



2025 Annual Report



The Year in Review

2025 was a powerful reminder of what is possible when neighbors come together with a shared purpose. At Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, we witnessed firsthand the strength of community, the dedication of volunteers, and the impact of collective action in protecting and restoring our watershed.

Throughout the year, our volunteer board members spent countless hours designing an organizational structure that will provide opportunities for volunteers to take a more active role in developing and leading the activities of NNWB. A new committee structure provides for committees to plan and execute events in the cleaning up near the stream and across the watershed, planting native species, monitoring water quality, and educating neighbors about the importance of protecting the Northwest Branch. These efforts go beyond environmental projects—they help ensure the Northwest Branch is preserved for our children and future generations.

We are deeply grateful to every volunteer, donor, partner, and supporter who makes this work possible. Your commitment fuels our mission and allows NNWB to continue growing as a trusted steward of this vital natural resource.

As we look ahead, we are still focused on strengthening Neighbors of the Northwest Branch and its restoration efforts, expanding community engagement, and deepening partnerships that amplify our impact. We are developing a healthier watershed and a stronger, more connected community.

With gratitude,

Deborah Briceland-Betts, J.D., President, Board of Directors

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

Neighbors of the Northwest Branch (NNWB) inspires and mobilizes residents to protect, restore, and celebrate the Northwest Branch watershed — improving water quality, enhancing habitat, and strengthening community connection to the environment.

Vision

We envision a healthy, thriving Northwest Branch where clean water flows, trees and native plants and wildlife flourish, and neighbors work together to sustain this natural resource for current and future generations.

Core Values:

- Environmental stewardship
- Community engagement
- Education & advocacy
- Collaboration
- Integrity & transparency.

Watershed Restoration

NNWB organized stream cleanups, native plant installations, and invasive species removal projects that directly improve habitat quality, stream health, and ecosystem resilience.

In 2025 Neighbors in Montgomery County sponsored **14 cleanups** led by volunteer Nick Clements, and board member Ben Simasek was the leader in Prince George's County events. **175** volunteers collected **246** bags of trash from the stream and its watershed for a **total of 9,635 pounds of trash**. The picture below was taken at a recent clean up event. See 2025 clean up photos and highlights [here](#). Find clean-up events and sign up [here](#).



The NNWB was praised by Montgomery County for its clean activity. For the second year in a row NNWB clean up volunteers removed the second highest amount of trash from parkland. The volunteers removed 8,251 pounds of trash during 50 clean ups in the NWB parkland. NNWB volunteers picked up 13,228 pounds of trash in parks in 2025.

Native and Invasive Vines:

In 2025 NNWB Invasive Vines program, led by board member Scott Zillmer, sponsored 4 invasive vine removal events, coordinated with Ed Murtagh and the Montgomery County Weed Warrior Program. Three distinct species were targeted at those events, The first was targeting oriental bittersweet at Northwest Branch Recreational Park, along the new trail. The second was Kudzu at Northwest Park Apartments on Southampton Drive, where there is a new and fast-expanding Kudzu infestation. The third was at Northwest Branch Recreational Park, targeting Oriental bittersweet near the trailhead for the new Northwest Branch Trail. The fourth was targeting massive wintercreeper vines at the Matthew Henson Trail State Park unit. The invasives team hosted **4 events** with **40 participants** and **rescued 125 trees** from vines; many were oversized and choking the tree. See 2025 invasive removal photos and highlights [here](#). Find clean-up events and sign up [here](#).

Volunteers in Northwest Branch were hailed by the Montgomery County Weed Warrior staff for providing:

- 1,171 Weed Warrior hours.
- Over 0.5 Full Time Employee Equivalent and \$40,980 (Monetary Volunteer Contribution)
- 1,855 trees/shrubs saved from NNI vines.
- 52 Weed Warrior Workday events.
- 60 Certified Weed Warriors entered data.
- 197 Drop-In Volunteers (not certified WWs) took part in group Weed Warrior Workdays
- 257 volunteers participated in Weed Warrior efforts.

