

WINTER

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

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## BUILDING PLANT COMMUNITIES

BY ALAN FORD

As the new year begins, I invite you to join us in exploring the concept of plant communities. Nothing lives in isolation and this holds especially true for our flora. We are only beginning to understand all the connections which support the rich and diverse habitat one can find in a mature forest or open meadow. This concept, referred to as phytocenosis, recognizes that there are necessary interactions between species within a well organized ecosystem based on soil chemistry, topology, water, disturbance, and other factors. These communities will be generally homogenous over a defined area and may be adjacent with neighboring communities of different composition.

A mature forest will have the overstory of long-lived trees, and an understory of smaller trees and shrubs. Below that, an herbaceous layer provides ground cover, shelter, and food for indigenous fauna. Moss and lichen will hug the ground. Finally the soil contains an entire community of its own. Yet all these zones are linked and co-evolved to share resources and transport water and nutrients among the many different species comprising this community.

What is the consequence of this dynamic? For one thing, the overall health of the biome is coupled to the diversity and completeness of this community. Removing any one species or set will compromise the whole.

We, too, need to recognize and build communities. Identifying the many different individuals who comprise the Native Plant Society is like seeing the forest and the trees. Our members range across the

## Upcoming Events

**January 10, 7:30-9:30 pm**

### **Plants and Their Neighbors**

Native plants are best understood and enjoyed in the context of the plants and the environment in which they have evolved. Join Charles Smith as he shares patterns we can use to identify and appreciate the many Natural Communities of Virginia

**February 21, 7:30-9:30 pm**

### **Communities in Landscape Design**

The wealth of resources now available on regional plant communities gives landscape designers opportunities to move from simple arrangements to increased design complexity. Susan Abraham will discuss how designers can use the concept of plant communities to explore natural systems and the power they have to help heal our fragmented landscapes.

**March 14, 7:30-9:30 pm**

### **The Flora of Virginia**

We celebrate the publication of the much-anticipated *Flora of Virginia*. This historic accomplishment is the product of 12 years of work. The Flora describes 3,164 taxa in 200 families, with 1,400 captioned, scaled, and botanically accurate drawings. Join our speaker as we learn about the creation of this important work, and the future directions of the project.

*All events are free & open to the public.*

*Meet at Green Spring Gardens.*

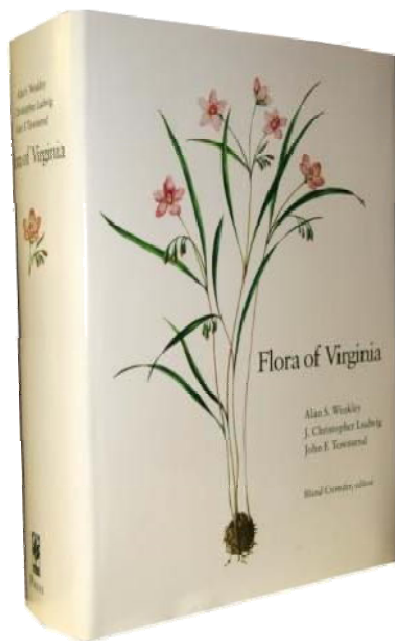
4603 Green Spring Road  
Alexandria, Virginia 22312

## Building Plant Communities (CONTINUED)

spectrum of knowledge and experience, yet we all share the enthusiasm and concern about the native flora which surround us and strengthen us. We all are eager to learn more and find ways we can invite others to enjoy the beauty and value of native plants from forest giant Oaks to ephemeral blooms. From common violet to rare or threatened species, each fits into the community.

But we need each other and all our strengths to thrive. The Society is enriched by your presence and your contributions in time and knowledge and participation. Join us this year on a walk or at a presentation by one of our guest speakers. Help with the propagation and plant sale. Come out to one of the invasive management workdays organized by our colleagues. Help us carry our message to schools and garden clubs through our speaker's bureau. I hope to see you this year as we explore the meaning and expression of community in the native flora and our lives.

## Now Available: The Flora of Virginia



*The Flora of Virginia*, a book cataloging Virginia's native plants, has now been published. This historic accomplishment is the product of twelve years of work between collaborating partners, with members of the Virginia Native Plant Society providing funding, leadership, and expertise. The Flora describes 3,164 taxa in 200 families, with 1,400 captioned, scaled, and botanically accurate drawings. Introductory material includes chapters on the natural history and vegetation of Virginia and a historical account of botanical exploration in the state, as well as a key to the vascular plant families represented in the Flora. This is a valuable and long awaited resource.

This makes the perfect gift for yourself and other naturalists in your life. To get your copy, visit <http://brit.org/brit-press/books/virginia> today.

