

Superintendent Report

January 2024

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Virginia Department of Forestry notified JRPS and Friends of James River Park (FOJRP) of three grant awards that will support enhanced natural resource management in JRPS, including two year support for a fulltime Natural Resource Manager, funds to develop a natural resource management plan for JRPS, and support for major renovations for the City of Richmond Northside Nursery, which will cultivate native trees and shrubs for use in restoration landscape projects in JRPS and elsewhere in the City. Additionally VDOF will continue to support Invasive Species Management staff in 2024-2025.

PARK PROJECTS

Belle Isle

Development of a Belle Isle gateway area conceptual plan is underway. This includes extensive conservation landscaping, adaptive reuse of the Old Dominion Iron and Nail Works shed, improvements to the bike skills area, and construction of a nature play space. JRPS is working with FOJRP and Marvel Designs to produce the conceptual plan, with a goal of presenting to stakeholders, easement holders, and appropriate city review boards in the first half of 2024.

Dock Street Site

Development of an opening plan for the Dock Street park site in Richmond's East End is moving forward in collaboration with the James River Association and FOJRP with Marvel Designs providing design work. JRPS aims to open the Dock Street site to public use in June-July 2024.

Mayo Island

The City of Richmond is working with Capital Region Land Conservancy and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation on a new conservation easement that will guide the development of Mayo Island as a floodable natural park area with boating access. This is a long-term project that will overlap with the reconstruction of the Mayo Bridge superstructure.

Pump House Ramp

An ADA ramp will be constructed at the Historic Byrd Park Pump House by M&F Concrete with engineering and landscape design by Timmons Group. The project is funded by the Virginia Recreational Trails Program grant. Trees removed will be replaced at a 1:1 caliper inch ratio and all plantings will be native to JRPS and appropriate for the riparian area.

Z Dam Safety

JRPS replaced two warning buoys at Z Dam. The buoys were swept away in January's high-water. JRPS is communicating with the Virginia Dam Safety program and Richmond DPU to investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of suspended-above-river dam warning signage.

TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

Petronius Jones

Trail crew has been resurfacing the vita course at Petronius Jones Park.

Pine Camp

Working with volunteers from RVA MORE Trails has been developing a new trail network at Pine Camp.

North Bank Trail

With project support from FOJRP, Backyard Farmer is working with Trails & Greenways division to rebuild the boardwalk on the North Bank Trail. Work has begun and should be complete in March 2024. The trail will remain open.

JRPS PUBLIC PROGRAMS IN FEBRUARY

Riverside Readings

JRPS Outdoor Education staff hosts Riverside Readings at Reedy Creek on Saturdays from 10 am – 11: 30 am. These walk-in program sessions are open to families and children of all ages.

Belle Isle History Hike

Come learn about the history of Richmond’s most storied island. The tour illuminates the fascinating geologic, ecological, and human influences that make Belle Isle a JRPS gem. Meet at the kiosk in the Belle Isle parking area at 10 am on Saturday, February 10th.

Owl Prowl

The Owl Prowl returns to Pony Pasture on Monday February 12th from 4 – 6 pm. JRPS Outdoor Education will lead a dusk hike in Pony Pasture where guests will be invited to observe the tree tops and listen for owls.

Adventure Loop Hike

The JRPS Outdoor Education Team leads visitors on an iconic hike along JRPS’s scenic Buttermilk and North Bank Trail on Sunday February 18th from 10 am until 3 pm. This 6-mile trek departs from the Reedy Creek parking area and includes historic and geologic interpretation, with great views of the Falls of the James, historic remnants, and natural inhabitants of the park.

For all events, email programs@jamesriverpark.org for more information.

GET INVOLVED

Volunteer opportunities recur weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Visit cfengage.com to find out about events. From litter clean ups, to visitors center hosting, to invasive plant removal, there is a role for everyone to play to protect the James River Park System.

