



# ANNUAL REPORT

## FISCAL YEAR 2023

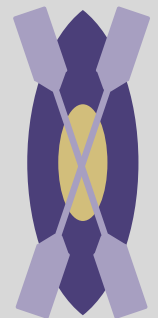
# FOJRP



Friends of the  
James River Park

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# DEAR FRIENDS,

The fiscal year 2022-2023 has been a good one for The Friends of the James River Park. Working closely with the Superintendent, Giles Garrison, and the staff at the James River Park System, FOJRP accomplished a meaningful list of projects to improve and enhance the JRPS for all of us who enjoy the Park. This annual impact report describes these projects, as well as some of our other accomplishments this year. We are excited about being able to follow through on our mission of Protecting, Enhancing and Expanding the JRPS and know that the next fiscal year will bring even bigger projects to bear in service to that mission.

In addition to financing more physical improvements in the Park, we will be making significant investments in park preservation through invasive species management, and helping to expand the capacity of the JRPS Education team this year. Invasive plant species removal has become a critically important function given the large and increasing number of invasive species which have taken over some areas of the Park. This important function is little known by most but provides for a better long-term outlook to keep the JRPS in a more sustainable natural state. A big shout out and thank you to the JRPS Invasive Plant Task Force, who coordinate volunteer activities for this important function and also work hard at eradicating invasive plant species in the Park.

Regarding education, we believe that this is another critical aspect of our mission. As citizen stewards, we see it as part of our duty to educate the next generations about nature, the wildness of the JRPS, and the outdoors in general. The JRPS Education team has done an excellent job introducing the

youth of our City to the JRPS and the many ways to enjoy and recreate therein. They also teach respect for the Park and conservation ideas by which to learn and live. We are proud to be able to directly support their work.

As we move into a new fiscal year, we want to thank you for your continued support of FOJRP and respectfully ask you to continue supporting us financially this year. Gifts may be restricted towards a specific purpose after a brief discussion with our staff to ensure alignment with current priorities. We also always welcome unrestricted gifts to our annual fund, which we use to fulfill our budgeted commitments. Should you have questions about any of this, please feel free to reach out to me (804-426-3230 - cell) or Josh Stutz, Executive Director, at 804-592-1031.

We are humbled by the support our donors have provided and we shall continue to use these gifts in prudent ways that support our Mission of Protecting, Enhancing, and Expanding the James River Park System. We are a low over-head organization run by volunteers who are dedicated to the Mission set forth above.

Thank you again for your support,



**Jake Savage**  
President,  
*Friends of the James River Park*

cc: Josh Stutz  
Cell: 804-592-1031

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## RIVER SAFETY SIGNAGE

*Installed July 2022.* Twenty of these simple signs went up in the Park in the Summer of 2022 near common water access points. The signs direct people to the FOJRP river safety page where they can find helpful tips that will keep them safe while recreating on the James.

## 42ND ST TOWER MURAL

*Completed Summer 2022.* The JRPS TRIP program students worked with local artist Sidney Olencias to paint a mural on the 42nd Street Tower throughout the Summer of 2022. Murals like this one prevent graffiti in the Park, and help beautify man-made structures.

## 21ST. ST TOWER PROJECT

*Completed in September 2022.* The area of the Park between 21st Street Tower and Belle Isle was improved when we worked with JRPS Staff and contractors to widen the trail, pave it with gravel, and move the fence around the tower. Prior to the work being done this area of the park was a dangerous choke point where bikes and pedestrians were often in conflict.

## 50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

*Hosted September 2022.* This event saw more than 400 people come out to Belle Isle to celebrate all things JRPS, and try something new. Special thanks to Whitten Brothers Automotive for sponsoring the event, as well as the JRPS Education team, Passages Adventure Camp, Riverside Outfitters, RVA Paddlesports, and Virginia Department of Natural Resources for hosting activities.

## STREETLIGHT DATA PROJECT

*Completed January 2023.* We worked with technology firm Streetlight Data to better understand who was coming to the park, and where they are coming from. This information is important to our work because it tells us where to dedicate resources, and helps guide our fundraising strategy. We learned, among other things, that only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of park users are City of Richmond residents,  $\frac{1}{3}$  are from the surrounding counties, and the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  come from more than 2,700 other zip codes in 49 different states.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

*Adopted in February 2023.* The FOJRP Board of Directors approved a Diversity and Inclusion Statement at our February board meeting. This document, written by our Community Engagement Committee, will serve to guide our project planning and organizational development philosophy in the future.

