SEARCH

They are either horizontal, vertical, or diagonal.

Winter

SNOWFLAKE MAZE
FROZEN NATURE SUNCATCHER

You will need:

• Found items from nature
• Shallow dish or tray that will hold water
• String or yarn
• Scissors
• Water

Directions:
1. Take a walk outdoors and collect a few natural items like leaves, berries, and twigs.
2. Fill your dish or tray halfway with water.
3. Cut a length of your string or yarn and tie a loop.
   Submerge part of your loop in the water and make sure enough of the excess loop hangs over your tray so you can later hang your suncatcher.
4. Add some extra water, if needed, to make sure all of your items and loop-end are fully submerged.
5. Leave outside or place in your freezer overnight.
6. Run some hot water over the bottom of your tray to release your frozen suncatcher.
7. Hang outside and enjoy.

Notes:
• Don’t worry if your nature items float around. Part of the fun is to be surprised how your suncatcher turns out after it freezes.
• To make multiple suncatchers, use a muffin tray.
• For a more colorful suncatcher, add a few drops of food coloring to your water.
**SNOWFLAKE MAZE**

They are either horizontal, vertical, or diagonal.

Winter

**SNOWFLAKE MAZE**

**FROZEN NATURE SUNCATCHER**

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**FOX’S SCAVENGER HUNT**

Go for a hike this winter in Wissahickon Valley Park and help Fox find everything on his list.

- LEAFLESS TREE
- CHICKADEE
- CARDINAL
- WOODPECKER
- FROZEN PUDDLE
- BIRD BOX
- MAPLE TREE
- SNOWY BARK
- MOVING WATER
- BOOT PRINT
- BRIDGE
- BROWN LEAF

Start

End