



Ridgeview Woods:  
A Guide to Its History  
and Mystery

*All of you with little children, take them to the woods and streams if you wish their highest education. They will forget their books, they will never forget the grassy fields.*

Adapted from

Journal of Popular Education, 1903

Author: Patricia Shanley  
Illustrations by Nancy Stark  
Editorial design by Gabriela Álvarez

Additional illustrations by:  
Mary Rogers Miller (page 7)  
Margaret W. Morley (pages 28, 33)  
Irene E. Jerome (pages 29, 32, 33, 37)  
Alice Josephine Smith (page 38, 39)

Printed in Princeton, New Jersey, USA  
First Edition, May 2022

Copyright © 2022 Ridgeview Conservancy  
All rights reserved

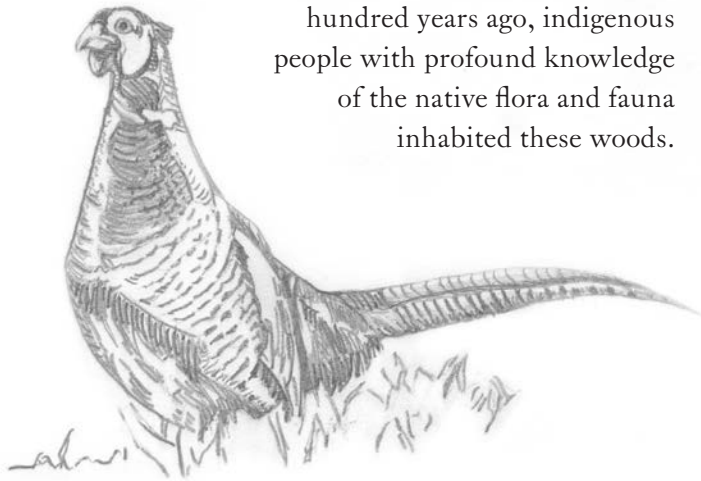




## Ridgeview Woods: A Guide to Its History and Mystery

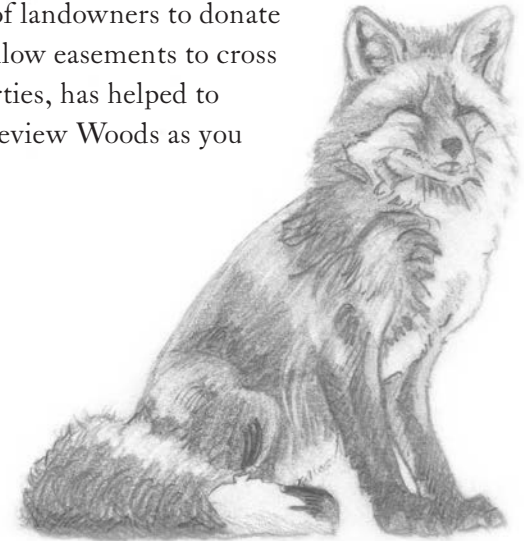
Welcome to Ridgeview Woods! The name of this woods gives you a clue to its history as a ridge with a view. Two hundred years ago, this region was open farmland, and from atop this bald ridge one could spot downtown Princeton and the spires of the University.

By the early 1900s, many farms were abandoned and over decades the forests returned, growing into the magnificent beech, oak, and hickory forests we see today. This forest has been home to foxes and pheasants, bears and bobcats and is now habitat for endangered and threatened species like the wood turtle and barred owl. Eight hundred years ago, indigenous people with profound knowledge of the native flora and fauna inhabited these woods.



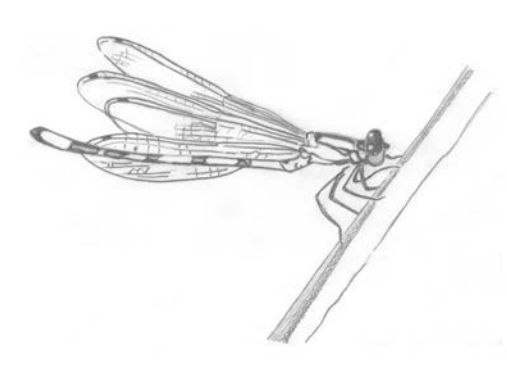
During the last decade, members of Ridgeview Conservancy and Princeton High School students have removed thousands of invasive plants to restore the forest and to uncover native plants used as food and medicine by our Woodland ancestors.

