



Friends of Little Hunting Creek Newsletter

UPCOMING EVENTS

→ **Save the date! 2017 CLEANUP is APRIL 8.** High tide is 6:31 a.m., low tide is 1:07 p.m. Community service credits provided.

→ **March 18, Advocacy Training Workshop,** 1:30-4:30 pm, Green Spring Garden Park. Learn how to speak up for the environment and bring about change. To register and for info, go to <http://audubonva.org/>.

→ **April 23, FOLHC Annual Meeting,** 4 p.m., followed by potluck awards banquet.

→ **May 8, Trash Day of Action: the Battle of the Bottle,** 7-10 a.m. A protest against plastic water bottle litter sponsored by Friends of Little Hunting Creek and Friends of Accotink Creek at the Alexandria headquarters of the International Bottled Water Association.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE—by *Betsy Martin*

Several bills that would affect water quality in Little Hunting Creek were introduced in the Virginia General Assembly in the 2017 session.

Plastic bag tax in Chesapeake Bay Watershed (SB925), introduced by Senator Chap Petersen, would put a 5¢ tax on disposable plastic bags provided to consumers; retailers would retain 1¢ to cover administrative costs. D.C.'s bag tax has reduced plastic bag litter, and I testified in favor of this bill in Richmond, but it was defeated in the Senate Finance Committee. It is likely to be reintroduced in future sessions.

Study; economic impacts of litter on fishing, farming, and water quality in urban streams (HJ636), introduced by Delegate Paul Krizek, requests the Department of Environmental Quality to study economic impacts of litter and propose strategies, campaigns, and necessary

state actions to protect the economy of the Commonwealth from harm caused by litter. Delegate Krizek submitted this bill after discussions with Friends of Little Hunting Creek and Friends of Accotink Creek. It died in the House Rules Committee.

Alexandria's release of raw sewage into the Potomac River was the target of various bills (SB818, SB898, HB1423) introduced by Senators Scott Surovell and Richard Stuart and Delegates David Albo and Paul Krizek. Like Fairfax County (see article below), Alexandria is required by the Clean Water Act to reduce the pollution it discharges into the Potomac River. Every time it rains, Alexandria's antiquated combined stormwater-sewer system overflows and dumps raw sewage into the Potomac River. It has submitted its required pollution-reduction plans to the EPA, but they do not address the outfall at Oronoco Bay, which dumps 11 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Potomac each year. Alexandria wasn't planning to even start studying how to solve the problem until 2032! The version of the bill that passed the Senate (SB898) would force Alexandria to deal with the Oronoco outfall by 2025. A companion bill, HB1423, is being considered in the House.

The Friends of Little Hunting Creek have not voted to officially adopt a position on these bills. I urge you to support SB898/HB1423. Your representatives' email addresses are here: <http://virginiageneralassembly.gov/>. Please contact them to express your views.

TRASH DAY OF ACTION: BATTLE OF THE BOTTLE 7-10 a.m. May 8

At the Friends' annual meeting last April, the membership enthusiastically endorsed a public and well-publicized protest against litter. The proposed target of protest: the International Bottled Water Association. IBWA successfully lobbied Congress to prevent the National Park Service from stopping the sale of disposable bottled water in national parks, and opposes other policies to help reduce bottle litter.

The Friends of Accotink Creek and the Friends of Little Hunting Creek have joined forces to form a "Trash Action Work Force" and lead our first action this spring. We have been leading stream cleanups for many years, and despite hundreds of our volunteers removing thousands of bags of trash from local streams over the years, it just keeps coming back. We need to start addressing this issue at its source!

On Monday, May 8th, 7-10am, we will lead a **Trash Day of Action: Battle of the Bottle** at the headquarters of the International Bottled Water Association in Alexandria, Virginia, calling on them to take the lead on meaningful actions to reduce plastic bottle waste in Virginia watersheds.

We will march peacefully and legally around the building, and engage and inspire the morning's commuters with creative signs, trash-themed costumes, and hand-outs.

Join us! We need volunteers with good ideas and partners to help with planning and outreach, and we want lots of happy people who care about their streams and rivers participating with us in our Day of Action!

Learn more and get involved at our next planning meeting, Monday, Feb 13, 6.30-8.30pm at the Sherwood Hall Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane. Sign up at

<https://www.meetup.com/Accotink/events/237250672/>

Save the date for our Trash Day of Action: Battle of the Bottle! You can sign up here: <https://www.meetup.com/Accotink/events/237250926/>



Bottle litter in Little Hunting Creek downstream of Janna Lee Ave bridge, 2011

CLEANING UP THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Have you seen or read about "TMDL" in the news and wondered what it is?

TMDL is the abbreviation of Total Maximum Daily Load, and it's a tool used by federal, state, and local governments to limit pollution flowing into the Bay. In order to receive a permit from the EPA to discharge stormwater into the Potomac River, Fairfax County (and other counties and jurisdictions in the five states in the Chesapeake Bay watershed) must reduce the amounts of sediment and nitrogen and phosphorous (there's a TMDL for each) carried by stormwater runoff into the Bay and its tributaries. Too much of each currently flows into the Bay, resulting in algae blooms that reduce oxygen and create "dead zones" where fish and other life cannot survive. The goal: reduce these pollutants enough so the Bay meets water quality standards by 2025.

Fairfax County presented its draft plans to reduce pollution and help restore the Bay and

the County's impaired streams at a Dec. 15 public meeting at the Mount Vernon Government Center.

