Just as in spring, growth is everywhere at FOW. With our biggest budget to date, 2023 promises to be a big year for implementing projects and programs. The new year kicked off with two annual events that reflected this upward trajectory. This year’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service was FOW’s largest MLK cleanup event yet (p. 7), drawing 187 volunteers! Our Public Projects Meeting (p. 5) highlighted the steady progress of four major capital investment projects, as well as the ongoing restoration work by our partners at the Philadelphia Water Department.

We continue honoring FOW’s mighty force of 1,000+ volunteers, whose numbers continue to soar, both in hours served (11,000+) and in the work they accomplish (removing 20 tons of litter in 2022). That’s equal to the weight of a full school bus!

FOW’s staff is growing, too. We welcomed a new business manager, Margo Jackson, and a new field coordinator Patricia McGuire. Get to know them on page 10.

On page 9, Weavers Way’s Nima Koliwad relates the Co-op’s efforts to convince more people to stop using plastic bottled water.

Kudos and thank you to everyone who participated in the Seventh All Trails Challenge (p. 12): 30 Challengers completed all 50 miles! And congratulations to the winners of the Biennial Photo Contest, whose photos capturing the beauty of all seasons in the Wissahickon are featured on page 13.

Speaking of winners, by supporting FOW’s stewardship efforts to improve the park, everyone wins. There are many ways to show your love for this extraordinary urban resource and make an impact: membership (fow.org/wissmagmember); direct donations, like the one from BrandONE (p. 10); volunteering at regular service days or at the big Saturday Spring Cleanups (details on p. 7); or even practicing the principles of Leave No Trace every time you visit the park.

Enjoy this season of growth and renewal. Let’s continue to be great friends.
THE WISSAHICKON TRAIL CLASSIC IS BACK!

2023 WISSAHICKON TRAIL CLASSIC

SATURDAY, JUNE 3
(NATIONAL TRAILS DAY)

10K TRAIL RACE
AND 1 MILE FAMILY-FRIENDLY NATURE WALK

8:30 A.M.

Starts on West Northwestern Ave. at Forbidden Drive

The Wissahickon Trail Classic was established in 2006 to highlight Wissahickon Valley Park as one of the best trail-running destinations on the East Coast because of its beauty, location, and challenge. Back for its 14th anniversary after a three-year hiatus, the Wissahickon Trail Classic will engage hundreds of trail runners throughout the region, providing a unique race experience in Philadelphia’s premier park.

Benefiting Friends of the Wissahickon, funds raised through the Trail Classic will go directly to the stewardship of the Wissahickon trail system and watershed.

Consider Becoming a Sponsor
Sponsorship of the Wissahickon Trail Classic offers valuable opportunities to connect with thousands of health and fitness enthusiasts, as well as spectators, fans, and more. FOW will work with sponsors to develop a customized marketing plan through its highly engaged social network. To learn more, call 215-381-2942 or email Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org.

Thank you to our sponsors!

SAVE THESE DATES

ANNUAL FOW MEMBERS MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 6
6 p.m.

FOW members are invited to review the last year, elect members to the Board of Directors, and learn about upcoming projects at this annual event, which will be virtual. Visit fow.org/events to register.

LEAVE NO TRACE SUMMIT
THURSDAY, MAY 4
6-7:30 p.m.
Virtual

Stay tuned to FOW’s website and social media for details.

Friends of the Wissahickon • Spring 2023
GIVING

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). Visit 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.

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 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 wills 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 wildness of the Wissahickon, The 1924 Society honors and recognizes the commitment of our friends to ensure that 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 wills, receive 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.
FOW’s annual Public Projects Meeting in January recapped last year’s significant achievements, highlighting progress on and next steps for four major capital investment projects.

“2023 is going to be our biggest year yet,” said FOW’s Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann, who hosted the third consecutive virtual meeting, which drew nearly 80 participants. “With our largest budget and most ambitious capital projects, we are focused on big moves to keep the Wissahickon Valley Park healthy, accessible, and beautiful.”

FOW crews are back in full force and volunteer participation in work groups and at cleanup events is steadily increasing continuing to climb back to pre-pandemic levels. Our Zone Steward Program, which we piloted in 2022 among our Crew Leaders, is proving to be a successful strategy to increase FOW’s ability to monitor and steward the park. Dividing the park into 18 mini-zones, beginning with the eastern side of the park last year, we are better able to focus on specific areas needing repair and other trail work.

