

# Falls Church City Community Wildlife Habitat Project

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This document is the project description and plan for the Falls Church City Community Wildlife Habitat Project, also called the "Falls Church City Healthy Habitat Project". This project is a multi-year effort initiated by the City of Falls Church Environmental Services Council and concerned residents to gain certification from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) as a Community Wildlife Habitat.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Describe the City of Falls Church community and its ecological characteristics.
- Introduce the project's overall goal and mission and identify specific certification, education, community, administrative, and post-certification goals.
- Identify the initial project team members.
- Provide a plan and approximate timeline for meeting the specific goals over a multi-year period beginning in May 2005, with NWF Community Habitat certification occurring in approximately December 2008.
- Provide references to additional information related to this project.

## Project Overview and Overall Objectives

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The Falls Church City Healthy Habitat project is sponsored by the Environmental Services Council (ESC), and the Healthy Habitat Team is a Task Group formed by the ESC. The Healthy Habitat Team is comprised of City of Falls Church residents, City staff members, and members of local civic organizations. Many Falls Church City residents participate as volunteers in the areas of environmental protection, education, and conservation, and City residents historically have valued trees, natural areas, and a healthy environment in the City.

Loss of open space and habitat are concerns that the entire community shares. The Healthy Habitat project seeks to educate the community regarding steps that all residents, businesses, and institutions can take to make Falls Church City

a healthier place for wildlife and humans.

The project's overall goal is to conserve, protect and restore an ecologically-balanced habitat in our urban environment. We envision a habitat that is healthy for both humans and wildlife, and that promotes clean water, clean air, and environmentally-friendly land management.

The Healthy Habitat project will move us toward our vision by:

- Improving **water quality** by limiting run-off due to impervious surface and lack of vegetation; reducing or eliminating the use of pesticides and fertilizers; and using native plantings, which require little or no supplemental watering.

- Improving **air quality** by encouraging more vegetation and trees and discouraging the use of gas-powered tools required to maintain a conventional landscape.
- Encouraging **land use that is respectful of a healthy environment**, by creating and preserving more quality open space and natural areas.

Beyond the clear positives, a successful Healthy Habitat project will assure our children and grandchildren the wonder of seeing a butterfly, chipmunk, or salamander for the first time within City limits, and the healthy environment that comes with it.

The Falls Church Healthy Habitat project will involve the assessment and certification of single-family homes, townhomes, apartment/condominium communities, parks and public areas, churches, schools, daycare centers, office buildings, and other locations throughout the City. In addition, the project will accomplish significant goals and activities aimed at educating citizens about environmental and wildlife habitat problems and solutions, building an even stronger sense of community around those solutions. To achieve these goals and maintain them over time, the project will complete administrative and post-certification goals designed to keep up interest in the program and ensure its continued positive impact and success. Specific goals are detailed in the "Specific Goals" section of this document, with a plan for achieving the goals detailed in the "Plan of Action / Yearly Goals" section.

## Community Basics

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The City of Falls Church is an independent city located seven miles from Washington, DC. It is bordered on the north, west, and south by Fairfax County; Arlington County forms the eastern boundary. Although the City is densely populated and part of a large metropolitan area, the City of Falls Church is a tightly knit community with residents who take great pride in being active in local civic and social activities. Located in the Piedmont region of Virginia, the City is characterized by gently rolling terrain. It contains 7.2 acres of passive

parkland/natural resource areas, 52 acres of active parkland, and 16.1 acres of the W&OD Trail right-of-way. There are currently ten neighborhood parks.

The City of Falls Church has been awarded the Tree City USA award from the National Arbor Day Foundation for the past 27 years (the first and longest continuous Tree City USA in Virginia). Falls Church City has formally celebrated Arbor Day since 1892 (first Arbor Day celebration in Virginia). The City has an active Tree Ordinance and Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance, and the City's Development Services Department has an Urban Forestry Division with a full-time Certified Arborist. There are also the following environment-related citizen boards and commissions: Environmental Services Council, Tree Commission, Open Space Task Force, and Recreation and Parks Advisory Board. In addition, the City has one of the highest recycling rates in the United States (54 percent of all trash recycled by residents).

Following are additional demographics of importance to this project:

- Size: 2.2 square miles
- Population: 10,377
- Total Housing Units: 4,471
- Schools: 2 public elementary, 1 public middle and 1 public high school, plus one private elementary/middle school and several private day care centers and preschools
- Businesses: 1,450

## Ecological Characteristics of the Community

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humans.