This work, along with the generosity of landowners to donate land or to allow easements to cross their properties, has helped to create Ridgeview Woods as you see it today.



## Red Oak Letter Box

This trail begins at the letter box beside the grand red oak. As you walk, you will discover the places and pass through the habitats described in this Field Guide. Keep your eyes and ears alert to “read” the forest, and your spirit open!



## Cherry Run Stream

If you toss a twig into the creek beside the trailhead, it will soon join Cherry Run Stream, one of the purest in the region and the aquatic living room of an astonishing array of insects and amphibians.

Keep an eye out for northern two-lined salamanders, called ‘indicator species’ because they only flourish in clean water, and so *indicate* that the creek is healthy.

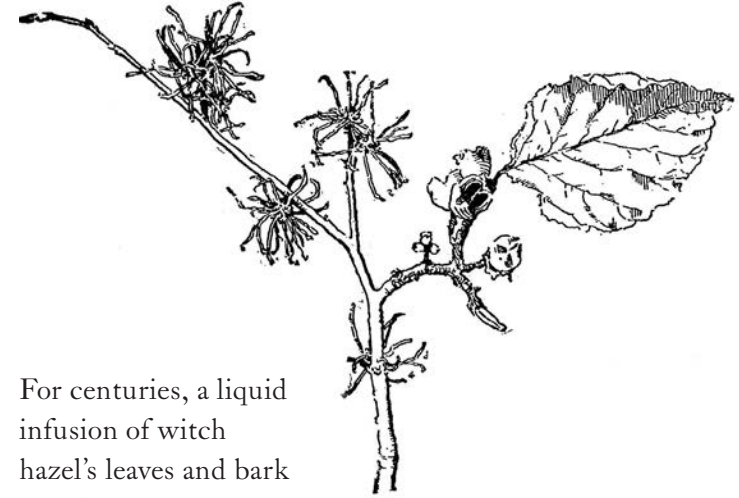


The Late Woodland people fished and hunted along Cherry Run Stream, and offered gifts and prayers to the forest, expressing reverence for the earth, water, and sky. Let us follow their tradition of giving thanks and showing respect as we enter their ancestral grounds.

## Stepping-Stone Spring

Why is there a pile of rocks between the bridge and creek, and a stone wall along the creek bank? This remnant of a 19th century farm offers a glimpse of rural ingenuity. The farmer and his family likely dammed the creek below the spring to create a watering hole for their farm animals. Until the spring of 2020, these relics of Wind Whistle Farm were hidden beneath 12 feet of invasive species!

Three truckloads of briars were removed to unveil buried native species like spice bush and a witch hazel shrub arching across the bridge, along with vestiges of this forest's agricultural past.



For centuries, a liquid infusion of witch hazel's leaves and bark have been used to heal cuts and sprains. The supple branches are also used as divining rods to detect water!

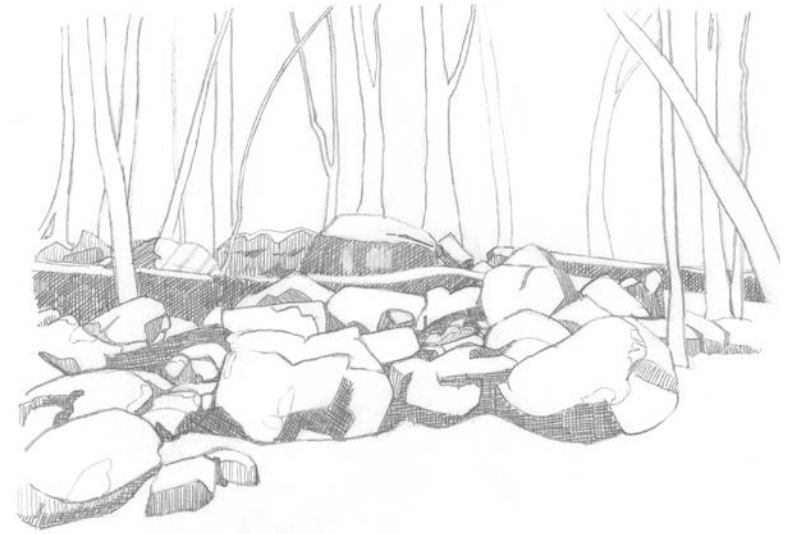
## Boulder Field

### Splitting of the Continents

How did these boulders get here? Hint: the name of one big boulder is *Morocco Rocco*.