Guiding FOW’s current work are elements from the Strategic Blueprint, which began in 2018 and was extended through 2022; our next three-year plan will be released later in 2023. We remain committed to using the data gained from our Ecological Land Management Plan and are working through completion of the Sustainable Trails Initiative, evaluating what we learned and applying best practices throughout the park.

What We’re Working On
Below is the status of FOW’s latest strategic improvement projects:

LOWER VALLEY GREEN RUN RESTORATION AND PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

Project planning continues to remediate years of worsening erosion on both sides of Valley Green Run which caused the natural trail to collapse, along with the elevated wooden boardwalk, forcing the area’s closure to traffic. FOW is investing more than $1 million in two simultaneous complex projects to stabilize the streambank, reduce the speed and force of water flow, and restore an essential trailhead link along Valley Green Road.

Feature element: A new pedestrian bridge will move visitor foot traffic off the road as people head down to this central area of the park. Designed for beauty and function, it will be built on a galvanized superstructure for strength and resilience. The approximately 200-foot extended walkway will gently undulate across the newly restored streambank with an added observation platform, allowing park visitors a better view of the Wissahickon’s signature schist outcrops and the historic Valley Green Bridge. It is destined to become the newest iconic feature to grace our park.

The combined projects are anticipated to be completed sometime in late 2023. Look for announcements about fundraising and recognition opportunities for the bridge and boardwalk project.
GERMANTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION PROJECT

This project, which will focus on rehabilitating 1,600 linear feet of crumbling sidewalk on Harvey Street (along the edge of the park), will create safe pedestrian access to the park from Wissahickon Avenue near Rittenhouse Street for neighborhood residents, who currently must cross heavily trafficked Lincoln Drive. FOW developed a proposal for the scope of services and key design elements with neighbors, contractors, and other stakeholders for an expanded trail network to improve entry to the main stem of the park, newly defined signage and wayfinding, and new sidewalks. A crosswalk on Harvey Street will include traffic calming elements to alert and slow down motorists.

New plantings and increased stewardship will help restore the native habitat. FOW and park neighbors anticipate that these actions will beautify the area, discourage illegal dumping, and ultimately encourage more recreation.

The project is funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Councilwoman Cindy Bass, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Sensodyne, and the Clean Air Council. Design is in late stages, with hopes for the project to go out for bidding this year.

EAST FALLS REROUTE AND HABITAT RESTORATION

The mixed-use trails in this area have long been identified as unsustainable. This ongoing project will close a rapidly eroding, steep trail, then reroute it along the contour by adding a stone staircase and restore the habitat with native plantings to mitigate stormwater runoff, all as part of FOW's Sustainable Trails Initiative completion plan. Updated signage and wayfinding will add to this popular area's increased accessibility.

If you missed the Public Projects Meeting, watch the full recording at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQq8i_AbdWg to learn more about FOW's work in the Wissahickon.
RESTROOM FACILITIES MASTER PLAN

Developed to provide accessible restroom facilities to the growing number of visitors to the park, this major strategic project, which we undertook with our PPR partners, was the initial step of a longer process that will responsibly guide any future development of restrooms in the park. A key goal is reducing environmental impact in our watershed park, and ultimately reduce the need for portable restrooms, which are expensive to properly maintain.

The project is now complete, and we’ve identified up to 16 potential toilets in up to seven different locations. Thank you again to the over 1,000 people who contributed via survey and public comment to inform and help shape the plan.

Next steps: Design, permitting, and construction of a demonstration project, for which FOW has received support from generous private donors in addition to being awarded half a million dollars from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP). [See sidebar for details.]

FOW RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS FUNDING FOR PARK IMPROVEMENTS

We are pleased to announce that FOW has been selected for Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) funding toward park improvements. This highly competitive Commonwealth grant program provides up to 50 percent of project construction costs for civic, cultural, economic, recreational, or historic preservation projects.

