

Bessie Bocoock Carter Conservation Award Winner for 2019

Winchester-Clarke Garden Club Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve

*by Heidi James, GCV Conservation Awards Committee Chairman
The Lynchburg Garden Club*

Thank you to all member clubs for sending in your ballots to determine the winner of this year's Bessie Bocoock Carter Conservation Award. The award, named for the Garden Club of Virginia president from 1998-2000, was established in 2009 and is a monetary award that is funded through the GCV, with the generous support of the Carter family. Clubs receiving this award must implement a project that conserves resources and/or protects the environment, benefits a local community or the entire Commonwealth of Virginia, and should serve as a catalyst for community action and inspire future conservationists and conservation accomplishments.

This year's winning project is the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve, sponsored by Winchester-Clarke Garden Club in partnership with the City of Winchester's parks and recreation department and Shenandoah University's environmental studies program. The club began supporting the project in 2003. With a central location, this 25-acre urban green space and wetlands preserve is



an educational and recreational resource for Winchester. In 2017, recognizing the fragility of the marsh, Winchester-Clarke began raising funds and donating volunteer hours to restore and protect it. The marsh is a habitat for more than 304 plant species, including 20 that are rare in Virginia and 2 that are found nowhere else in the state. No other comparable wetlands in Virginia has as many rare plant species. Because the marsh is also a calcareous muck fen with a limestone bedrock, low acidity and high nutrient levels, it captures pollutants and keeps them out of drinking water. It can take 10,000 years for a fen to develop, and it would be terrible to lose it. Encroaching shrubs and trees threatened the area, as does nearby development. Club members will add signage, accessible-to-all paths, an audio walking tour, and manpower to help keep the marsh free of invading plant life. Because of the efforts of Winchester-Clarke, the City of Winchester and Shenandoah University, the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve is a protected haven for learning, relaxing and appreciating the gifts of nature. This year's award, which is \$7,000, was presented at the GCV annual meeting on May 8 in Portsmouth. ❁

For a full list of Bessie Bocoock Carter Conservation Award recipients, go to gcvirginia.org.