



#### FIRST EDITION

This is the inaugural edition of the newsletter for the Urban Biodiversity Information Node (UrBIN). UrBIN, as a Node on the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII)--[www.nbio.gov](http://www.nbio.gov), aims to supply urbanizing communities with the information and tools needed to make decisions that account for conservation issues. This newsletter is intended to keep stakeholders informed and encourage their involvement in UrBIN projects.

#### URBIN NODE ADOPTS TIMELY VISION

Across the United States, rapid urban and suburban development is changing the composition and character of the landscape. As the populations of metropolitan areas grow, urbanization places increasing pressure on public officials, planning boards, resource agencies and others responsible for regulating land uses and maintaining environmental quality. The challenge is to satisfy the need for developed land while conserving natural resources and the benefits they bring to citizens and functioning ecosystems.



Lower Holmes Run provides habitat in urban Alexandria.

In response, there is a growing awareness across the United States of the need for proactive management for urban natural resources. States, counties, and cities are hiring urban resource professionals, enacting

legislation, and implementing programs to create harmony between natural resources and people who inhabit our communities. However, there are emerging concerns that the proliferation of urban natural resources programs has been extended beyond the existing scientific underpinnings for sound resource management and conservation. There is no existing coordinated process for a locality to follow in assembling the information necessary to make wise decisions. In the past, communities have been forced to rely on haphazard information inputs, highly variable datasets, and a complete lack of methods for synthesizing information.



Humans and wildlife interface in urban natural areas.

The vision of UrBIN is to provide the necessary information, data, and tools to communities, but also to develop and evaluate the process that communities undertake in gathering and using them to address conservation issues. NBII, in collaboration with Virginia Tech and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, is focusing UrBIN projects on the metropolitan DC area in a first attempt to realize this vision. In order to concentrate resources and obtain maximum stakeholder participation, UrBIN is conducting a pilot project on the Holmes/Tripps Run watershed in Northern Virginia.



### STAKEHOLDERS PROVIDE INPUT

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, UrBIN hosted a meeting to inform stakeholders and solicit their input. Thirty-four people from governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and academia provided a lively atmosphere to discuss pressing issues in the Holmes/ Tripps Run watershed, uncover existing sources of data, and identify priority information needs. The meeting was a thorough success, providing UrBIN with great momentum to launch its efforts.



Lunch provides an opportunity to interact with fellow stakeholders.

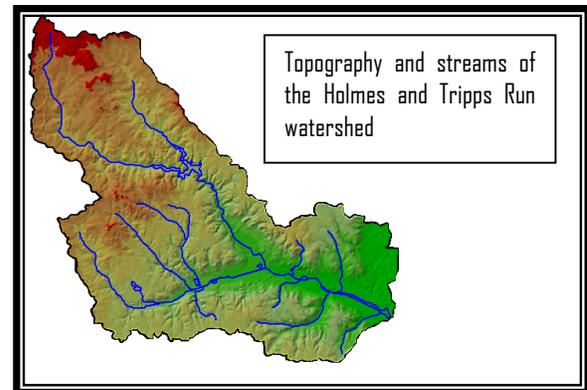
### SLUSSER TAKES ON DEVELOPMENT ROLE

Critical to UrBIN's success in obtaining and deploying a full range of data, information, and tools, is the ability to make connections to multiple partners and sources of external funding. To that end, UrBIN is pursuing a strategy of collaborating with stakeholders inside of its study area and seeking appropriate funding sources. Coordinating these functions is a key role that will help create products that are more robust and useful in making decisions about biodiversity in urban and suburban environments. Bob Slusser, a candidate for a master of science in Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources, has adopted this crucial role. While continuing to participate in other science/information portions of the

Holmes/Tripps pilot, Bob will explore new partnerships, track related efforts, identify funding sources for UrBIN partners, and develop proposals that are relevant to UrBIN's vision. He has already taken great strides in assembling the team of current UrBIN stakeholders. Thanks Bob!

### FIRST PILOT TASKS ARE READY TO GO

The UrBIN partners are gearing up to begin the initial projects in the watershed. Building upon information gathered from the October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, NBII is funding Virginia Tech and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to undertake five tasks. These are (1) GIS data acquisition and synthesis, (2) landscape characterization and spatial analysis, (3) information compilation and website development, (4) environmental education, and (5) biological and physical characterization of the watershed.



GIS datasets offer a robust (and attractive) source of information.

### URBIN PREPARES TO TAKE NEXT STEPS

Looking to the future, since UrBIN is set to begin work on initial projects in the watershed, it is time to reassemble the stakeholders. Holding a second meeting will provide the opportunity to update current stakeholders, inform new stakeholders, plug people and resources into the five nascent projects, and continue constructive dialogs. Keep an eye out for the meeting in the coming months!