

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

A Publication of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc.

Natural

by Michael 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" (Marris, 2008). 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 conserved lands.

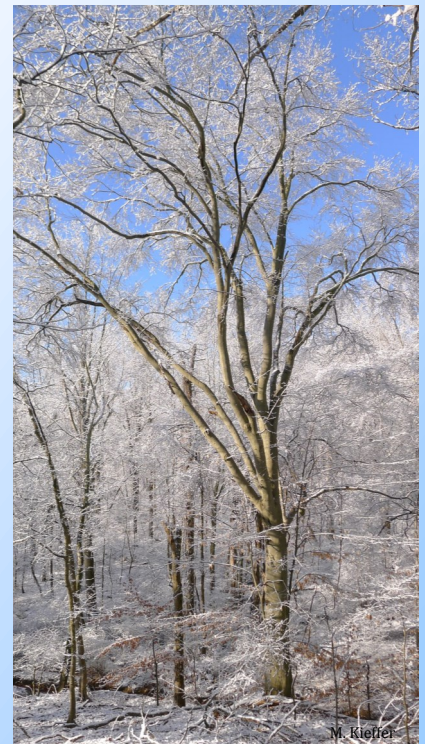
Based on Peterken's terms, the conserved lands in the Bull Run Mountains Region "original naturalness" was lost with the American Indians' management of the mountains for game and berries through their use of fire. Since the American Indians first contact, this area has been logged, inhabited, quarried, 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. These lands 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.

It makes it difficult to reach the goal of perpetually sustaining our natural resources without a clear definition of what is natural. However, I propose it is the process of attempting to manage towards "naturalness" that leads to a 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 Region. Thanks to members and donors generous contributions we have been able to fund a four-year moth survey, a three-year beetle survey, an American Chestnut study, a bat survey, a dragonfly and damselfly survey, 13 years of ecological change on the Bull Run Mountains vegetation study, and continuing macro-invertebrate stream monitoring through our programs.

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 our conserved lands, as well as continue basic research to understand them more deeply. As time marches on, Preserves are the lighthouses in the fog of understanding naturalness at all.

Reference: Marris, Emma. *The Heart of Wood*. Nature. 455, 277-280 (2008).



Winter Lecture Series January—March 2024

Join us for a series of informative lectures on the first Wednesday of each winter month. All lectures will be held at BRMC headquarters, 17405 Beverley Mill Dr., Broad Run, VA 20137. The Winter Lecture Series is presented through a partnership of BRMC and the White House Farm Foundation.

Restoring & Expanding Native Plant Habitat **Wednesday, January 3, 2024, 10a.m.**

Learn about common native plants that make up our forests and meadows, why these plants are critical for wildlife, and how we can make these populations healthier on public lands through restoring and reconnecting habitat.



Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve **Wednesday, February 7th, 2024, 10 a.m.**

Preserve Conservation Assistants Deneith Reif and John Lenox will provide an overview of VOF's work being done at BRMNAP, including leading a hike following the lecture.



Virginia Snake Talk and Overview **Wednesday, March 6th, 2024, 10 a.m.**

Learn to identify and safely handle Northern Virginia's native snakes, and discover their ecological importance with Bill Crisp of K2C Wildlife Encounters. Participants will have the opportunity to interact with live snakes and learn about intervention and sustainable practices to deter them from entering homes and yards.



M. Belknap

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is a publication of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc.

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The Small Changes

by Matthew Frost

Every Friday, for the past 50 Fridays at the time of writing this, excluding one or two that I missed due to sickness or weather, I have attended Conservation Corps at Leopold's Preserve. With a revolving door of volunteers and seemingly never-ending projects, every Friday is a new experience. On reflection, even the most miserable of days spent in nearly 100-degree heat with no shade or below-freezing conditions with no buffer, I have always come away with a greater appreciation of nature. Whether the appreciation stems from learning how to identify a species of bird based on call or the ability to differentiate between native and invasive plants, I always seem to have a new or better understanding of the natural world surrounding me. Volunteering is more meaningful when you can see how the effort you contribute is affecting the evolving landscape around you. The small positive ecological changes are the most gratifying from new wildlife appearing in a restored field or new plant life sprouting after clearing invasives. As Aldo Leopold once said, "Our job is to sharpen our tools and make them cut the right way... The sole measure of our success is the effect which they have on the forest."



M. Frost

BRMC Public Programs~*Winter 2024*



WINTER WATERFOWL WALK

Saturday, February 10th, 10a.m.-1p.m.

Join BRMC as we spend the morning birding with a focus on the area's winter waterfowl. David A. Wiedenfeld, Ph.D., Sr. Conservation Scientist, with American Bird Conservancy, will be leading our walk. Participants are encouraged to bring their own binoculars and spotting scopes. We will meet at the Mountain House (17405 Beverley Mill Dr., Broad Run, VA 20137), before traveling to local ponds to view our winter ducks.

Pre-registration is required.

Members: \$20/non: \$25

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.

Winter Schedule

Saturday, January 20th, 10a.m.-noon...Geology

Join us to explore and discuss the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Saturday, February 17th, 10 a.m.-noon...Winter Birds

Join us to view the colorful ducks wintering on the wetlands

Wednesday, March 6th, 6:00-8:00 p.m...Amphibians of Spring

Join us to enjoy the harbinger's of spring in full force.

Wednesday, March 13th, 6:45-8:00 p.m...Woodcock Watch

Join us for their elaborate courtship displays and flight.

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.

Geology

Tuesday, January 16th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore and examine the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Wednesday January 24th—all ages—10a.m-noon. Join us to explore and discuss the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Orienteering

Tuesday, February 13th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us as we learn compass skills, topo map interpretation, then orienteer to a secret location in the woods.

Wednesday, February 21st—all ages—10a.m.-noon. Join us as we learn to use a compass and the lay of the land when orienteering to a secret location in the woods.

Amphibians of Spring

Tuesday, March 5th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore habitats and life cycles of amphibians. Our focus will be on one of the areas largest salamander spp.—the spotted salamander.

Wednesday, March 13th—all ages—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore the habitats and life cycles of amphibians. The spring chorus of frogs is the harbinger of spring and we will enjoy their display in full force.





Town & Country Nature Walks

Winter 2024

Town & Country Nature Walks™ are designed to get people of all ages and backgrounds outside to explore, understand, and appreciate the "wild" side of their own neighborhoods and inspire interest in visiting natural places further afield.



Join BRMC as we explore Selby (private). Take a stroll with Michael Kieffer, BRMC's Executive Director, and David A. Wiedenfeld, Ph.D., Sr. Conservation Scientist, with American Bird Conservancy.

Saturday, February 24th ~ 10a.m.-noon



Winter World

photos by Michael Kieffer





**Bull Run
Mountains
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Education · Research · Stewardship



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