

Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains

Annual Report 2017-2018



Our **Mission**

To preserve, enhance, and
celebrate the Blue Ridge
Mountains as a valuable
resource and treasured
space for present and future
generations

VISION

The Blue Ridge Mountains stand secure as a national treasure for all time – ancient and sacred space that is maintained as a model of natural and cultural preservation – a free and accessible destination for recreation, discovery, and renewal that inspires others to join and sustain our effort.





Over the past several months I have had the opportunity to spend time in a number of our national parks: hiking the north rim in Yellowstone to view breathtaking waterfalls; taking in the stunning contours of the Grand Tetons; thrilling to the sheer magnitude of Zion and the other-worldly colors and shapes of rock formations in Arches National Park and Bryce Canyon; and scrambling up the steep sand masses at Sleeping Bear Dunes. These experiences have filled me with awe – a result in large part of the fact that something of particular beauty and scale has been preserved *for its own sake*. These experiences have served, as well, to deepen my appreciation of a sense of place... and of the importance of protecting and preserving natural wonders that are both profound and fragile. I have returned from these adventures more curious about the special character and wonder our Blue Ridge Mountains represent. Here are some of the things I have discovered:



- the Blue Ridge, which comprises the highest mountains in eastern North America south of Baffin Island, developed during the Silurian period over 400 million years ago and is formed of ancient rock including unique gneisses and granitoids;
- during the 17th and early 18th century the Blue Ridge was a source of hunting and fishing for several Native American tribes – the Siouan Manahoacs, the Iroquois, and the Shawnee – and became a key demarcation point in early settler treaties with the Iroquois; in the mid-19th century, the Blue Ridge played a role in the Civil War, serving as a screen for Robert E. Lee and his troops as they began the second invasion of the north;
- the Blue Ridge hosts a diversity of fish and wildlife species including black bear, red and gray fox, bobcat, coyote, grouse, wild boar and turkey, and the celebrated mountain stream brook trout;
- and, of course, the Blue Ridge is famous for its distinctive hue, a function of the isoprene released by trees, especially oaks, that populate the mountain, giving it a hazy, magical quality.

In the pages that follow you will read about our efforts over the past year to advance our mission of preserving, enhancing, and celebrating the Blue Ridge... and our plans going forward to take on a new stewardship initiative at Sleeter Lake Park, in partnership with other conservation organizations, that expands our scope to include the larger ecosystem of the mountain. We hope you will be inspired to join us in this effort.

Let me close on a slightly different note by sharing that, having had the wonderful experience of serving in the role of President of *Friends* over the last five years, I am excited to step aside to make room for Peter Weeks, currently Treasurer, Chair of the Membership and Development Committee, and Co-Chair of the Education Committee, to assume the role of President, effective December 1st. At that time I will shift my focus to Chairing the Education Committee. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity I have had as President to work with an excellent board and to have had the confidence and support of our members. I am proud of what we have accomplished in the last five years, building on the wonderful work that had come before... and I look forward to more great things to come under Peter's leadership.

Warmest regards,

Carole Napolitano

President, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*





Membership and Development Committee

Chair **Peter Weeks**

The goal of the Membership & Development Committee is twofold: to grow the organization's membership and mailing list... and to generate revenue to support *FBRM* activities and operating expenses. Membership has remained steady at just under 200 members while our e-mail distribution list continues to grow. In terms of development, *Friends* continues to seek out opportunities to raise monies through grants and fundraising events. For the second time in recent years, *Friends* was awarded a Community Connection grant by the Purcellville branch of Wells Fargo. Funds from *Friends'* inaugural fundraiser, a benefit concert at Franklin Park late last fall, increased our Education Endowment, which helps to underwrite our student environmental science awards and scholarships, to over \$30,000. This year we have integrated fundraising into our annual meeting, rebranded as the Annual Member Celebration & Fundraiser.

Celebrations, Communication and Outreach Committee

Chair **Rebekka Prinz**

Following quickly on the heels of *Friends'* first-ever fundraiser, the 2017 Annual Meeting in late fall was a culminating event for the Celebrations, Communications, and Outreach Committee. The event was held on the evening of November 30th at Doukenie Winery in Purcellville, VA. A celebration of ten years of *Friends* and its work, we welcomed and honored founding and former board members, and past scholarship winners, along with members and guests. Attendees were treated to Doukenie's wines, hors d'oeuvres, and the dulcimer music of Maddie MacNeil. *Friends'* secretary Deb Snyder was honored for her many years of service as she stepped down from the board. The annual Friend of the Mountain award was presented to W. Joseph "Joe" Coleman Jr. Coleman "in recognition of his significant conservation initiatives and many years of volunteer efforts to protect wildlife and their habitats, promote citizen science, secure conservation easements, and engage individuals of all ages in discovering the wonder of the natural world - all of which contribute to preserving, enhancing, and celebrating our Blue Ridge and its foothills."

In the interest of staying more closely in touch with our members and subscribers, *Friends* initiated a new bi-weekly e-mail communication: "Happenings Around the Blue Ridge" is a clearing house for events, news alerts, and other items of interest that affect our audience. Kudos to Joan Freidson, *Friends'* administrative assistant for managing this new initiative and for her efforts to keep our Facebook postings current and engaging.