## MAROOKA

*Purchased February 2023.* Working with the JRPS Staff, the City of Richmond Trails Crew, and RVA More, we located and purchased an important piece of trail maintenance equipment. The Marooka MST-300 is a small, track wheeled, dump vehicle designed to fit into tight spaces. It will be used to meet a number of different trail maintenance needs, including resurfacing the Floodwall Trail.

## DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

*Completed March 2023.* Thanks to a generous donor who kept getting lost in the park, we were able to install street sign style directional signage at all of the major trail intersections throughout the Park. These simple signs will help park visitors find their way around, and let them know the distance to important park landmarks.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS



## WOOD RIVER RUN 2023

*Hosted April 2023.* We hosted another successful iteration of the Wood River Run in the Spring of 2023. This year, nearly 300 people joined us for the race, in memory of Christian Wood. Together we raised more than \$40,000 for the FOJRP mission, and to provide scholarships to Passages Adventure Camp.

## URBAN RANGER PROGRAM SUPPORT

*Jeep Purchased in April 2023.* Thanks to a generous grant from the Beirne Carter Foundation we were able to purchase a brand-new 2023 Jeep Wrangler for use as the patrol vehicle for the newly launched Urban Ranger program. This grant will also fund other vehicle needs of the program when it is up and running in the late Summer of 2023.

## WRIC RIVERWATCH AND T-POTT BRIDGE CAMERA

*Launched April 2023.* In partnership with WRIC ABC 8 we launched a new river safety initiative in the Spring. This new initiative provides live camera views of the James River and broadcasts the river levels as part of the daily weather report on the channel. The goal of the program is to make river levels and safety information more readily available to the general public. The program will run from April through October, when James River recreation activities are most active.

## RVA OSPREY CAM

*Completed in February of 2023,* We replaced the RVA Osprey Cam with a higher quality camera. This new camera can be manipulated remotely, has a better zoom, and can stay running for a lot longer. When the Osprey are not in their nest this camera provides views of the river downtown. The new camera was installed before Maggie and Walker returned to their nest at the end of February.

## PONY PASTURE PARKING LOT RESURFACE

*Completed in May 2023.* The JRPS Staff removed the blacktop and installed compacted gravel at the Pony Pasture Parking lot in the Spring of 2023. FOJRP Supported this project by paying for the removal of debris and delivery of materials.

## TREDEGAR RAMP REBUILD


*Completed April 2023.* We worked with the City of Richmond to fund the replacement of the Tredegar St. Boat Ramp. This project was particularly important because that is one of the primary launch point for the Richmond Fire Department river rescue boats. The new ramp provides a better surface for launching boats and is designed to last longer.

## REEDY CREEK BYPASS TRAIL

*Started in Spring of 23, completed August 2023.* Planning for this project began in the Winter of 2023, and construction began just before the end of the fiscal year. The Reedy Creek Bypass is a new trail spur designed to separate vehicle and pedestrian/bike traffic near JRPS HQ at Reedy Creek. Upon completion, cyclists, hikers, runners, and other park users will have a safe route around all of the park service and employee vehicle traffic at Reedy Creek.



# FISCAL SPONSORSHIP



As the largest nonprofit supporter of the James River Park System, FOJRP works with a limited number of small, project-focused, organizations that operate in alignment with our mission to Protect, Expand, and Enhance the JRPS. We provide Fiscal Sponsorship to these organizations so that they can further their mission, and provide a benefit to the JRPS. The JRPS Invasive Task Force, Richmond Environmental Film Festival, and Friends of the Pump House all operate as fiscally sponsored organizations under Friends of the James River Park. This section of the report contains more information about their work this fiscal year.

## **RVAEFF • RVAEFF.ORG**

The mission of the RVA Environmental Film Festival (RVAEFF.org), an all-volunteer organization, is to showcase films selected to bring awareness of environmental issues facing our city, region, and our planet. Due to our volunteers and the generosity of local non-profit organizations and businesses the RVA EFFI remains free and open to the public.

In spite of the dissolution of our previous Fiduciary Sponsor, Enrichmond Foundation, the festival committees met their challenge goals allowing the 13th annual festival to proceed albeit one month later than normal. The RVAEFF Steering Committee is particularly grateful to the Friends of the James River Park for serving as our Fiduciary Sponsor.

