



OUR SPRING IN THE DC-AREA

Thanks largely to our new greenhouse, courtesy of the Fairfax County Park Authority, our propagation made a tremendous leap forward this year. Even after our record-setting Spring Plant Sales, our Wild Plant Nursery is still jam-packed with pots and flats stashed temporarily in between rows. Our propagation success is especially surprising given the cold, wet spring, which probably set us back a few weeks. For planting, however, it was perfect weather and we took advantage of it!

In Fairfax County, we expanded our work at Americana Park with the County's Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, and Friends of Accotink Creek. Over 1,000 plugs and pots of native grasses and forbs, along with 10 pounds of seed, were planted in what was an invasive bramble patch along the Beltway interchange. That's in addition to the wet meadow near the baseball diamond, where we supplied about 1,000 plants last year. Friends of Accotink Creek have made great progress in this park and we're proud to be collaborating with them to improve the Accotink Creek watershed.

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¡BOSQUES RENTABLES!

Our Dominican colleagues — with the help of our American donors — have got the Tree Bank's new "Bosques Rentables" program off to a strong start. The Tree Bank works along part of the Dominican Republic / Haiti border, on the Dominican side, to boost the incomes of small-holder farmers and restore native forest.

"Bosques Rentables" means "profitable forests." The project is designed to replant exhausted, low-value farmland as forest — and to help farmers make money from that forest. It's a simple idea: there are vast amounts of marginal land in our region; on some of it, we'll replant native canopy trees, then, a few years later, we'll establish understory groves of cocoa and coffee, which are high-value, shade-tolerant tree crops. These crops will make the forests profitable.

Obviously this is a long-term project, but maybe not as long as you might think. Trees grow quickly in the tropics, and we have several tricks to create quick shade — planting banana, for example. Of course, Bosques Rentables won't recreate the original forest, but it's probably our best bet for reestablishing a more-or-less natural canopy over much of our region.

Our goal for this first year was to establish five sites, on five different farms, each site about three-quarters of an acre. Each was to be cleared of tree-inhibiting scrub, and planted with at least five native canopy species. (The trees are produced at the main Tree Bank nursery. See the nursery note inside.) One of the sites is shown above.

We still have work to do on these sites this year, but the planting is now far enough along so that we know we'll meet this year's goal. And that is allowing us to make an early start on next year's agenda. We're planning to expand the number of sites and include our new "Bosques" in our conservation mapping, so that we can see where the program will do the most good for the region's surviving forests and wildlife.

— Chris Bright, President



Photos: Above, Tree Bank site managers examined a Bosques Rentables test site in May. The site burned by accident last year. At left and also in May, we collaborated with Fairfax County, Virginia, to create a display meadow at the County's Government Center.



DC-AREA NURSERY: TIME FOR PIPE & CINDERBLOCK

Summer has arrived. The soupy, oppressive heat heralds the end of our planting season and the beginning of our annual round of nursery maintenance and renovation chores. Here's a sampler of projects in search of volunteer time and muscle:

Our quixotic but necessary war on weeds grinds into its fifteenth consecutive year as we continue to clean and mulch pots. This is generally easy work and suitable for beginners, so if you've been looking for an opportunity to start volunteering, you're in luck.

The squirrels and chipmunks have been especially hard on our oak and hickory seedlings this year, so we'll convert a large coldframe and one trough into rodent-resistant enclosures for tree seedlings.

The lumber frames of some of our raised beds are rotting away, so we'll replace the lumber with cinderblock.

Our pond trough needs renovation too. We'll also donate most of the lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*) to make space for yellow pond-lily (*Nuphar advena*).

An Eagle Scout candidate plans to help build a large soil bin in the rear of the container yard. This will help us keep the nursery clean and make it easier for us to keep weed seeds out of our soil.

At the greenhouse, we'll use PVC pipe to make sturdy table legs for the bench tops that the Park Authority provided along with the structure. This should make this coming winter even more productive.

This list probably sounds unreasonably ambitious. That's why we need your help! For volunteer information, go to earthsangha.org and click on "Volunteer" under "Take Action" in the top menu.

— Matt Bright, Conservation Coordinator

Photos: Above, in our Tree Bank Nature Reserve, students prepare to plant a deforested slope. See also the back page photo. Below, our DC-area Wild Plant Nursery Open House, in May, was a soggy affair, but spring sales still raised over \$29,000 for our local conservation projects. Many thanks to everyone who came out!





COCOA, COFFEE, & CORAZON DE PALOMA

The Tree Bank is going to need a forest's worth of trees, and soon. To serve our "Bosques Rentables" program (see the front page), we'll have to produce tens of thousands more native tree seedlings annually, and thousands more coffee and cacao seedlings. (Cacao is the little tree whose seeds are used to make cocoa and chocolate.) A brief tree-production report follows.

