

VIRGINIA OUTDOORS FOUNDATION OWNED LANDS ACTIVITIES REPORT

Prepared for the June 11, 2026 Board Meeting

BULL RUN MOUNTAINS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE 2,528 acres in Prince William and Fauquier Counties

Trails, Interpretive Signage, and Welcome Area Progress

As previously reported, a new out-and-back trail is nearing completion, with a soft opening of the “Blue Trail” planned for June 19th. Prototype interpretive signage was developed for this stretch of new trail and installation is imminent. This signage tells the captivating story of the post-emancipation African American quarry neighborhood that was uncovered by years of research through our cultural history program supported by grant awards such as the National Park Service Chesapeake Gateways grant for ~\$70,000.

Alfred Robinson
Emancipation of a Family Patriarch

Alfred Robinson, patriarch of one of the Bull Run Mountains' most enduring families, transformed a life of forced labor into a legacy of place and heritage.

FROM BONDAGE
Alfred was likely born in 1841 and was enslaved by the Thompson family near Somerville until he was hired out to the Smith family near Bethel. Alfred and his wife, Susan Marshall, had their first two children before 1865.

A MOUNTAIN HOME
About 1880, the Robinsons moved to the Bull Run Mountains, where their 11th child, Moses, was born. Alfred passed away by 1915, but his son, Moses, and family remained at the homestead until after wife Kate passed in 1951.

AN ENDURING LEGACY
With help from descendants, forensic genealogists, historians, and others from the community, VOF has preserved the stories of Alfred and his family for future generations, ensuring that the Bull Run Mountains remain connected to the people who found freedom and a home here.

Robinson Homestead

Blenheim / Chelsea Farms

Bethel

TO FREEDOM
Once emancipated, Alfred remained working as a paid laborer on Smith family farms until 1879 - Alton, Blenheim, and Chelsea. By this time, eight more children had been born into the Robinson family.

Family photo from a 2024 Descendants Day gathering.

vof.org
bullrunmountains.org

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QR code and Adobe Express logo.

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 and a maintenance area behind a lockable gate.

We are happy to report further improvements of our “stewardship hub” (a shed made from two cargo containers and a connecting roof system), with the installation of a rainwater catchment system. This sustainable system captures rainwater from the building’s roof within a 550-gallon tank and will enable more efficient and effective Invasive Plant Management (IPM) at BRMNAP by enabling broadcast herbicide application to target larger carpets of non-woody target species, such as Japanese stilt grass and wavyleaf basket grass.



VOF Easement Property Owner Turned Owned Lands Volunteer!

VOF easement property owner and attorney, Susan French, organized fellow members of the Environmental Law Section of the Virginia State Bar Program to spend this past Earth Day with VOF staff to remove invasive Japanese barberry from BRMNAP's future welcome area.

Following this meeting, Ms. French, further connected with VOF staff by volunteering some legal expertise in exploring possible conservation solutions for an heirs property that is of critical importance to BRMNAP and the historical integrity of its surrounding community.



VOF Continues to Provide Meaningful Community Space for Science, Education, and Outreach

BRMNAP continues to serve as a space to facilitate science, education, and VOF outreach.

We have these updates to report regarding the facilitation of research:

- Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and The Clifton Institute have expanded their Eastern box turtle population and movement study onto BRMNAP property. This research aims to investigate human impacts on this species, such as vehicle and mower strikes, and how they might be mitigated with a better understanding of their populations and movement patterns. This study will provide a glimpse into the population that exists along our South Section's public trail system.
- The first research study resulting from Dr. Ben Kligman and his team's paleontological work on the Preserve's Waterfall Formation was published within the *Journal of Anatomy*. Entitled, "A bristle-nosed Jurassic ray-finned fish (*Actinopterygii*) bears true dermal odontodes on its snout", this publication is the first of many that will formally describe what the Bull Run Mountains environment, flora, and fauna was like 200 million years ago during the Triassic-Jurassic boundary. This body of work will fill a major gap in the understanding of this region's ancient environment.



