

## **Natural Heritage Committee Held Successful Bioblitz in the Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park**

On May 1, 2010, 50 volunteers and 6 staff of the Parks & Recreation Department conducted in the Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park the county's first-ever Bioblitz for the purposes of planning the new park and preserving the biodiversity of Albemarle County.

In 2004, Robert Byrom donated 600 acres of land to Albemarle County in honor of his wife, Patricia. In 2008, the Board of Supervisors approved creation of the Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park. This beautiful, steep, mountainous land is located in northwestern Albemarle County and abuts several large private landholdings and, via a small segment of land, Shenandoah National Park.

In 2009, after having actively participated in the planning of the new Preddy Creek Park, members of the Natural Heritage Committee offered their services to the Parks & Recreation Department to help plan the new Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park. More specifically, the committee offered to organize a Bioblitz, a 24-hour event in which teams of scientists, volunteers, and community members join forces to find, identify, and learn about the biodiversity of a specific area of land or water.

The event was a major success and reflected excellent partnering between a Board-appointed committee and county staff.

The Natural Heritage Committee provided overall organization for the event, recruited professional scientists and skilled naturalists to participate, initiated and conducted communications with neighbors and participants before and after the event, managed two mini inventory events before the big event, and managed all data collection and analysis.

The Parks & Recreation Department managed on-site development and safety. They cleared the entrance to the park, cleared and sign-marked trails, provided mapping information, obtained all special permissions, maintained communications with neighbors, transported participants to more distant locations of the park via ATV's, organized emergency medical coverage, provided participants with radios for on-site communication during the event, and provided logistical equipment such as tables and tarp shelters.

On the day of the event teams of about half dozen individuals equipped with observation forms, field guides, maps, cameras, GPS units, and communication radios were sent out to predetermined locations in the park. In most cases they had been given a specific class of organisms on which to focus based upon the expertise of members of that group. A total of 90 volunteers participated and included highly trained amateurs and professionals in the areas of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, worms, aquatic invertebrates, fish, plants, geology, land use history, and photography. Volunteers included members of the local Master Naturalists' group, students of all levels and professors from UVA, and professional biologists from a private firm in Hampton, VA. Volunteers gave a total of 700 hours of service to this project. This 700 number includes 250 hours spent by members of the NHC organizing and managing the event and analyzing data.

The Bioblitz revealed – and it's worth noting that this was primarily during a 24-hour period and only in about 10% of the park – that the Patricia Ann Byrom Preserve

Forest Park contains a wealth of biodiversity. The participants recorded 245 different species. Of special note are the unusual species of American chestnut, American elm, and Big-toothed aspen; exceptionally high numbers of salamanders, ferns, and orchids; and high numbers of specific birds whose lives are totally dependent upon healthy intact forest habitats. [Please refer to attached spreadsheet for specifics about organisms observed.]

Based on the findings of the 2010 Bioblitz in the Patricia Ann Byrom Forest Preserve Park, the Natural Heritage Committee makes the following recommendations to the Parks & Recreation Department for planning.

1. Plan trails and recreation areas so that there is minimal disturbance to the few identified unusual species (ex. American chestnut, American elm, Big-toothed aspen), groups (ex. ferns, orchids), geology, and habitats (ex. seeps, wetlands, and streams especially where streams and old logging roads intersect or adjoin (along trails A and E)).
2. Restrict active recreation to only certain portions of the park.
3. Reserve large blocks of the park's forests to remain undisturbed, especially in areas of highest elevation or steepest slope.
4. Reserve areas of the park with high cultural history to remain undisturbed until further inventories can be made.
5. Invite specialists from the community to conduct further or more specialized inventory and interpretive studies (ex. UVA, Master Naturalists, Tree Stewards).
6. Invite scientists, historians, and educators to use the park as a resource for research and interpretive work.
7. Create a plan for providing interpretation of the park's resources for the public.
8. Create a plan for management of non-native invasive species.

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