Although the City enjoys some diversity of wildlife in its parks and naturalized properties, many local and migratory wildlife species have disappeared over the last 50 years due to loss and degradation of habitat. Certain species, such as raccoons, do well despite the loss of their natural habitat. These species are a concern, due to their ability to sustain themselves within the human environment and the lack of natural predators to keep their populations in check. There is also the danger of rabies from wildlife living in such close proximity to

Following are Falls Church City's key ecological characteristics:

- **Watersheds:** Tripps Run, Four Mile Run, Cameron Run, Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay
- **Migratory Path/Flyway:** Atlantic Flyway
- **Dominant Ecosystems:** The City of Falls Church, while urbanized, is considered a mixed deciduous forest. Historically, the native forest type would be classified as an Oak/Hickory type. Remnants of the original forest are evident throughout the City. The City also includes 2 miles of open streams, 9 miles of undergrounded piped streams, and floodplains. Local perennial streams include Tripps Run and Four Mile Run and their tributaries. Tripps Run flows into Holmes/Cameron Run in Alexandria, while Four Mile Run flows into the Potomac River in Arlington. The City of Falls Church is required by the Commonwealth of Virginia to have a valid Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance to help protect the Chesapeake Bay from the negative effects of development on the Bay ecosystem.
- **Environmental/Ecological Challenges:** Habitat and open space loss / degradation / fragmentation due to development and redevelopment; chemically dependent residential and commercial landscaping practices; poor water and air quality; invasive species; riparian degradation; floodplain enlargement due to development; and littering.
- **Endangered and Threatened Species and Other Species of Concern:**
  - Wood turtle (*Clemmys insculpta*)
  - Regal fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*)
  - Ginseng (*Panax quiquefolium*)
  - White trout lily (*Erythronium albidum*)
- **Invasive / Non-Native Species Causing Problems**
  - **Plants:**
    - English ivy (*Hedera helix*)
    - Porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)
    - Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
    - Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*)
    - Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*- including Hall's honeysuckle)
    - Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)
    - Climbing euonymous (*Euonymous fortunei*)
    - Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
    - Mile-a-minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum*)
    - Bush honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.)
    - Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)

- Bamboo (*Phyllostachys*, *Bambusam* and *Pseudosasa* are most destructive)
  - Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
  - Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) and all other ornamental pears
  - Cherry, edible and ornamental (*Prunus avium*, *P. cerasus*)
  - Wisteria, Chinese and Japanese (*Wisteria sinensis*, *W. floribunda*)
  - Burning bush (*Euonymus alantus*)
  - Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
  - Lesser celandine, celandine buttercup (*Ranunculus ficaria*)
- **Animals:**
- European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)
  - House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)
  - House (English) Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
  - Norway Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)
  - Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

## Habitat Team

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A strong team of individuals dedicated to the Healthy Habitat project will be critical to its success. Because many residents and staff of the City of Falls Church have both professional and personal interest in the environment, natural resources, gardening, and wildlife, we have been able to assemble an excellent Habitat Team. The Habitat Team will meet regularly to plan and manage activities related to the certification process and to monitor progress toward certification.

Following is a list of the initial members of the Falls Church City Healthy Habitat team:

- Sam Beatty, City of Falls Church resident and member of Environmental Services Council (ESC)
- Ellen Gilmore, City of Falls Church resident and member of Environmental Services Council (ESC)
- John Hardi, Falls Church Garden Club
- Howard Herman, City of Falls Church Director of Recreation and Parks
- Officer Rebecca Keenan, City of Falls Church Animal Warden
- Annette Mills, City of Falls Church Environmental Programs Specialist
- Mia Musolino, City of Falls Church resident and NWF Habitat Steward
- Jill-Anne Spence, City of Falls Church Arborist
- Sandy Tarpinian, City of Falls Church resident and Fairfax County Master Gardener
- Melissa Teates, City of Falls Church resident and member of ESC
- Cay Wiant, City of Falls Church resident and Board Member of the Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

## Specific Project Goals



This section lists all goals that the Healthy Habitat project will complete in order to achieve certification from NWF. Registration for certification with NWF requires a certain number of activities and related points. Certification for a community the size of Falls Church City requires a total of 350 points, 175 of which must come from certification of properties as National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat sites. The remaining certification points come from completion of education-related, community-related, and administrative activities or events.