<https://www.cfengage.org/organization/001A000000aAvPSIA0>

James River Park System Outdoor Education - January 2024

**Number
Participants**

196

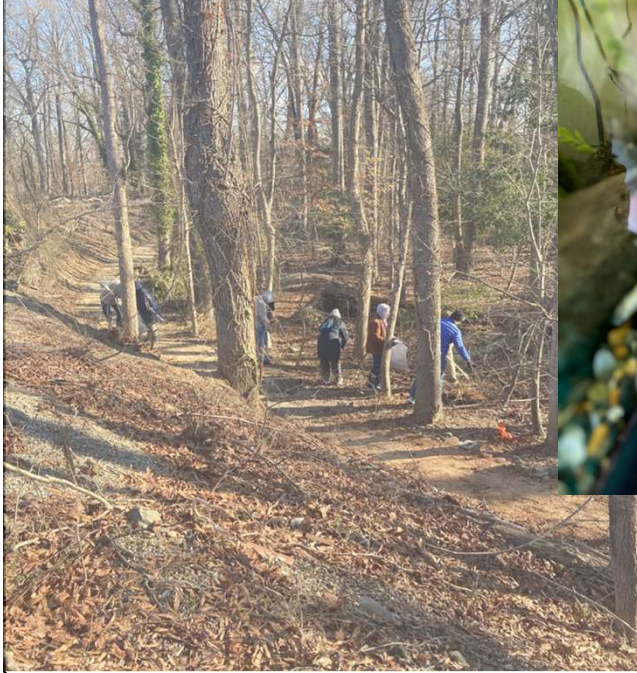
Number Programs

14

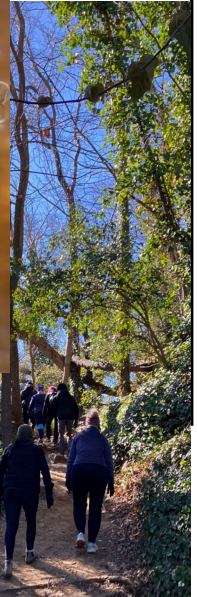
Staff: Penelope Davenport
Tyler Twyford
Willa Moffatt

Joey Binkley
Nathan Hill
Toolen Meyer

JRPS teamed up with Blue Sky Fund's Outdoor Leadership students to pick up trash along the new Pine Camp Trails on a brusque January morning.



A robust group of adventure hikers on the North Bank Trail.



Above: Participants in our newest public program, Riverside Readings, spent some time getting to know our resident catfish.



Date	Number Participants	Program Title	Audience	Program Area	Activity
1/11/2024	10	Kids' Pool Kayaking	Community Center After School	Academic Year Out of School Time	Kayaking
1/11/2024	6	Adult Pool Kayaking	General Public	Public Education-Adventure	Kayaking
1/12/2024	20	Pumphouse Tour	General Public	Public Education- Cultural Interpretation	History Tour
1/17/2024	41	T-Pot Birdwatching Pop-Up	General Public	Public Education- Ecology	Birdwatching
1/18/2024	5	Kids' Pool Kayaking	Community Center After School	Academic Year Out of School Time	Kayaking
1/18/2024	6	Kids' Pool Kayaking	Community Center After School	Academic Year Out of School Time	Kayaking
1/18/2024	12	Adult Pool Kayaking	General Public	Public Education-Adventure	Kayaking
1/20/2024	5	Riverside Readings	General Public	Public Education	Children's Story Time
1/20/2024	15	Trash Pickup at Pine Camp Trails	Blue Sky Fund Outdoor Leaders	Volunteer Engagement	Litter Cleanup
1/21/2024	6	Adventure Loop Hike	General Public	Public Education- Adventure	Hiking
1/25/2024	7	Kids' Pool Kayaking	Community Center After School	Academic Year Out of School Time	Kayaking
1/25/2024	15	Adult Pool Kayaking	General Public	Public Education-Adventure	Kayaking
1/26/2024	12	Pumphouse Tour	General Public	Public Education- Cultural Interpretation	History Tour
1/27/2024	11	Riverside Readings	General Public	Public Education	Children's Story Time
1/31/2024	25	T-Pot Birdwatching Pop-Up	General Public	Public Education- Ecology	Birdwatching

JRPS Outdoor Education Initiatives

January's lull in field trips gave the education team opportunities for more public engagement, professional development, and program planning and strengthening. We developed a new communication strategy and set annual goals, driven by departmental and community needs and by what worked well in 2023.

Program Highlight: While conducting a pop-up birdwatching program using the spotting scope on the T-Pot bridge, we spoke to a mom and young child while spending time on the T-Pot and they came to Reedybout JRPS programs and the Reedy Creek Visitor Center. We were delighted to welcome the same pair to Reedy Creek 2 days later; they had come to visit as a result of our conversation on the bridge! This repeat engagement is a great example of how pop-up interaction leads to broader access to the Park, encouraging visitors to increase their scope of Park access.

BWET Updates: The first meeting of the Student Advisory Group took place at the Richmond Technical Center in January. Nine wonderful students from across RPS high schools came together to talk about the environment and to advise on how the ELP will be relevant to students. We can't wait to see what these talented youth contribute to this process.

Simultaneously, the Teacher Advisory Group continues drafting the ELP. We have broken the document into component elements, and are especially focused on building out a matrix of experiences to link driving questions about the James River to experiences that every RPS student will have during their academic career.

Professional Development was an important component of the team's January work. The workshops we attended spurred the kinds of critical thinking that we are always aspiring toward as an education team. Debriefs after each workshop connected the concepts we were learning into actionable steps to improve programs immediately and to build out policy document to ensure the sustainability of this improvement.

Communication: We had a great conversation with Josh, from Friends of the James River Park, and Chris, from RocketPop, about enhanced public program communication. As a result of this conversation, we saw program registration double within a week. We are grateful for this partnership support and excited to continue to collaborate on public engagement.