Volunteer recruitment brought in eleven new committee members including new chairs for the Sponsorship and Film Selection committees. Twenty three organizations and six individuals contributed to the festival. Major Supporters (>\$1,000) were Capital Region Land Conservancy, Sierra Club-Falls of the James Group, Vegan Action, the Byrd Theatre, the Science Museum of Virginia and the Cultural Arts Department of the City of Richmond.

Twenty films were screened over twelve days- nine films were followed by Q/A sessions. Opening night was the nationally-released film Wild Cat, the emotional and inspiring story of a young veteran on his journey into the Amazon, and included the filmmakers. Attendance was in line with recent years (1,300). The Virginia Environmental Film Contest First Prize was awarded to Coal Blooded, a documentary short on the community impacts of a coal terminal in Newport News, Virginia.

Looking forward, the Vision2025 committee is considering how to improve the festival sustainability, including by partnering with one of the Richmond-area universities. The next RVAEFF is targeted for early 2025.

# FISCAL SPONSORSHIP



## **FRIENDS OF PUMP HOUSE • FRIENDSOFPUMPHOUSE.ORG**

Our volunteers devoted their time and talents in a variety of ways, making repairs to the building, leading tours, hosting events, and so much more. Despite challenges that at times seemed overwhelming, we persevered and still managed to achieve many of our goals. In fact, this was probably one of the most impactful years in our history, especially considering that we had no access to our funds for several months.

Our most visible accomplishment has been the repair of multiple windows and transoms in the boiler room, which were completed by Karnage Construction. The windows are protected by Lexan panels on the outside of the building and have generally been left alone since their installation. Thanks to a grant from Security 101, we now have 24-hour video surveillance of the building, which should help prevent future vandalism.

We are particularly proud of the work done to rebuild the exterior stairway on the west end of the building, which was completed with the help of volunteers from the Richmond Bar Association. The new stairway is much safer than the previous one and should serve us well for many years to come.

Several other projects have helped to improve the appearance of the building and park grounds. We have removed graffiti both inside and outside the building and painted handrails and wooden boards where necessary. Major progress has been made in removing ash and dirt from the boiler room, and we are currently in the process of painting exposed portions of the ballroom floor.

## **INVASIVE PLANT TASK FORCE • JRPSINVASIVEPLANTS.ORG**

JRPS Invasive Plant Task Force (IPTF) impact included ongoing volunteer-driven management efforts in three park units, outreach, special projects, and collaboration with JRPS staff (note: JRPS management is excluded from this report, which solely represents the work of the IPTF).

IPTF members lead ongoing invasive plant management projects: Anne Wright, retired VCU Life Sciences professor, along Buttermilk Trail west of 42nd Street; Catherine Farmer, Richmond Tree Steward and Virginia Master Naturalist, on Belle Isle; and Joey Shelton of the James River Association on Chapel Island. Farmer and Shelton are VDACS-certified herbicide applicators.

The objective of the Buttermilk Trail volunteer-supported management continues to be manual removal of English ivy groundcover; this site is approaching the goal of invasive cover below five percent compared to invasive cover at or above 75 percent documented in the 2015 baseline inventory study. Recovery of native spring ephemerals has been dramatic.

# FISCAL SPONSORSHIP



## INVASIVE PLANT TASK FORCE, CONT.

Anne Wright worked with JRPS staff to install erosion control mats on slopes along an eroded section of trail above a stream. Volunteers then planted ‘plugs’ of locally native species propagated by task force member Bill Shanabruch of Reedy Creek Environmental.

