

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

WINTER 2025



FODM 2025 Member Meetings

February 23, 3 p.m. (see p.1)

Mount Vernon Government Center
2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria 22307

May 14, 7 p.m., Zoom

October 22, 7 p.m., Zoom

Calendar of Events

Every Sunday, 8 a.m., Bird Walks

Invasive Plant Control, February
23; March 1, 15 and 29, 10 a.m.

See page 11 for more.

Check www.fodm.org for details.

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Restoring Mussels to Our Rivers

February 23, 3 p.m.

On Sunday, February 23, Dean Naujoks, the Potomac Riverkeeper, will give a presentation on restoring freshwater mussels to the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, the Potomac Riverkeeper Network's 50 Million Mussel Project.

Mussels are nature's water-based "cleanup crew." One adult mussel can clean up to 10 liters of water per day. "The

disappearance of freshwater mussels usually indicates chronic water pollution problems," says a U.S. Department of Agriculture website. To improve water quality, the Potomac Riverkeeper Network (PRKN) has launched the 50 Million Mussel Project to restore freshwater mussel populations in the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers.

When the first English settlers arrived, "They were astonished to discover rivers practically paved in freshwater mussels," according to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Since then, pollution, dams and invasive species helped put 70 percent of mussels in the United States at risk.

Naujoks, with more than 25 years of experience, is among the nation's most stalwart protectors and defenders of our right to clean water and he relies on dedicated supporters such as the partners organizing this meeting to achieve his mission which is driven by his passion, say his colleagues.

This in-person meeting will be at 3 p.m. at the Mount Vernon Government Center,

2511 Parkers Lane (between the GWM Parkway and U.S. 1). Please join FODM from 2 to 3 p.m. for an informal social hour.

The sponsors are FODM, Northern Virginia Trout Unlimited, Friends of Mason Neck State Park, Four Mile Run Conservancy Foundation, Prince William Conservation Alliance, the Friends of Accotink Creek and the Friends of Little Hunting Creek.



Eastern lamp mussel (*Lampsilis radiata*)



Researchers (here, Matt Ashton) lower cages into the river. The cages contain fish carrying microscopic mussel larvae.

Annual Meeting and Election on February 23

The February 23 meeting is also FODM's annual meeting and election. The proposed nominees, all of whom have agreed to serve, are listed below. Members can consider other nominations at the meeting.

We have included in the paper copies of the Marsh Wren a proxy form for establishing a quorum and voting at the meeting if a member cannot attend. The form includes instructions for completing and returning it by February 19. For those who receive the newsletter by email, we will send you a separate email with the proxy and instructions. You can reply by email. Please send your proxy if you cannot attend.

Our nominee for Vice President, Stacy Langsdale, is currently a member of the Board of Directors. Three nominees are not incumbents: Kay Bushman, Scott Cameron and Charles Jackson.

Kay was an attorney with the Defense Logistics Agency-Energy at Fort Belvoir for 30 years, specializing in procurement, logistics and environmental law and

procurement of alternative and renewable energy. A resident of the Belleview/Belle Haven area since 1989, she has led bird walks in Dyke Marsh.

Scott has worked at the U.S. Department of Interior and U.S. Senate and chairs the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors. His son erected our bulletin board as an Eagle Scout project.

Charles is Energy Project Manager for Alexandria's Department of General Services. He lives next to west Dyke Marsh and has volunteered for trash cleanups and invasive plant control.

Nominees

Glenda Booth, President
Stacy Langsdale, Vice President
Katya Wanzer, Secretary
Matthew Smith, Treasurer
Kay Bushman
Scott Cameron
Carolyn Gamble
Jim Gearing

Deborah Hammer
Charles Jackson
Dorothy McManus
Clarence Monteiro
Randy Myers
Robert Veltkamp
Ed Eder, Past President

Welcoming the Parkway's New Superintendent, Jennifer Madello

BY CHRISTOPHER HERSHEY, Chief of Staff, GWMP

George Washington Memorial Parkway is delighted to announce the appointment of Jennifer (Jen) Madello as the new Superintendent of the Parkway (GWMP). Jen officially assumed her role on December 29, 2024, bringing an impressive portfolio of experience and unwavering dedication to our mission.