Operations Report

JRPS Park Operations: ~~November~~, 2024

Park Visitation in Jan 2024:

87,107

2023 – 111,434

2022 – 73,549

2021 – 116,770

2020 – 117,757



Updates

- Handicap spaces reinstalled at Huguenot Flatwater.
- Missing Life Ring reinstalled at Ancarrows Landing.
- Final Memorial Bench Installed at Belle Isle - This completes the set of 4.
- 16.5' River took out part of Pony Trail. Park staff added 100 tons of gravel to address parking lot ruts, remade two sections of back trail and pulled dumpster out of the woods.
- MLK Day Volunteer Group – installed tree id markers and added mulch to former tree planting at Reedy Bypass Trail.
- Wedge Building on Belle has had a complete roof collapse. Park plans to contract out demolition soon.
- 4 Park employees attended the NRPA Maintenance Management School in WV.
- Huguenot Flatwater bridge grip hoisted out of the creek. Future JROC Project will be to install a concrete bridge abutment and re-assemble bridge on new footing.
- Replacement buoy's will be installed at Z Dam in early February by park staff.

Projects

- 1/11 – Crooked Branch Ravine Park entrance sign
- 1/15 – River Flood Event | Pony Pasture Roadwork
- 1/18 – Pony Pasture Road Work.
- 1/27 – JROC Workday: 14th Street takeout and Riverside Outfitters changing room demolition
- 1/28 – Huguenot Flatwater Bridge Plans
- 12/30 – Outdoor Education deck project begins



1/11 – Crooked Branch Sign Creation

One of three new frames constructed for the new trail system – Crooked Branch Ravine Park. This trail connects southside Richmond from George Wythe High School to 42nd st.

1/15 – River Flood

The James River recently experienced two flood events this month rising to as much as 16.5 feet. For reference, Pony Pasture parking lot was completely submerged during this water event and destroyed portions of the back trail.



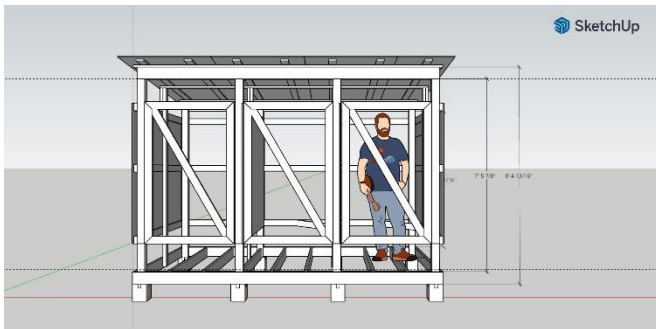
1/18 – Pony Pasture Roadwork

Operations staff respond to the damage caused by recent flood events by adding 100 tons of gravel between the parking lot and portions of the back trail. Park staff were able to regrade, smooth out and reinforce low portions of the parking lot and back trail and hoist the dumpster out of the woods.



1/27 – JROC Workday: Changing Blinds

Last month's JROC workday was a two-part project – remove and dispose of the old changing blinds at 14th street takeout, take down and salvage materials from Riverside Outfitters changing blinds. With the changing blinds removed from 14th st, park staff now have room to begin construction of its replacement utilizing new and salvaged lumber and hardware.

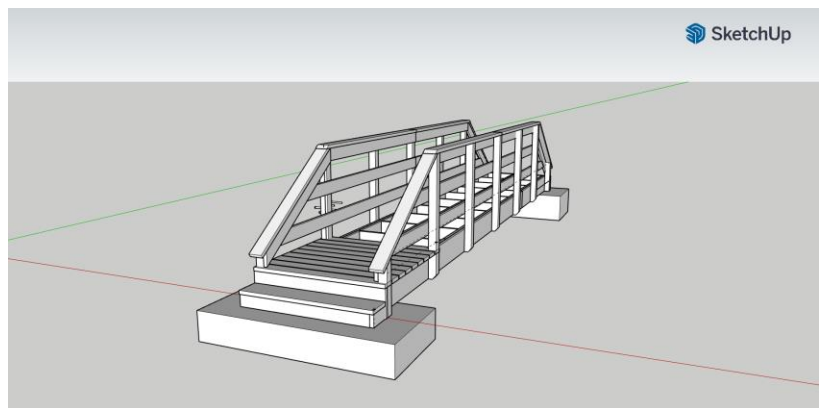


1/28 – Replacement Changing Blinds

A preview of the new changing blinds to be installed by park staff and JROC Volunteers in February. This will be one solid unit that offers plenty of room and privacy for users to change clothes.

Coming Soon – Huguenot Flatwater Bridge

The pedestrian bridge at Huguenot Flatwater has been deemed unsafe due to erosion damage from the bridge abutment. Park staff managed to grip hoist this bridge out of the creek and plan to move the bridge onto new concrete footings. This is a former JROC volunteer built bridge and will be re-assembled in March this year.



