

# Lands and Waters 2020

I hope this letter finds you well. 2020 was challenging. Schools and clubs began closing in February. Without access to classrooms and students, we lost the very foundation of our approach to teaching. So like nature, we adapted by shifting to outdoor activities. Removing invasives, addressing stormwater issues, and planting natives became our daily routine. We expanded our partnerships to support additional conservation work.

I have missed the students and classroom lessons. But, there have been many good things - new projects, new partners, and lots of new volunteers, working in small groups, wearing face masks, and social distancing.

Thanks to you, our partners, and volunteers, 2020 has been a productive year, in spite of all the challenges.



VolunteerFest, Literacy Garden  
Daniels Run Elementary



VolunteerFest, Vegetable Garden  
Daniels Run Elementary

## Volunteer Workdays, New Projects Daniels Run School

**VolunteerFest:** For the past 7 years, we have participated in VolunteerFest, a weekend of community wide service events hosted by our partner Volunteer Fairfax. Even with this year's restrictions, over 40 volunteers participated in our VolunteerFest workday. Activities took place outside in the school's 2 courtyards and large living classroom in the back.



Philip Latasa, Friends of Accotink Creek,  
lead volunteers in invasive removal



Chris Smith, principal, unloads  
mulch for use in courtyards



Volunteers used tarps and wheelbarrows to move  
debris from courtyard to collection area



Cindy Wackerbarth, Monarch  
Teacher Network, weeding

**MOM's Organic Market:** Several times a year, volunteers from MOM's Organic Market join us to support our projects. They remove invasive plants, weed, mulch, and plant native plants. This year they joined us in the literacy garden.



## Living Classrooms 2020, Maximizing Opportunities

Daniels Run's Living Classroom was one of the first outdoor learning centers in our area. Today, its benefits are well documented and the number of local schools with living classrooms is growing. This year as schools shut down, I saw living classrooms in a new light. When being outdoors and social distancing is needed, these spaces could provide a safer teaching environment for teachers and students. How can we make them more useful in such times? Obvious things came to mind: • Sitting areas for small groups • Tables/chairs for individuals and small group • Designs that enable teachers to easily observe and interact with students. We chose Daniels Run to test our ideas and learn more.



William Brabrand, former student, began our work with his Eagle Scout Project. He and his volunteers added a table and placed fences to define teaching areas.

## Stormwater Project:

Lands and Waters' first big project (2005) was the design/implementation of a stormwater plan for Yorktowne Square, my condominium community, in Merrifield, VA. Since then, we have continued our work to make Yorktowne (YT) more sustainable. It serves as an environmental educational site demonstrating sustainable landscaping and Low Impact Development (LID) techniques. This year, the community funded a Lands and Waters' project that addressed a serious flooding and erosion problem. Community volunteers, maintenance and office staff joined us to complete the first phase. The project's design was based upon LID and sustainable landscape concepts.



This photo was taken in an average rain event. Note water flow into the drain.



Planting *Carex grayi*, native, water loving plant. Note shallow pond in back

When it rains, large amounts of water flow into this storm drain from the surrounding areas. As the water travels to the drain, it causes erosion and flooding. It picks up trash, sediment, and chemicals from our lawns and roads. Then the storm drain system carries the polluted water into our local streams, seriously degrading, them and the Chesapeake Bay. This occurs even during average rain events, not only in Yourktowne, but in all developed communities.

### *The Best Place for a Rain Drop is Where It Falls*

The solution is to reduce water runoff. Seems simple, but is often difficult to achieve. Here we were able to landscape the drain's surrounding areas to reduce runoff. We planted hundreds of water loving plants adjacent to the drain and surrounding areas. We built a retaining wall, added and amended soil, and mulched heavily. We created a shallow pond to collect air condition condensation which provides much needed water for wildlife in summer. To protect the plants and reduce soil compaction from foot traffic, we constructed a pervious sidewalk. This serves as a walkway through the area without increasing water runoff. Our project has weathered significant 2020 storms and has performed admirably.

### *Invasive Removal, Restoration*

This fall, we received a Chesapeake Restoration Fund Grant for four invasive plant removal / restoration projects. After removing the invasives, the focus for each project will be: **Daniels Run School** - restoration of forest understory. **Carlin Springs School** - define and expand path through the wooded area that runs along the school's border, extend the tree corridor. **Knox Church** - create new native plant gardens and enhance existing ones. **Yorktowne** - plant a wide variety of native understory, canopy trees and shrubs in the long wooded corridor.



Latter-day Saint missionaries removing invasives and planting native plants at Knox Church and Daniels Run

Volunteer Invasive Removal, Yorktowne

Your support makes our work possible, thank you!  
Please help us continue by making a contribution.

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or visit our website at

[www.landsandwaters.org](http://www.landsandwaters.org)

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Delivering mulch to native gardens, W&OD Trail, to support other conservation projects