

VIRGINIA OUTDOORS FOUNDATION OWNED LANDS ACTIVITIES REPORT

Prepared for the June 2025 Board Meeting

BULL RUN MOUNTAINS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE **2,350 acres in Prince William and Fauquier Counties**

Partners at BRMNAP: VOF's Local, State, and Global Reach!

Partnerships make a diverse community project like BRMNAP possible and VOF welcomed partners from near and far this spring season! Here are some highlights of partners visiting BRMNAP:

- The Piedmont Environmental Council's Communications Team utilized our VOF Research Outpost for a team meeting and then hiked with VOF Preserve Manager, Joe Villari, to the eastern overlook parcel and our in-progress trail project on the South Section.
- Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage's Regional Supervisor and Steward for the Mountain Region & Natural Areas Science Coordinator, Ryan Klopff, and Regional Supervisor and Steward of the Northern Region Steward, Michael Lott, visited BRMNAP's Highpoint Restoration Area, which is approaching ten years of rehabilitation. Michael and Ryan noted greatly improved habitat conditions that they credited to the on-the-ground action taken by VOF.
- Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage's Invasive Species team Kevin Heffernan, Amos "A.G." Sweany, and Lindsay Caplan, visited BRMNAP to learn how they could best support our invasive plant management work. They are seen standing in front of a stack of tree trunks created from over 130 invasive ailanthus trees that resulted from last year's invasive plant removal effort.
- Francisco Javier Robayo Guerra is the manager of the Dracula Reserve, a 5,342 acre reserve protecting cloud forest habitat in Northern Ecuador. He is also a strategic partner to two locally based organizations, Reserva: The Youth Land Trust and The Rainforest Trust. Javier was in the U.S. to attend a number of conservation meetings with these partners and requested to visit BRMNAP to experience Virginia wilderness and compare our native snake population to what he stewards in Ecuador. Javier and our BRMNAP team discovered through this field meeting that they face many of the same land management challenges, despite the differences in habitat and geographic location.



Federal NPS Chesapeake Gateways Grant Complete!

Our final grant reports have been accepted and Federal funds secured for our NPS Chesapeake Gateways program. This award provided VOF with \$71,711.90 towards BRMNAP's cultural history program for our application, "Living on the Edge: Uncovering and Sharing the Stories of Bull Run Mountain's Diversely Peopled Past".



This funding enabled continued archaeological and genealogical work, along with a historical structural analysis of a still standing home along the Fern Hollow trail. All of this work culminated in greater insight into our understanding of the Robinson family, including a look into the life of family patriarch, Alfred Robinson, pre-emancipation. The grant also enabled VOF to hire a seasonal fellow to create educational programming covering Bull Run Mountains' cultural history for two entire grades (fourth and fifth grades) at two public schools within Prince William County (Chris Yung Elementary and Buckland Mills Elementary), special interest groups, and the visiting public.

Infrastructural Improvement Progress

As previously reported, VOF has planned for the development of a new parking lot and trailhead at the Bull Run Preserve for over 20 years. A 4-acre parcel that borders Beverley Mill Drive was set aside from preserve status for this purpose (dedicated as permanent open space, but not designated as Natural Area Preserve). The planned improvements will move our visitor parking lot from its current position along a VDOT right-of-way onto VOF land. This will provide a safer, more welcoming, user experience while improving site security, by placing parking behind a lockable gate.

Our parking lot development has been progressing and is slated for completion this fall. Concurrent work on a stretch of a newly planned trail is well underway. This new trail is shown as the “popsicle trail” venturing north and marked in blue on the existing trail map. It will take visitors up the visually stunning Catlett’s Branch stream corridor to a number of homestead sites that will add one mile of trail and historical depth and breadth of experience to our visitors related to the Preserve’s peopled past.



Spring Outreach at BRMNAP

A number of educational events have occurred here at VOF's Preserve at Bull Run Mountains over the last few months. These include:

- Our popular Spotted Salamander event kicked off this year's offerings with a mid-February emergence and vernal pool migration that brought all ages to the preserve.
- A guided spring ephemeral hike in early April revealed the botanical wonders of early spring within the interior forests and stream sides of the Bull Run Mountains.
- In mid-April, VOF tabled at the Prince William Conservation Alliance and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resource's annual Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area.
- iNaturalist is a free phone application that allows anyone to make species observations that can meaningfully contribute to science and land management by anchoring a photo and accompanying data of their encounter in real time from their smart phone. During the last weekend of April, BRMNAP welcomed the public to come act as "community scientists" by contributing data via iNaturalist's City Nature Challenge.
- In mid-May, we welcomed the Oak Spring Garden Foundation for their annual "Reading The Landscape" course led by historical ecologist, Michael Gaige, where the participants journey "back-in-time" on their day-long field course finale on the North Section's trail system.
- Celebrating the spring nesting season, we welcomed birders out in late May to our North Section to encounter a variety of returning migrating birds species.



HOUSE MOUNTAIN RESERVE

884 acres in Rockbridge County



VOF continues to manage and maintain the property with a focus on public access and natural and cultural resource protection. The trailhead kiosk has been refreshed in anticipation of an updated map, and our extraordinary volunteer continues to keep the parking area clear and trails open, despite numerous downed trees that fell during the multiple winter and spring storms.



On a recent visit, VOF staff met with Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) staff, who were observing species on the property.



VOF looks forward to the spring and summer seasons on the mountain and continuing to explore ways to improve access to the saddle.

