

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens.

Volume 15, Number 1

Spring 2010

Park Focus: Narrow Gauge Way

by Drew YoungeDyke, technical writer and NAP volunteer

You may pause as you step into Narrow Gauge Way Nature Area, the change in environment is that striking. Nestled in the middle of subdivisions, condominiums, and roundabouts, the 13.5-acre natural area offers tranquility, history, and a hint of the wild within the city limits.

Narrow Gauge Way is bordered on the north by a street of the same name, and lies between Green Road to the west and Fox Hunt Drive to the east. A stream runs across its northern end, cutting a dramatic ravine as it winds its way toward Millers Creek. This tributary is the healthiest stream in the Millers Creek Watershed, and in the whole of Ann Arbor, as evidenced by the presence of multiple families of stoneflies. The stonefly is an indicator species that requires clear, cold water to survive. The tributary contains three families from the mayfly, stonefly, and caddisfly orders (Ephemeroptera-Plecoptera-Trichoptera, or EPT) and two sensitive families of benthic macro-invertebrates that can only survive in healthy, unpolluted water. "This tributary shows us the potential of what Millers Creek can be," said Joan Martin, Adopt-A-Stream Director for the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC).



Dr. Harold Allen, former owner of the Narrow Gauge Way property, transports maple sap using the narrow gauge rail in this 2001 picture. Photo courtesy Michael Allen.

The stream also contains diverse species of plants such as skunk cabbage, marsh marigold, zigzag goldenrod, and red-twig dogwood. Sand and gravel line the banks of the stream, remnants of the moraines lying underneath Ann Arbor that were formed by the retreat of glaciers between 10,000 and 16,000 years ago. A kame, located halfway between the northern and southern boundaries along the western edge of the natural area, also gives clues to its geological history. The kame is a hill of sand and gravel, which at one time accumulated in a glacial hole and was deposited in its present position as the glacier receded.

The kame is now covered in dense thickets, providing habitat for terrestrial wildlife including rabbits, deer, and squirrels. During winter, these animals leave tracks in the snow that read like a journal of their daily activities. The tracks of a doe with two yearlings run through the middle of a stand of mixed oak and cedar; a bare patch of ground indicates where they bedded the night before. A tree as thick as a fencepost is shredded as high as can be reached, as is a smaller tree up on the kame, where a buck rubbed the bark bare during the November rut. His large splay-toed track is frozen in the earth, just below the snow cover, where it will remain until spring. A tufted titmouse perches on a branch; a squirrel scurries up a tree.

A wooded draw leads from the valley stream to the drier upland of the southern tract of the natural area. It contains some of the many native plant species that comprise the flora of Narrow Gauge Way including oak, hickory, maple, sycamore, sassafras, basswood, and black walnut trees as well as ragwort, jack-in-the-pulpit, richweed, Christmas fern, and lopseed. Non-native and invasive species like honeysuckle, buckthorn, and garlic mustard have invaded parts of the natural area and will need to be removed in the future, through the help of volunteers, to restore Narrow Gauge Way to its full, natural potential.

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Coordinator's Corner

Spring Renewal

"In the depths of my deepest winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." A friend recently shared this quote from French author and philosopher Albert Camus. It's a note of encouragement. When things seem their bleakest, that's when we need to search our souls for that light within us. For Camus, there seemed to be not only a distant, dim light, but the awareness of a strength he previously didn't know he possessed.

It's a good message for all of us to consider, in all aspects of our lives. I write this on a gray day in the middle of winter, when pleasures like spring burn season, bird and salamander migration, singing frogs, and wildflowers seem far off. It's also budget time, and the message this year for the City (and many others) is bleak. Times are tough. Resources are scarce. Negative impacts are unavoidable. There is pain ahead.

But now is not the time to be discouraged. Spring *will* come, in all its rapturous glory. Birds and frogs will sing in full chorus. Beautiful flowers will adorn the forest floor. Life will return, with a vengeance, to what now appears a lifeless landscape. The economy's recovery is less predictable than the return of spring, but I believe it is coming, eventually. And for any of you suffering through your own personal bleak winter, I am sure a spring and summer lie ahead for you as well.