The table below lists the activities and points in each category that the project will complete to earn NWF certification. A plan of action distributing these activities and points over the anticipated three-year registration period follows this section.

Activity	Points
<b>Registration Goals (40 points required)</b>	
Name your Community Wildlife Habitat project.	Required
Form a Habitat Team.	Required
Register the team members as NWF volunteers.	Required
Set up a project notebook.	Required
Research your community and complete the NWF Community Basics information form.	Required
Develop goals for 1, 3, and 5 years.	Required
Obtain a map of your community.	5
Complete the NWF Ecological Characteristics of Community Description form.	10
Obtain a letter of support from Community Government Officials.	10
Develop a plan for keeping all members of the Habitat Team in regular communication.	5
Identify three potential sites for Backyard Wildlife Habitat demonstration gardens.	5
Plan and organize a kick-off celebration.	10
<b>Total Registration Points:</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Certification Goals (175 points required)</b>	
Certify 4 schools.	20
Certify 10 common grounds/community/workplace sites.	30
Certify 135 homes or townhomes.	135
<b>Total Certification Points:</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Education Goals (40 points required)</b>	
Establish a resource library for the project.	5
Establish an information kiosk where community members can get information about the project.	5
Create a project brochure specific for Falls Church City and place in public locations.	5
Secure a feature article in the local media about the project.	10

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Points</b>
Hold a series of workshops to educate the community about the project, wildlife gardening, or sustainable gardening, or some similar topics.	10
Each member of Habitat Team completes Creating Places for Wildlife online course at NWF website.	10
Create and distribute a native plant list for your community.	5
<b>Total Education Points:</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Community Goals (50 points required)</b>	
Create bulletin board or website where community members can learn about the project.	10
Examine the community's weed ordinances and work to change them to be more native plant and habitat friendly.	10
Work with local park agencies to convert parkland to wildlife friendly landscapes.	10
Organize a native plant sale.	10
Create an information booth at one (at least) community event.	5
Coordinate a stream or trail cleanup.	5
Each Habitat Team member that serves on a community board, commission, or council related to environmental issues (up to three).	15
Restore native plant communities along stream and riverbanks to provide habitat and buffer waterways from urban and agricultural runoff.	10
<b>Total Community Points:</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Administrative Goals (20 points required)</b>	
Maintain a project notebook.	Required
Complete CWH certification form.	Required
Identify the individuals that will make up the post-certification team.	Required
Submit bi-annual updates.	Required
Per new volunteer registered with NWF (up to 20).	3
Per formalized partner affiliated with your project (up to 5).	10
Each grant application submitted (up to three).	10
<b>Total Administrative Points:</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Post-Certification Goals (40 points required each year)</b>	
Maintain a project journal/notebook.	Required
Submit yearly post-certification update forms.	Required
Secure a feature article in the local media about your project.	10
Maintain bulletin board or website established during certification stage.	10
Continued hosting of annual event started during certification stage.	10
Participate (through a booth) in at least one community event.	5
Host a Schoolyard Habitats workshop.	10
Host a Habitat Stewards training.	10
Frogwatch sites (up to 5).	10
Create a service-learning opportunity for high school students in your community.	10
Get Access Nature or Ranger Rick adopted into the school curriculum.	10
Have the college/university associated with your community become involved in the Campus Ecology program.	10
Work with the department of transportation to convert medians into wildlife-friendly landscapes.	10

Activity	Points
Continue regular column in your community paper/newsletter to educate community members about your project.	10
Deliver an oral presentation at a community group not yet associated with your project (i.e. Garden club, HOA) (up to 6).	5
Have member of habitat team serve on a community committee or board that addresses community environment issues.	5
Examine your community's weed ordinances, and work to change them to be more native plant and habitat friendly.	10
Host a workshop to educate builders and developers in your community about what they can do to conserve habitat during the site selection, planning, and conservation phases of their projects.	10
Work with local park agencies to convert parkland to wildlife friendly landscapes.	10
Each additional home, town home or apartment certified as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat site.	1
Each community site certified as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat site.	3
Each Schoolyard Habitats site certified.	5

## Plan of Action / Yearly Goals Schedule



This section details the activities to be performed in each year following registration.