About 200 million years ago the continent called Pangea stretched, pulled apart, and then broke, forming the Atlantic Ocean between what is now North America and Africa, including Morocco which used to be our neighbor! In North America, magma burbled up in the fractures formed at the beginning of the separation and hardened into a new type of rock, which we call *Rocky Hill Diabase*.

Millions of years of erosion of softer rock has exposed the hard, gray diabase rock we see around us in the boulder field – and Morocco Rocco!



## A Magic Wand from Holly Haven



If you need a magic wand, which tree would you fashion it from? Hollies have long been known to hold special powers, such as granting protection during spiritual quests. It was a Holly wand that chose Harry Potter! Holly trees grow very slowly, and a small, slim tree may be many decades old. How did hollies arrive in these woods? Holly seeds are often dropped by birds who eat the red berries (poisonous to humans) and expel them while flying overhead. In the wintertime, hollies are a favorite of birds, who hide in the evergreen branches.

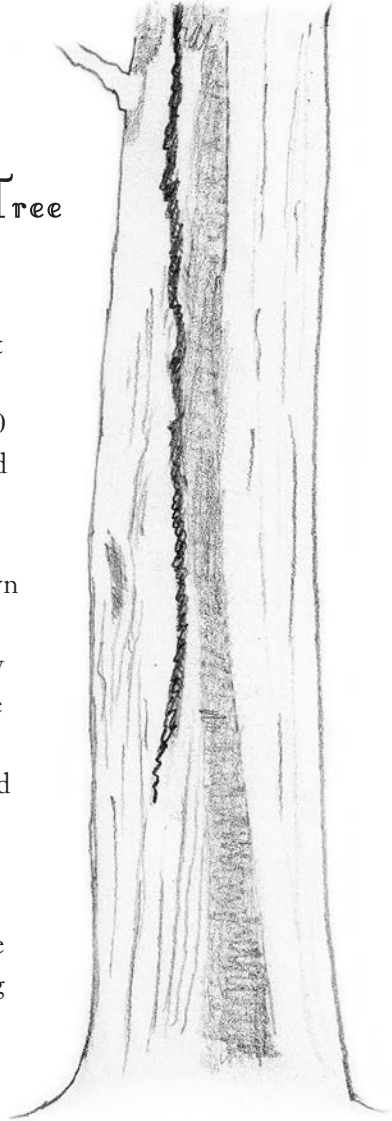
Winter cheer and lore are entwined with the holly, as well as its neighbor here, Christmas ferns, whose leaflets are formed like stockings!





## Sparky The Grand Tulip Tree

Tulip poplars are the tallest deciduous tree in North America, extending 100-170 feet into the sky. One grand tulip poplar along the trail bears a vertical scar on its trunk stretching from crown to root. In July 2020, the tree was violently struck by lightning during Hurricane Isaias. When young, tulip poplars require sunlight and grow rapidly and straight as an arrow towards the sky. Rapid growth results in its wood being less dense than that of slower growing hickory and oak.



One of its names, 'canoe wood', recalls its past use when hollowed out by indigenous peoples. In Spring, the blossoms look like tulips atop the tree, each petal resembling a miniature orange-yellow sunset.



By folding over the top of a tulip leaf and making two half circles near the leaf tips, you can create a kitty face mask!



## Spice Bush Feast for Songbirds

Look for a 3-6-foot-high bush alongside the trail with oval, green, fragrant leaves, and tiny raised whitish dots on its gray bark. This native shrub is called spice bush, or *Lindera benzoin* by botanists, and 7-Up or Sprite by children due to its lemon-scented leaves and twigs that make a restorative tea.



In early Spring, when its bare twigs become adorned with delicate specks of yellow blossoms, it earns the nickname ‘forsythia of the forest.’

The green, lipid-rich fruit on female shrubs turns bright red in autumn, just in time for neotropical migratory songbirds to stop, rest and “gas up” to continue their thousand-mile journey home to Central or South America. Colonial families gathered, dried, and crushed these berries to infuse their stuffings, and pumpkin and apple pies, with its allspice-like flavor.