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Submissions to *Potowmack News* should be sent to the Editor at [vnps.pot@gmail.com](mailto:vnps.pot@gmail.com)

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# Potowmack Chapter Programs

## 2013 – Celebrating the Natural Communities of Virginia

BY DIANA CARTER

Virginia possesses an extraordinary wealth of ecological communities — from maritime forests of the coast to spruce forests and shale barrens in the mountains. In 2013, we will celebrate and explore this unique ecological diversity through a series of lectures and field trips, especially highlighting VNPS Registry Sites. We will visit as many of these sites as we can during the year, exploring how native plants and collections of species interact and co-evolve in specific habitats.

We are privileged to have seven of the twenty-one Registry Sites under our chapter's purview — and each of these is a wonderful example of one or more Virginia Natural Communities. Another six Registry Sites are within an easy drive. In the first quarter of the year, we will visit the Potomac Gorge and the Thompson Wildlife Management Area. For more information on the Registry Sites, please visit:

<http://vnps.org/wp/conservation/know-your-vnps-registry-sites/>

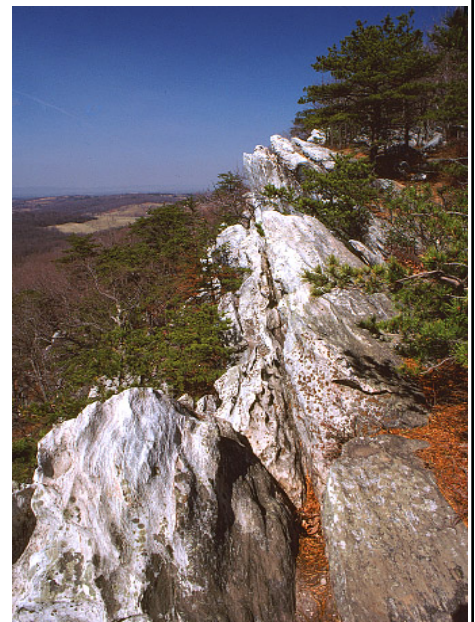
Following is some background to highlight the inspiration for this year's program, excerpted from the recently published *Flora of Virginia*, p. 24. "The Nature of the Virginia Flora", by Gary Fleming:

The flora treated in the book is the product of geological, climatic, and biological factors interacting over time on Virginia's landscape. . . . A basic understanding of [these influences] is essential to developing a deeper appreciation of the diverse plant habitats., vegetation, and species distributions in the state. Why certain plants grow where they do and how they came to occupy those habitats are topics of great interest . . . [Virginia's] flora contains substantial groups of species with affiliations to northern regions, the Southeast, the Midwest, and endemic habitats of the Appalachians, as well as many distinctive within-state distribution patterns.

. . .

Stretching east to west from the Atlantic Ocean well into the Appalachian Mountains, Virginia spans 5 of the more than 20 major physiographic provinces defined for North America (Fenneman 1938)—Coastal Plain, Piedmont, Blue Ridge, Ridge and Valley, and Appalachian Plateaus—making it one of the most topographically diverse states in the East. Virginia's considerable latitudinal range (36°30' N-39°30' N), vertical relief (sea level to 1746 m [5279 ft]), and variety of geological settings contribute to a significantly wide range of landforms, soils, and microclimates supporting correspondingly diverse vegetation and flora.

We are looking forward to 2013 as a year of learning, appreciating and enjoying the flora of Virginia in its natural community settings. Please let us know your ideas for this year's programs — and we look forward to seeing you!



Woodlands dominated by table-mountain pine (*Pinus pungens*, above), pitch pine (*P. rigida*), and ericaceous shrubs are widespread on xeric, exposed ridges throughout western VA. Bull Run Mountains, Fauquier County. Photo: © Gary P. Fleming

# REGISTRY SITE REVIEW: TURKEY RUN PARK

**BY JOHN DODGE, REGISTRY CHAIR**

## INTRODUCTION

Each VNPS Chapter is responsible for the Registry Sites in its geographic area. “Responsible” means we should inspect the site annually, and generally maintain some knowledge of the site condition on a continuing basis. And, we all should have some knowledge of what is special about the site that warrants its registry status. To help all Potowmack Chapter members to have some knowledge of each of our seven Registry Sites, this is the first in a series of articles we plan to present that will tell the story of these Sites.



## WHY TURKEY RUN PARK IS A REGISTRY SITE

Turkey Run Park became a Registry Site in about 2003. You’ve probably heard something about the plant and habitat diversity in the Potomac Gorge. It is the biologically-diverse prize in the DC area. Ecologists believe it is diverse for several reasons. 1) It is at the boundary between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions in Virginia, and will have at least some of the plants from each region; 2) it has rocky regions and sandy regions, open areas and forested areas – many habitats that are good homes for many species; 3) the Potomac is a large watershed, so the spring floods and other flooding along the banks and flood plains can bring plants and seeds from habitats far away. This diversity is the reason for the selection of Turkey Run Park as a VNPS Registry Site. In case you might not know where the Gorge begins and ends – it starts at the Great Falls of the Potomac (in Great Falls Park – another VNPS Registry Site) and continues to the Key Bridge. Fortunately, much of the riverside land in this stretch of the River is protected, which gives us a start in conserving the most biologically diverse area in both Maryland and Virginia. Turkey Run Park is a small portion of this protected land; its western boundary is the American Legion Memorial Bridge – the beltway bridge. The Park’s riverside boundary continues downstream about three miles. Its area, including the Claude Moore Colonial Farm, is somewhat over 700 acres. Its southern boundary is essentially the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) itself.

