Washington Grove Conservation Park Meadow Restoration: Objectives and Timeline

Project Summary

The Washington Grove Conservation Park Meadow Restoration project aims to restore native meadow habitat and protect open space by maintaining the park as a meadow. A collaboration involving the Town of Washington Grove (which owns the land that comprises the Conservation Park) and its Meadows Committee, Montgomery Parks (MP, which holds a permanent easement to the to maintain the park as a meadow), and other community members and volunteers, the project focuses on invasive species control, the reduction of woody incursions, and native plant introductions to enhance biodiversity and ecological function. Since the project began in January 2024, we have begun the transition to an open viewshed in the form of an ecologically healthy meadow.

This work has been supported in part by a $10,000 grant from Sustainable Maryland and PEPCO. In addition, starting with the town's FY 2026-27, the Meadows Committee receives funding to continue its work from the town. The committee currently (May 2026) consists of ten voting members including its Washington Grove Town Council liaison.

Objectives

The Meadows Committee seeks to enhance the Washington Grove Conservation Park to meet two objectives:

1) Habitat restoration: The species that Montgomery County is most in danger of losing are the meadow species. The local solution is to maintain a treeless expanse populated by a variety of native grasses and wildflowers that form the base of a meadow ecosystem. In addition, meadow habitats are typically superior to both playing fields and forests at stormwater management, water purification, and carbon capture, and provide a different recreational experience.
2) Protecting our open space: By both the town and MP honoring our legal agreement to maintain the former farmland that constitutes the Conservation Park *as a meadow*, we preserve the historic viewshed.

In addition, the Meadows Committee has attempted to engage with MP concerning the maintenance of the "lower meadow" (i.e., Piedmont Crossing Local Park). This has proved to be challenging, as the potential future paving of this park has caused MP to dedicate minimal resources to this meadow. Weed Warriors can and do opt to work in this park, and the bluebird trail extends there.

Timeline of the Restoration Project (actions of the Meadows Committee except as noted)

2024:

- Town Council approved the establishment of an *ad hoc* Meadows Committee tasked with reaching out to MP to restore the conservation meadow. The committee held its organizing meeting, worked with the town's webmaster to launch a webpage, and reached out to MP to begin discussion of a restoration plan. Bruce Daggy volunteered as Committee Chair and Anne Vincent as Secretary. Other initial members included Georgette Cole, Audrey Maskery, Joan Mahaffey, David Stopak, and Donna Shriner. The Town Council liaison was Christine Dibble, replaced in June 2024 by Kriss Grisham. Additional resources were identified in the persons of the Chair of

the previous Meadow Committee and certified Weed Warrior Ernie Kawasaki, and Master Gardener Jay Everhart. (January)

- The first in-person meeting with Ryan Colliton from MP Meadow Restoration team was held in the meadow on April 5. The committee has established and maintained a strong working relationship with MP.
- Met with MP Weed Warrior Coordinator Corinne Stephens in the meadow on May 17. Corinne identified priority Non-Native Invasive (NNI) plant species to target.
- First Weed Warrior event: May 24. Guided by MP staffer Silvia Nunez, volunteers pulled Canada thistle and mile-a-minute and left these NNIs to rot down in place. [Note: Certified Weed Warriors remove NNIs without MP supervision throughout the project.]

- Second Weed Warrior event: July 13. Volunteers supervised again by MP staffer Silvia Nunez freed trees from roundleaf bittersweet and pulled mile-a-minute and wineberry.

- Received a proposal from MP (Ryan Colliton) in July for a restoration plan that included a 2-phase reduction of about 75 red cedars, invasive and woody plant species control efforts, and a planting program. The committee worked with residents, Town Council and MP on a modified plan for phase 1 of the tree reduction which was ultimately approved by Town Council on January 13, 2025.
- Applied for (July 10) and received (September 12) a $10,000 grant from Sustainable Maryland, funded by Pepco, to hire a contractor to conduct the tree reduction.

- Parks replaced the old bollards along Ridge Road. (completed October 25)

- MP (Ryan Colliton) shared a detailed restoration plan on Dec. 4. Briefly, it called for: 1) the reduction in the number of mature trees, 2) once annual mowing in early spring to control woody species [Note: Controlled burning is not an option in this location.], 3) control of NNI plants through Weed Warrior events and selective use of herbicides by MP, and 4) enhancing plant biodiversity through planting events. In addition, MP committed to work with the town to select woody species that could be planted within the tree line to obstruct the view of highway traffic.
- On Dec. 14, volunteers supervised by staff from MP held our third Weed Warrior event and removed bittersweet, English ivy, wineberry, and Japanese honeysuckle.

2025:

- On Jan. 13, Town Council recognized the Meadows Committee as a standing committee to help ensure follow-through of the restoration efforts. At the committee meeting held on Jan. 15, Bruce Daggy was elected Chair and Anne Vincent was elected Secretary.

- Supported Grove resident Ken Shapiro in maintaining the bluebird trail. New nest boxes were constructed and installed; old boxes were repaired and cleaned. (February)

- Contracted with Myers and Laws Tree Service who conducted phase 1 of the red cedar tree reduction. The trunks were donated to a community garden to edge garden beds. The chips were spread over patches of NNI plants in areas suitable for understory planting. (completed February 24)

- MP initiated the once annual mowing to control woody species on Feb. 24. (Completed in March due to equipment breakdown)

- The fourth Weed Warrior event was held on Feb. 28 and included volunteers from Gaithersburg High School. Volunteers supervised by Parks staff removed wineberry and English ivy plus a car tire and other debris from the park.

- MP removed a mature invasive Bradford pear in March 2025.

- We note with sadness that Meadows Committee member and Weed Warrior Joan Mahaffey passed away in April. Supporting the meadow restoration was one of the last of Joan's many contributions to Washington Grove.