Jen's distinguished career with the National Park Service (NPS) began in 2003 as a budget analyst. Over the years, she has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and strategic vision in various pivotal roles. As Deputy Comptroller and Budget Officer for the NPS, Jen expertly managed a \$3 billion annual budget, supporting critical fiscal



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or our **Facebook** page.

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Board members can receive emails at info@fodm.org. *The Marsh Wren* is a publication of the Friends of Dyke Marsh, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Letters and submissions to *The Marsh Wren* are welcome. Send them to the post office or email address at the left.



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

We send a warm welcome to the George Washington Memorial Parkway's (GWMP) new superintendent, Jennifer Madello (see page 2). She comes to GWMP from the National Park Service's (NPS) Park Facility Management Division where she led the implementation of NPS's policies and programs for employee housing, asset management, transportation, sustainability and accessibility.

New Leaders in Washington

With new U.S. government leadership in the executive branch and the Congress, including leadership of the natural resources and national parks committees in both the House and Senate, it is unclear what these changes will mean for our national parks, but with a near federal government shutdown in December, the future could be problematic for the country's natural resources. One challenge: National parks have a \$23 billion maintenance backlog, according to the National Parks Conservation Association. "Imagine cutting your home maintenance budget by more than a third," said their president, Theresa Pierno. "Cuts of that magnitude could force you to delay repairs like a leak in your roof, which over time could easily turn into a much larger, more costly roof replacement." Please urge your U.S. senators and representatives to support our national parks.



FODMer Donna Stauffer clips ivy off trees.
Photo by Glenda Booth

Hats Off to Volunteers

The late President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter were exemplary volunteers. Rosalynn said, "Without volunteers, we'd be a nation without a soul." FODM has many dedicated volunteers, for whom we are

very grateful. For example, one team led by Jim Waggener in 2024 completed its ninth year of butterfly and dragonfly surveys in the preserve. Twice a month volunteers work to control invasive plants. Virginia has added 13 more species to the Virginia Invasive Plant Species List, a list that now totals 103. The additions include two-horned trapa (*Trapa bispinosa* var. *iinumai*), nandina (*Nandina domestica*) and orange-eye butterfly-bush (*Buddleja davidii*). Visit <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspdflist> for the complete list.

Why control invasive plants? One reason is to create a self-sustaining, biodiverse ecosystem that supports native insects, birds and other wildlife. Here's another reason from the Stroud Water Research Center: "Preserving and establishing forested buffers along streams and rivers is essential for the health of our freshwater ecosystems. These buffers, consisting of native trees and shrubs, play a vital role in preventing erosion, filtering pollutants and excess nutrients, stabilizing streambanks, and moderating water temperatures. However, planting and maintaining successful buffers is challenging because streamside areas are particularly vulnerable to flooding, erosion and invasive plant pressures that threaten tree survival."

Filling the Gaps

At the National Park Friends Alliance October meeting in Yosemite National Park, then NPS Director Charles Sams, the Service's 19th director, thanked the 130 attendees, the largest friends gathering ever.

He reported that friends' groups donated \$600 million last year in kind to NPS. "You do what the government cannot do. You fill in the gaps." He challenged the group to "show us where the roadblocks exist" and described how NPS has to "balance a variety of imperatives. We're all in this together," he stressed. Thank you, Director Sams and Secretary Deb Haaland, for your service.

With new leadership in the federal government's executive branch, many observers are predicting changes in many policies, practices and personnel of many federal agencies, including the National Park Service. To learn more, visit the National Parks Conservation Association at www.npca.org and the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks at <https://protectnps.gov>.

What's Happening Outside?

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

February can be cold, gray and relatively quiet, but nature is never totally dormant. Here are a few things going on in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve and on the Potomac River this winter.