JRPS Invasive Plant Management – January 2024 report

Management activities including volunteer events (does not include events led by volunteer task force members)

- *Weather conditions and impacts from flooding canceled several volunteer events.*
- Staff conducted a total of twelve management events in four park units.
- This included a total of 24 volunteer participations (could include repeat volunteers) contributing 44.5 volunteer hours.

Primary management targets

- Shrub and evergreen woody vine removal and treatment, including Free-A-Tree, are the primary activities in mid-winter.

Education and Outreach

Em Robertson and Laura Greenleaf worked with Richmond's Franklin Military Academy teacher Rosemary Tucker to host her AP Environmental Science for a field trip to Pony Pasture. Students participated in English ivy removal, a biodiversity exercise, and an informal "walk and talk". We have made tentative plans for the class to return in April for a water quality study and a follow up visit to restoration areas to observe spring flora.

- Laura gave a presentation on invasive plants and management to the Three Rivers Garden Club.
- The R.K. Mellon Foundation grant program continues to progress; the Qualtrics online survey is nearly complete, four workshop locations are booked for the last two Saturdays in March, and the presentation is ready. Survey postcards will go out to 5,000 households neighboring the park. Em is managing this project as part of a team that includes Vicky Shivy, Emily Gianfortoni, Shawna Shade and Laura Greenleaf.

Website redesign

- The JRPS invasives (Invasive Plant Task Force) website redesign is underway. Em Robertson is leading this effort in a collaboration with the Webbones design team.

Other projects

- Em Robertson and Megan Lowe had a Huguenot Flatwater site visit with Carson Mayes who will be mapping out current invasive management focus areas starting with Flatwater.
- Laura conducted a site visit and preliminary management assessment of Evergreen Cemetery at the request of DPRCF.
- A Natural Resource Management Plan is in the works with a consultant selected. This is a collaboration of JRPS and members of the Invasive Plant Task Force.

New initiatives

- JRPS invasive plant management will be the community partner for Rachel Hill, Assistant Professor of Biology at VCU, for her Biology 497 *Ecological Service-Learning* class this semester. Gera Williams is the point of contact.
- Team Rubicon is a humanitarian nonprofit that serves communities experiencing natural and manmade disasters. They are seeking ways to contribute their skills, training and capacity to central Virginia communities during times they are not deployed. Gera is working to set up a partnership focused on removing the abundant, impactful debris from emerald ash borer-killed ash trees in The Wetlands and Pony Pasture. This initiative will yield multiple benefits including visitor experience and invasive control (by improving access to areas for treatment and preventing piles of downed trees from becoming supports to invasive vine overgrowth).



Megan triumphs over a massive thorny olive along Pleasant Creek Trail, Pony Pasture.



AP Environmental Sciences class from Franklin Academy after English ivy removal along Rockfalls Creek, Pony Pasture.

Beautification of Parks & Greenspaces - January 2024

Hours of Service

346

Events Completed

24

Total Volunteers

155

Avg. Hours per Volunteer

2.2

Avg. Volunteers per Event

6.5

Example text describing activity in the photo below

Example text describing activity in the photo below

Example text describing activity in the photo below

Metric Summary

	Non - Invasive	Invasive
Hours of Service	140	206
<i>Average Hours per volunteer</i>	2.00	2.42
Events Completed	8	16
<i>Avg. Volunteers per event</i>	8.75	5.31
Total Volunteers	70	85

Date	# Volunteers	Duration (hrs)	Hours Served	Project	Invasive (Yes/No)	Notes
1/3/24	14	2	28	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/6/24	9	2	18	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/10/24	1	2	2	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/13/24	15	2	30	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/17/24	15	2	30	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/20/24	14	2	28	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/24/24	1	2	2	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/31/24	1	2	2	James River Park Cleanup	No	
1/11/24	1	3	3	Belle Isle Invasive Management	Yes	
1/18/24	3	3	9	Belle Isle Invasive Management	Yes	
1/25/24	4	3	12	Belle Isle Invasive Management	Yes	
1/13/24	5	2	10	Buttermilk Invasive Management	Yes	
1/20/24	3	3	9	Buttermilk Invasive Management	Yes	
1/27/24	3	3	9	Buttermilk Invasive Management	Yes	
1/17/24	1	3	3	Flatwater Invasive Management	Yes	
1/24/24	2	3	6	Flatwater Invasive Management	Yes	
1/31/24	1	3	3	Flatwater Invasive Management	Yes	
1/9/24	3	2	6	Pony Pasture Invasive Management	Yes	
1/16/24	5	2	10	Pony Pasture Invasive Management	Yes	
1/23/24	2	2	4	Pony Pasture Invasive Management	Yes	
1/30/24	4	2	8	Pony Pasture Invasive Management	Yes	
1/6/24	11	3	33	Wetlands Invasive Management	Yes	
1/13/24	7	3	21	Wetlands Invasive Management	Yes	
1/27/24	30	2	60	Forest Hill Park Invasive Management	Yes	
TOTALS	155		346			