## Grape Vine Food, Nests and Fun

When the Vikings first landed in North America, they called it *Vinland* due to the abundance of wild grape vines.

You can see these thick, brown ropes with shredding bark, heart-shaped leaves, and curlicue tendrils reaching all the way up into the canopies of ash, sassafras, poplars, and hickories. They provide food and nesting materials for songbirds – and swings for adventurous trail walkers!





## Poison Ivy

### Leaves of Three, Let it Be

Another vine, the infamous poison ivy, begins its life as a small, three-leaved plant, then slithers up trees, attached by tiny root hairs. As it gets older, poison ivy becomes a thick, hairy vine. Although villainized, the fruits of poison ivy provide food for birds, and because it is often found on forest edges, some believe that it protects the woods. To avoid falling prey to itchy skin, remember the adage: *leaves of three, let it be, hairy rope, don't be a dope!*

## Bittersweet

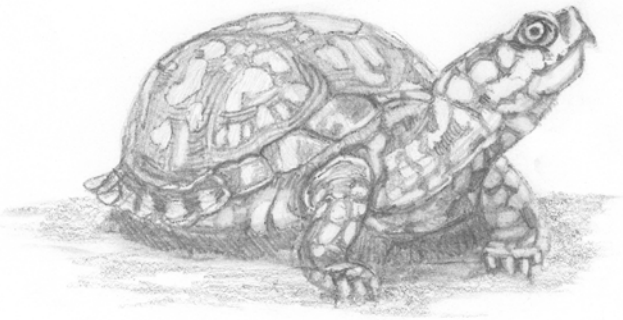
### The Gray-Skinned Strangler

A third vine begins life as an innocent-looking tendril but can grow to become as thick as a child's leg, strangling trees in the process. Called oriental bittersweet, or the "gray-skinned strangler", this vine is an invasive plant, with smooth gray, tannish bark, serrated oval leaves, and distinctive orange-red berries in the Fall. To liberate trees, Ridgeview Woods stewards cut the stem of bittersweet at the base, pull out the root, and then play tug of war to pull the entangled vine out of the tree's crown.



## Forest Elders

Once you reach a sign for Wolf Hollow you are entering the deeper woods where canopies of century-old trees stretch into the sky, and ferns blanket the forest floor. You are now among the forest elders. Mature beech, oak, and hickories offer food and nesting grounds for wildlife and songbirds. Understory trees, like witch hazel, muscledwood, and black haw viburnum form a lower awning of shelter and shade. Look to the west for two zig-zag shaped limbs reaching high into the forest canopy, and a grape vine valentine hanging in midair before the bridge!



Old forests and winding brooks offer crucial habitat to endangered species like the wood turtle, barred owl, and red shouldered hawk – animals which require significant tracts of undisturbed forest to survive. As we lose old forests, we eliminate the kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms of wild creatures, contributing to the local extinction of species that have graced these woods, like the elusive New Jersey bobcat.

## Star Gazing Rock

Star Gazing Rock is a large flat stone, a perfect size and shape to lie upon and observe the wonders of the night sky through a gap in the tree canopy. In 2015, the jagged boulders surrounding star gazing rock were invisible, cloaked beneath tangles of invasive vines and fallen tree limbs. It took geological forces to shape the rock, trees to frame the view, and dedicated stewards to clear the stage so that you can enjoy the stars from this spot, a diabase rock created by magma 200 million years ago!