- The first planting event was held on May 12. Volunteers and MP staff planted over 300 native wildflower and native grass plugs which were supplied by MP's Pope Farm facility.

- Nominated the Conservation Park as a Hotspot on eBird. The first two bird observation lists were uploaded in June. Over time such observations are hoped to help document the beneficial effects of the restoration.

- Grove resident Janet Lottero was certified as a level 2 certified Weed Warrior. This authorizes Janet to independently control non-native invasive plant priorities 1-4 (in some cases, after first informing Montgomery Parks). (June)

- Conducted a meadow tour for the Gaithersburg Environmental Services Division on July 9, in support of their project to update Gaithersburg's watershed management plan.

- MP chemically treated NNIs (wisteria, Canada thistle) on July 28. Some NNIs are too difficult to control solely by mechanical means.

- Held the fifth Weed Warrior event Aug. 1. Volunteers led by MP staffer Silvia Nunez pulled mile-a-minute and wineberry. It was noted during this event that bittersweet, English ivy, mile-a-minute, and wineberry are becoming more difficult to find in the park. From the start of the restoration project through this event, the NNI removal effort involved 47 individual volunteers, contributing 143 hours of service.

- Initiated a plant inventory. At the request of the Meadows Committee, Anna Spector and her sister Tova have begun collecting a plant inventory for the park. Species are entered into iNaturalist, creating geotagged photo-documentation that is accessible to others with this app. Other plant scientists can access their lists and increase the certainty of accurate documentation. If the species identified is an NNI addressable by Weed Warriors, the app can help guide them to the spot. The list can also be shared with MP to help update the restoration plan. Finally, the inventory can be used to track progress over time. (August)

- MP provided an updated meadow restoration plan. (September)

- Committee members Bruce Daggy and Anne Vincent were certified as level 2 Weed Warriors. This authorizes them to independently control non-native invasive plant priorities 1-4 (in some cases, after first informing MP). (October)

- The second planting event was held on Oct. 28. Six volunteers and three MP staff planted 46 native trees and native shrubs which were supplied by MP's Pope Farm facility. These specimens were planted along the edge of the tree line bordering the southeast corner of the park.

- The Meadows Committee received an updated meadow restoration plan from Ryan Colliton, the Vegetation Ecologist in the Park and Planning Stewardship Division who leads MP's Meadow Restoration Program. This document updates the plan shared with the Town last December. It is consistent with the previous version but adds descriptions of the work carried out since the earlier plan and provides additional information concerning actions going forward. (Sept.)

- Town Council approved the updated restoration plan submitted by MP in September, and empowered the Meadows Committee to continue its assessment of the plan and propose changes it deemed advisable directly to MP. The Committee voted to reply to MP with one amended and one alternative plan. Both involve further tree removal but differ in extent of the reduction and in the allocation of remaining grant dollars. Both plans emphasize the need to address the woody seedlings proliferating in the park. (Nov.)

- MP responded to the Meadows Committee's feedback on the Sept. 2025 update of the meadow restoration plan by reaffirming its plans. MP will consider committee input on specific trees selected for removal, with the stipulation that selection must be consistent with the goal of opening up the center of the meadow. MP also clarified that the funds set aside for non-native invasive (NNI) removal will be used to continue treating the extensive wisteria in the park, and reconfirmed that its staff will treat the woody seedlings after the next mowing. (Dec. 15)

- Four new bluebird nest boxes were constructed by Steve Linscheid and delivered to Ken Shapiro to add to the bluebird trail in the meadows and in town. (December)

- Certified Weed Warriors started removing the extensive bittersweet and English ivy vines from trees on the Piedmont Crossing Local Park side of the band of trees between the upper and lower meadows. The Conservation Park side was done previously. A "window" is cut in the vines and the upper reaches are left to dry out and eventually fall. This will be an ongoing project as schedules and weather conditions permit. (Dec. 18 and 28)

2026:

- Contracted with Myers and Laws Tree Service who conducted phase 2 of the red cedar tree reduction. A further 35 cedars were removed with a focus on expanding the core and softening the edges of the meadow. While not achieving the original intent of having over ten acres of the park as meadow, this phase did expand the historic open viewshed. The chips were delivered to the composting facility at Pope Farm. (Jan. 21-22)

- Annual mowing by MP (initiated Feb. 20, completed early March)

- Bluebird trail maintenance: Nest boxes were inspected and cleaned. Two new boxes were added to the lower meadow. A few boxes already had signs of bluebirds building nests by March 18.

- As the 46 trees and shrubs planted in October broke dormancy, nearly all were found to have survived.

- Weed Warrior activity continued, with a focus on bittersweet vines, garlic mustard, mile-a-minute, and wineberry. (April-May) Garlic mustard before (L) and after (R).

- MP performed the first of two planned spot herbicidal treatments of aggressive woody saplings in the Conservation Park meadow (April 23). Here is shown a non-native invasive (Autumn olive) to be treated. Control of these woody species by annual mowing plus spot treatment preserves the meadow as a meadow, with the types of native wildflowers and grasses that support meadow pollinators, birds, and other species.

- MP supervised treatment of the non-native invasive wisteria that was climbing up many trees in the park, especially at the north end. This activity along with the two rounds of tree reduction completed the spending of the Sustainable Maryland/PEPCO grant funds. (May 18)

FUTURE PLANS:

- MP to refresh park signage
- Hold an educational and celebration event for Grovers and guests
- Planting event (~ Oct.)
- Bird counts (ongoing)
- Plant inventory documentation (ongoing)
- MP to continue once annual mowing (Feb-Mar)
- MP to monitor NNI and woody incursions and address as needed (ongoing)
- Weed Warrior events (2-3 each year) and activity