Cleaning the Rocks

NNWB volunteers also partnered with the **Mid Atlantic Climbers (MAC)** twice in 2025 to **clean graffiti from the boulders at Burnt Mills** and worked to **clean and restore the trails** along that section of the stream. NNWB and MAC are developing a new program in 2026 to provide a quicker response to cleaning up the rocks.

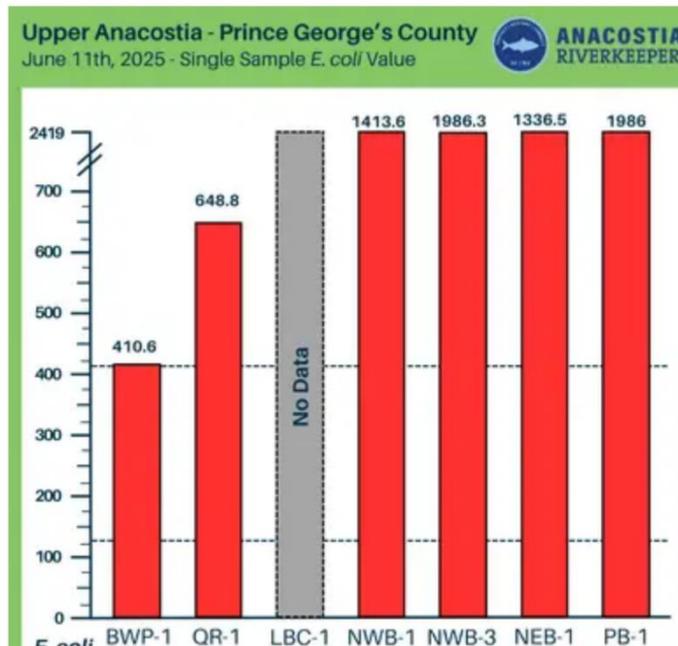
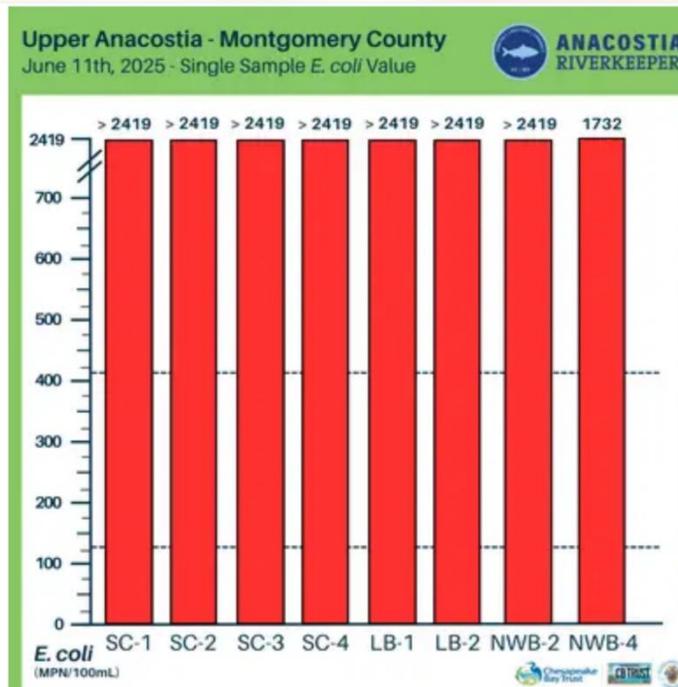


Water Quality Monitoring

Volunteers conduct regular stream testing and monitoring to track the health of the Northwest Branch. This data supports long-term restoration planning and informed community action. NNWB conducts three different monitoring programs.