Wetlands like Dyke Marsh, while not very green, are still supporting biodiversity, storing water and acting as buffers against storms and flooding. At low tide, dead or dying spatterdock plants are spread across the mudflats. Cattails sway in the breeze. The seeds and roots of duck potato, also known as broadleaf arrowhead or wapato, have been food for waterfowl throughout the winter. Wapato roots were once a staple food for the Dogue and other Indigenous people of this region.

Fish, frogs and turtles have slowed down their metabolism and some wildlife, like frogs, have burrowed into the mud to survive in a state of dormancy. Dragonflies, mayflies and stoneflies are overwintering as nymphs in their watery world.

Bald eagles along the river are incubating eggs and probably rearing young eaglets. The adults started bringing sticks to build up last year's nests as early as November.

Some of the waterfowl that wintered here have gone north to breed and raise their young and if dark-eyed juncos are not yet gone, they will be soon. Great horned owls are mating and selecting their nest sites. Like eagles, they often return to the same nest year after year.



Eastern gray squirrel nests or dreys stand out in the trees. The nests are roundish clumps about 30 feet above ground and have an outer layer of brown leaves. The squirrels are in their winter breeding season and preparing to house their young, which will be born between March and April. Male squirrels chase females, part of their mating ritual.

Beavers are using their lodges. Steam rising from the lodges can indicate that the lodges are occupied. Like



beavers, muskrats do not hibernate and have been active in Dyke Marsh all winter. By late winter they are more likely to be seen as their activity spreads into daylight hours.

Many insects overwinter as larvae, nymphs or pupa. Some insects like bees spend the winter inside hollow stems. If a warm day occurs, a mourning cloak butterfly may emerge, showing off its maroon wings with yellow dorsal edges. Mourning cloaks, insects that have overwintered as adults, not as chrysalises, are the first butterflies to emerge in late winter. And while they consume nectar at times, they prefer tree sap.

In the Plant World

Plants may not have summer leaves or flowers, but some have fruits or berries. Poison ivy's berries are food for wildlife like eastern bluebirds. Beware! Poison ivy's hairy vine, like the plant's leaves, can cause rashes on susceptible people. Cedar waxwings and American robins are feasting on American holly berries. Many bird species also feed on eastern red cedar berries.

Slowly swelling buds signal that spring is coming. Beech and red oak trees have kept last summer's leaves all winter but will drop them soon.

Looking ahead to March

March weather can be unpredictable, but spring will unfold. Some blossoms will appear and overwintering insects and amphibians will emerge. Vernal pools will thaw.

Redwing blackbirds will start establishing their territories in the cattails. Listen for the male's conk-la-lee song.

Ospreys will return, mate and reconstruct nests or build new nests. Wood ducks will settle into natural cavities or boxes. Bald eagles will bring fish and other prey to their nestlings.

The Burning of the West Grove Plantation House

BY ELIAS N. LOZANO, Historian, U.S. National Park Service, George Washington Memorial Parkway

One of the side effects of publishing an article in the Friends of Dyke Marsh newsletter is discovering obscure little factoids, such as the destruction of the West Grove Plantation house, a structure formerly just west of today's Dyke Marsh. These factoids, often overlooked in mainstream history, can shed light on intriguing historical events. Documents indicate that the plantation was on the land where the Belle Haven Country Club Golf Course sits today. I found it intriguing to sleuth the most likely suspects behind a legend that during the American Civil War, the Union Army burned down the West Grove Plantation house in 1861 because the owners' sons served as officers in the Confederate Army.

Let's begin our investigation with local author and historian Jay Roberts, who wrote of West Grove Plantation in his book *Lost Alexandria, An Illustrated History of 16 Destroyed Historic Homes in and around Alexandria, Virginia*, published in 2017. Roberts described the plantation's house as a two-story brick structure built in 1700 by Major John West, which served as the family home for the next four generations. David Heiby wrote in *Samuel Richard Johnston, Lee's Reconnaissance Officer at Gettysburg*, that in 1815, the land was sold to Dr. Augustine Smith, who held onto the property until 1830, when Dennis Johnston acquired it after Smith's death. In 1852, the property was inherited by Johnston's son, George, who served as a high-ranking officer in the Confederacy's Quartermaster Corps during the Civil War. Johnston's other son, Samuel, also served the Confederacy during the war as a reconnaissance officer and would later serve General Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Gettysburg. The landowner's sons were indeed officers in the Confederacy. But what about the Union soldiers that the legend speaks about?

