Volume 27

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SHOOTING THE BREEZE

A Publication of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc.

Naturalness

by Michael J. Kieffer



In George Peterken's 1996 book *Natural Woodland* the British naturalist contrasts "original naturalness"—"the state that existed before people became a significant ecological factor"—with "present naturalness", "the state which would prevail now if people had not become a significant factor". One must remember that forests are constantly shaped by storms and fire. If a forest is spared human disturbances, over hundreds of years it can become "present naturalness". If people were removed completely and permanently the forest enters its "future naturalness". While not many have adopted this terminology, preferring "virgin" and "old growth" descriptors, Peterken's terms provide a nice conceptual way of looking at our natural areas.

Based on Peterken's terms, the Bull Run Mountains "original naturalness" was lost with the American Indians' management of the mountains for game and berries through their use of fire. Since the American Indians first contact, the mountains have been logged, inhabited, quarried, farmed, and pastured. It has endured acid rain deposition, gypsy moth invasions, and countless plant introductions, many that have turned invasive and detrimental to its native flora. The mountains do not qualify for the term "present naturalness" and since people will not be removed completely or permanently the forest will not in the foreseeable future enter into "future naturalness". For that matter, there is no landscape on earth that can qualify for "original, present, or future naturalness" as the entire surface of earth is affected by anthropogenic disturbances.

How do we work to perpetually sustain a landscape's resources without a clear definition of what is natural? Maybe it is the process of attempting to manage towards "naturalness" that leads to better understanding of ecological functions of forests, grasslands, freshwater systems etc. that are vital to our physical and mental health. We would have never realized the magnitude of the complexity of natural systems if it was not for our attempt to set aside landscapes specifically and above all else to preserve their naturalness.

For BRMC's part, we work to continue to learn what comprises the flora and fauna on the Bull Run Mountains. Thanks to members and donors generous contributions we have been able to fund a four-year moth study, a three-year beetle study, dragonfly/damselfly study, a bat study, and a stream survey of the mountain's five perennial streams. BRMC staff has continued to monitor life in the mountains streams through our Chesapeake Watershed Workshop for 15-18 year olds. We continue to utilize our nature camp program to document the species of salamanders, frogs, toads, turtles, lizards, and snakes found on and around the mountains.



The idea of "original naturalness, present naturalness, and future naturalness" may be beyond what humans will ever witness again, but the attempt to maintain landscapes with this primary purpose has never been more important. It is imperative to add to and support conservation along with basic research to understand our natural landscapes more deeply. As time marches our preserves become the lighthouses in the fog of understanding naturalness at all.

Speaker Series November 2026

Local Conservation and Land Management with the Department of Parks & Recreation

Saturday, November 21st—2 p.m.

BRMC Mountain House, 17405 Beverley Mill Dr., Broad Run, VA 20137

Join Prince William County Department of Parks and Recreation as they explore the intersection of land stewardship, local biodiversity, and ecological restoration. Featuring insights from ecological entomologist Dr. Rea. and PWC Parks Recreation Specialist Craig Makufka.

Dr. Rea is an ecological entomologist with a master's in environmental science from the University of Virginia and a doctorate in entomology from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Her research has focused on the impacts of land management on insect communities and the history of invasion ecology. She has worked for USDA APHIS, NoVA Parks, and the Oak Spring Garden Foundation.



M.

Craig is currently the Recreation Specialist for the PWC Department of Parks & Recreation. He oversees recreation programming on the western end of PWC at five outdoor parks and an indoor community center. Craig has previously worked for multiple non-profit organizations as an environmental educator, education coordinator, and a program director. Craig holds a master's in agricultural and life sciences from Virginia Tech University.

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Goodbye, BRMC Friends—Human and Otherwise *by Kevin Dwyer*

The movers arrived on September 3 at 6:30 p.m., and my tenure at BRMC ended two hours later. Leaving the Beverley Mill Drive apartment was sad, but, at the same time, I looked forward to being back to New York. (September is glorious here, as Michael, also a native New Yorker, knows well; I thought I despised heat and humidity with a vengeance, but Michael might have me beat.)

What will I miss most about my stint in Virginia? Michael, Matt, Mike, and Sandy—a great team fully dedicated to BRMC's mission. (Keep supporting their efforts!) I'll also miss BRMC's events—Speaker Series, Town and Country Walks, Annual Fundraiser, Halloween Safari (I manned the flashlight).

Now, I'm living right in town, which is my preference. I enjoy the street sounds, a 90-second walk to the bar, no need to drive my car for a week, pedestrians outside my window. But I do miss the other forms of life right outside my window in Broad Run. The Hummingbirds at the feeder in the coneflowers; the phoebe nesting on top of the floodlights; the mink that, I believe, lives somewhere between BRMC and I-66.

And the moths. Every morning during spring and summer, there would be a new, incredible-looking moth on the front door. Their patterns amazed me. I started taking pictures.



K. Dywer

I once read a book called The Moth Snowstorm. The author, a Brit, described how, in the 1970s, a car's headlights would illuminate an endless "snowstorm" of moths—and how the intensity of those snowstorms has decreased dramatically over the decades. It's sad to know that these glorious creatures (I am a textbook anthropomorphizer) are disappearing. And it's bad: Moths play an important role in ecosystems.

The good news is that organizations like BRMC are working around the clock to protect our ecosystems and everything that supports them. As I said, let's keep up the support!