American naturalist John Burroughs said, "I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order." Nature can offer *you* those same soothing properties, and it's as close as your nearest City natural area. This time of year NAP offers a cornucopia of opportunities to immerse yourself up to your elbows in nature. You can join the prescribed burn crew, help survey wildlife, pull garlic mustard and other invasives that compete with our native wildflowers, or help keep trails open so hikers can enjoy the parks. You'll find a wide range of opportunities on pages four and five of this newsletter. I encourage you to take advantage of them. Let nature soothe and heal you, and help you find the invincible spring and summer that lie within you.

In closing, though not a Nobel Prize winner like Albert Camus, modern day blogger Jeb Dickerson still has some wisdom to share. "Nature rejuvenates so quickly, so completely. Though we often view ourselves otherwise, we are nature."

Dave Borneman, Manager

*The flowers of skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) are first to emerge here in the spring, often while the ground is still covered with snow. The plant is able to generate heat that helps melt the snow covering it, facilitating its emergence from the deep winter. We can learn much from skunk cabbage!*



CITY OF ANN ARBOR
**Natural Area
Preservation**

*The mission of Natural Area
Preservation is to protect and restore
Ann Arbor's natural areas and to
foster an environmental ethic among
its citizens.*

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If you would prefer to receive
your next newsletter via
e-mail, please call NAP.

NAPpennings

thank you . . .

to the following for their help last autumn and winter:

- Girl Scouts for seed collection and distribution at Kuebler Langford Nature Area
- CHS workers for help in the office and making gift bags
- UM Ecology and Engineering students for shrub cutting in Barton Nature Area
- The Pioneer Rowers for shrub cutting (two days!) at Bandemer Park
- Ann Arbor Adventist students for trail chipping at LSNC
- UM Circle K for shrub cutting at Argo Nature Area
- UM Ecology 205 students for shrub cutting at LSNC
- UM Theta Xi for shrub cutting at LSNC
- Staffer Robb's co-op for shrub cutting at Ruthven Nature Area
- St. Mary's Student Parish for helping in the NAP office

NAP Partners with AnnArbor.com

You may have noticed our blog, Facebook, twitter feed, and Flickr accounts. (See page two for details.) Recently we've also partnered with AnnArbor.com. Our

Volunteer of the Year, Roger Wykes, has the first article! Make sure to look for us on AnnArbor.com.

NAP Staff Member Honored

Kudos to Jason Frenzel-Wright who recently was presented with the Wild Ones Honorary Bob Grese Deep Roots Award. This honor is given by Wild Ones in recognition of exemplary stewardship of native plant communities, through leadership, education, and community involvement. Previous recipients of this award include Bob Grese, Trish Beckjord, Jeannine Palms, Aunita Erskine, Mary Huggins, Dave Borneman, Matt Heumann, and Faye Stoner.

Earn a Free Day at Disney

Disney is offering a special incentive for volunteers. Help out at the organization of your choice and earn a free day at Disney. Children are eligible too. You must register with Disney before you work. To sign up and for details visit www.disneyparks.com. Of course we hope that you choose NAP for your volunteering!