Urban Ranger Report
December 2023

Total engagement opportunities, types, and locations:

In the month of December, 77 interaction reports were generated, resulting from direct interactions with park guests, ranger responses to specific issues, and regular patrols. Rangers were present throughout the James River Park System, specifically:

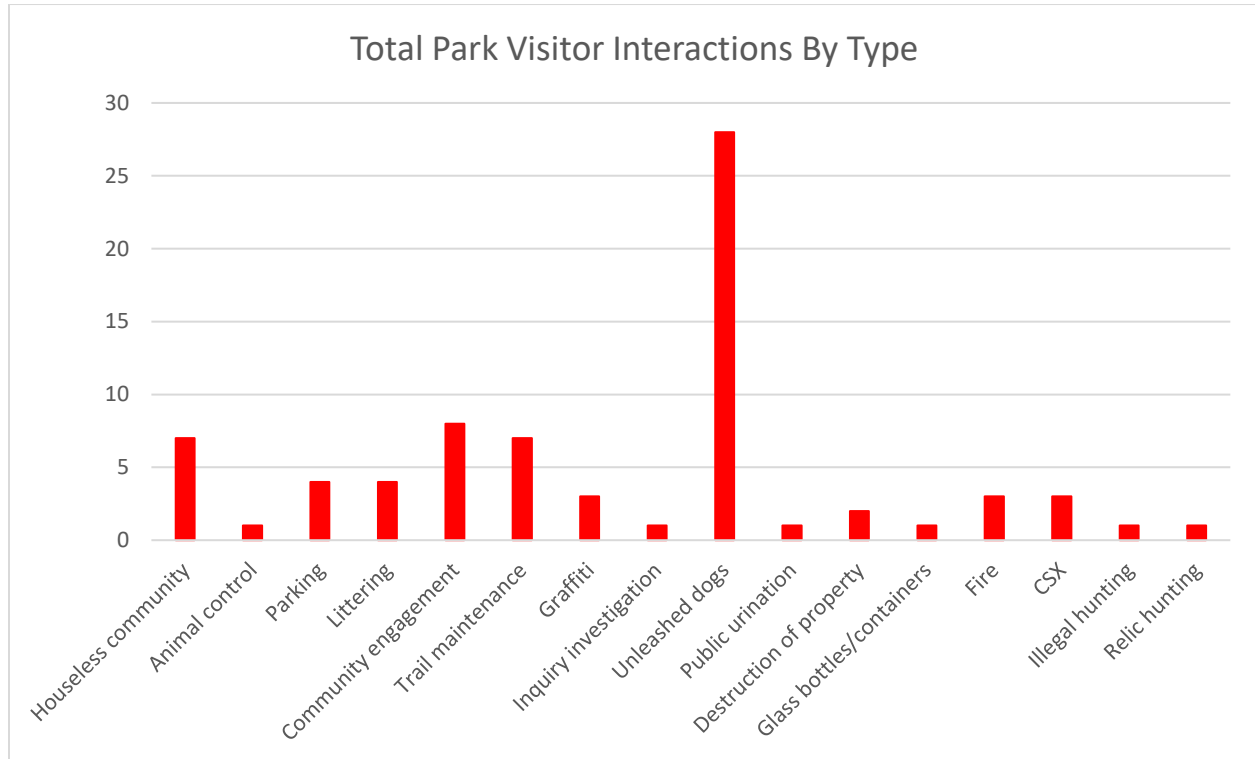
- Reedy Creek Trail
- North Bank Trail
- Pony Pasture
- Shiplock
- Belle Isle
- Wetlands
- Huguenot Flatwater
- Pump House
- Brown's Island
- Pipeline
- Chapel Island
- Buttermilk Trail
- 22nd Street Parking
- 42nd Street Parking
- Dry Rocks
- Ancarrow's Landing
- Texas Beach Trail

Parks patrolled outside of JRPS in December, specifically:

- Chimborazo
- Church Hill Playground
- Bandy Field Nature Park
- Jefferson Park
- Pine Camp

Ranger shifts were consistently Monday-Friday, with a few Saturday shifts. Approximately 61% of interaction reports were sourced from opportunities to educate around park rules and infractions observed, as well as community engagement and resource-sharing. 20% of reports were sourced from trail and service maintenance, which also includes wildlife management and animal control. The remaining 19% of interaction reports resulted from regular patrols where no infractions needed addressing and no trail or service maintenance needs were observed. Out of the total ranger/visitor interaction where behavioral change was requested, rangers achieved 92% compliance.

