Riverbend Park in Winter

In spring, Riverbend Park’s floodplain is carpeted with Bluebells. In summer, its trails are shaded by silver maple, sycamore and tulip trees while the Potomac River floats lazily by. Fall brings brilliant colors, bright berries, and the ground covered with leaves. Winter is colder and quieter, but it nonetheless has charms all of its own and is well worth a visit. Don’t let cold weather deter you from coming to Riverbend Park.

With their leaves gone, the tree trunks and the entire forest is seen in an entirely new perspective. The bark of the sycamore trees is particularly vivid. The absence of the leaf canopy opens up the visitor’s vista to a much broader view, extending all the way to the river. Many different birds, including migratory species such as the bufflehead, appear on the
river, along with ruby-crowned kinglets, winter wrens, hermit thrushes and yellow-bellied sapsuckers. The American Bald Eagles begin their nesting on Minnehaha Island in early winter. Riverbend Park in winter in many ways is as interesting and as spectacular, although in different ways, as it is in all its other seasons.

*Photos courtesy of Paul Laurenza, Scott Miller and Hugh Morrow.*
Another wonderful feature of Riverbend Park in winter is that, even though it is cold and there may be snow on the ground, there are still many, many activities, programs, camps and special events being carried out by the Riverbend Park staff. Some of these programs include:

- Tree ID – Bark and Buds
- Winter Waterfowl Hike
- Field Trip: Winter Birds of the Coast
- Full Moon Nature Hike and Campfire
- Holiday Animal Winter Festival
- Hot Cocoa Party
- Scatology
- Klondike Campfire Cookout
- Kids Night Out
- Our Furry Friends
- Snow Big Deal

Boy Scout programs are also available for Merit Badges in Astronomy, Chemistry, Environmental Science and Indian Lore. Girl Scout programs include Brownie GS badges for an Outdoor Art Creator and Start Your Journey – Wonders of Water; Junior GS programs Start Your Journey – Get Moving and Take Action Project; Cadette GS program Start Your Journey – Breathe; and Senior GS program Sky Naturalist. Riverbend in winter also features three winter camps – Animal Vets Winter Workshop, Crime Scene Science and Geology Rocks Camp. All of these programs run from December through March and are well worth the time to learn and stay in touch with Nature.

More information on these programs, events and camps as well as registration information is available on the Riverbend Park website:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend
FORB Page Now on Facebook

The Friends of Riverbend Park created a page dedicated to the park on Facebook last summer. The first post on July 26th attracted no visits, but since then the number of people reached, those engaged with the website, and the “likes” received have increased steadily. The post on November 2nd reached 123 persons and that entered on December 5th was viewed by 430 people. We urge all FORB members to “share” our page on Facebook and thus increase our audience.

FORB’s Facebook page is utilized not only to extol the virtues of Riverbend Park and encourage membership and donations to support the park, but also to announce upcoming events and particular features which might prove interesting and enjoyable to viewers. Examples include announcement of Riverbend Park’s Virginia Indian Festival in early September and FORB’s Barbeque Benefit in Late September. One post was dedicated entirely to the beautiful moths and butterflies which are encountered at Riverbend Park.

Our page may be found on Facebook (www.facebook.com) by searching for Friends of Riverbend Park or by entering the direct link: https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Riverbend-Park-1860876507539239/

There are, however, other “Friends of Riverbend Park” pages, one in Florida and another in Ontario. The Friends of Riverbend Park in Great Falls, Virginia is marked by our logo shown below. Please visit our page to keep up on current news and events, and “like” or “share” our page.

![Riverbend Park Logo]
Navigating the Trails at Riverbend Park

While most visitors to Riverbend Park are very familiar with the Potomac Heritage Trail, formerly known as the River Trail, which follows the Virginia-side bank of the Potomac River all the way from the Upper Potomac Regional Park to Great Falls Park, far fewer are as familiar with those that lead away from the river or which parallel the river further away. Such colorful names as Follow the Hollows Trail, Madison’s Escape Trail, Bootlegger Trail, and Duff N Stuff Loop (shown below in fall) are all within Riverbend Park and are well worth exploring. They are also very often much less crowded on pleasant summer days, and offer the prospect of a quiet walk in the woods.
FORB’s Annual Meeting of Members

The Friends of Riverbend Park’s Annual Meeting of Members was held on Tuesday, November 13th 2018 at 7:30 PM at the Visitors’ Center. The full Minutes of the meeting, along with the overview slide presentation on FORB’s accomplishments and finances during recent years is available by request to forbpark@gmail.com or by visiting our website at www.forb.wildapricot.org.