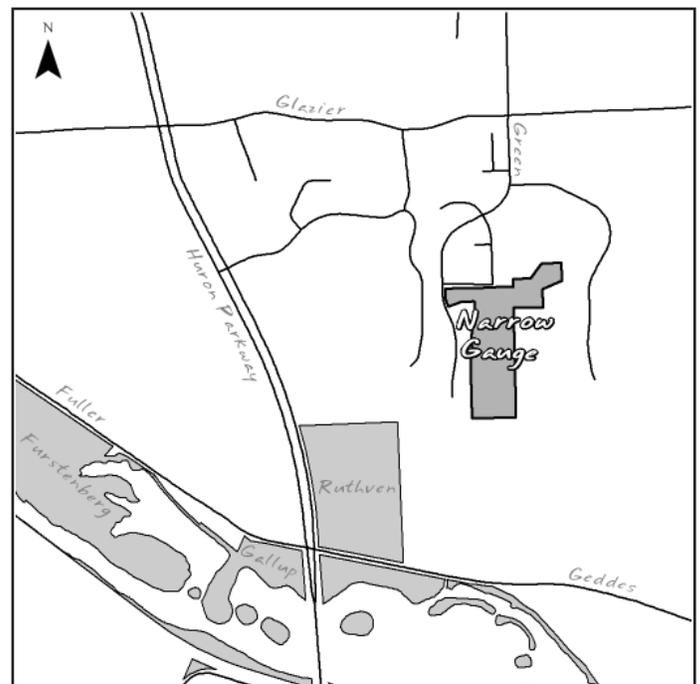
Park Focus: Narrow Gauge Way

Continued from page 1

It may seem like a natural wonder that this place exists. In fact, it is the result of well-thought-out planning and community involvement. The City of Ann Arbor agreed to purchase Narrow Gauge Way in 2007 for \$1.8 million with funds from the Greenbelt Program (approved in a 2004 millage), Narrow Gauge Holdings, and Sandra Gunn. The city has now owned the property for a year, and NAP is preparing to carry out restoration work there. Much of the property was once owned by Dr. Harold Allen who was an Aeronautical Engineering professor at the University of Michigan, a pilot, veteran, world traveler, and avid hiker. In 1962 he began building a one-third-size narrow-gauge railroad on the property, eventually operating four steam locomotives, including two that he constructed himself. The railroad reached almost a mile in length and lent its name to the natural area and its bordering street. Dr. Allen passed away in 2001, and the railway has been removed.

Narrow Gauge Way was identified as a potential conservation area in the 2004 Millers Creek Watershed Improvement Plan due to the high quality of the stream and the biodiversity present in the surrounding oak forest. Because natural areas provide irreplaceable hydrologic functions and wildlife habitat, one of the HRWC's objectives is to increase the biological diversity of wildlife by protecting critical habitats such as Narrow Gauge Way.

Narrow Gauge Way offers an authentic slice of nature at its best: clear streams, dynamic topography, glacial remnants, a varied mix of tree and plant species, and abundant wildlife. You may pause as you leave Narrow Gauge Way Nature Area and wish you had more time to stay. Take heart, it will be here when you return.





Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

Spring 2010

Natural Area Preservation
City of Ann Arbor
1831 Traver Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
Phone: 734.794.6627
Email: nap@a2gov.org
Web site: www.a2gov.org/nap

March

March 2, Tuesday
Controlled Burn Public Meeting
Leslie Science & Nature Center
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor
7:30 to 9:00 pm

This meeting provides information about NAP's Controlled Burn Program. Learn about the ecological benefits of burning, and hear about the specifics of effectively and safely using fire as a restoration tool.

March 3, Wednesday
Controlled Burn Crew Training
Leslie Science & Nature Center
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor
12:00 to 5:00 pm

This is the *required* training session for all new volunteers interested in assisting with NAP's controlled burns. Register by February 27th. Call or email us to sign up, or for more information.

March 9, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels
709 N University Ave
7:30 to 8:30 am

This month's topic: We're great at restoring lands--as long as we have the money. Where do we find our funding? What are additional sources to augment our work?

March 20, Saturday
Photo Monitoring Kick-Off
Leslie Science & Nature Center
1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor
10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Do you like photography and the outdoors? Photo monitoring may be the perfect volunteer activity

for you! Come join us at this informational meeting for more details about this opportunity.

March 25, Thursday
Nature Hike
Black Pond Woods Nature Area
6:00 to 7:30 pm

Join us for a nature walk through Black Pond Woods Nature Area. Meet at the Leslie Science & Nature Center parking lot (1831 Traver Road). Free and appropriate for all ages.

March 27, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Black Pond Woods Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

You've taken the nature hike--now take action! Help keep Black Pond Woods beautiful by removing invasive shrubs. Meet us at the Leslie Science & Nature Center parking lot (1831 Traver Road).