At the onset of the Civil War, anyone could have burned the house down, but 1861 is mentioned as part of the legend, so I explored that detail for the likely suspect. Various units, federal and volunteer, rallied to the capital city to support and defend the city from a Confederate invasion. Among those called was the 39th New York Infantry Regiment, the Garibaldi Guard, comprised of ten companies of men from Italy, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Switzerland, France and Austria. Mustered on May 28, 1861, under the command of Colonel Frederick George D'Utassy, the unit reported to Washington, D.C., on May 30, 1861. The Garibaldis encamped in various locations around

Washington, D.C., and Alexandria. Among them were B. W. Hunter's Farm at Abingdon, likely the plantation and today Reagan National Airport, and on Summer Hill, called Camp Grinnell. They also camped at Four Mile Run near Roach's Mill. One of the more significant places they were ordered to camp was the land on F. E. Johnson's Farm. Ordered there on July 13, 1861, it appears that the 39th New York Infantry had the elements that consistently point to them as the likely suspects in burning down the house. Johnson's Farm was situated between the Accotink Turnpike (part of today's U.S. highway 1) and the Gravel Road (believed to be today's Fort Hunt Road), one mile south of Hunting Creek in Fairfax County, Virginia, and just south of the West Grove Plantation. They would have to pass the West Grove Plantation house on their march to the Johnsons' farm.

If the date of 1861 is accurate, it places the Garibaldi Guard in the vicinity of the plantation. They had the means, motive and opportunity to destroy the house in July 1861. The discovery of an 1862 pen and ink map, clearly marking the site and noting a "burnt house" where the Belle Haven Country Club Golf Course now stands, provides compelling evidence that the 39th New York Infantry was the likely culprit.

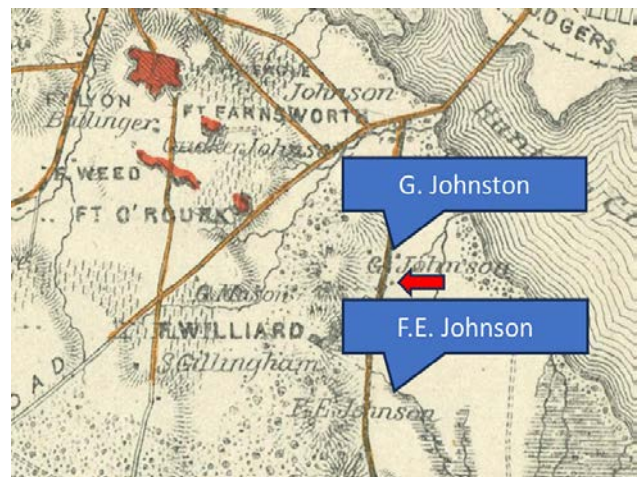


Figure 1. Excerpt from 1865 Map of Alexandria, Virginia, and the surrounding lands indicating land ownership. Note the first banner that indicates the land owned by George Johnson (sic) (actually Johnston) and the second banner indicating the land of F.E. Johnson. The red arrow indicates the approximate location of the West Grove Plantation House.

Source: United States War Department, Engineer Bureau, United States Congress, and Bowen & Co. Extract of military map of N.E. Virginia showing forts and roads. [Washington, D.C.: Engineer Bureau, War Department, 1865] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lva0000011/>

SEE THE BURNING ON PAGE 6

Source for Third Paragraph

Soffee, Jonathan N. "First Brigade, Fifth Division, Thirty-ninth New York Infantry." Accessed November 5, 2024. <http://www.firstbullrun.co.uk/NEV/Fifth%20Division/39th-new-york-infantry.html>

Images: Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Figure 2. Excerpt from 1862 Map of Alexandria, Virginia – The map, dated 1862 illustrates the burnt house along the gravel road (Fort Hunt Road today) which is the site of the West Grove Plantation house. The red arrow indicates the location of the West Grove Plantation house. The "Telegraph Road" on this map is modern-day Richmond Highway.