Coffee: During 2013 and 2014, the coffee rust pathogen *Hemileia vastatrix* eliminated the Dominican Republic's coffee stands, and we have been propagating rust-resistant coffee seedlings by the thousands since then. We're using the seedlings to replant our partner-farmers' traditional, shade coffee groves, as well as for Bosques Rentables.

Cacao: To boost production of this valuable shade crop, we built a second Tree Bank nursery. You can see a picture of it above. It will be devoted exclusively to cacao, at least for the next few years. It's on land owned by one of our partner farmers, José Aquino Lauriano. We built it as a separate facility, rather than as an extension of our main nursery, so that it could have its own water supply. We think that we can get about 15,000 cacao seedlings out of the new facility this year and we hope to do better next year.

Natives: This will be our biggest challenge. We need both more native tree species and more volume — and that will require a lot more seed. As with our DC-Area nursery, the Tree Bank grows its native trees from wild seed. But collecting seed is not a traditional activity in our region and we have to coax people into it. We achieve this with a simple technique: payment! We now pay our farmers 1,000 pesos (about \$22) for useable quantities of seed from species that we

Photos: Above, the beginnings of Rising Forests® Cocoa. In May, our partner-farmers sowed thousands of cacao seeds in the Tree Bank's new cacao nursery. (The seeds of the cacao tree are used to make cocoa and chocolate.) At right, one of the native-tree species in production at our main Tree Bank nursery. Corazón de paloma ("dove's heart") is a common tree in the Tree Bank region; it grows rapidly, especially along streams.

want to grow. That's double what we used to pay, and people are beginning to notice. We like to point out that collecting tree seed is a lot less work than regular farming.

We've also made some structural improvements at the main Tree Bank nursery. We installed a second water-tank, to increase our on-site water supply. And we expanded our container yard by about 50 percent. These changes should allow the main nursery to produce up to 30,000 seedlings a year, and there's plenty of space for additional expansion.

We're also buying more labor. Farmers can now earn 400 pesos for a morning at the nursery, filling grow-bags with soil, watering, and weeding. It's easy work, and it's a valuable opportunity for our farmers because there are very few ways of earning money in the community.

More labor, more space, more water, and more seed — that, we hope, will be an effective recipe for more forest!

— Chris Bright, President





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Farther west, we supplied 2,000 pots of native grasses and forbs, as well as eight pounds of seed for the Fairfax County Government Center pollinator meadow project. While not strictly a restoration planting, this meadow will be seen by hundreds of people daily and will feature signage extolling the ecological virtues of native plants. Supervisors John Cook and Sharon Bulova spoke to the crowd about the importance of native vegetation and pollinators.

In the City of Falls Church, we worked with the Department of Urban Forestry to complete a “daylighting” project that restored a stream from a buried concrete pipe to a more natural, above-ground state, and to replant the floodplain forest, which had been infested with invasives. This was our first big project with Falls Church. We put in over 1,500 grasses and forbs, along with 450 shrubs and trees — and we’re looking forward to additional projects with the City.

In the City of Alexandria, we worked with Master Naturalists, the City government, and Alexandria Renew (the water utility) to create a native pollinator garden. We supplied over 800 forbs and grasses in collaboration with designer Elisa Meara to create a garden that would showcase a broad selection of native plants, and create ecological value on what had previously been just a turf slope.

Also in Alexandria, we provided over 200 plants for a hillside adjacent the Telegraph Road and Duke Street intersection. This area had been invaded by a mix of non-native shrubs and shrubby trees. Small non-park sites like this are often left unrestored, but they are frequently havens for invasives. Appropriate native plantings can help create early successional habitat and reduce the spread of invasives from these areas into parks.

Not a bad spring. And given how full our nursery still is, we’re hoping that our partners will have a busy fall schedule too!

— Matt Bright, Conservation Coordinator

Photo: In May, local high-school students in our Tree Bank project area, in the Dominican Republic near the border with Haiti, teamed up for a native-tree planting to celebrate Earth Day. The students were working in a deforested section of our “Reserva,” a park that we established to protect the local watershed. See inside for a photo of their planting site.

The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

Want to contact us or make a donation? You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to “Earth Sangha”) or donate on our website. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. (If your name and address are correct on your check, there is no need to send us anything else.) To donate specifically to our DC-Area programs, write “DC-Area” on the check memo line; to donate specifically to the Tree Bank, write “Tree Bank” on the memo line. [Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707 | \(703\) 764-4830 | earthsangha.org](mailto:info@earthsangha.org). Complete program information is available on our website.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us? We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia. We meditate in the Del Ray section of Alexandria on Tuesday evenings. For more information see our website or call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

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