See below for graph illustrating total interactions and types:

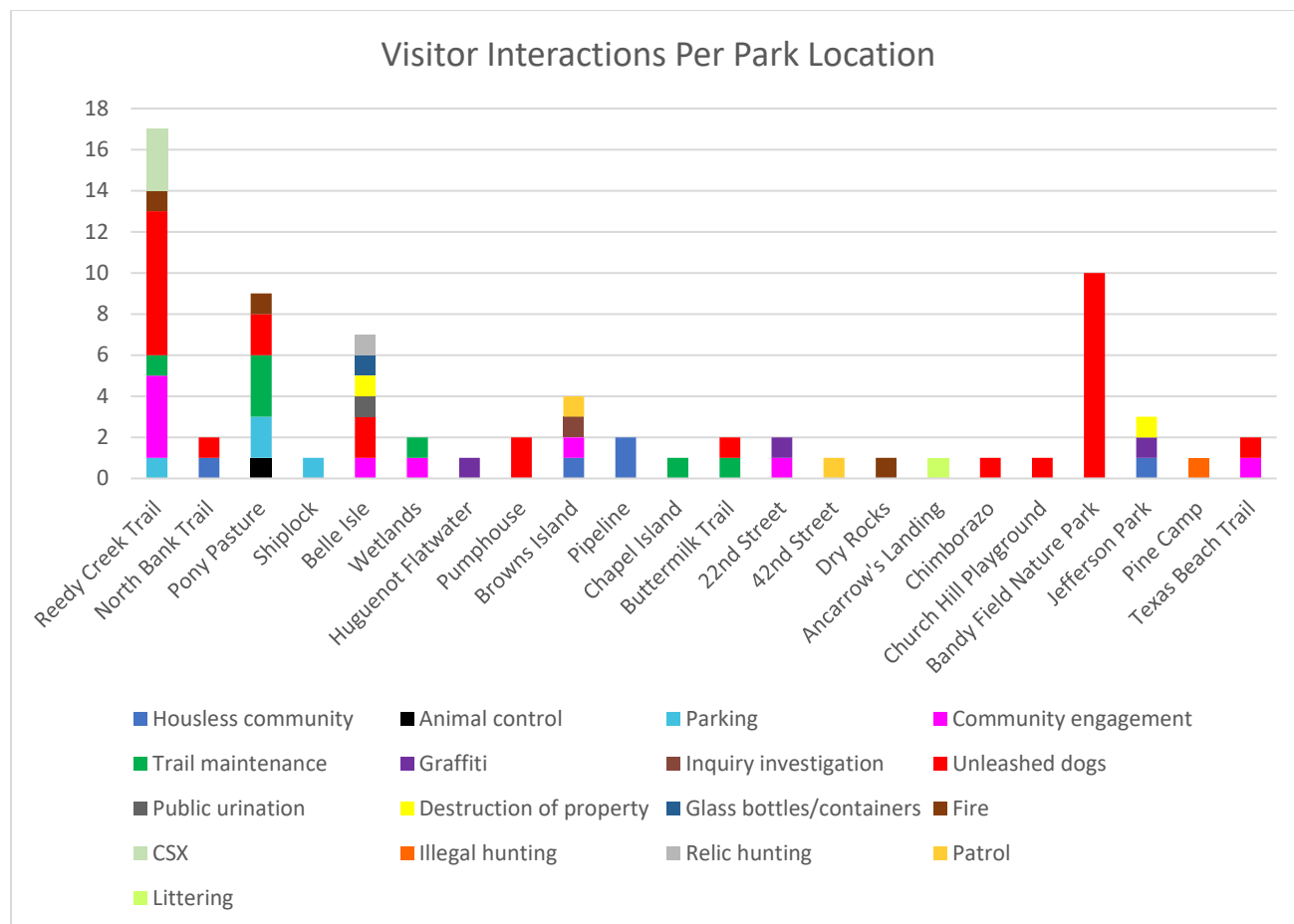


General breakdown of percentages per interaction type:

For the month of December, unleashed dogs continued to be the predominant reason for ranger/visitor interaction and requests for behavior change, totaling 37%. Community engagement (providing trail directions, park directions, etc.) follows at 12%. Illegal camping/houseless community and trail maintenance are round out the third most prevalent source of reports, each totaling 9%. The remainder of interactions constitutes the following percentages of the total:

- Animal control: 1%
- Parking: 6%
- Littering: 6%
- Graffiti: 4%
- Inquiry investigation: 1%
- Public urination: 1%
- Destruction of property: 3%
- Glass bottles: 1%
- Fire: 4%
- CSX trespassing: 4%
- Illegal hunting: 1%
- Relic hunting: 1%

See below for types of visitor interactions, broken down by location:

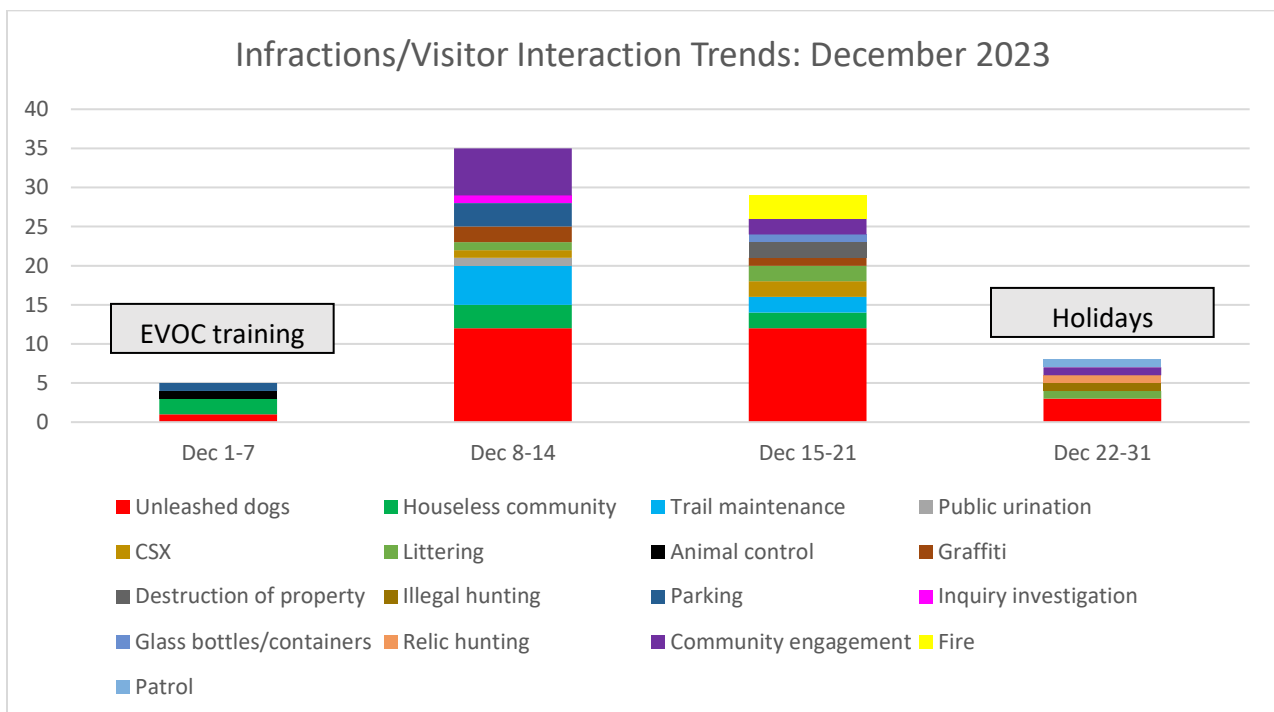
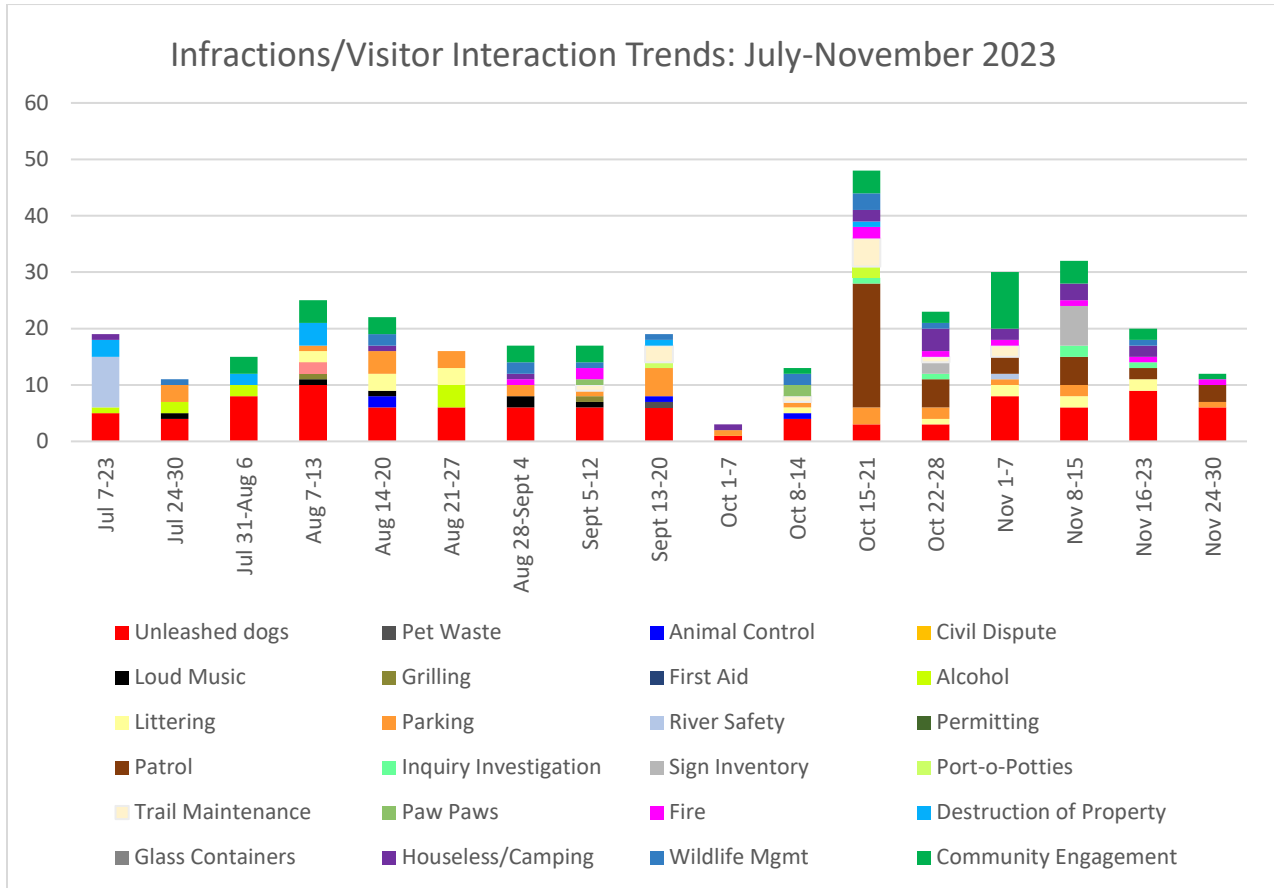