April

April 3, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Leslie Woods Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00 pm

Come out with NAP to learn to identify native springtime plants and pull the invasives that crowd them out! Meet us at the park entrance at the north end of Upland Drive, north of Plymouth Road.

April 13, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels
709 N University Ave
7:30 to 8:30 am

This month's topic: Herbicides are a powerful tool in ecological restoration. How do we use them safely and appropriately? How do we navigate all the regulations and label instructions?

April 17, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Cranbrook Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Come learn about beautiful native plants that call Cranbrook home, and pull the invasives that crowd them out! Meet in the Church of Christ parking lot at 2500 South Main.

April 17, Saturday
Huron River Clean Up
9:00 am to 2:00 pm

Join crews from the Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab and the EPA to help pick up trash on the river by canoe. Call David Fanslow at 734.741.2353 for more information and to register.

April 20, Tuesday
Breeding Bird Survey Kick-Off
Leslie Science & Nature Center
1831 Traver Rd.
7:30 to 9:00 pm

This is the evening to sign up and get materials for our annual breeding bird survey. Some experience in bird identification necessary. For more information about joining our Breeding Bird Survey or to register, call or email our office by April 17th.

April 22, Thursday
Nature Hike
Bird Hills Nature Area
7:00 to 8:30 pm

Join us in a free nature walk through Bird Hills Nature Area. Meet at the Newport Road entrance, just north of M-14. Plenty of time will be available for questions. Open to all ages.

April 24, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Bird Hills Nature Area

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help us keep Bird Hills beautiful. Join NAP in pulling the invasives! Meet up at the Bird Road entrance, west, off of Huron River Drive.

April 24, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Furstenberg Native Garden
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help us maintain the native plant garden at Furstenberg Nature Area with Park Steward and Master Gardener Aunita Erskine. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School.

April 25, Sunday
Earth Day Festival
Washtenaw Community College
12:00 to 5:00 pm

This free, family-friendly event features displays from local non-profit organizations, live animal exhibits, hands-on activities, live entertainment, and green building features. For more information, visit www.a2gov.org/green.

May

May 1, Saturday
11th Annual Garlic Mustard Weed-Out Day and Barbeque
See back page for full details!

May 8, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Greenview Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Come help NAP, neighbors, the Friends of Greenview, and the Ann Arbor Public Schools preserve this public greenspace at a garden workday. Meet at the Greenview Park sign, on Greenview Drive, across from Barnard Road.

May 8, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Cedar Bend Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00 pm
Cedar Bend Nature Area, is one of Ann Arbor's oldest parks. Help us remove the invasive garlic mustard.

Meet at the park entrance near the perennial gardens on Cedar Bend Drive (off Broadway Street).

May 11, Tuesday
Stewards' Circle
Bruegger's Bagels
709 N University Ave
7:30 to 8:30 am

Our plant world is completely dependant on pollinators. What can we do as restorationists to help all these critical critters?

Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian, or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.

May 14, Friday
Bird Watching Walk
Gallup Park Canoe Livery Dock
6:00 to 8:00 pm (misprinted in the NAP wall calendar as 7:30 to 8:30 am)
Join City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong as she leads a walk to look for birds in the evening in Gallup Park and Furstenberg Nature Area. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at the paddleboat dock in Gallup near the canoe livery.

May 15, Saturday
Spring Adopt-a-Park Kick-Off
Various locations
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Would you like to help beautify your neighborhood park? We rely on volunteers for stewardship efforts in city parks! For more information contact Adopt-A-Park at 734.794.6627 or Adopt-A-Park@a2gov.org.

May 15, Saturday
Downtown Cleanup Day
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Help plant flowers throughout the downtown area! Meet coordinators at Liberty Plaza at the corner of Division and Liberty to volunteer. Free pizza and pop lunch. To pre-register, or for more information call 734.994.4176.

May 16, Sunday
Stewardship Workday
Redbud Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00 pm
Beautiful native species flourish in this small preserve. Join us to pull the invasive plants. Meet at the park entrance at the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.