To be eligible for application to the RACP, the project must first be itemized in an annual Pennsylvania Capital Budget Project Itemization Act. In 2017, both Senator Art Haywood and Representative Chris Rabb advocated for FOW to be included in the state budget, clearing the way for us to apply. Thanks to our state representatives, FOW is now well into the long process to access this needed funding for park infrastructure improvements. FOW will use the money for new construction or adaptive reuse of existing structures for restrooms throughout the park. Our Master Restroom Facilities Master Plan was completed at the end of 2022 and will inform where to prioritize restroom construction, in addition to the type of facility.

FOW is proud to partner with the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and were proud to welcome Rick Howley, Ecological Restoration Manager, whose team designs stream restoration projects that interface between the park’s infrastructure and the natural environment.

PWD WORKS IN THE WISSAHICKON

Park Line Drive Interceptor and Gorgas Chute and Outfall

Infrastructure improvements in the park have a direct impact on the quality of the Wissahickon Creek, a source of drinking water for one in three Philadelphians. For more than a decade, PWD has taken a leadership role in restoring the Wissahickon and other Philadelphia watersheds from the harmful impacts of uncontrolled stormwater. The increasing impacts of climate change, such as more frequent and heavier storms and flooding, are exacerbating the problems, along with the worsening deterioration of Philadelphia’s more than 200-year-old water systems.

Work to prevent streambank erosion continues with a project begun last year to patch damage in the stone and brick masonry wall of a concrete culvert on the White Trail at Park Line Drive that brings water to a small tributary. A second project is repairing large cracks and fissures that have formed on a concrete stormwater chute on Gorgas Run, which has damaged the Yellow Trail. To stem erosion from flows around the chute, construction of a plunge pool downstream of the interceptor and culvert will stabilize the hillside on both creek banks.

Project goals are to create long-term resiliency of the infrastructure and the trails that are affected trails being compromised by the damage.

Bidding is underway, and once construction begins, hopefully by August, combined work on these projects is expected to last six to nine months. Temporary trail closures on and detours for the White, Gorgas Lane, and Yellow Trails will be posted.
At FOW, stewardship of Wissahickon Valley Park is a year-round activity, even in the winter. In January, we hosted our biggest Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event in FOW’s 99-year history, with 187 volunteers coming out on a crisp, sunny day for a large-scale cleanup. We spread out to multiple locations, primarily beneath the recently reopened bike bridges near Ten Box. Together, we removed 161 bags of trash and over 100 various car parts, random large items such as furniture and folding tables, and more from decades of debris that had collected in the area.

More than 70 individuals applied to the 2023 Class of Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders, and those selected to join these volunteer corps went through multiple training sessions while learning information about park history, watersheds, and wildlife that they will share with visitors.

Now that spring has arrived, FOW is ready to get back into full swing, with our new class of stewards hitting the trails to co-manage service projects, lead hikes, clear fallen trees, assist park users, and engage them in discussions about the significance of Wissahickon Valley Park.

Our Volunteer Service Days (always open to the public!) are conducted on most Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings to cut back invasive vines, clean litter, and much more. No prior experience is needed—FOW provides the tools, work gloves, and instructions. These fun, informative sessions provide much needed improvements in the park. Sign up to join us at fow.org/volunteering.

BIG Saturday Spring Cleanups

- April 1 – Another Lincoln Drive closure to clear trash and debris from Lincoln Drive in partnership with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation
- April 22 – Earth Day celebration with three service project locations to choose from
- May 13 – Love Your Park Service Day

Several school and corporate groups have already scheduled cleanups with FOW for the spring season. If you are part of a business or organization and are interested in a private service project in the Wissahickon for your group, read more here: fow.org/volunteering/corporate-groups/. 
FOW VOLUNTEER SNAPSHOT

OUR COMMUNITY:

1,030+
INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS
(including Wissaheroes, with nearly 90 cleanups)

11,000+
HOURS SERVED

140+
SERVICE DAYS*
*Including Wissaheroes, who put in nearly 200 hours over almost 90 cleanups, collecting nearly 2,260 pounds of litter

28
GROUPS

OUR WORK RESULTS:

20
TONS OF LITTER REMOVED

42,000+
SQUARE FEET OF
INVASIVE PLANTS REMOVED

20
MILES OF TRAILS IMPROVED

2022 VOLUNTEER HONOREES

Each year, we honor several volunteers who have gone above and beyond to help make the Wissahickon a better place.