(photo: [www.wrenaissance.com](http://www.wrenaissance.com))

### Year One Goals (2005-2006):

Goal Type	Activity	Points
Certification	Certify 1 school.	5
Certification	Certify 5 common grounds/community/workplace sites.	15
Certification	Certify 35 homes or townhomes.	35
Education	Establish a resource library for the project.	5
Education	Establish an information kiosk where community members can get information about the project.	5
Education	Create a project brochure specific for Falls Church City and place in public locations.	5
Education	Secure a feature article in the local media about the project.	10
Education	Hold a series of workshops to educate the community about the project, wildlife gardening, or sustainable gardening, or some similar topics.	10
Education	Each member of Habitat Team completes Creating Places for Wildlife online course at NWF website.	10
Education	Create and distribute a native plant list for your community.	5
Community	Create bulletin board or website where community members can learn about the project.	10
Community	Work with local park agencies to convert parkland to wildlife friendly landscapes.	10
Community	Organize a native plant sale.	10
Community	Create an information booth at one (at least) community event.	5
Community	Coordinate a stream or trail cleanup.	5
Community	Each Habitat Team member that serves on a community board, commission, or council related to environmental issues (up to three).	15
Community	Restore native plant communities along stream and riverbanks to provide habitat and buffer waterways from urban and agricultural runoff.	10
Administrative	Maintain a project notebook.	Required
Administrative	Submit bi-annual updates.	Required
Administrative	Per new volunteer registered with NWF (up to 20) – 3 pts	3
Administrative	Each grant application submitted (up to three) – 10 pts	10
	<b>Total Year 1 Points:</b>	<b>173</b>

**Year Two Goals (2007):**

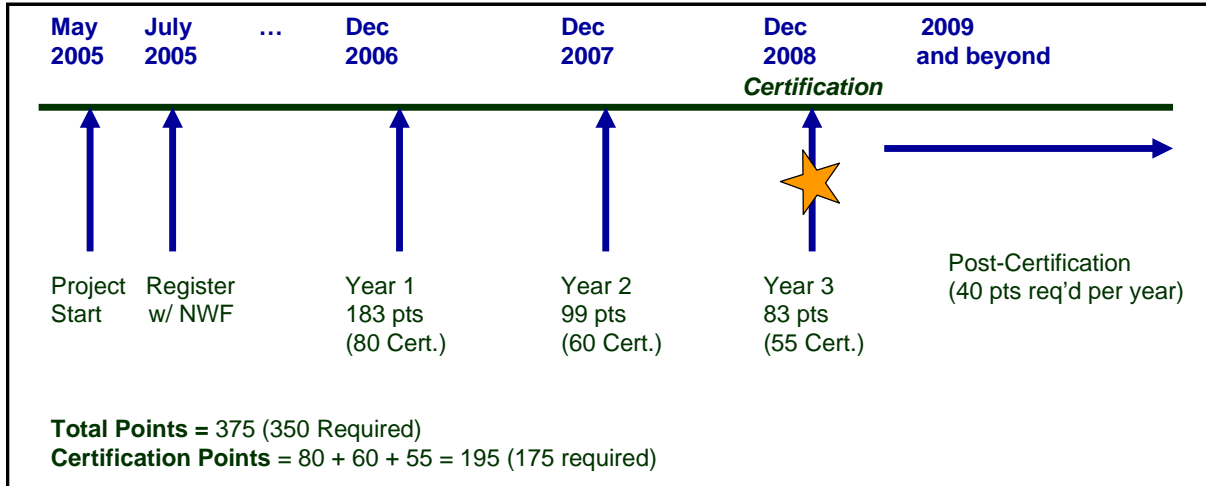
<b>Goal Type</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Points</b>
Certification	Certify 2 schools.	10
Certification	Certify 50 homes or townhomes.	50
Education	Hold a series of workshops to educate the community about the project, wildlife gardening, or sustainable gardening, or some similar topics.	10
Community	Examine the community's weed ordinances and work to change them to be more native plant and habitat friendly.	10
Administrative	Maintain a project notebook.	Required
Administrative	Submit bi-annual updates.	Required
Administrative	Per new volunteer registered with volunteer (up to 20) – 3 pts.	9
Administrative	Each grant application submitted (up to three) – 10 pts.	10
	<b>Total Year 2 Points:</b>	<b>99</b>