We have these updates to report regarding outreach and education:

- Our anticipated public event that welcomes the public, of all ages, out to BRMNAP to witness the emergence of the spotted Salamanders, brought out around 30 participants and put VOF on the cover of the Fauquier Times.
- Oak Spring Garden Foundation's (OSGF) historical ecologist, Michael Gaige, and his students joined us at the Preserve's North Section for their final field trip and practicum of a week-long residential professional training course, known as "Reading the Landscape" (RTL). This is the 7th year this in-demand course has been held and is designed for professionals and advanced students, from a wide range of backgrounds. They spend the week at OSGF learning how to interpret landscapes and their history, employing a suite of archival and field forensic methodologies, before coming out to apply them at VOF's Preserve at Bull Run Mountains.
- VOF staff tabled at two environmental events in Northern Virginia, sharing information about our work throughout the commonwealth and welcoming NOVA locals to visit VOF's Preserve at Bull Run Mountains. One of these tabling events was Fauquier County Park and Recreation's and the Town of Warrenton's "Cultural Heritage Festival" which is held at the Warrenton Aquatic and Recreation Facility (WARF), while the other was at Prince William Conservation Alliance's "Blue Bell Festival" held at Merrimac Wildlife Management Area.
- VOF staff led these hikes for 1) The nature club at the nearby Potomac Green retirement community who requested a guided hike to witness orchids and other spring flowers that BRMNAP protects, 2) and another such wildflower walk for the general public, 3) a hike that honors the life and contributions of late, NOVA conservationist and former Executive Director of the Prince William Conservation Alliance, Kim Hosen, and 4), a Black and African-American hike that shared the rich history of the Preserve's Catlett's Branch quarry community. This offering welcomed back past VOF fellow, Barinaale Dube, as a guest speaker. Ms. Dube was one of two fellows that helped us kick off our Fellowship program back in 2020, when she was still a sophomore at Howard University.



HOUSE MOUNTAIN RESERVE 884 acres in Rockbridge County

VOF continues to manage and maintain the property, with a focus on public access and allowing activities that are conducive to the ongoing protection of its natural and cultural resources. VOF staff from the Bull Run office joined Staunton office staff for a site visit to install new signage at the parking lot kiosk and saddle between Big and Little House Mountain trails. While there, they met with local VOF volunteer and House Mountain enthusiast, Brian McCannon.

It was a beautiful day to be on the mountain! We saw a dozen happy hikers, some of which were Washington & Lee students and VaTech alumni.



On the hike we observed putty root orchids, American chestnut trees, and many species of birds including Red-eyed Vireos, nesting Blue-headed Vireos, and Cerulean Warblers (photo right). The Cerulean Warbler is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need by the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan. Populations have dropped significantly (by over 70% since the 1960s) due to the loss of mature, unfragmented hardwood forests in both their Appalachian breeding grounds and their wintering ranges in Central and South America.



KOHL'S ISLAND RESERVE

80 acres in Northumberland County

Dredging project for the Little Wicomico River update

Chief Patron Senator Richard Stuart and Co-Patron Senator Ryan McDougle introduced a line-item amendment to the first year of the FY 2027 budget, adding \$2.6 million from the General Fund to the Marine Resources Commission total funding amount to be provided to the Northern Neck Planning District Commission for dredging of the Little Wicomico River. This amendment provides \$2.6 million in GF revenue in the first year for emergency dredging of the river channel which was last dredged in 2014. Permitting and engineering design activities are expected to be completed by early July 2026. The project will be put out to bid and once a contractor is selected, the physical digging is expected to commence in early fall. Dredging will entail moving 36,900 cubic feet of material, mostly sand.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) approved \$2.6 million in emergency funding from the Waterway Maintenance Grant Program to dredge the federal navigation channel of the Little Wicomico River, following a unanimous 8-0 vote on February 24, 2026. Emergency funding was requested due to safety concerns and potential economic impacts if the channel remained impassable.

The Northern Neck Planning District Commission, which manages the Northern Neck Shallow Draft Dredging Plan, highlighted that delays in dredging could result in loss of life, total river closure, and economic disruption. Emergency crews, including Smith Point Sea Rescue, have previously had to take longer routes due to shallow conditions, and local marinas, watermen, and seafood processors rely on the channel for their livelihoods. VOF has granted access to Kohls Island for planning and design purposes. The construction work will not impact Kohls Island, and all dredge materials are slated to be placed on the beach to the south of the channel.



Historic image of Kohl's island prior to residential and waterfront development.

BLUE BALL MOUNTAIN

100 acres in Clarke County

VOF staff performed a site visit at our Blue Ball Mountain property in May. This forested mountaintop sits above the Shenandoah River and serves as a scenic viewshed for those traveling along the Route. and river corridor, while providing a suite of environmental services to the surrounding human community and native wildlife. The 100 acres are largely composed of oak forest, and staff are happy to report that there were no new signs of trespass, or disturbance, observed. The mountain is bounded largely by private properties subject to VOF easement.