Debbie Hoellein & Jim McClory:
A PA Master Naturalist, Debbie found her place in retirement by getting active with FOW as a Trail Ambassador. Her dedication inspired her husband Jim to become a Trail Ambassador (TA) as well, and now it’s something they do together, leading two hikes last year. Jim, who loves coming out to service days, is also a brand-new Crew Leader. 353 combined hours

Stan Kozakowski:
With his extensive knowledge and enthusiasm, Stan is always willing to help, whether it’s with volunteer training and mentorship or leading guided Walks & Talks and school groups. 150 hours

Ken Class:
New to volunteering with FOW, Ken started out as a general volunteer but really found his place as co-leader of the Structures Crew. 102 hours

Volunteer of the Year: AMY YUTER
Amy is an all-star! If she’s not at work, she’s probably in the Wissahickon, not just as a TA, co-leading guided hikes and helping with volunteer training, but also as a newly minted Crew Leader, at which she is a quick study and tenacious. 173 hours

Thank you to our partners:
Philadelphia Parks & Recreation
Philadelphia Water Department
Philadelphia Streets Department
Cedars House Café
PAPERtrail Bike Café
Historic Rittenhouse Town
Wissahickon Restoration Volunteers
Friends of Cresheim Trail
PowerCorpsPhl
Fairmount Park Conservancy
Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics

Volunteers gather for the 2022 Earth Day cleanup at Harvey Street. Photo by Johanna Austin
Using less plastic is on everyone’s mind these days, and we’re all trying to consume less single-use plastic by investing in multiuse options. At Weavers Way, some of our most popular items in this category are reusable metal straws, colorful scouring pads made from plastic bottles, stainless steel bento lunch boxes, silicone sandwich bags, and, of course, reusable metal water bottles. The problem with this approach is that often we end up buying things we use when they’re new and in front of us, but we soon fall back into our daily patterns and do things as before.

Of all the single-use plastic products, bottled water is consumed the most and is the top contributor to plastic consumption. Although there are quite a few options on the shelves that use less plastic, they still have plastic parts. What draws us to buy a bottle of water? Is it the familiarity? Is it convenience? Perhaps some brand’s sleek design? Or is it just that we are creatures of habit and it’s hard to make the shift? Why do people prefer bottled water versus tap or filtered water from drinking fountains?

The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University has been investigating ways to launch initiatives at a grassroots level in Philadelphia to bring about change that is both sustainable and effective. To understand the root cause of bottled water consumption, they surveyed a group of local schools to determine the top reason students and teachers buy bottled water. The results were quite unilateral and surprising.

This quote summarizes the consensus:

We do not like the taste of tap water, so we buy bottled water. We have gotten used to a certain taste of water and it’s hard to make the switch. If the tap water tasted better, we would use our reusable bottles!

So, let’s get to work and make the water taste better. How do we do that?

One way is to infuse the tap water with pleasing flavors that make it more palatable. Weavers Way and the Academy of Natural Sciences will soon collaborate to develop some interesting recipes to help pump up flavor in your water bottle. This is such an easy way to make something that’s readily available more interesting. At the Co-op we have a great variety of produce available to craft interesting combinations of flavors. Our executive chef is working on some creative recipes that will be shared with Philadelphia-area schools to encourage them to use tap water and reusable bottles and reduce their dependence on bottled water. Some fun and delicious flavor combinations we’ve recommended include grapefruit, cucumber, lime, mint with ginger and watermelon, and strawberry and thyme.

At Weavers Way we offer lots of ways to reduce plastic use in your day to day life. We have reusable bags, reusable containers, and our popular bulk department, but the best way to reduce plastic use is to take advantage of what you have on hand and keep using it. Bring your own containers and bags to the store when you shop, not just at the Co-op but everywhere. Can we inspire you to reuse items this year?
**FOW WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBERS**

**Margo D. Jackson** is FOW’s new business manager, responsible for overseeing all business operations, from technology to benefits, as well as administrative support, organizational policies and procedures, and vendor and consultant management. Margo brings to this role more than 15 years of experience in improving administration, operations, financial systems, and human resources for organizations in nature, cultural, historic preservation, and residential building spaces. A spirited advocate of historic preservation, Margo holds a BA in architectural history and design from Arcadia University, and an MA in historic preservation from Goucher College. In her spare time, she enjoys baking and spending time with family and friends.

