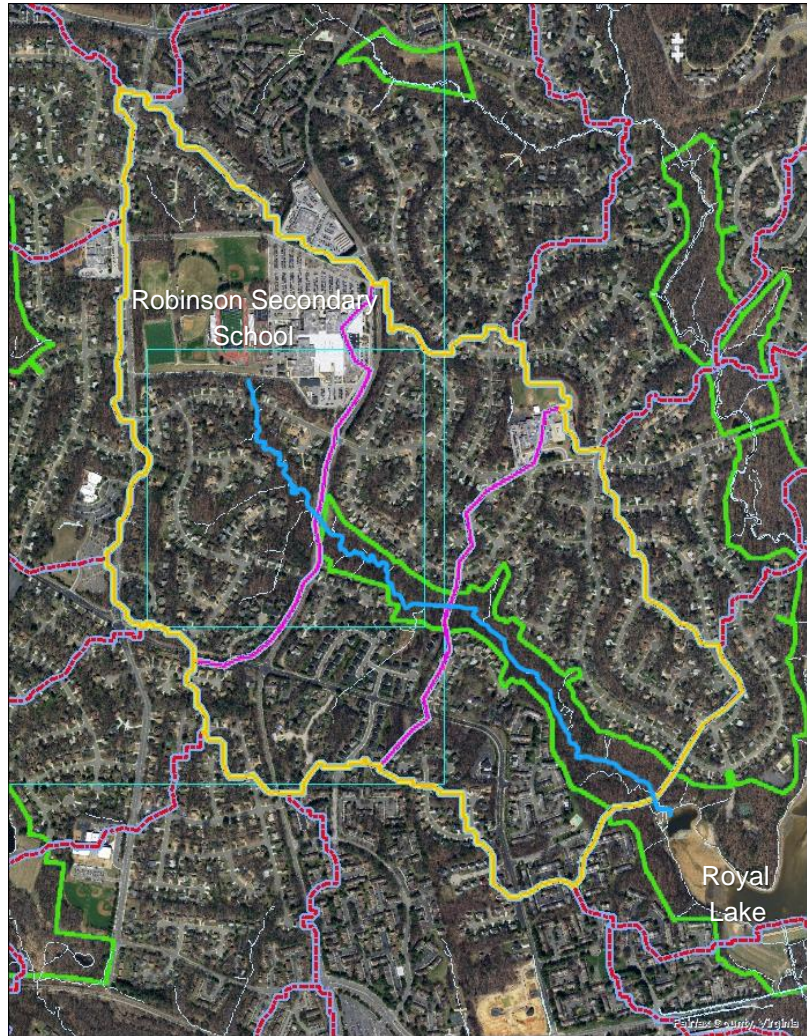


## “Shanes Creek” Is Official!

By Greg Sykes ([greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com))

In the April 2019 article, [The Naming of Shanes Creek](#), we learned how a stream was christened after John McAnaw’s beloved Irish Setter. The moniker, Shanes Creek, is so prolifically used that many locals simply accepted it. This name helps identify the two major Royal Lake tributaries—the second and longest one being Rabbit Branch.

A major section of Shanes Creek is scheduled for stream restoration to fix problems caused by artificial factors, such as impervious surfaces and degraded or destroyed riparian buffers. Without naturally absorptive landscapes, the unimpeded stormwater eroded and continues carving out much of the stream banks. In addition to the physical damage, pollutants carried by the runoff contaminate the waterways. Shoring up the stream, a task falling under Fairfax County’s Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), will help reduce sediment accumulation in Royal Lake and improve this waterway’s health. More information about this project is in the April 2019 article, [Q/As About Shanes Creek and Royal Lake](#). The initial restoration draft was called, “Fairfax County Watershed Projects, Rabbit Branch at Collingham Drive Pre-Concept Plan.”



**Figure 1. This image shows Shanes Creek (blue line), some of its tributaries (thin white lines), and the perimeter of its watershed (orange). The map also features other tributary watersheds (magenta) and park boundaries (green). Image courtesy of Fairfax County.**

Wait a minute—“Rabbit Branch at Collingham Drive?” What happened to “Shanes Creek?” Officially, this waterway is a tributary to Rabbit Branch. It is not formally a Royal Lake tributary because these designations pre-date Royal Lake’s creation with a dam placement shortly downstream of the Rabbit Branch and “Shanes Creek” junction. Time to make “Shanes Creek” an official name!

A process to naming or renaming natural geographical features (e.g., waterway, lake, mountain) is through the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (USBGN), which is part of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Artificial objects, such as roads, buildings, and bridges, fall under different naming procedures that are outside of this article’s scope. The first step is to research any name already given to that feature. In this case, the creek had more of a designation than a true name. The new name must meet certain criteria, such as it needs to have community significance, cannot be named after someone living or within five years of death, and that person must have a marked connection to the feature.

The on-line application covers many aspects of the natural feature and its proposed name, such as:

- what it is (a stream)
- its description (starts at Robinson Secondary School at 38.815349, -77.304971 and flows south-east to 38.804546, -77.292119 for Royal Lake or 38.801908, -77.288558 for the currently sub-merged Rabbit Branch intersection)
- any existing names (the Rabbit Branch Tributary)
- administrative information (passes through HOA land, most of the area is owned by Fairfax County and overseen by agencies within the county)

Perhaps more important arguments to accepting the name change are in the supporting documents. When a colloquial name has a good history and enjoys broader use, the board considering the name request gives it stronger merit. In this case, the supporting documents contained the previously mentioned "Naming of Shanes Creek" article, which offers a historical perspective. A link to [John McAnaw's obituary](#) mentions Shanes Creek (misspelled with an apostrophe) and discusses John's community service including several decades heading the KPW Parks & Lakes Committee. The application had a photograph of Shane's tombstone, who is interred in the Noah's Ark section of the National Memorial Park, Falls Church, VA. An invitation to nearby residents from the DPWES to meetings and field tours of the proposed stream restoration work made a reference to "the area locally known as Shanes Creek," which shows the name usage in an official government document. Finally, to be clear about the waterway in question, a map was provided with the creek's course outlined.

Several months after submitting this application, the USBGN reconvened and approved Shanes Creek's name, making it now official! It is currently in the national geographic names repository at [https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:3:::NO::P3\\_FID,P3\\_TITLE:2805413,Shanes%20Creek](https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:3:::NO::P3_FID,P3_TITLE:2805413,Shanes%20Creek). Everyone involved agreed that naming this waterway was a wonderful way to celebrate John McAnaw's community contribution and legacy.

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