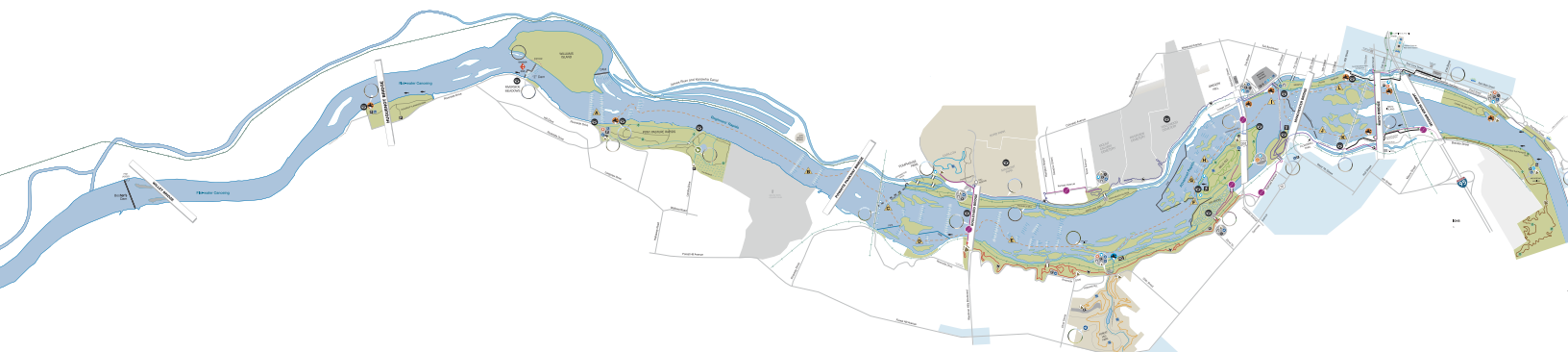
The James River Association hosted 20 volunteer events at Chapel Island throughout the year with 176 volunteers contributing 317 hours. Target invasive species were Chinese Privet, Garlic Mustard, Japanese Hops, English Ivy, and other vines. An Urban and Community Forest Assistance Grant (VDOF and USDA Forest Service) supported contractor services on a 4-acre site.

Belle Isle volunteer-supported management continued weekly at multiple sites within the original 3.5 acre project area. Targeted species included woody vine groundcover and tree-cover, forbs, shrubs, and trees. Control included treatment to suppress regrowth of privet, the dominant invasive shrub. Volunteers also planted dozens of trees of nearly twenty native species suitable to the natural community according to the Digital Atlas of the Flora of Virginia and IPTF member Robert Wright, a wetlands ecologist and botanist.

Comprehensive data on volunteer events for Buttermilk Trail and Belle Isle is not available at the time of this report.

Bill Shanabruch developed and initiated an experimental project to assess the introduction of aggressive native species as a complementary management strategy for invasive Japanese Stiltgrass in Pony Pasture and The Wetlands. Shanabruch established and planted six initial test plots with two native grass species.

In addition to individual outreach presentations, the IPTF hosted “Richmond Invasive Species Awareness Week” in March, a locally branded version of a national event. RISAW featured a declaration from city council, a kick-off event, volunteer events throughout the week, and a closing party





# VOLUNTEERISM



Volunteers provide a great benefit to the Park. Thank you to everyone who volunteered in FY 2023! Together we logged over 2,000 hours of volunteer time in support of our mission to protect, expand, and enhance the JRPS.

## CORPORATE AND GROUP VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering in the James River Park System is a great way to get employees or group members involved in the community, promote teambuilding, and give back to the environment. It is also a great way to connect with other businesses and organizations that are committed to making a difference. Some of the ways that your group can volunteer in the James River Park System include:

- Trash pickup and litter removal
- Tree planting
- Graffiti removal
- Trail maintenance
- Invasive plant management

These are just a few examples of the many ways that businesses and other groups can volunteer in the James River Park System.

## INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS

This year we launched an individual volunteer program, focused mainly on ensuring park visitors have the tools they need to enjoy the park safely and respectfully. Our Park Hosts work in the Reedy Creek Visitors Center and roam the Park. Their job is to answer questions, monitor park conditions, report maintenance issues, and help park users.