FORB Holds Election of Directors

The Friends of Riverbend Park conducted its election of Directors in October-November 2018. Karen Hershey, Kurt Laubinger and Frank Zeng were elected as new Directors for a three-year term expiring in 2021. Jack Bowles, John Hughes-Caley, Hugh Morrow and Cynthia Nordstrom-Fisher were re-elected as Directors also for a three-year term expiring in 2021. The new FORB Board of Directors is as follows:

Hugh Morrow, President
Nancy Waugh, Secretary
Kevin Dillon, Treasurer
Eleanor Anderson
Jack Bowles
Karen Hershey
John Hughes-Caley
Kurt Laubinger
Cynthia Nordstrom-Fisher
Frank Zeng
John Callow, Riverbend Park Manager, ex-officio
Flooding at Riverbend Park and the Future

Over the past thirty years, the Potomac River has flooded many times, and often to levels which pose an imminent danger to Riverbend Park and to its principal structure, the Visitors’ Center. The USGS (United States Geological Survey) monitors the river’s water levels at the Little Falls Pumping Station, which is its closest monitoring station to the Riverbend Park’s Visitors’ Center. The Riverbend Park staff has also developed an excellent correlation between the Little Falls Gage Height and the levels it measures at the Riverbend Park boat launch. The USGS levels from 2008 through 2018 are shown in their graph below:

![Graph showing water levels at Riverbend Park](image)

These data clearly show that flooding, defined as the 10-ft gage height level by the National Weather Service, occurred in 2008, 2010, 2011,
2013, 2014 and several times in 2018. The river was also very close to flood stage (above action stage) in many other years. Examination of the USGS’ water discharge rate data at this same location going back to 1988 also indicates flood or near-flood conditions in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2003 and 2004. Major floods (as measured by park staff at the boat launch railings) have been recorded at the Riverbend Park boat launch in January 1996, September 1996, June 2018 and September 2003. It is clear that flooding at the Riverbend Park Visitors’ Center location is a chronic occurrence and not an occasional one.

It must also be noted that the current Visitors’ Center sits squarely on the Potomac River Flood Plain, and is thus completely vulnerable to the now-regular flooding which occurs at Riverbend. The survival of the building is only a matter of the severity of the flooding. It is not a question of “if” it will occur but a question of “when” it will occur and how severe it will be.
The diagram above, taken from the 2013 Riverbend Park Master Plan, clearly shows that the present Visitors’ Center is right in the Resource Protection Area (RPA) which corresponds to the maximum expected extent of the Potomac River flood plain. The Visitors’ Center is located just above and to the right of the label for Conn’s Creek in this map. Both the upper and lower parking lots at the Visitors’ Center are also in the cross-hatched RPA area or flood plain. In addition, flooding in Riverbend Park often leads to serious bank erosion, sweeps trees and vegetation away, and has damaged some of the memorial benches along the Potomac Heritage Trail. One of the projects being undertaken now by park staff is to replant trees along the river bank to help stabilize it.

Flooding at Riverbend Park necessitates execution of certain mandated protocols by the park staff depending on its extent. The Potomac Heritage Trail along the river is normally closed, and boating on the river is curtailed. Both of these actions result in far fewer park visitors and thereby lost income, either directly to Riverbend Park or indirectly through FORB’s ability to support the park. In extreme situations, the park may be shut down entirely.
The Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) is greatly concerned over periodic flooding at Riverbend Park, the vulnerability of the Visitors’ Center to that flooding, and thus the future financial viability of Riverbend Park. FORB recently sent a formal request to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) to include funding in the 2020 Park Bond Issue to initiate planning and a design study for a new Interpretive Center in accordance with the 2013 Riverbend Park Master Plan.

The Interpretive Center would sit above the Potomac River flood plain, and would accommodate most of the functions and programs now housed in the Visitors’ Center. Shown below is the 2013 Conceptual Development Plan from the FCPA’s Riverbend Park Master Plan. The envisioned Interpretive Center is above the Floodplain Forest Zone whereas the present Visitors’ Center is not. The Visitors’ Center would be repurposed as a Waterfront Activity Center. Some projects shown on this diagram have already been completed or changed since 2013.
Flooding, of course, is an inevitable part of the cycles of Nature, but it is one which needs to be accommodated and planned for in order to ensure that Riverbend Park will endure as a refuge for all to enjoy and yet remain financially viable in the future.

Don’t Forget to Renew Your FORB Membership

Don’t forget to renew your FORB Membership before the end of the year to take full advantage of a 2018 tax deduction. Membership renewals and donations may be made on our website using the three-bar menu tab on the upper right hand corner of our home page. Thank you for your support of Riverbend Park, and best wishes for the Holidays and the New Year.

Friends of Riverbend Park Contact Information

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