BRMC Public Programs~*Fall 2026*







HIKE WITH A NATURALIST
Wednesday, November 4th, 10 am (last of 2026!)
Join a professional naturalist to discover some of the flora and fauna of the local region. This program is free, meets at Leopold's Preserve (16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA 20137) and all are welcome. *Pre-registration is preferred.*

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAMS
All programs are 10am-12pm. $5 pp, including adults.
BRMC invites you and your child to spend an adventurous outing interacting with and learning about nature! We meet at Leopold's Preserve, 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA 20137.

Fall Ecology!
Tuesday, October 13th*—age 15-adult—*10a.m.-noon. Join us to marvel at the beauty of autumn! We will be focusing on the life cycles of trees and fall color.

Wednesday, October 21st*—all ages—*10a.m.-noon. Join us to marvel at the beauty of autumn! We will be focusing on the life cycles of trees and fall color.

Old Homes & Succession!
Tuesday, November 10th*—age 15-adult—*10a.m.-noon.
Explore the cemeteries, foundations, and vegetation that tells the story of the Thoroughfare community!

Wednesday, November 18th*—all ages—*10a.m.-noon.
Explore the cemeteries, foundations, and vegetation that tells the story of the Thoroughfare community!

Winter Survival!
Tuesday, December 1st—age 15-adult—10am-noon. Learn what mammals do to survive winter!

Wednesday, December 9th—all ages—10am-12pm. Learn what mammals do to survive winter!

YOUTH OUTDOORS NATURALIST PROGRAM:
WINTER NATURALIST CAMP
December 22nd & 23rd, 2026 10a.m.—3p.m.

Join BRMC for a winter adventure and learn more about the winter woods. Birds are more easily seen in leafless trees and sounds are magnified in the winter stillness. Dress for the weather—snow makes the day all the more fun. We will meet at Leopold's Preserve and Hopewell Sanctuary (private).

LEOPOLD'S PRESERVE
Monthly Naturalist Walks
BRMC is proud to partner with ***The White House Farm Foundation*** and its mission to enrich individuals with knowledge of and involvement with our natural ecological systems through monthly naturalist walks on Leopold's Preserve: 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA 20137.

Fall Schedule

Sunday, October 25th, 10 a.m.-noon—Fall Ecology!
Join us to marvel at the fall colors as we focus on the life cycles of trees!

Saturday, November 14th, 10 a.m.-noon—Reading the Land!
Join us as we interpret the physical, biological, and cultural clues to understand Leopold's Preserve landscape as seen today. Explore the cemeteries, foundations, and vegetation that tells the story of the Thoroughfare community!

Saturday, December 12th, 10 a.m.-noon—Winter Survival!
Learn what mammals do to survive winter!

White House Farm Foundation
With Support From the Plein Family Charitable Trust

BRMC 'S 27TH HALLOWEEN SAFARI!
Friday, October 16th & 23rd
7:00p.m.—8:00p.m.
Join BRMC for a non-scary night hike where a guide will lead you along the trail to meet native "wildlife" that perform natural history skits. Don't miss this theatrical adventure which includes live music by a bonfire!



Reservations $10/person in advance
Pre-registration at www.brmconservancy.org



Register for 10/16

Register for 10/23

BRMC's 27th

HALLOWEEN Safari

Bull Run Mountains Conservancy invites you to a family night of un-scary adventure!

Follow your guide along the trail at **Leopold's Preserve** and see native "wildlife" perform fun natural history skits. Then enjoy live music by the bonfire!

Leopold's Preserve, 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA

October 16 & 23	7:00-8:00 p.m.	$10 - register online or by mail

Bull Run Mountains Conservancy

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Roadside Awareness

by Matthew Frost



Almost everyone in Northern Virginia either has a story about a wildlife-vehicle collision (WVC) or knows someone who does. Whether it's a deer jumping into traffic, a small mammal, or a slow-moving reptile (watch out for those box turtles!), these encounters can feel like an unfortunate inevitability in our region.

The heart of the problem lies within our landscape. Living in a densely populated area surrounded by fragmented natural habitats creates a severe habitat connectivity issue. Parks and nature preserves may exist nearby but are often isolated by vast road networks. For wildlife moving between these green spaces, crossing asphalt is often the only option.

White-tailed deer are a leading cause of wildlife-vehicle collisions in Virginia. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) estimates that deer-vehicle conflicts cost drivers approximately $533 million annually across the state. With more than 60,000 recorded deer collisions each year, Virginia consistently ranks among the top 10 states nationwide for deer collisions, with states like West Virginia and Montana taking the top spots.

Addressing this major issue starts with gathering concrete data to map precisely where and why these collisions occur. To help get a baseline for our local region, Bull Run Mountains Conservancy has partnered with DWR to pinpoint where these animals are being hit using an application developed specifically for this project. BRMC selected three local road segments based on their history of high WVCs and has collected over 300 roadkill observations over the last 6 months, with deer (132) and squirrels (118) topping the charts. We intend to use this data to help support the development of wildlife crossings such as fencing, culverts, and underpasses. These findings are also crucial for educating the public on the importance of this issue.

Volunteering on weekends to look for roadside remains to determine whether a blotch of fur belonged to an opossum or to estimate how many days a deer carcass has lain in a ditch may sound macabre. But these observations help turn a problem many drivers only notice after a collision into something visible and preventable. By sharing what we learn, BRMC can help raise awareness and support safer roads for both people and wildlife.

Youth Outdoors Summer Programs 2026!



Bull Run Mountains Conservancy

Education · Research · Stewardship