**Patricia McGuire** has joined FOW’s field stewardship team as field coordinator, serving as the main point person for FOW’s infrastructure-related work, including trail building and maintenance, and maintaining and coordinating repairs on a variety of items, from machines to historic and manmade structures. She is also involved in volunteer training and co-leading Volunteer Services Days, as well as leading specialized volunteers on trail work and structure repair projects. Previously, Patricia worked for the State of Vermont, Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation as seasonal trails coordinator in Rutland, where she assessed, planned, and coordinated trail improvement projects for 100+ miles of trails on state lands, and as a seasonal park manager for Quechee State Park, where her responsibilities included managing daily operations and supervising park staff and volunteers. Before that, Patricia was a conservation corps member for the American Conservation Experience in Flagstaff, Arizona. She earned a BA in environmental studies and economics at Skidmore College in New York. Patricia is excited to be back in Philadelphia, after leaving in 2019 to establish her career in conservation and land stewardship.

FOW recently received $10,000 from BrandONE, a leading national franchise development consultancy, as the recipient of its annual donation to a designated charitable organization. The company bestows the gift as part of its mission to give back to the communities that BrandONE’s franchise brands serve and to help deserving nonprofits achieve their own goals.

The honor of selecting the recipient goes to BrandONE’s Lead Developer of the Year. In 2022, it was Sarah Van Aken, vice president of franchise development, who did not hesitate to choose Friends of the Wissahickon, stewards of the Wissahickon Valley Park.

“Friends of the Wissahickon has always had a special place in my heart,” said Van Aken, who lives within walking distance of the park, where she walks her dog every day. “I feel it’s important to give back to something that gives me so much. So much so, that Van Aken personally contributed $2,500 to stewarding the Wissahickon.

“We are grateful that Sarah and BrandONE selected us as the 2022 recipient of this generous donation,” said Ruffian Tittmann, executive director at FOW. “This support will help advance our work to improve the forest habitat, park user experience, and stormwater management, now and for generations to come.”
Volunteer Spotlight: JIN XU

How did you decide to start volunteering with FOW?
I live not too far from Wissahickon Valley Park, and I’ve always loved hiking the trails. It has plenty of challenges and it’s easy to form hiking loops of various lengths and difficulty levels. When COVID-19 hit, most of the group hikes I usually attended stopped, so I decided to hike by myself. Eventually, I noticed that as more people came to use the Wissahickon, more trash started to appear in the park. The Wissahickon gives me so much joy, and I wanted to give back and keep it clean. A quick Google search led me to the FOW website, and I started my volunteering with FOW.

What do you love most about Wissahickon Valley Park?
I love the hiking trails in the Wissahickon. They offer various levels of hiking difficulty. I can always find a proper difficulty level to suit my hiking needs. I also love the rich history of the trails and the opportunity to take a break at Valley Green Inn.

What are your favorite moments from volunteering with FOW?
I enjoy volunteering with FOW. I recall one time on a hot summer day, we saw a kid swimming in the creek with his family looking on. We walked down to them and explained that the water was not suitable for swimming. To my amazement, the parents called the kid back. Our gentle persuasion worked. We were all very happy.

What are your favorite places in the Wissahickon?
I like the rest area in front of Valley Green Inn. I love to see geese and ducks in the water. I love to see kids running along the bank; their laughter makes me smile!

Crew Leader Field Report

Submitted by:
David Bower

Date: Wednesday, 1/11/23

Number of Volunteers: 14

Location: Wise’s Mill Road

Work Metrics: 6 large plastic bags of trash, 2 large paper bags of recycling, and a Steelers basketball (a mystery since there is no Steelers basketball).

Description: Removed leaves, trash, and windfall tree limbs from the concrete swale along the south side of Wise’s Mill Road. Scattered organic materials at the edge of the woods on the north side of the road. Picked up trash along the road, in the nearby woods, and around the Philadelphia Water Department stormwater retention ponds. Trash was picked up afterward by Parks & Recreation staff. Removed a few invasive vines and Devil’s Walking Stick along the swale. Not enough to quantify, just individual specimens at various spots. Volunteers were regaled with site-specific history, especially the tale of the early 1980s efforts of FOW that prevented the construction of two high-rise apartment buildings at the top of the road near Henry Avenue.
I love weasels. Technically, I love members of the mammal family Mustelidae, named for the genus of Old World weasels, Mustela. Members of this family are called mustelids. Besides weasels, in North America this group includes otters, badgers, fishers, martens, and wolverines. Seven species of weasels are found in Pennsylvania. It’s unknown how many sightings occur in Philadelphia. Without good photos or specimens, it can be difficult to confirm identification from sight records.