May 20, Thursday
Nature Hike
Berkshire Creek Nature Area
7:00 to 8:30 pm
Join us for a walk through Berkshire Creek Nature Area. Meet at the end of Exmoor Road off of Glenwood, north of Washtenaw near the Platt intersection. Time will be available for questions. Open to all ages.

May 22, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Berkshire Creek Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Come out with NAP to learn to identify native springtime plants and pull the invasives that crowd them out! Meet at the end of Exmoore Road off Glenwood, north of Washtenaw near the Platt intersection.

May 22, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Evergreen Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Come out with NAP to learn springtime plants and pull the invasives that crowd these natives out. Meet at the park entrance on Valley Drive, between Pinewood and Barber, off Dexter Road.

May 22, Saturday
Stewardship Workday
Onder Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00 pm
Join us in pulling invasives in one of the newest parkland additions to the city. This park helps connect other parks along the Huron River. Meet us at the intersection of Hilldale and Brookside.

Wildlife Photography in Stapp Nature Area

by Thomas John Bethell, *astrophysicist at the University of Michigan and photographer*

Living next to Stapp Nature Area has provided me with an excellent opportunity to watch and photograph many of its inhabitants, both during the day and at night. Deer, raccoons, opossums, foxes, flying squirrels, owls—over the past three years I've photographed them all in this unassuming eight-acre woodland.

Whenever photographing wildlife, my basic strategy is to wear discrete “bird watching colors.” In the presence of an animal I avoid staring and, if possible, I crouch down to appear less threatening. Stalking the subject rarely seems to work. I suspect that being silent is just as important as looking discrete—both raccoons and deer are very sensitive to sounds. Rather than try to be invisible, I try to look like a harmless creature that belongs in the woods. I know this is working when I find emboldened Carolina Wrens perching on my camera lens, raccoons foraging their way up my pants leg, and deer coming to within feet of me to drink the secretions from a bracket fungus.

Although I use a digital SLR camera with interchangeable lenses, a decent compact camera is quite capable for daytime wildlife photography. Usually you will want to use the longest focal length available—300mm or longer is excellent—although you will often want more! Accessories called teleconverters are an economical way to extend the reach of your camera lens. The “digital zoom” specification is a marketing ploy that should be ignored. Autofocus and the built-in automatic metering modes available on many cameras are your friends. A tripod is standard equipment, although

sometimes it can be a hindrance. Image stabilization is a new and popular technology that will help you get sharper images without a tripod. The “golden hours” for photography are at sunrise and before dusk—this is also when many diurnal animals are most active.

While daytime photography requires a large dose of serendipity, wildlife photography at night is a much more challenging affair, requiring considerably

more planning than luck. During the winter a record of the identity and activity of animals is left in the snow. Combined with a basic knowledge of foraging areas, these tracks are invaluable for planning ahead. A night composition is usually scouted for and visualized several days beforehand. Two or three off-camera flash units are used, fired by radio triggers (easy to find these days, very useful, and really not that exotic). An understanding of photographic exposure is useful as both camera and flash settings are best set manually. The camera is placed on a tripod and focused manually. It's then time to sit back and patiently wait. Interestingly, most

night animals don't seem to mind the burst of light from a flash (perhaps not surprising in an urban environment). They are more alarmed by the click of the camera, so I try and situate the camera as far away as possible.

Photography is a great excuse to get outdoors. Just as valuable as the photographs of beautiful animals are the memories associated with them, and the intimate knowledge you gain from visiting your local nature area.



Stapp Nature Area is home to many kinds of wildlife including this curious young raccoon.

Staff Updates

hello . . .

Harold Eyster

I am a sixteen-year-old homeschooler from Chelsea. I have conducted Breeding Bird Surveys in Ann Arbor parks for the last five years and have found the work very rewarding. So last fall I became an intern at NAP where I have been working in the outreach office updating and creating workday booklets, as well as with the field crew collecting native seeds.