Source: Sneden, Robert Knox. The U.S. forts and batteries near Alexandria, Virginia, showing Fort Lyon with extended works. [to 1865, 1862] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/gvhs01.vhs00110/>



Figure 3. Colonel D'Utassy, Commander, 39th New York Infantry Regiment, Garibaldi Guard

Source: Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, photographer. Col. D'Utassy, Garibaldi Guard / From photographic negative, from Brady's National Portrait Gallery. United States, 1861. [New York: Published by E. Anthony, 501 Broadway] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018648097/>

New FODM Stickers

We hope you will put our new sticker on your vehicle or water bottle and help spread the good word about FODM and Dyke Marsh. You can pick one up at our February 23 member meeting and other events.

FODM's founders chose the marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) for the logo because Dyke Marsh once supported the only known nesting population of this bird in the upper Potomac River tidal zone. In 1947 Louise Halle wrote, "All over the marshes we heard them, singing in a steady chorus, each song a gurgling chatter, brief but repeated with hardly time for breath between. The dots were bobbing up and down everywhere, like a natural effervescence given off by the marsh." In 1950, surveyors

counted 87 singing males; by 2008, only ten breeding pairs. Sadly, our surveyors have not seen breeding evidence since 2016.



Catching King Tides with Citizen Science

BY STACY LANGSDALE

How is Potomac River flooding in the Alexandria region changing? We have a new tool to help answer that question. In October 2024, our region officially joined the “Catch the King” program, a citizen science initiative to collect flood data, particularly during the river’s king tides. The name “Catch the King” refers to king tides which occur when the earth, sun and moon align and the moon is closest to the earth. They can be the highest tides of the year. In our region, king tides were expected last mid-September, mid-October and mid-November.

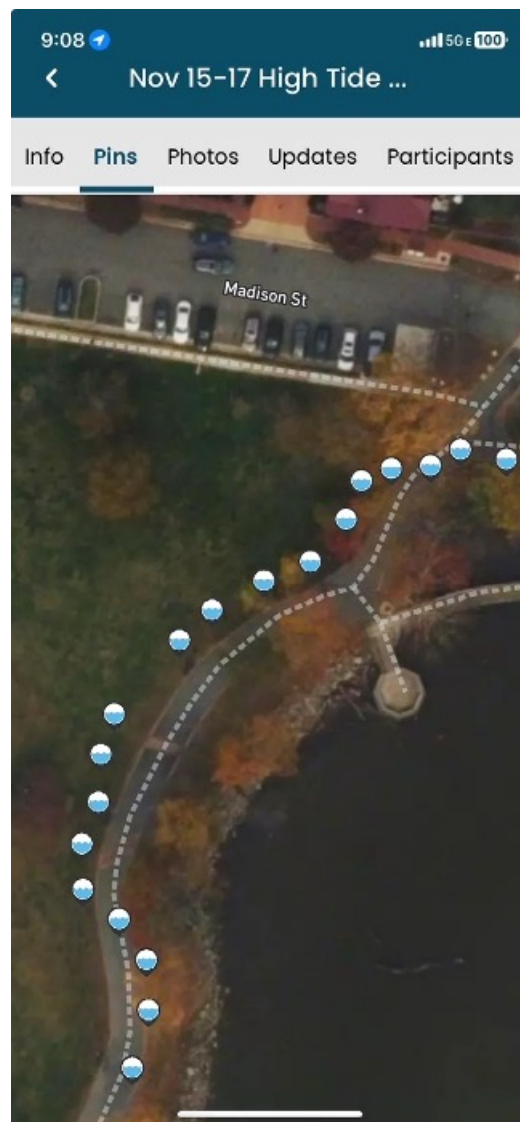
The non-profit organization Wetlands Watch launched the Catch the King program in 2017 in Norfolk, Virginia, to observe increases in “sunny day” flooding correlated with sea level rise. Volunteers use their own mobile devices with the program’s Sea Level Rise app. They collect data simply by walking the perimeter of floodwaters and marking their location along the way. (A fun bit of trivia: that first year the initiative set a new Guinness World Record for the “most contributions to an environmental survey” with 700 volunteers who collected nearly 60,000 data points.)

