



# NATURE NEWS



A seasonal newsletter brought to you by the Mill Creek Neighborhood Nature Committee

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, PAGE 1

JANUARY 2023



## Top stories in this newsletter



**Neighborhood Nature Trails are available for you to explore!**



**Plant expert making Mill Creek house calls!**

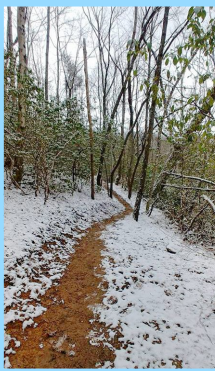


**Make a difference and make new friends at an NNC workday!**



**Look for new Mill Creek HOA Property Markers!**

## New Neighborhood Nature Trails give you a reason to get out this winter!

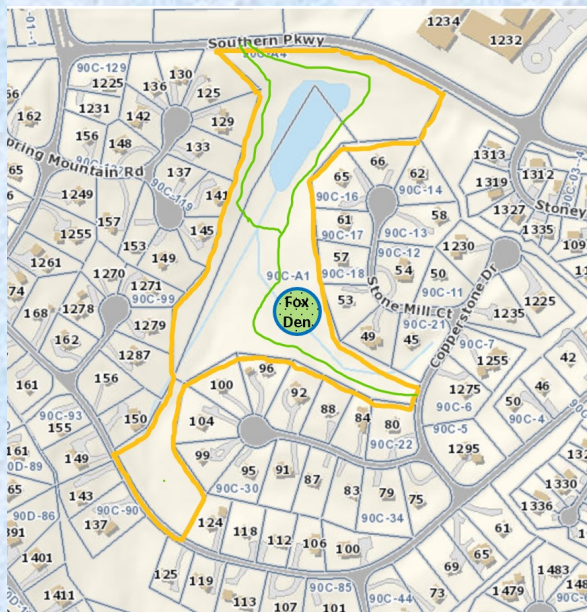


Multiple group workdays and many individual efforts have been underway this past fall and winter and the NNC's vision of nature trails meandering through Mill Creek's Common Areas to allow residents to experience up-close the magnificent natural resources that surround us is becoming a reality! Thanks to the hard work of many of your neighbors, a mulched path is now open between Southern Parkway and the creek leading to the pond. Another path from Southern Parkway across the pond dam and down the east side of the pond has been cleared to close the loop. A branch has been started to connect the pond trail to a path that leads up to Copperstone Dr but is being rerouted around a newly identified fox nursery. The winter months provide an interesting view of our common areas and expose features that are hidden by the leaves and undergrowth present during other seasons. Nature is pretty amazing in the winter - bundle up and go exploring!! But please be mindful of wildlife and sensitive habitats and try to minimize any disturbance, especially

around the fox den. You'll also see evidence of the NNC volunteers' invasive vine cutting efforts to liberate some of our most valuable mature trees. The willows, pines, oaks, alders and other species that have been freed are the foundation for a healthy native ecosystem. Slow but steady progress is being made on removing invasive non-natives such as English Ivy, Winter Creeper, Bittersweet and Autumn Olives. The NNC is still gathering neighborhood input on trail development, so your feedback is encouraged.

**CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS!** If you are interested in joining the NNC or volunteering for a workday, or have thoughts on the trail development please reach out to Caroline Wade at [carolinewade3@gmail.com](mailto:carolinewade3@gmail.com).

### TRAIL MAP



**Please be respectful of wildlife and habitat in the Common Areas. Keep disruption to a minimum. Keep your dog on a leash and away from animals and animal dens at all times.**





## NNC Common Area clean-up days are being planned for February!



The Neighborhood Nature Committee would like to get out ahead of the growth that will be upon us come spring so we'll be hosting several clean-up days in the next few months. The group will be trimming along the trails, spreading mulch, cutting vines and invasive species, and encouraging native species and habitats. Not only is progress being made to more proactively maintain our common areas and develop access trails for all Mill Creek residents to use, but new connections and friendships are being made with neighbors. It will take a group effort to keep these types of trails accessible, so please consider dedicating some time to help - and perhaps make some new friends in the process! Volunteers will be rewarded with a wildflower walk later this spring being planned by one of our committee members!

**The Committee will provide work gloves, tools, and snacks. All are welcome, so please contact Caroline at [carolinewade3@gmail.com](mailto:carolinewade3@gmail.com) if you would like to join us!**



## Mill Creek's Resident Plant Expert Makes House Calls!

If you were at the Mill Creek HOA Fall picnic, you may have noticed a table displaying various invasive plants – ones found in our neighborhood! We also had fliers from Blue Ridge Prism (great source for information - <https://blueridgeprism.org/>) which had photos and descriptions of a dozen invasives found in our area. One intention for the Plant Committee (PC) is to do our best to remove and control invasive species in our common areas. This is a long-term plan. For example, Japanese Stiltgrass seeds can last up to 7 years in the soil. Yes, you will need to pull the plant for 7 years minimum. Or you will need to mow or weed whack the grass before it seeds, usually in August. We hope to encourage individual homeowners to do the same. We are learning as we go and are glad to share information. We can even walk your property with you to offer suggestions.