Another accomplishment in 2017 was the renovation of our website in partnership with the Downstream Project. The new platform with enhanced functionality is now in place. Efforts will begin shortly to update and enhance website content.

Finally, the Celebrations, Communication and Outreach Committee is currently working on a member survey to be launched in the first quarter of 2019.

Land Use Committee

Chair **Norman Myers**

Over the past year our attention has been focused on efforts to influence the Loudoun County Comprehensive Plan, especially as it affects western Loudoun County which abuts the Blue Ridge and includes its foothills. To that end we have drafted the following Position Statement relative to the Comprehensive Plan:

- Higher density residential zoning is supportable and sustainable where there is existing transportation and infrastructure, as planned around the Silver Line Metro stations.
- Oppose higher densities that create suburban sprawl in the Transition Policy Area
- Encourage land preservation using such tools as Conservation Easements and Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) as part of a proffer process for increasing density in appropriately located urban centers and for rezoning of commercial and industrial land.
- Support Performance Standards for rural economy uses based on criteria such as road safety standards, lot size, and proximity to other event centers; include noise and lighting standards.
- Support Design Standards for Rural Economy Uses and residential cluster development in the rural and transition planning areas.
- A high priority is the development of trails, creating a green network of corridors for hikers, bikers, horse riders, and wildlife, such as outlined in the Emerald Ribbon.
- Support the recommended changes to Envision as by the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition.



By way of expanding our impact, the Land Use Committee has engaged with individuals in the community willing to bring their resources to the committee including Paul Lawrence (Goose Creek Association), Mike Hummel (land planner with H2Land), and Lindsay Moler, attorney-at-law. Also Land Use has actively participated in meetings with several other conservation entities to further conservation interests. These include:

- The Committee of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPCC) that is reviewing the proposed Comprehensive Plan. Actions include advocating modifications to the Envision Draft through meetings with County Supervisors, Staff, and Public information forums.
- LCPCC and Loudoun Planning Staff pertaining to Rural Cluster design standards
- Supervisors and Staff advocating the establishment of a TDR program
- Conservation groups promoting and advocating Conservation Easements
- Opponents of the proposed Rockwool Plant in Ranson, West Virginia





Stewardship Committee

Co-Chairs **Norman Myers and James Remuzzi**

Having accomplished what we can over the past many years at Blue Ridge Regional Park, *Friends* set its sights on finding an opportunity for our on-the-ground stewardship efforts. Sleeter Lake Park, a new park in Round Hill, offered such an opportunity that *Friends* has embraced in collaboration with several other partners including the Town of Round Hill, Loudoun County Master Gardeners, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and *FBRM*. *Friends* is providing the Town with a professional master plan that incorporates their existing Sleeter Lake Park concept plan and infrastructure. Loudoun Wildlife is developing a native pollinator plant meadow. Master Gardeners has identified existing mature trees and is recommending additional new trees. This project plan connects existing and future amenities by walking paths and locates areas for new trees. It also incorporates the proposed trail between the Sleeter Lake and Franklin Park being developed by Loudoun Department of Parks & Recreation. Besides being a public recreation and gathering place, plans include development of a viewing platform, outdoor classroom, pollinator gardens, picnic areas & benches, fishing pads along the lake, and measures for erosion control. We will encourage community participation in the tree planting from such groups as area scout troops and earth science students. This project has been selected as the theme for *Friends* 2018 Annual Membership Celebration & Fundraiser.





Board Elections

Elections were held at the October 24th board meeting to fill positions that will be vacated due to a retirement and a move. Peter Weeks, currently serving as Treasurer and Co-Chair of the Education Committee, will assume the role of President, effective December 1st, to succeed Carole Napolitano who is stepping down after having led the organization for the past 5 years. Carole will remain on the board, filling the role of Chair of the Education Committee as Peter becomes President and as Jed Shilling, second current Co-Chair, moves out of the area to join family in California. Beckwith Bolle, new to the board in 2018 and an active member of the Annual Member Celebration & Fundraiser Committee, was elected to the office of Treasurer. And Juanita Tool, who recently brought her talents to the Annual Member Celebration & Fundraiser Committee, was elected to serve as a member of the board.