As a native Philadelphian and avid naturalist, I enjoy seeing wildlife within city limits. Friends and family have seen mink, river otters, and long-tailed weasels in Philly. I saw giant otters in Brazil and had an ermine scamper over my boot in the Arctic before I saw a Philly mustelid. It’s silly, but I was getting a little frustrated!

I was 43 when I finally saw a mustelid in Philadelphia. I was working from home during the start of the pandemic and took a mountain bike ride on the Yellow Trail during lunch. As I approached the ponds on Wise’s Mill Road, an American mink darted across the trail. I finally saw a Philly weasel, and it was in my beloved Wissahickon!

Minks are semiaquatic weasels, and the Wise’s Mill ponds, the Wissahickon Creek, and its tributaries provide excellent habitat. Minks eat frogs, crayfish, fish, birds, and mammals. Despite only weighing between one and three pounds, mink have been known to kill prey as large as gulls and cormorants! They are also a major predator of muskrats. Minks have brown fur that can look black when wet; they usually have a white chin that helps distinguish them from river otters and other weasels. Minks are more stout than other weasels but less robust than otters. Their pointy nose and shaggier fur also help to distinguish them from otters.

The American mink (Neogale vison), was named for its resemblance to the European mink (Mustela lutreola) and its similar semiaquatic habits. These species are not closely related. Mustela includes many species called weasels, as well as ferrets, stoats, ermines, and polecats. American minks share their genus with only three extant species: Amazon weasel, Colombian weasel, and long-tailed weasel. The sea mink, which lived in coastal New England and the Canadian Maritime Provinces, was made extinct by the fur trade. Unfortunately, the American mink’s popularity as an economically farmed fur species has led to its spread to Europe, Asia, and South America, where it is an invasive species.

Besides mink, I have heard reports of river otters and weasels being seen in the Wissahickon. I know two people who swear they have seen fishers, one in the Wissahickon and one on private land near the Schuylkill Center. I have even heard of one spotted on a street in the Bronx!

In Philadelphia, the most reliable place to spot a mink is at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum. This is likely due to the sheer number of visitors and extensive network of walkways and vantage points through aquatic environments. In the Wissahickon, it seems that these creatures are usually seen accidentally while doing something else, especially fishing or birding. I wish I had better advice on how to see a mink in the Wissahickon, but I guess the best way is to spend more time in the park!

Tony Croasdale, MS, is an environmental education program specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.
All Trails Challenge Continues to Make Strides

To all the Challengers and supporters who helped make the seventh annual All Trails Challenge (ATC) another success, thank you! Your contributions make a profound impact on FOW’s abilities to sustain our treasured urban oasis for current and future generations.

- **156 CHALLENGERS PARTICIPATED**
- **NEARLY 7,000 MILES LOGGED** *(56% MORE THAN LAST YEAR!)*
- **RAISED ALMOST $25,000**
- **CHALLENGERS COMPLETING ALL 50 MILES: 30**

Thank you to our sponsors:

The 2022 All Trails Challenge top individual fundraiser Sue Osthoff raised $5,051. With her hiking partner dog Saffy, she surpassed the 50-mile goal to achieve 78.5 miles. Sue also won the prize drawing in the $2,500 minimum raised category.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE LEADING PARTICIPANTS**

- **Top individual fundraiser:** Sue Osthoff
- **Top team fundraiser:** “The Trail Ambassadors”
- **Top individual mileage:** Martha Lippa, with over 1,000 miles!