What we see in the neighborhood are the following:

- ◇ Autumn Olive – shrub that looks like a small tree, produces berries, difficult to eradicate. Start by removal before seeds ripen (mid July)
- ◇ Porcelain Berry vine – beautiful berries! Look at what they have done to the trees in the field at the bottom of Southern Parkway. They may be choking trees in your yard too.
- ◇ Oriental Bittersweet Vine – I'm guilty. I once collected these and made fall arrangements. Often seen along with the Porcelain berry choking the same trees.
- ◇ English Ivy – How smart are these Ivy League schools? Still sold at nurseries. It will also choke your trees. Ticks like to live in this ivy – maybe that will encourage removal!
- ◇ Japanese Stiltgrass – smothers natives, spreads readily, dried field is a fire hazard. I have personally watched this spread along Biscuit Run creek trail over recent years.
- ◇ Japanese Honeysuckle – It's everywhere, right? Invasive! There is a wonderful native honeysuckle, and the hummingbirds love it.
- ◇ Ailanthus, Tree of Heaven – most frightening now because the Spotted Lantern Fly lays its eggs on this tree. One sure identification factor – it stinks where you break the leaf or branch. Difficult to eradicate.
- ◇ Kudzu – I think we do not have it. Let's not let it find us.

The first step is to recognize what invasives we have. Once you start to identify them, you just can't stop seeing them! Mill Creek has always had the reputation of being the community that was built around the trees, saving the natural environment. We'll be making a small dent with our efforts, but we think it's worth it. Let's ask questions, learn how to properly remove the bad guys, and start adding native plants.

The NNC has resources to help you identify and control invasives and promote natives.

If you would like to have a committee member visit with you in your yard, please reach out to Joyce Kaswandik at [joycekaswandik@gmail.com](mailto:joycekaswandik@gmail.com) for more information







## Biscuit Run Connector Trail and Park Planning Update



You may have noticed the new “Property of Mill Creek HOA” signs that have been posted along the portion of Mill Creek HOA’s trail that runs along Biscuit Run. Did you know that Mill Creek HOA owns a significant area of wooded land that extends from behind the homes on Timberbranch across Biscuit Run Creek and up to the back of the properties along Maymont Ct in the Oak Hill subdivision?

A proposed easement by Albemarle County to use the Biscuit Run portion of our HOA trail as a connector trail between the Charlottesville Trail Hub at 5th Street Station and the new Biscuit Run County Park being developed off of Route 20 is still under consideration and negotiation by the Mill Creek HOA Board. The board is involved in ongoing discussions with County staff and also communicates with representatives from the Piedmont Environmental Council, who owns property adjacent to Mill Creek’s Common Area along Biscuit Run. As part of the negotiations, the Mill Creek HOA Board has identified some critical issues to be resolved in the easement language for protecting Mill Creek residents and the ecosystems in our common areas. The board has been diligently working on your behalf to ensure that the final document is favorable to our interests before bringing it to all the homeowners for a vote on approval. Stay tuned for more information coming as part of the annual HOA meeting in April!



Meanwhile, Albemarle County and the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) are moving ahead with development efforts within the County Park. Current activities include:

- ◇ Construction will begin in Q1 of 2023 for the planned Route 20 park entrance and trailhead with the trailhead expected to be complete by October 2023.
- ◇ A PEC led project to design a bridge to connect Hickory St and surrounding neighborhoods to Biscuit Run park is underway. The bridge will be located near Hickory St. where a trailhead is also being planned.
- ◇ Albemarle County will kick off an engineering phase with their design team (Line+Grade) in February, focused on the design of planned bridges and boardwalks within the Phase 1 trail network. This planning will include coordination with leadership from the CAMBC mountain bike club on the planned Downhill Bike Area and planned Flow Trails Bike Area.
- ◇ County Park planning efforts also include ongoing assessments of, and conservation planning for, natural heritage resources and increased capacity for invasive species management and corresponding restoration projects as part of the County’s FY2024 budget planning process. In addition, a grant proposal is pending that would help to fund a stream restoration project along Biscuit Run creek.
- ◇ Albemarle County is holding a kick-off meeting this month with their design team (LPDA) to begin designing the planned Connector Greenway between 5th Street Station and Biscuit Run Park, as well as a Trailhead Park at 5th Street Station. Implementation of this work is dependent on the acquisition of needed greenway easements from Mill Creek HOA and Foxcroft HOA.
- ◇ VDOT is about to begin their Smart Scale project – the 5th Street Trails Hub – the first week in February. This VDOT-funded project would be located between the two County-led projects and efforts are focused on ensuring successful coordination between and the County.