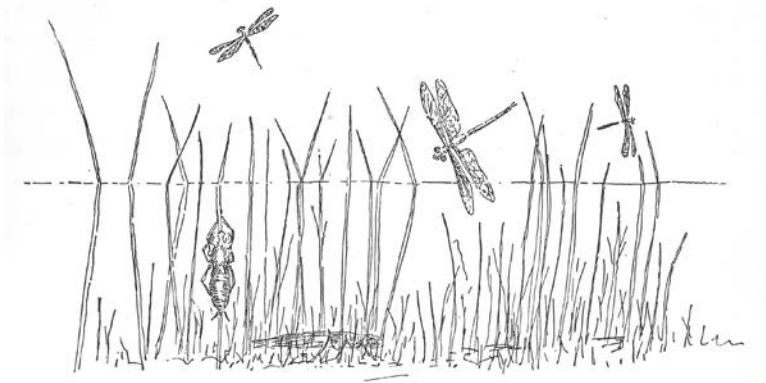


## Wolf Hollow

Magnificent and grand, with smooth gray bark, beech trees are a sign of ancient forest. Young beeches are shade tolerant, and grow slowly beneath the crowns of other trees. Some beech trees live to be 500 years old. “Wolf trees” are those bearing lofty canopies which dominate the sky, casting a blanket of shade upon the forest floor. Here in Wolf Hollow, a centerpiece beech and a tulip poplar fill the sky with their branches, sheltering our forest living room below. These trees spread their crowns upward, like wolves howling to the heavens, proclaiming their century-old tenure in this forest hollow.





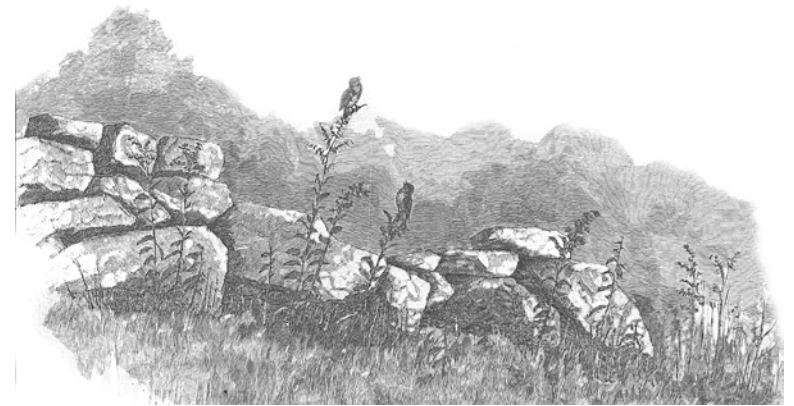


## Wetlands Way

On Princeton Ridge, boulders jut out of the earth and tough diabase rock lurks just below the ground. Because water cannot infiltrate this hard rock, it collects at the surface in soggy wetlands and vernal ponds. In spring, wetlands are the life blood of the forest, serving as a nursery for fish and amphibians. Throughout the year, they provide watering holes for songbirds, raptors, owls, and wildlife. Wetlands also filter and clean our water, prevent flooding, and offer a home to many endangered and threatened species.

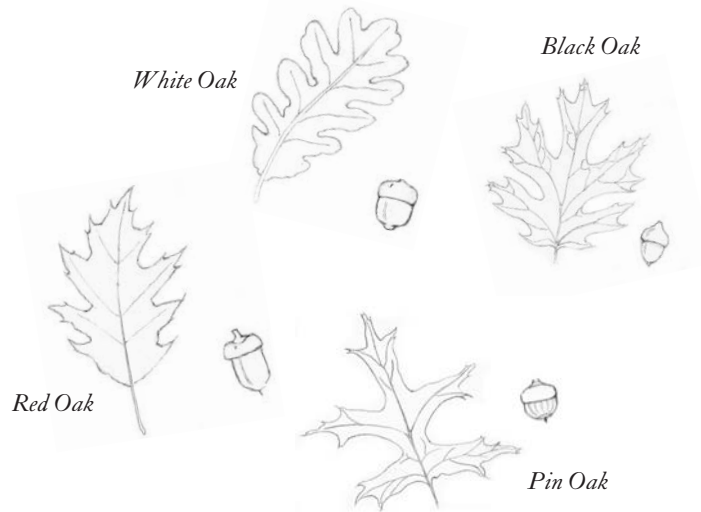
## Stone Wall Trail

When rugged farmers built these stone walls in the early to mid 1800's, an expanse of cedars grew in this region, earning this part of town the name Cedar Grove. At that time, many local forests were logged to make way for livestock, fields, and orchards. Cedars are a successional species, growing up after the abandonment of farm fields, and overtime become shaded out by hardwood species. The maple and oak trees we see here today are the new generation of trees which replaced the cedars.



