

# New Sanctuary Established For Vulnerable Fireflies

by Amy Carpenter-Driscoll



Map of area included in the firefly sanctuary

When days are hot and muggy in Maryland and the sun sets late in the evening, dusk brings out a fantastic winged beetle that has enchanted children and adults alike every summer for ages: the firefly. Indeed, fireflies are a hallmark of early summer in our state, charmingly emitting soft flashes of light in the woods, fields and yards as they send signals to one another.

However, firefly populations are increasingly at risk. A study published in the February 2020 issue of BioScience, entitled A Global Perspective on Firefly Extinction Threats, finds that the consensus among firefly experts is that firefly populations are threatened across the globe by multiple factors, including habitat loss, light pollution and pesticide use. The experts also identified drought, extreme temperatures and flooding as significant threats widely attributed to global climate change. Residential and commercial development chip away at the firefly's native habitat, while artificial light at night confuses the insects and interrupts their signaling.

A group of Greenbelt residents have taken it upon themselves to preserve a parcel of land as a designated habitat to help protect fireflies. Mary Ann Canter, a Greenbelt resident of 20 years, enjoys seeing the fireflies along the pathway that winds through Stream Valley Park. "I've been enjoying the fireflies for 20 years that I've lived here," she says. "But there was a project proposed for the area. And I realized all at once that it could be developed in some way."

The city operates this approximate four-acre area, which currently is a mowed space with a paved pathway lined by a small basketball court, benches and a stream that underwent restoration in 2011. "It was a spontaneous thing," Canter says of her idea for a firefly sanctuary. I thought, "Oh, they could develop this land and then I wouldn't be able to see them anymore." She understood fireflies' need for protection. "They have sanctuaries for animals. Why can't we have a sanctuary for the fireflies?" Canter created a Firefly Sanctuary Committee, along with neighbors who are equally passionate about firefly conservation. The

Greenbelt City Council approved the group's proposal for a firefly sanctuary on March 10, 2020.

The firefly sanctuary will provide protected habitat in which local populations of fireflies can thrive. There are limited overhead lights in the immediate area, restricting the amount of artificial light at night that contributes to harmful light pollution. Public Works will leave a 10-foot buffer of grasses along the wood line and mow only once a year. Fireflies rely on grasses throughout their life cycle. The sanctuary

precludes current or future use of pesticides and herbicides. Both entrances to the area will have interpretive signage, providing education about the importance of fireflies and what the sanctuary provides.

Canter hopes the sanctuary will benefit both fireflies and the community. "I'd like to bring that kind of enjoyment of them to more people in the community. And I'd like to see them thrive, of course. They're doing well recently, so I'd like to see that continue," she says.



PHOTO BY AMY CARPENTER-DRISCOLL

Fireflies will continue to thrive in this area along Stream Valley Park.

## Friendly Relief Calls Through The Greenbelt Time Bank

by Jane Young

My brother Jeff has Alzheimer's and he lives alone in Nevada. Two family members bring him food and check on him weekly. I'm the only person who phones him often and he's always glad to talk. When my husband and I planned a month-long getaway this spring I worried that Jeff would be lonely, since other family members were tepid on the idea of substituting for me. I asked Jim, a Greenbelt Time Bank (GTB) member who needed to earn hours, if he'd be interested in calling Jeff. Jim agreed to try, and after a little bit of a shaky start it worked out really well. Of course I didn't get to take my trip but Jim continues to phone Jeff. It's such a relief to me that Jeff has someone else to converse with. Jeff said he really enjoys Jim's calls.

Jim said: I recently had the

pleasure of meeting my friend, Jeff, who has Alzheimer's, when his sister Jane asked me if I could do some phone visits with him a few times per week. Jeff has a lot of interesting stories. He studied social psychology in college and has had a lot of variety in his career. He has traveled extensively both within and outside the United States. Jeff is also genuinely interested in hearing about my life and asking questions about my current successes, challenges and political views.

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