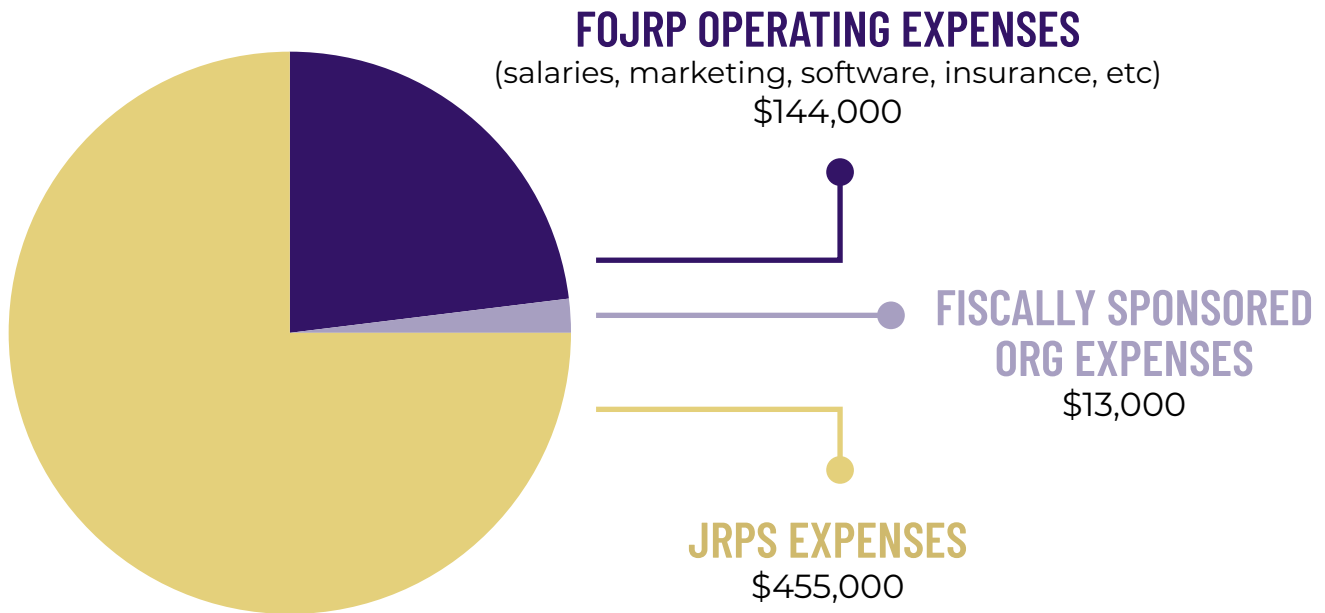
Individual volunteers are also sometimes called on to assist with special volunteer maintenance projects as necessary. This year we reached out to individuals to support some river cleanup events, and to help re-paint all of the parking lot lines in the Park.

## BOARD VOLUNTEERING

Our Board of Directors are our most talented and dedicated volunteers. They set aside time each month to provide oversight, ensure fiscal stability, and set strategic goals for the organization. They use their diverse skills to keep the organization on track and true to our mission.

Find out more about how you can get involved with our volunteer programs by visiting [jamesriverpark.org/volunteer](https://jamesriverpark.org/volunteer).

# FINANCE



Total Expenses: \$615,000



FOUNDATION  
\$173,000



INDIVIDUALS  
\$127,000



FISCALLY SPONSORED ORGS  
\$90,000



GOVERNMENT GRANTS  
\$73,500



LICENSE PLATES  
\$47,000



EVENTS  
\$40,200



BOOK SALES  
\$5,600

Total Revenue: \$580,000

# FUTURE

FY 24 will hopefully be another big year for FOJRP. In service of our goal to lead the collaborative implementation of the JRPS Master Plan, we have started the planning process for our first series of “big” projects. We are stepping back from some of the smaller scale projects we have taken on in the past, and instead will be focusing our efforts on how to improve one of the busiest, and most iconic, sections of the JRPS, Belle Isle.

The Belle Isle Improvement Plan is aimed at creating a better outdoor experience for park visitors in an area where amenities can be concentrated without disrupting the natural feel of the Park. As a former heavy industrial site, Belle Isle has many different features that make it ideal for some light park infrastructure improvements. With your help, we hope to create a stronger and more sustainable Belle Isle over the next few years.



# BOARD



## **JOSH STUTZ**

*Executive Director*

## **G. JACOB (JAKE) SAVAGE, III**

*President*

## **DAVID C. BROOCKE**

*Vice President*

## **MATT RIGBY**

*Secretary*

## **G. DEAN BRUNSON**

*Treasurer*

## **GILES GARRISON**

*Superintendent, James River Park System*

## **SHAWNA SHADE**

*Office Administrator*

## **MARY K. MARTIN**

*Immediate Past President*

Madge Bemiss  
Byron Chafin  
Todd Cornell  
Scott Dickens  
Bill Draper  
Karen Garner  
Patrick Griffin  
Jean Linnell  
Kendra Norrell  
Lucia O'Connell  
Mel Smith  
Greg Velzy  
Krista Weatherford  
Janet Woodka

## **ABOUT THE BOARD**

The Board of Directors for Friends of the James River Park serve as the fiscal stewards and governing body for the organization. Among other duties, these dedicated volunteers meet monthly to review the organization's finances, provide input to the Executive Director, and help build an annual budget that aligns with the mission of the organization. They believe preserving, advocating for and enhancing the James River Park System, fostering a sense of personal and community ownership, is essential to ensuring an inclusive, accessible and sustainable place of refuge, learning and beauty for Richmond and beyond.

If you would like to learn more about our board of directors, or are interested in joining, please contact [friends@jamesriverpark.org](mailto:friends@jamesriverpark.org)