## The Pancake Tree

Which oak tree's acorns would you use to make pancakes: red, black, white, or pin oak? The Lenape who lived here knew. They chose white oak because their acorns are sweeter and less bitter than the other species. White oak acorns still need to be soaked, dried, and ground into nutritious flour before they can be made into pancakes. The white oak has leaves with rounded lobes, and silvery gray bark. For centuries, white oaks have been revered as symbols of strength and used for shipbuilding. In Ireland they are treasured as the home and haunts of woodland fairies.



## Seasonal Splendor

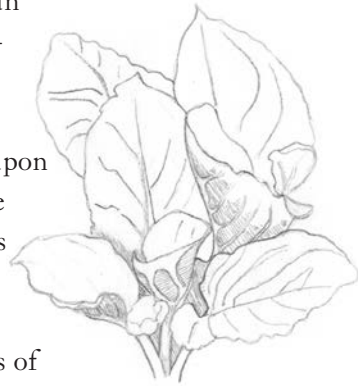
Every day, in every season, the woods change. In **Winter**, the architectural majesty of leafless trees is revealed, and the story lines of woodland creatures are recorded in the snow. Tracking paw prints we may discover a fox den, glimpse frozen droplets from a hibernating creature's breath (known as hoar frost), encircling a groundhog hole, or behold "angel wing" snow prints where owls and hawks swooped into the woodland cafeteria for lunch.



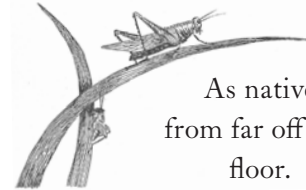
In **Spring**, the world warms. Music from tropical migrating songbirds grace the woods.

Skunk cabbage melts snow around its base, summoning pollinators to its snug club house, and beckoning its wildflower friends to come forth.

Sensing the warmth of the sun through the soil, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, May Apples, Spring Beauties, Trout Lilies, and Solomon's Seal arise, jewels upon the forest floor. Each of these spring ephemeral wildflowers holds a treasure chest of forgotten remedies, wisdom, and lore of earlier inhabitants of these forests.

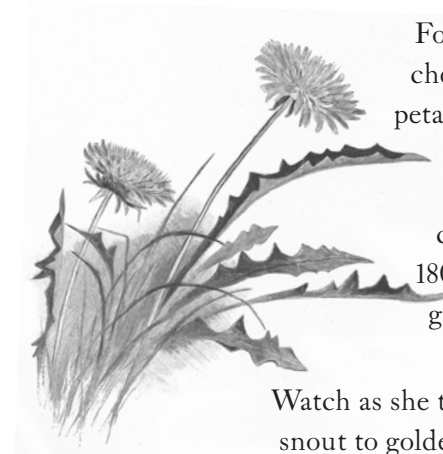


In **Summer**, crickets and frogs serenade. Forests offer a refuge from the hot sun, as trees cool the air and provide shelter.



As native wildflowers wither, exotic species from far off lands can swiftly blanket the forest floor. Many were introduced as beautiful ornamental plants, but they can behave like bullies, aggressively pushing out native species, diminishing biodiversity, and creating a food desert for wildlife.

Other naturalized species, like the phytonutrient rich dandelion, were carefully brought over by colonists to nourish and cure ills.



For centuries, families have cherished the ragged yellow petals of this health-restoring flower through traditions of foraging, healing, and childhood play – until the 1800's, people wisely pulled grass out of lawns to make space for dandelions!

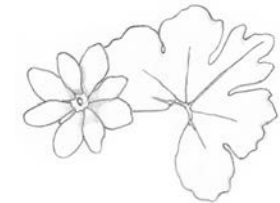
Watch as she transforms from a swine's snout to golden princess, puff ball, and finally, a bald monk's head.



Come **Autumn**, the trees can be distinguished from afar by their colors: orange sassafras, bright yellow tulip poplars, red maples, and brown, gold, and red hickories and oaks. Their golden and scarlet robes and nutrient-rich nuts scatter to the forest floor, and the cycle starts again. From one season and one moment to the next, a woodland walk is never the same.

## Forest Rx Healthy Forests, Healthy People

By walking in these woods, you received a whole body-mind-spirit tune-up! Medical research reveals that forests give a boost to our endocrine, respiratory, cardio-vascular, nervous, and immune systems. They lessen anxiety and enhance creativity, while warding off disease. Forests are the humblest and cheapest MD in town.