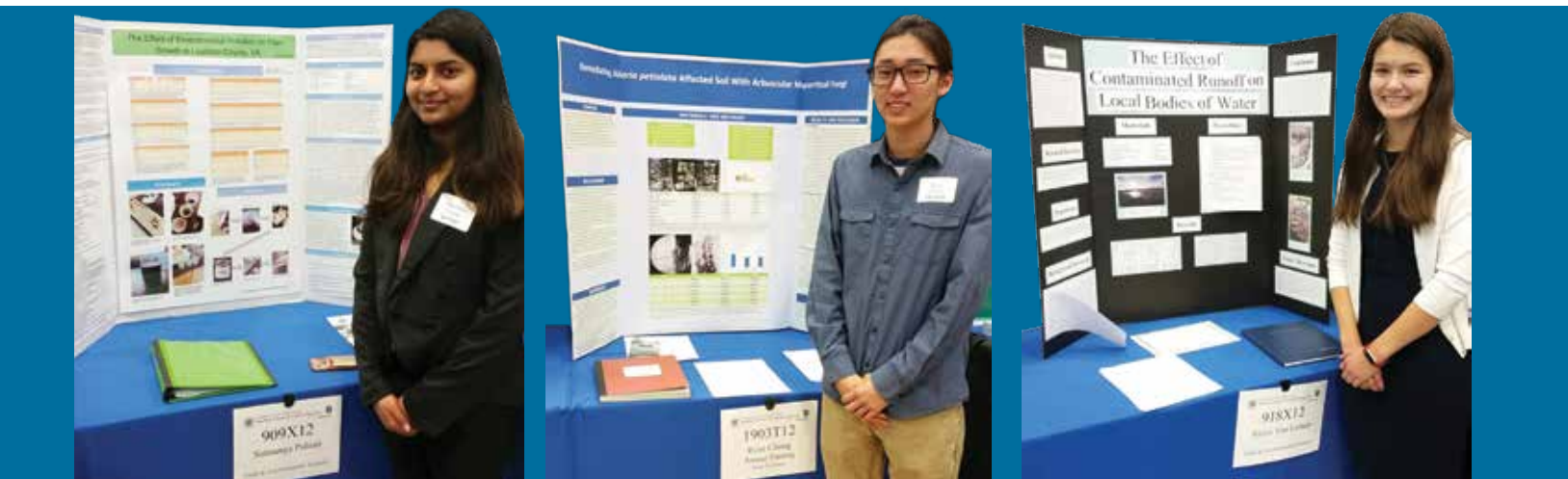
Education Committee

Co-Chairs **Peter Weeks, Jed Shilling**

The Education Committee focuses on ways to increase and support environmental awareness while teaching high school students the ecological importance of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In 2018 the Jane Pratt Education Award went to Zachary Klonicke, a senior at Loudoun Valley High School who will be attending Virginia Tech this Fall. Zach's qualifying essay expressed the transformation he had experienced when he took an environmental studies class thinking it would look good on his transcript. As a result of the teaching and mentoring of teacher Liam McGranahan, Zach developed a new appreciation... and a new sense of responsibility: "I can say that my eyes have been opened to a completely new side of the natural world I live in, and I have discovered a new passion for environmental stewardship."

The Education Committee also developed a new relationship with Loudoun County's annual Science Fair. Three cash prizes were awarded to students who developed research projects directly related to mountain eco-systems. *Friends* has encouraged Science Fair organizers to broaden the range of research projects focusing on the Blue Ridge – our native mountain range.

Efforts in the coming year will focus on creating greater visibility for the scholarship award and raising awareness about our Science Fair awards to incentivize projects that feature mountains, especially the Blue Ridge.





BLUE RIDGE
CONSERVATION
ALLIANCE

Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance (BRCA) Report

Steering Committee Member **Carole Napolitano**

Over the past year, *Friends* has continued to play a leadership role with the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance, an organization *Friends* helped to found for the purpose of leveraging the collective impact of regional conservation organizations. As a member of the BRCA Steering Committee, Carole Napolitano formed and chaired a stewardship committee within BRCA which sponsored two events in 2017 and early 2018. The first was a field trip, open to the public, for a tour of the Piedmont Memorial Overlook led by Amy Johnson, bird expert from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI), and Celia Vuocolo, wildlife specialist from Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC). The event, hosted by PEC, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*, The Piedmont Chapter of the VA Native Plant Society, the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, and Virginia Working Landscapes, provided an opportunity to learn about managing large landscapes for conservation values.



A follow-up event, convened in Shepherdstown, WVA, in early February 2018, drew a crowd of 70 members from the local community and beyond to discuss the importance of biodiversity and the ways in which homeowners' landscaping choices can affect the vital food web that supports biodiversity. Excerpts of the film "Hometown Habitat" offered starting points for interactive small-group conversations about the value of planting native species. The evening closed with a review of simple practices for property owners.





Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains
Annual Income Statement and Financial Statement



12 months
ending 8/31/18

Income

Membership Fees	\$4895.00
Special Event Concert Fundraiser	\$21,445.00
GiveChoose	\$3,339.00
General Funds	\$3,957.15

Total Income \$33,636.95

Expenses

Concert Fundraiser Expenses	\$7,419.44
Administration	\$3,975.95
Program Services	\$4,873.10
Scholarship	\$1,500.00

Total Expenses \$17,768.49





Board of **Directors**

Carole Napolitano
President

Norman Myers
Vice-President

Peter Weeks
Treasurer

Rebekka Prinz
Secretary

John ("Jed") Shilling

James Remuzzi

Beckwith Bolle



left to right Peter Weeks, Beckwith Bolle, Jed Shilling, Carole Napolitano, Norman Myers **absent** Rebekka Prinz, James Remuzzi

To learn more about *Friends...* and to join or donate, visit **www.friendsofblueridge.org**.

Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Taxpayer ID Number 22-3970963

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Thank you to our **generous donors and sponsors**

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