Actually, Fairfax County is way ahead of the game, because it began developing watershed management plans in 2005 and implementing water quality improvement projects in 2009, before requirements were in place. The projects include stormwater retrofits, stream restorations, land use changes, septic conversions, nutrient management plans for athletic fields and other county land, and more. So far, restoration of streams has been by far the most effective tool for reducing pollution flowing into the Potomac River. According to county estimates, it has already achieved the required reduction in phosphorous, and is more than 60% of the way toward meeting required reductions in sediment and nitrogen loads.

Little Hunting Creek was the very first watershed for which the county developed a watershed management plan, and 11 of the 68 projects planned for our 11-square-mile watershed have been completed, at a cost of about \$1.5 million.

Soon, the county will submit its plans to the state for approval. There will be a mid-term assessment—are the county's estimates of the reductions it has achieved in sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorous confirmed by measurements of water quality actually flowing into the Potomac River? 2017 is a crucial year—stay tuned.

There are many ways homeowners can reduce polluted stormwater runoff from their properties and help clean up Little Hunting Creek and the Chesapeake Bay. First, do no harm: never put anything down the storm drain, and always pick up your pet's waste and dispose of it in your trash. Other ways to improve water quality in the creek: plant trees; reduce use of fertilizer and other chemicals on your lawn; install a rain garden

to intercept and absorb runoff from your downspout rather than sending it down the storm drain; install a rain barrel to collect water from your downspout, to use in watering your plants. You can even get financial assistance to help with your own watershed improvement project! For information, see the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District website, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/cap/cap-homeowner.htm>.

PLANT NOVA NATIVES

The Friends were invited to join a partnership of organizations sponsoring the PLANT NOVA NATIVES campaign, and the Board voted to accept the invitation. The campaign aims to reverse the decline of native plants and wildlife in Northern Virginia, by encouraging residents and public and commercial entities to install native plants as the first step toward creating wildlife habitat on their own properties. If you are interested in planting native plants that will attract and support birds, butterflies, bees, and other beneficial wildlife, check out <http://www.plantnovanatives.org/>, as well as the website for the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia Audubon at Home program at <http://audubonva.org/audubon-at-home-1>

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS— *by Claire Kluskens*

Before 1900, hunters engaged in a Christmas holiday tradition of competing to see who could shoot the most birds and wild game.

Beginning 117 years ago, on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman proposed a new holiday tradition—a Christmas Bird Census to count birds during the holidays instead of shoot them. Over the years, the idea gained in popularity.

The Fort Belvoir Count Circle held its count on January 2, 2017, a rainy and miserable day. Over 150 participants counted 107 species.

FOLHC member Claire Kluskens led the count in the Fort Hunt Sector, which includes the area from Little Hunting Creek east to the Potomac River and south of Morningside Lane (including Stratford Landing, Riverside Gardens, Gum Springs, Tauxemont, etc.) 21 participants observed 54 species and counted 4,160 individual birds. FOLHC participants were Glenda Booth, Dixie Hougen, Claire Kluskens, Lauren Lyles, Betsy Martin, and Paul Siegel.

Species seen in and around the Little Hunting Creek area include: Canada Goose, Tundra Swan, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Purple Finch, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

American Robins (762), Canada Geese (621), European Starlings (488), and American Crows (369) had the highest counts.

You do not need to be a bird expert to participate in the Christmas Bird Count. Beginners and people who don't know anything at all about birds are placed on a team with experienced birders who will share their knowledge—a good way to learn to identify birds. Several people watched birds at their bird feeders from inside their warm and comfortable houses!

Contact Claire Kluskens, Fort Hunt Sector Leader, birdlady2011@icloud.com if you think you might be interested in participating in next year's Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 31, 2017. By spending a few minutes watching your bird feeder or a few hours in the company of knowledgeable birders, you will contribute to a serious citizen science project that provides data that helps scientists and policy makers make rational and effective choices that save bird populations from extinction.

Ideas, photos, opinions, feedback? Want to join FOLHC, or learn more about the Trash Day of Action, or make a submission for the Best Beaver Contest? Contact betsy@folhc.org.

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BEST BEAVER CONTEST

—*from Ranger Don*

Who's got the best beaver?

We do. Our beaver, here on Stockton Parkway, is the best beaver on the creek. Fantastic beaver. He took down two trees in one night on our property next to the creek. Two nights later, he hauled them away. Unbelievable. I finally saw him yesterday, and he's YUUGE. He smacked his tail, hard, on the water 5 or 6 times to warn me off. He's terrific, believe me. And he's bold. He came across the street and took down trees in our front yard. It's true.

Does your beaver do that? No? Your beaver is a loser. Our beaver is the best beaver.



Mort also had a huge beaver. Really big beaver, maybe 90 pounds. Mort's beaver and his kin built an enormous lodge on Mort's property (on Brady Street) and a dam across Little Hunting Creek. Fantastic dam. It's so big, you can see it on Google Earth. It's true. Type in the coordinates 38 44'00.39"N 77 04'58.19"W, you'll see. Huge.

But Mort's huge beaver died. Sad. Mort's beaver, dead. Total loser. Now our beaver is the best beaver. Sorry, Mort.

Maybe you think you've got the best beaver. Tell us about him, take a picture. Give him a name, and tell us what it is. Maybe you'll win the BEST BEAVER CONTEST. I doubt it, because we have the best beaver, but maybe.