**Year Three Goals (2008):**

<b>Goal Type</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Points</b>
Certification	Certify 1 school.	5
Certification	Certify 5 common grounds/community/workplace sites.	15
Certification	Certify 50 homes or townhomes.	50
Administrative	Per new volunteer registered with volunteer (up to 20).	3
Administrative	Each grant application submitted (up to three).	10
Administrative	Maintain a project notebook.	Required
Administrative	Complete CWH certification form.	Required
Administrative	Identify the individuals that will make up the post-certification team.	Required
Administrative	Submit bi-annual updates.	Required
Administrative	Receive certification as a National Wildlife Federation Community Wildlife Habitat.	Not Applicable
Administrative	Define and begin post-certification goals (min pts each year is 40).	To Be Determined
	<b>Total Year 3 Points:</b>	<b>83</b>

## Project Time Line and Points Distribution

The diagram below shows the timeline for the Falls Church Healthy Habitat project.



## References

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Following are references to additional information related to the Falls Church City Healthy Habitat Project.

## Contacts

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For more information about the Falls Church City Healthy Habitat Project, contact Mia Musolino, at 703-533-3423 or [mia\\_musolino@yahoo.com](mailto:mia_musolino@yahoo.com) or Annette Mills, at 703-248-5176.

## Programs, Organizations, and Internet Resources

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### Local/Regional:

- **Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment Community Wildlife Habitat** - [www.arlingtonenvironment.org/programs/wildlifehabitat](http://www.arlingtonenvironment.org/programs/wildlifehabitat)
- **Audubon Naturalist Society** - [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org)
- **Audubon Society of Northern Virginia** - [www.fairfaxaudubon.org](http://www.fairfaxaudubon.org)
- **City of Falls Church Environmental Services Council** - [www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/ESC.html](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/ESC.html)
- **City of Falls Church Open Space Task Force:** [www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/openspacetaskforce.html](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/openspacetaskforce.html)
- **City of Falls Church Tree Commission** - [www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/TC.html](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/community/BoardsCommissions/boardsandcommissions/TC.html)
- **City of Falls Church Urban Forestry Division** - [www.fallschurchva.gov/government/developmentServices/arborist.html](http://www.fallschurchva.gov/government/developmentServices/arborist.html)
- **Falls Church Environment Web** - [www.fallschurchenvironment.org](http://www.fallschurchenvironment.org)
- **Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society** - [www.vpis.org](http://www.vpis.org)
- **Maryland Native Plant Society** - [www.mdflora.org](http://www.mdflora.org)
- **Potomac Overlook Regional Park and Nature Center** (Located in Arlington County, but owned by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority; the City has no nature center within the City limits.) - [www.potomacoverlook.org](http://www.potomacoverlook.org)
- **Raptor Society of Virginia** - [www.raptorsva.org](http://www.raptorsva.org)
- **Roots and Shoots School Garden (Lexington, Virginia)** - [www.rootsnshoots.info](http://www.rootsnshoots.info)
- **Virginia Native Plant Society** - [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org)
- **Washington Area Butterfly Club** - [users.sitestar.net/butterfly](http://users.sitestar.net/butterfly)
- **Wildlife Rescue League of Northern Virginia** - [www.wildliferescueleague.org](http://www.wildliferescueleague.org)
- **Wrenaissance** - [www.wrenaissance.com](http://www.wrenaissance.com)

## National:

- **American Bird Conservancy** - [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org)
- **Humane Society of the United States** - [www.hsus.org/wildlife/wildlife\\_and\\_habitat\\_protection\\_programs](http://www.hsus.org/wildlife/wildlife_and_habitat_protection_programs)
- **National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program** - [www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat](http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat)
- **National Wildlife Federation Community Wildlife Habitat Program** - [www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/certifyyourcommunity.cfm](http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/certifyyourcommunity.cfm)
- **National Wildlife Federation Schoolyard Habitat Program** - [www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats](http://www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats)

## Books

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- *The Forgotten Pollinators*, by Stephen Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan.
- *National Wildlife Federation: Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife*, By David Mizejewski.
- *Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Back Yards*, by Sara Stein.
- *Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning*, Green Teacher Magazine.
- *Roots and Shoots Down to Earth Handbook* (schoolyard gardens), by Molly Brown.
- *Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife*, by John Hadidian (The Humane Society of the United States).