Wade Lehmann

I graduated from Michigan State University twice, first in 2008 with a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture, and again in 2009 with a Master of Art in Environmental Design. I returned to Ann Arbor and have been helping out at NAP since November. I have been working on creating new park brochure maps which integrate hand graphics with GIS data. I enjoy coming in every week to contribute my skills, and acquire new knowledge about the profession. Plus everyone at NAP is a pleasure to work with! I am also helping with the parks Master Plan at the Parks Department.



Drew YoungeDyke

I graduated in 2003 from Michigan State University with a B.A. in Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy. I attended law school at Michigan State and lived in Chicago before moving to Ann Arbor with my wife, Michele, in November. I spend my free time backpacking, hunting, mountain-biking, writing, and playing guitar. I am volunteering for NAP because I enjoy natural areas untouched by development, and I want to do what I can to contribute to that end.



You are invited to
Adopt-A-Park's Spring Kickoff
May 15th from 9:00AM-12:00PM

Join us to help care for the active recreation parks throughout the city. We will be planting flowers, mulching around trees, refreshing playground chips, and generally sprucing up our neighborhood parks.

For a list of participating parks visit our website:
www.a2gov.org/adopt-a-park
or call 734.794.6627

Join the Garlic Mustard Challenge

In an effort to spur interest in ridding our landscape of the invasive weed garlic mustard, the Stewardship Network is once again sponsoring the Garlic Mustard Challenge. All bags of the garlic mustard we pull throughout the season will be weighed, and the results reported to the Network. NAP is in one of seven "clusters" of environmental groups in Michigan. Our cluster is called the Huron Arbor Cluster. We will be competing with the six other clusters to see who can pull the most garlic mustard and claim the "Challenge Cup." The Huron Arbor Cluster won the cup in 2009, but it has been won by other groups in previous years. We need lots of help to win again this year!

In 2009, the Huron Arbor Cluster pulled over 158,000 pounds of garlic mustard. That's over 5,200 thirty-gallon trash bags full! Please note that you can also report your own efforts separate from NAP directly to the Network. The tally is done by location, so if you live in the Ann Arbor area, it will still count towards our cluster. The challenge runs from mid-April through the end of June. Visit www.stewardshipnetwork.org for more information.

Garlic Mustard Weed Out Day is May 1st

Garlic mustard is an invasive plant which can quickly result in a total loss of native ground cover and a decrease in species diversity. Stop by the park of your choice (See below.) between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 1, to help us remove this plant.

After the workday come to a potluck barbeque from 2:00 to 4:00 pm at the Leslie Science and Nature Center at 1831 Traver Road. We provide hot dogs, burgers (veggie too), beverages, and a few garlic mustard dishes. Please bring a dish to share. Family and friends are welcome. RSVP to nap@a2gov.org, or call us at 734.794.6627 if you plan to attend the potluck.

Participating parks:

Berkshire—Meet at the end of Exmoor Road, off Glenwood, North of Washtenaw.

Bird Hills—Meet at the Bird Road entrance, west of Huron River Drive.

Black Pond Woods—Meet at the Leslie Science & Nature Center parking lot at 1831 Traver Road.

Bluffs—Meet in front of the Park Steward's house at 236 Sunset Road.

Dolph—Meet at the parking lot on the east side of Wagner Road, between Liberty and Jackson.

Eberwhite Woods—Meet in the Eberwhite Elementary School parking lot.

Hannah—Meet at the west end of Bath Street, west of Seventh Street (between Miller and Huron).

Huron Hills—Meet on Hunting Valley off Provincial Drive.

Huron Parkway—Meet at the Park Steward's house at 3470 Woodland Road, off East Huron River Drive.

Marshall—Meet in the parking lot off Dixboro Road, north of Plymouth Road.

Miller—Meet at the Arborview Boulevard entrance, just east of Wildwood Avenue.

Sunset Brooks—Meet at the park entrance on Sunset Road, at the end of Brooks Street.

Wurster—Meet at the cul-de-sac of Edgewood Place off West Davis Ave.



Springs 2010

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