On top of that, trees and forests:

- 🌿 filter, clean and store water
- 🌿 produce oxygen and clear the air of pollutants
- 🌿 store and sequester carbon
- 🌿 support social cohesion and reduce crime
- 🌿 are home to wildlife and biodiversity
- 🌿 *and help to mitigate the twin crises facing the earth – climate change and species extinction!*

## Old Forests Biological Legacies



Old trees and forests offer all of these services better than young ones. This is not just because they are bigger. It is because forests are complex ecological systems – of ancient trees, animals, soils, microorganisms, water, and air – working together and communicating to create an exquisite symphony supporting life. If forests were a fancy, human-made technology, we would spend fortunes on them. Instead, all we need to do is respect forests, and allow them the space and time to grow old.



## Threats to Forests

These woods and wetlands along Cherry Run Stream narrowly escaped being logged for an expanded gas pipeline and for the construction of various homes. However, neighbors – including a nine-year old citizen scientist – fought hard to keep thousands of trees standing, to preserve habitat for wildlife such as salamanders and tropical migrating songbirds, as well as to save this forest's remarkable indigenous, African American, and literary history. If a nine-year old can save forests – you can too!



In recent decades, these forests have faced new threats. Exotic species from around the world have been accidentally introduced or intentionally planted as ornamentals. Many of these outcompete native wildflowers and understory species.

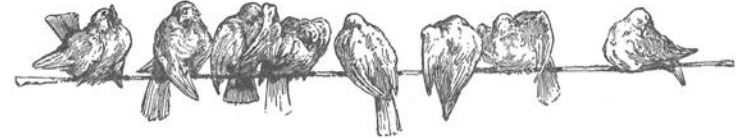
Hungry deer prefer the tender, exquisite taste of native over invasive species, further reducing native species.

Notably, habitat destruction and the spread of invasives species are the two primary causes of biodiversity loss and species extinction worldwide. Currently, one million species are at risk of extinction.



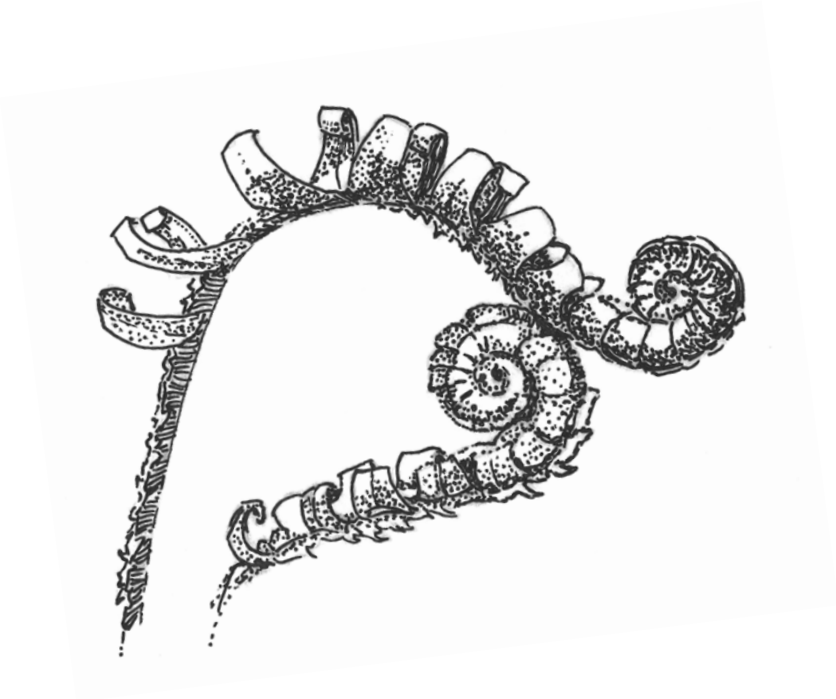
By forming neighborhood FBI (Fighting Back Invasives) Strike Teams, you can help protect native species and keep forests healthy.

So, let's save all that is left of our forests, especially the old ones, and take care of our trees!



If you would like to know more about Ridgeview Woods and other nearby forests, see:

[www.ridgeviewconservancy.org](http://www.ridgeviewconservancy.org)



RIDGEVIEW  
CONSERVANCY