## TURKEY RUN PARK AND THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY

Who owns Turkey Run Park? Well, we do! It is one of the several areas of the GWMP, which is administered and cared for by the National Capitol Region of the National Park Service. Other areas that are part of the GWMP are the Great Falls Park, the Claude Moore Colonial Farm, Fort Marcy, Theodore Roosevelt Island, Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary, Daingerfield Island, Fort Hunt Park, and the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. These conserved areas, along with the GWMP itself (the highway to Mount Vernon and adjacent parkland) comprise the federally conserved land on the Virginia side of the Potomac River from Great Falls to Mount Vernon.



# VNPS Registry Sites (CONTINUED)

## TURKEY RUN PLANTS

Field botanists often evaluate a described area based on the number of species that are found growing naturally in that area. There does not appear to be such an inventory of Turkey Run Park alone. For the entire GWMP, the NPS staff has compiled records of several surveys and reports 1234 species. A bold estimate of the species growing in Turkey Run Park is 500 species, based on its much smaller size and its fewer habitats. Also, since it is mostly forest, there are few wetlands and open areas. A note to admirers of colorful flowering plants: these numbers include trees, ferns, grasses, rushes and sedges.

There are many flowering plants in Turkey Run Park that will reward the seeker. Cris Fleming, Marion Lobstein, and Barbara Tufty published *Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area* in 1995. Since the GWMP is much the same now as it was in the 1990's, the plants are likely about the same now as they were then. So we suggest that is a useful reference for checking a park area like Turkey Run prior to a visit. A sample from their book describing Turkey Run Park: "In mid-April, an explosion of bloom occurs in the rich bottomlands and moist hillsides of this park. Over 25 species flower at this time, including masses of Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) on the floodplain. Other plants found along the riverside trail are wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*), swamp buttercup (*Ranunculus septentrionalis*), sessile trillium (*Trillium sessile*), trout-lily (*Erythronium americanum*), and its close relative, white trout lily (*Erythronium albidum*)." The authors provide about two pages of text about the Park's plants including plant names, bloom time, and their general location.

## ANNUAL VISIT FOR TURKEY RUN PARK

A major feature of the VNPS Registry Program is an annual visit by members of the Chapter responsible for monitoring the Registry Site, and the Annual Report that results from the visit. The visit helps with our responsibility of staying informed about the condition of the site. Normally the visit takes place during the growing season, but this year the visit to Turkey Run was in conjunction with preparation for this article, and occurred in early December. It included an interview with Brent Steury, who is a Supervisory Biologist for the NPS and Natural Resources Program Manager for the GWMP. Brent explained that the two problems that face the GWMP currently are control of exotic invasives and reducing deer browse to forest floor plants.



Efforts to control exotic invasives are a continuing effort. Rarely does the Park have resources available to effect a large control program. So most of the time, only occasional targeted efforts are possible. The deer browse control effort is in the same situation – currently there are only sparse resources available for deer control. GWMP is prepared for focused activities in these two areas when resources become available.

Our thanks to Brent Steury and Karl Gallo, National Park Service employees at the GWMP Headquarters, for providing information for this report.



# POTOWMACK CHAPTER UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

ALL CHAPTER PROGRAMS AND WALKS ARE FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. PLEASE CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ABOUT ALL OF OUR PROGRAMS. SPACE IS LIMITED ON OUR FIELD TRIPS.  
[WWW.VNPS-POT.ORG](http://WWW.VNPS-POT.ORG)

<p><b>Woody Plants in Winter</b> Led by Elizabeth Rives <i>February or early in March (Date TBD)</i></p>	<p>One of the favorite field trips of 2012 was the Winter Tree Identification training and field trip. Elizabeth Rives will lead us again this year – stay tuned for date and location information!</p>
<p><b>Hemlock Overlook Park</b> Led by Rod Simmons <i>Late January or early February (Date TBD)</i></p>	<p>Hemlock Overlook Park covers approximately 40 acres along the Bull Run. Although located in Northern VA, this place has the feeling of a remote stream in deep woods.</p>
<p><b>Spring Wildflowers at Turkey Run Park</b> Led by Chris Fleming, Botany Chair <i>Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup></i></p>	<p>Join us for a walk through one of our area’s best spring wildflower displays. This VNPS Registry Site is famous for the spectacular show of Virginia bluebells.</p>
<p><b>Thompson Wildlife Management Area</b> Led by Alonso Abugattas <i>Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup></i></p>	<p>Join us for a Spring wildflower walk at Thompson, one of the VNPS Registry Sites. This site is a perennial favorite for the abundance of early flowers, especially Trilliums.</p>

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*Virginia Native Plant Society*

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