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

**$2,500 minimum raised:**
Ultimate outdoor experience package
Sue Osthoff

**$1,000 minimum raised:**
New Fitbit
Sam Scavuzzo

**$500 minimum raised:**
Outdoor portable game set
Stephen Fawley

50 miles completed:
Weekend stay at Skytop Lodge Poconos resort
Ronald Siena

**Top individual fundraiser:** Sue Osthoff

**Top team fundraiser:** “The Trail Ambassadors”

**Top individual mileage:** Martha Lippa, with over 1,000 miles!
Thank you to this year’s judges:

- Troy Bynum, TB Wildlife Photography
- Brad Maule, FOW’s Instagram editor
- Erin Lawrence, Woodmere Art Museum

They gave it their best shots! Check out the winning photos from the 2023 Wissahickon Photo Contest, hosted by Friends of the Wissahickon, Woodmere Art Museum, and Wissahickon Trails. Congratulations to the photographers of top photos chosen in each category, and thank you to everyone who participated and shared their beautiful work.

**A Winner for All Seasons**

- **Winter:** “Historic Rittenhouse Town” by Melvin A. Chappell
- **Fall:** “Golden Bridge” by Denise Speranza
- **Spring:** “Barred Owl at Four Mills” by Redmond Brubaker
- **Best in Show:** Daniel Kalamarides’s amazing photo captured a male northern flicker spitting a mouthful of wood chips while excavating a nest cavity near Houston Meadow.
- **Summer:** “Upside Down, Green Ribbon Trail in Ambler (Rotary Bridge)” by Douglas Zenzel
- **People’s Choice:** “Snowy Wissahickon” by Rachael Balascak
- **Youth Winner:** “A Lonely Bird Box” by Maddie Bergson-Conklin
Welcome Back Little Friends of the Wissahickon (L)FOW!
Philadelphia Kindergarten - second grade teachers can take advantage of our FREE in-class story reading of Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park through which students learn about locations in the park. Best of all, each child gets a copy of the book, a certificate, prize pack; and the teacher can request a follow-up field trip to a Wissahickon Valley Park location. Little Friends Registration: tinyurl.com/LittleFOW

FREE Community Programs to Engage Everyone!
Monthly family-friendly activities will inspire you to experience the Wissahickon and beyond... From drop-in crafts and games to interactive outdoor recreation experiences, there will be something for everyone. Check out the opportunities and register by clicking here. tinyurl.com/LGOFOw

Third Saturdays: Get-To-Know (L)FOW with LGO!
Beginning, March 2023, drop by a select location to learn about or participate in the (L)FOW program, engage with partners through hands-on activities, and/or learn about FOW opportunities. Usually hosted in the Wissahickon Valley Park, but sometimes at another Philadelphia park location; visit our website for third Saturday location. LGO Programs - Get-To-Know FOW: tinyurl.com/LGOEvents

Explore and register for programs at letsgooutdoors.net/lgo-fow-community-engagement

HABITAT MONITORING: SPRING
FOW's community-based science program continues this spring. Take a look at the map and photos below to help guide your spring habitat monitoring. Consult FOW's habitat monitoring page on our website for more details and instructions, and consider printing the photo page and bringing it to the park to check off what you find along the way.

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

Use eBird to find:
- Bald Eagle
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Carolina Chickadee
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Use iNaturalist to find:
- Tufted Titmouse
- Eastern American Toad
- Wood Anemone
- American Pokeweed*

*Skin contact with any part of American Pokeweed can cause blisters or rashes. Avoid touching this plant.

Welcome Back Little Friends of the Wissahickon (L)FOW!
Philadelphia Kindergarten - second grade teachers can take advantage of our FREE in-class story reading of Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park through which students learn about locations in the park. Best of all, each child gets a copy of the book, a certificate, prize pack; and the teacher can request a follow-up field trip to a Wissahickon Valley Park location. Little Friends Registration: tinyurl.com/LittleFOW

FREE Community Programs to Engage Everyone!
Monthly family-friendly activities will inspire you to experience the Wissahickon and beyond... From drop-in crafts and games to interactive outdoor recreation experiences, there will be something for everyone. Check out the opportunities and register by clicking here. tinyurl.com/LGOFOw

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WHO WILL FIND FROG?
Follow the trails to see which animal friend leads to frog.

![Forest map with trails leading to frog]

WORD SEARCH
Find the “Spring” words below. They can be forwards or backwards horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

INSECTS  MEADOW
BUTTERFLY  SUN
GROWTH  BREEZE
BLUE SKY  BIRDS
FLOWERS  GARDEN
PUDDLES  RAIN
BUNNY  PICNIC
CONNECT THE DOTS
Help the sun shine by connecting the dots and coloring it in.

MAZE
Find your way through the rainbow.