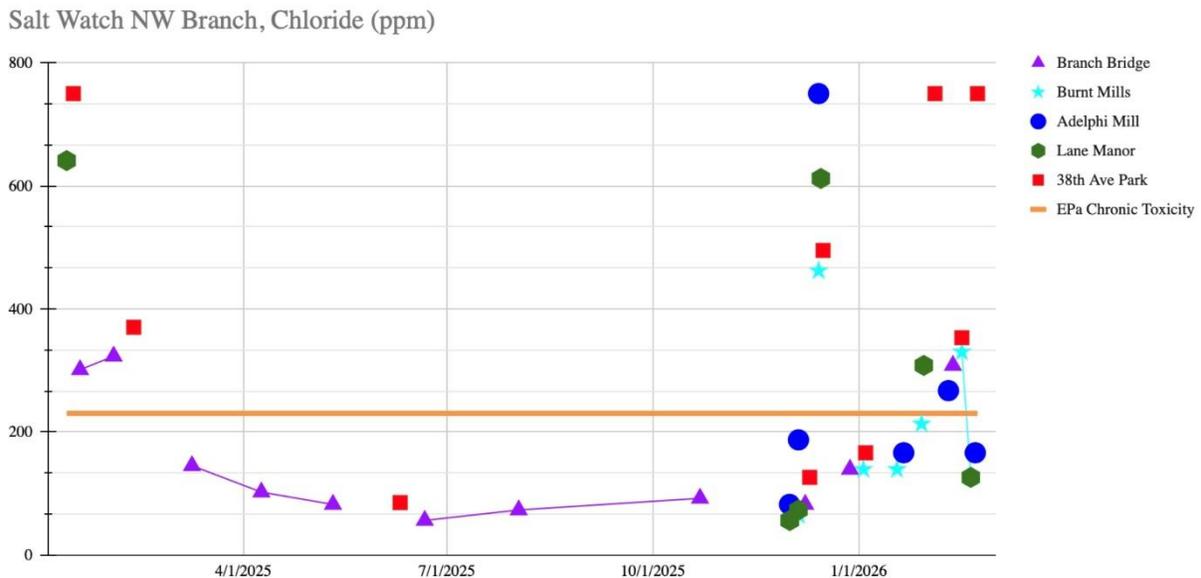
1)Bacteria & Nitrates: This is a summer program that runs from May to September in partnership with the Anacostia Riverkeeper. The program utilizes trained citizen scientists to gather water samples biweekly. The samples are taken to scientists at the University of Maryland who measure the amount of E coli and other bacteria. In 2025, the E. coli levels were often too high to be safe for people or their pets to touch. NNWB warned that August's hot, dry weather affected water quality and urged caution near the water. The chart below shows E coli results 405 MPN/100ml is the limit for safe water recreation. These sites were all over 2400 MPN/100ml and more. The tests that are

used to measure the amount of E coli only measure to 2400MPN/100ml. The charts below demonstrate the E coli levels found in the NWB. The charts are from June. [See the full Middle Anacostia report here.](#)



2) Micro invertebrates: Volunteer Glenn Welch leads this program for NNWB from Summer to Fall program in partnership with Nature Forward. Volunteers assess the types and quantities of micro invertebrates present in the stream. This summer and fall new micro invertebrates were found in the stream. Experts indicate that this development may imply an improvement in the stream's health, which has historically been assessed as ranging from poor to fair.

3) Salt Watch: is a monitoring in partnership with the Izzak Walton League. This program, led by Deb Briceland-Betts, was previously a Winter program, however it was determined that salt collects in the stream year-round and so the program is now a continuous effort. Five NNWB volunteers gather water samples from the stream after each snow or rain event and test them for salt levels. These levels are registered on the Clean Water Hub. Melissa Schweisguth designed the chart below to demonstrate salt levels in the stream as measured over time.



Community Engagement & Outreach

We provide education on pollution prevention, stormwater management, and watershed stewardship, helping residents make environmentally responsible choices at home and in their communities.

