

TOWN OF WOODSTOCK'S INDIAN SPRINGS WETLANDS PARK (8/30/11)

Background: Indian Springs is located on the western side of the Town of Woodstock. It is a natural wetlands area, about 1 acre in size, and has remained relatively intact since early settlement. It is highly unusual to have such a feature in a town. It was used by Indian tribes and hunting parties travelling through the Shenandoah Valley on the old Indian road, a peacetime trail extending from Canada to Georgia. This trail evolved into a wagon road for settlers, the Valley Pike, and today US-11. Later, African-American residents gathered at the wetland area for social and religious gatherings well into the 1900's. From 1844 to the present time, the property has changed ownership at least 18 times. In 1958, Virginia Electric and Power Company (now Dominion Power) obtained a fifty foot right of way to build and maintain an electric line through the property. When the adjacent Water Street was widened in 1997-98, a detention basin was installed on the southern edge of the property. The Indian Springs Wetlands (4 lots) was conveyed to the Town of Woodstock in February 2005.

Since that time, the Woodstock Tree Board (WTB) has been working to develop the area into a wetlands park for interpretation and use by both school or civic groups and the general public. Indian Springs Wetlands provides a unique opportunity to not only protect the wetlands but also provide educational information to both youth and adults. The goal is to provide information about the importance and role of wetlands, remove invasive and inappropriate plants, enhance its habitat values, and provide information about water quality management, using the wetlands and adjoining detention pond.

Current Activities and Future Plans:

The WTB partnered with students from James Madison University who helped develop a master plan for the Park as part of their environmental studies project. They did an excellent job and the Town and WTB have used their plan to guide activities. The WTB has held at least 2 cleanup days at the Park, and were joined by the JMU students for one of those. A number of invasive species (trees and shrubs) were removed.

The Town of Woodstock received a grant of \$50,000 of stimulus funds from the VA Department of Forestry to begin implementation of the master plan. Currently, the Town of Woodstock is using those funds for a contractor to construct an observation deck so visitors may have a closer view of the wetlands area. The deck should be completed by October 2011. The Woodstock Tree Board, Town and representatives of the Friends of the North Fork are currently working on developing a teacher's guide for use in the classroom as well as for onsite visits. Once developed, the guide will also be available on the Town's website.

In the longer term, a trail around the area and a boardwalk into the wetlands itself are being planned. Further, the WTB and Town hope to establish a partnership with the Hospital which owns adjacent property and have a wellness trail or similar link from the Hospital property down to the wetlands. Stay tuned!!!!

Partnerships: Developing the Indian Springs Wetlands Park has been a partnership effort involving the Town of Woodstock, the Woodstock Tree Board, and James Madison University (JMU). JMU faculty and students worked closely with the Woodstock Tree Board and Town for more than two years and have developed natural resources management and implementation plans for the site.

The Town has reached an understanding with Virginia Dominion Power Company to minimize their access and disturbance of the wetland while maintaining the power line.

The Virginia Department of Forestry provided funding to cover the costs of an observation deck. They have also been very helpful in providing a variety of technical information, resources and support.

The Town and WTB are working with Friends of the North Fork on developing a teacher's guide and the text for informational signs.

We anticipate partnerships with local businesses in helping with some of the materials and labor for the future built components.