In December, Reedy Creek Trail/Access Road saw the most ranger patrols and interaction reports. The unleashed dog issue continues to be a predominant issue, especially in afternoons and after work. Community engagement (providing directions, assistance) was a common occurrence, with visitors seeking clarity on how to get to Belle Isle. Rangers also witnessed an increase in CSX trespassing, and rangers intercepted several visitors cutting from Buttermilk to the Reedy Creek Trail, often en route to Belle Isle.

Upon request of concerned neighborhood residents, the ranger team now regularly patrols Bandy Field Nature Park to address the chronic unleashed dog issue. No other issues were witnessed. All requests to leash dogs were met with immediate compliance.

Pony Pasture was the third location with most recorded interaction reports. Due to inclement weather, trail maintenance opportunities were observed often and reported, or easily dealt with by ranger team. Unleashed dogs continued to be an opportunity to engage with visitors, especially during morning patrols. Illegal parking was often observed and dealt with, with 100% compliance.

Trends in interactions between July and December 2023:



In December, the ranger team spent a week in EVOC training (emergency vehicle operation certification) and took time off for the holiday season. Regardless of time away, unleashed dogs continued to be a consistent issue, and numbers reported for the month would likely be higher than November if the ranger team were not away in training for the first week of December. Of all requests to leash, all but one individual (Church Hill Playground) complied. The ranger team continues to hone our educational approach and have found that general friendliness and neighborly introductions to the ranger team are effective, if followed by a non-judgmental (but direct) request backed by explanations of ordinances and desire for everyone's equal enjoyment of and need for safety in park spaces.

The ranger team continued to address illegal camping and houseless issues within park property, though we have seen a slight decline in instances for the month (November's eight reports versus December's seven.) In prior months, all the most publicly reported camps had been removed, with a few remaining on Pipeline and Jefferson Park. The ranger team is working with Project Hope and DSS to address these areas and ideally place these individuals into shelters.

Situations requiring RPD involvement:

On December 6th and 20th, the ranger team issued notice to vacate to 5 total illegal camps and contacted Project Hope.

On December 7th, the ranger team was notified of a suspicious van in the Shiplock parking lot that appeared to be permanently parked and lived in. The ranger team worked with the RPD to issue notice to vacate. The van left by the following morning.

Park visitor interactions of note:

On December 13th, the ranger team had a potential sighting of a missing teen female at Pipeline camps. We notified Chesterfield PD and met with them on site. While they found homework and women's shoes at the site, they were unable to conclude that they were from the missing girl. No further updates from Chesterfield PD, and no additional sightings from ranger team.

On December 14th, the ranger team was notified by the public and JRPS staff of the possible illegal hunting of the Hollywood buck. We immediately contacted the Conservation Police and met with them in the Texas Beach neighborhood to provide neighbor descriptions of locations the animal was possibly last seen. The Conservation Police are currently seeking possible surveillance footage of the area and are building a case for the identified suspect. This person has been spoken to, as well as his family. They are also nailing down evidence for the second suspect (person who took the picture of dead deer.) The ranger team will reach out to contacts in DWR for additional updates.

On December 28th, the ranger team again was asked to find and dismantle another illegal deer stand in Pine Camp, located near the adjacent dog park. We successfully found the stand with the assistance of the trails team and noted that the equipment was the same as the prior stand taken down in November.