Elementary School Classroom Program:

This year, NNWB entered a collaboration with Cesar Chavez Bilingual Duo language Elementary school in Prince Georges County. Board members Deb Briceland-Betts, Nora Swisher and Ben Simasek went into the fifth-grade science classroom to help students learn about watersheds, native and invasive vines. The program included providing students active learning opportunities using a model watershed, identifying the differences in native and invasive plants and walking around the school property to see and discuss what they had learned in the classroom.

Other education programs have reached out to NNWB inviting us to partner with them in a similar effort. Vine Corps, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering community engagement and enhancing the learning skills of high school students, invited the NNWB to collaborate with its students through initiatives such as trash collection and water quality monitoring.

Kiosk Education:

The kiosks of NNWB, installed in 2024 at Lane Manor and Kirkwood, were updated regularly to provide communities who recreate in or near the stream on the water quality and salt content in the stream. The poster below was designed by board member Valerie Morris. See our [kiosk slide show](#) here.



Membership Development

The NNWB board of directors determined that more information of activities of the NNWB set at 2025 goal to provide the membership with more information on a consistent basis. Subsequently, the board voted to clarify the definition of membership in NNWB. A new system was developed to recruit new members and to guide them from signing up for volunteer involvement. Nora Swisher, Board Secretary, revived an email communications program and produces and sends quarterly newsletters to the membership. The premiere edition featured Nick Clements as volunteer of the quarter.

Advocacy

NNWB partners with local organizations, agencies, and community groups to promote clean water policies, sustainable practices, and shared environmental goals. The NNWB board met with six representatives of the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and the Montgomery County Parks and Recreation to discuss the University Boulevard Corridor Plan and its impact on the NWB. The plan includes increasing public access to the NW Branch Parkway near Piney Branch Rd. The NNWB board members emphasized the need to protect the area from increased trash and graffiti. The M-NCPPC indicated that the NNWB board will be included in the planning process.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Strong collaboration with agencies and community organizations advanced shared goals for cleaner water and healthier environment. In 2025, NNWB's partnerships included: Friends of Sligo Creek, the Anacostia Riverkeeper, Nature Forward, Mid Atlantic Climbers, Montgomery County Parks and the Montgomery County Parks and Planning Commission. (MNCPPC).

One Person Can Make a Difference



Nick Clements lives in the middle of the Northwest Branch watershed. He is a super volunteer who is enthusiastic about restoring and preserving the beauty of the Northwest Branch and its watershed. About five years ago as he cycled along the road, or hiked through the forest, he was shocked at the large amount of trash along the roadside or hiking trails. When he curtailed his cycling, he started picking up trash. In the last three years, he has picked up 30,000 pounds of trash, the majority of which is beverage bottles. Although Nick sees glass and aluminum beverage containers, plastic water bottles are the predominant trash recovered.

While it is often assumed that careless individuals are responsible for improperly disposed waste, Nick believes that there are several contributing factors. These include overfilled trash receptacles and recycling bins, inadequately covered transport vehicles, overflowing dumpsters, and tenants failing to ensure their waste is correctly placed inside dumpsters. Picking up trash is only a temporary solution for this problem. Elimination at the source is a key objective.

Nick chose to use his spare time to restore and protect the Northwest Branch and its watershed. You, too, can be a volunteer protector of the Branch.

Join today! NNWB website: neighborsnwb.org.

2025-2026 Board of Directors

Deborah Briceland-Betts, J.D. — President

Melissa Schweisguth — Vice President and Advocacy Committee Chair

Nora Swisher — Secretary

Melanie Kill — Treasurer

Greg Smith

Lilantha Tennakoon

Amy Yeager — (interim)

Valerie Morris — Manager, Facebook & Instagram and Graphic Designer, kiosk posters

Scott Zillmer--Native and Invasive Vines Committee Chair

Other Leadership:

Glenn Welch--Micro Invertebrate Program Leader

Nick Clements --Clean Up Committee Co-Chair

Ed Murtaugh -- Liaison, Friends of Sligo Creek

Juanita Roca --Outreach and Education Co-Chair