The most recent Catch the King event was held on October 17 to 20, 2024. Volunteers were poised to deploy in Alexandria and Dyke Marsh; however, the anticipated major flooding did not come. Tides ended up being much lower than forecasted; in fact, we only had minor flooding very late Saturday night. How was that possible when the Potomac had flooded Alexandria only two weeks prior — during a new moon? What happened? How could the predictions be so far off? I’ve researched what factors influence tide heights, so I now appreciate how challenging it is to predict tide heights accurately.

An internet search for tide charts will return multiple sites and apps that predict tide heights to the hundredth of an inch for weeks and months in the future. But high precision does not imply high accuracy, especially in this case. These forecasts are only based on the effects of the predictable movements of the earth and moon in relation to the sun on the world’s oceans. However, several more -- less predictable -- factors affect tides than just the alignment of these celestial bodies. Climate conditions including precipitation, wind and air pressure all impact river conditions and water movement. On top of these daily variations, the baseline is changing as seas rise over time. Sea level rise does not occur evenly across the planet but is more rapid in some areas like the southeastern United States. At Washington, D.C., water levels increased nearly four inches just since 2010 and rates of rise are increasing over time (Washington Post, 2024).

How do these factors combine to influence tide heights? Let’s compare a few examples:

- Floods can happen, even during a new moon. On October 3, the Potomac flooded Union Street (See photo). Since tides are generally lower during new moons, it seems precipitation was the driving factor, with significant rain



Location pins marking the extent of flooding at Alexandria’s Oronoco Bay Park on November 15, 2024. Screenshot from Sea Level Rise app by Stacy Langsdale.

the day before (1.41 inches measured at Reagan National Airport; Weather Underground). Rain anywhere within the Potomac River basin, including here to West Virginia, will raise river levels for hours, days or even weeks depending on where the storm occurs and how much rain falls. Storm events often bring decreased air pressure, which allows for higher water levels. Air pressure was slightly below average on October 2 (29.9 inches) which may have allowed for the higher water levels.

SEE CATCHING TIDES ON PAGE 8

- In contrast, October 17 was predicted to bring a king tide with the full moon. However, there had been no precipitation since October 2, so river levels were lower. Notably, winds as high as 20 mph from the northwest pushed waters away from Alexandria and Dyke Marsh. Additionally, air pressure was higher (around 30.3 inches) so kept levels down. “High-pressure systems can depress sea levels, leading to clear sunny days with exceptionally low tides. Conversely, low-pressure systems that contribute to cloudy, rainy conditions typically are associated with tides that are much higher than predicted.” (NOAA, 2025)
- A month later, on November 15, the expected king tide arrived with the full moon bringing water levels to 3.3 feet above average low tide, which resulted in flood waters on Union Street (again). This time, a little precipitation (0.21 inches) along with lower air pressure (29.9 inches) seems to have supported the higher water levels.

The tide height referenced above is based on a real time tidal gauge at Alexandria’s waterfront, which uses average low tide as the zero baseline elevation. The gauge is managed by the National



“Venice on the Potomac,” flooding on Alexandria’s lower King Street, October 3, 2024. Photo by Daniel Horowitz, dclensman.com

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and available at: <https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/AXTV2>. It records actual levels and also predicts conditions three days into the future, incorporating forecasts of some of these weather conditions. Thus, this resource is much more accurate than the simple tide charts.

While there appears to be some evidence of increased flooding and erosion in Dyke Marsh, by collecting data over time, we will be able to better understand the contribution of tides.

Even though we did not have significant flooding during the October 2024 king tide, we didn’t completely miss our opportunity. We are ready to track data throughout the year whenever we see the potential for flooding. If you are interested in participating, download the Sea Level Rise App, and follow instructions at <https://www.wetlandswatch.org/app-faqs>. Also, contact me at Stacy.Langsdale@gmail.com to help with future flood data collection.