Spring Peepers are Coming (and may already be here)!!



We are lucky to have habitats around the Mill Creek pond and along our creeks that are favorable to many species of frogs and toads. This information from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will help you learn to distinguish their sounds. Here is a fun activity for kids or adults - <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/who-is-calling-tonight.pdf>

What Frogs Are You Hearing?

Virginia Frog Phenology (Calling/ Breeding Periods)

Species	Calling/ Breeding Period							Early Season Mid-season Late Season		
	Late Jan.	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
American Bullfrog										
Green Frog										
Pickereel Frog										
Southern Leopard Frog*										
Atlantic Coast Leopard Frog**										
Wood Frog										
Carpenter Frog										
Barking Treefrog										
Green Treefrog										
Squirrel Treefrog										
Pine Woods Treefrog										
Gray Treefrog										
Cope's Gray Treefrog										
Northern Cricket Frog										
Southern Cricket Frog										
Spring Peeper*										
Little Grass Frog										
Mountain Chorus Frog										
Brimley's Chorus Frog										
Upland Chorus Frog										
New Jersey Chorus Frog										
Southern Chorus Frog										
American Toad										
Fowler's Toad										
Southern Toad										
Oak Toad										
Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad										
Eastern Spadefoot										

\* Southern Leopard Frogs and Spring Peepers are known to periodically call during warm, rainy evenings in the fall.

\*\* Recently described species to Virginia and calling/breeding phenology is not fully understood.



Each spring the night is filled with the calls of Virginia's twenty eight species of frogs and toads. Although it may sound like just noise, the experienced ear can pick out the call of each species the way some individuals can pick out each instrument in a symphony. Virginia's frog and toad symphony begins in January with the Wood Frog and Little Grass Frog. They are followed by the Spring Peeper and several of the Chorus Frog species in February. Calling begins as the weather warms and often after a heavy spring rain. The night time symphony continues into October with some species calling all summer and other species going quiet.

Only the male of each species call and each species has their own distinctive call recognized by members of the same species. Within each species there are several types of calls including; advertisement for mates, encounter calls when they meet a rival and are defending their territory, release calls when a male is grabbed by another male who mistakes it for a female, and a distress call that may be designed to startle a predator into releasing it so it can make its escape.

Architectural Review Committee (ARC) Reminders



As you develop plans to improve the exterior of your home and property, the ARC reminds you to read Article VII Sec 7.03 in the Bylaws, and Article VII Sec 1, 2 & 5 in the Covenants which are posted on the website [Millcreekhomeowners.org](http://Millcreekhomeowners.org) and to **remember that ARC review and approval is needed before work begins.**

**Any home exterior addition to or change or alteration requires the submittal of plans and approval by the ARC. This also includes all fences and sheds.** Note: the ARC has 30 days to respond, so please plan accordingly.

**The ARC prefers to visit with each homeowner to discuss their proposal and offer suggestions when appropriate, so please don't hesitate to reach out at [arc@millcreekclassic.org](mailto:arc@millcreekclassic.org)**

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## ARC Committee Reminders, continued



**Sheds** must have siding that is horizontal matching the siding of the home and colors of your home for siding, trim, doors and shingles.

**Paint colors** – The notebook that has samples of the approved paint colors is available for homeowners to borrow prior to purchasing paint/stain. Contact the ARC via email at [arc@millcreekclassic.org](mailto:arc@millcreekclassic.org) to borrow the notebook. Please note that the colors approved are specific to siding, trim and doors.

**Mailboxes** are to be maintained and painted following the guidelines of the association. The HOA purchases paint for homeowners to use. Contact the ARC to request paint. The plans are available on the website . **We are looking for someone to build and replace mailboxes. Anyone interested please contact the board at [hoa@millcreekclassic.org](mailto:hoa@millcreekclassic.org)** as we would like to assure homeowners re able to replace their mailboxes when needed.

**ALL Live Trees greater than 3 inches require approval prior to removal.** Dead trees may be removed by homeowner at any time

## Common Area Reminders

**Tree and yard debris should not be left along neighborhood roadways and should not be disposed of in Mill Creek Common Areas.** Dumping of debris can block required access, impede proper stormwater drainage which creates a flooding hazard, is unsightly for your neighbors, and in large amounts can negatively impact natural ecosystems. The NNC has begun to designate sites for the collection of some debris from the Common Areas, but ultimately, it is each homeowner's responsibility to either remove, mulch, or compost their own yard debris outside of the Common Areas. **If you need assistance or recommendations, please reach out to the NNC at [hoa@millcreekclassic.org](mailto:hoa@millcreekclassic.org) by including NNC in the email subject.**

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