

U.S. National Arboretum Decision on De-accessioning of Selected Collections

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Editor's Note: This article is a follow-up to the article entitled "US National Arboretum Decision to De-accession Selected Collections" that was published in the Spring issue.

When the U.S. National Arboretum announced its intention to de-accession the Glenn Dale Hillside of its Azalea Collection on Mt. Hamilton and its National Boxwood Collection and its Perennial Collection both of which are on the Bladensburg Road side of the Arboretum, there was a tremendous outpouring of support to retain those collections. The plant societies that had been involved in the support and maintenance of those collections over the years and other plant societies and local garden clubs that have an interest in and an established relationship with the USNA and the Friends of the National Arboretum reached out to their members, elected representatives, senior management at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Research Service, and members of the business and local community to enlist their support for maintaining the affected collections and to secure funding for those collections into the future.

As a direct result of the efforts of those dedicated groups and individuals, FONA has been able to secure a private donation which will be used exclusively to fund the maintenance of those collections and the USNA has suspended its plans to de-accession the three collections.

On February 14, 2011, FONA announced that it had received a \$1 million donation that it will use to establish an endowment to help preserve the azalea and boxwood collections at the USNA. The \$1 million donation, the largest single donation in FONA's history, was made anonymously by friends in honor of prominent attorney Brendan Sullivan Jr., and Lila Sullivan, longtime residents of the Washington area.

"This generous donation, offered in the hour of the Arboretum's greatest need, reflects not only the donor's passion for this national treasure, but also confidence that the Arboretum leadership will make sound decisions relating to the collections in the future" said Kathy Horan, Executive Director of FONA.

In that announcement, FONA's Board of Directors Chairman, Jeanne Connelly, added "FONA recognizes that these are difficult economic times and all government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, will face significant budget cuts in the coming years. That is why it is important for private partners to step in to protect one of the nation's most valuable treasures and one of Washington, D.C.'s most important green spaces."

Later the same day, in a prepared statement, the USNA

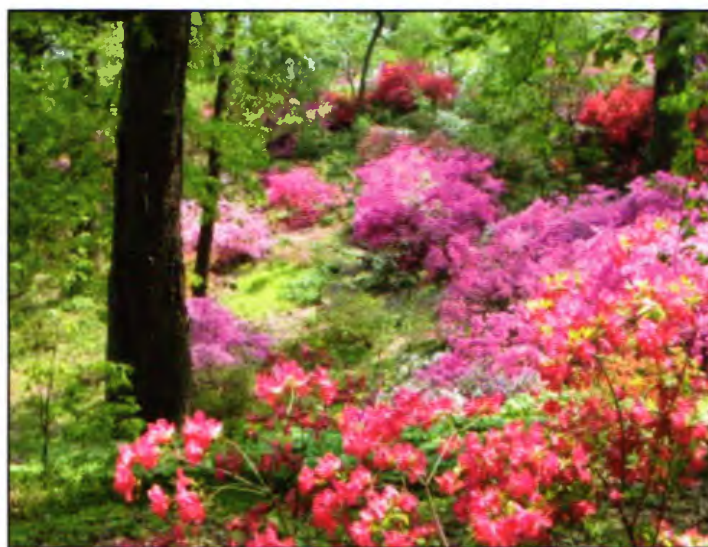


Photo U.S. National Arboretum

▲ Glenn Dale Hillside on Mt. Hamilton.

Director, Dr. Colien Hefferan, wrote "The U.S. National Arboretum is suspending actions to remove the Glenn Dale azaleas from our extensive collection of azaleas, as well as the National Boxwood and Perennial Collections subject to further discussions with stakeholders about the process and criteria for decisions about our collections. Although the resource challenges facing the Arboretum which initially led to these decisions are still very real and in need of a solution, we want to reassess our current resource use and opportunities to expand private support before we reduce or eliminate collections the public so values."

Dr. Hefferan also wrote "We have heard and appreciate the public outpouring of comments about deaccessioning the Glenn Dale azaleas and the boxwood and perennial collections. Managing resources through difficult times is challenging, but with the advice and guidance of our many stakeholders and colleagues we hope to develop an effective and well-understood policy for implementing decisions about our collections, as well as innovative approaches to developing new resources to sustain and support the Arboretum."

The Arboretum has established a new comments box on their Web site at <http://usna.usda.gov/> to solicit guidance from the public and stakeholders about the process and criteria that the USNA uses regarding decisions about their collections, and for their ideas for resource development to maintain the collections and programs at the Arboretum. The comments box is under the "Arboretum Information" tab.

Dr. Hefferan wrote "Please share your ideas and rec-

ommendations regarding these issues by responding to the questions we have posted in our new comment box on this Web site. We are eager to add your ideas to our decision-making processes. Over the next month, we also will be seeking more structured guidance from both horticultural and arboretum professionals, and from stakeholder groups. I hope that both the process of gathering this guidance and the ideas gleaned, help us to formulate and implement a collections policy at the USNA which is both enduring and well understood by the public."

Jeanne Connelly applauded the Arboretum's announcement saying "We are delighted that Dr. Hefferan has listened to the Arboretum's constituents and are heartened by the willingness of the Arboretum's new leadership to engage the public in an open discussion about decisions relating to its collections."

This spring, FONA launched a major fundraising campaign to raise an additional \$1 million needed to maintain these treasured collections into the future. Hopefully, other private partners, such as plant societies and their members, stakeholders, local garden clubs and individuals, will step forward to help FONA to reach its goal. Over the years, FONA has provided substantial funding and support to the Arboretum for the maintenance of its collections. Plant societies, their members, other stakeholders as well as individuals have volunteered to work in the Arboretum's collections thereby reducing some of the need for Federal funding.

Due to deteriorating economic conditions, the likelihood of additional Federal funding for the Arboretum and its collections is decreasing. Please consider making a donation to FONA, or volunteering to work in one of its collections or in an administrative capacity. If you choose to make a monetary donation to FONA, consider earmarking it for the endowment for the preservation of the Arboretum's Glenn Dale Azalea Collection on Mt. Hamilton and its National Boxwood Collection and its Perennial Collection. Further information is available from FONA at www.fona.org or (202) 544-8733, and www.savetheazaleas.org. If you would like to view the USNA Collections, please visit <http://usna.usda.gov/>.

Harold Belcher began his appreciation of azaleas while working at Dr. Wilbur Engleman's azalea nursery in Lanham, Maryland, during his high school years (1961 -1964). He graduated from the University of Maryland with a business degree in 1970. Harold worked for the Navy Department and the Department of Justice and retired from Federal government service in January 2009. He is a past four-term president of the Ben Morrison Chapter of the ASA and former ASA board member. Harold has been a resident of Cheverly, Maryland, all his life and has enjoyed visiting the U.S. National Arboretum since 1960.

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