Information:

NOAA. Tides and Water Levels. Accessed January 1, 2025 at https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/tutorial_tides/tides08_othereffects.html

NOAA Office of Water Prediction. Observed and Forecasted Data for Potomac River at Alexandria, Station AXTV2, <https://water.noaa.gov/gauges/AXTV2>

Washington Post, April 29, 2024, Where Seas are Rising at Alarming Speed, <https://wapo.st/4fHjFyD>

Past weather data reported by Weather Underground, <https://www.wunderground.com/history/monthly/us/va/arlington/KDCA/date/2024-10>

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. -- Aldo Leopold, Ecologist, Forester, Conservationist

State Agencies that Affect Dyke Marsh

BY SCOTT CAMERON, Vice Chairman, Virginia State Water Control Board

The Virginia State Water Control Board on June 25, 2024, considered a proposal affecting the interests of the Friends of Dyke Marsh. On my motion, the Board rejected a petition by a citizen to revise Virginia's state regulations protecting wetlands in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to narrow federal jurisdiction over what the law calls "waters of the United States" (WOTUS) under the federal Clean Water Act. I offered the successful motion to reject the petition, based primarily on the principle that the Supreme Court's decision, right or wrong, does not limit Virginia's ability to protect wetlands under state law. State laws that regulate activity in wetlands include the Tidal Wetlands Act of 1972, the Nontidal Wetlands Act of 2001 and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act of 1988.

Virginia's implementation of the state's environmental laws is institutionally complex. There are several state agencies that play roles, most notably the Departments of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Conservation and Recreation, Wildlife Resources and Agriculture and Consumer Services; and the Marine Resources Commission.

In addition, there are multiple boards of citizen volunteers appointed by the governor that work in close partnership with the agencies. For instance, the DEQ works with the Water Control Board, Waste Management Board and Air Pollution Control Board.

The board most relevant to Friends of Dyke Marsh is likely the Water Control Board. This board is responsible for administering the Virginia State Water Control Law and a variety of related statutes. It adopts regulations and considers special orders resolving violations of its regulations and permits that have had a related public hearing. The Board meets in public about every other month in the Richmond area to consider items brought before it by DEQ. Day-to-day administration of the board's programs is delegated to DEQ. The board is responsible for:

- setting standards of quality for state waters and water quality controls;
- determining requirements for treating sewage and industrial waste and for the recovery and reuse of wastewater;
- approving regulations to control pollution from boats;
- considering certificates for the discharge of treated waste into

- state waters and for wetland excavation;
- developing coordinated state policy, plans and programs for the conservation and economic development of the state's water resources;
- upholding regulations related to aboveground and underground storage tanks, oil discharge contingency plans and the financial responsibility of facilities and tank vessels that transport oil;
- developing regulations governing the issuance of surface water withdrawal permits;
- designating surface water management areas and issuing ground water withdrawal permits;
- administering programs of state and federal financial assistance for purposes of water quality control and conservation; and
- issuing procedures governing financial assistance for construction of publicly-owned wastewater treatment works.

The seven members of the nonpartisan Board are appointed to staggered four-year terms and come from all across Virginia. Governor Glenn Youngkin appointed me to the Water Control Board in June 2022. I am currently the only Board member from Northern Virginia. As a member of Friends of Dyke Marsh, I am especially pleased that the Board members recently unanimously elected me the Board's Vice Chairman.



The State Water Control Board approves regulations for wastewater treatment plants like the Noman Cole plant in southeastern Fairfax County.
Photo by Glenda Booth

The Life of Mussels

Mussels are aquatic mollusks, invertebrate animals with soft bodies usually enclosed in a hinged shell. Freshwater mussels can range from thumbnail to pie plate size and live from 20 to 100 years.

Mussels draw in water with their incurrent siphon and discharge it through their excurrent siphon. Their shells are usually, but not always, dark in color on the outside and pearly on the inside. Mussels grow in both freshwater and saltwater. They spend much of their lives partially buried in sediment.

Mussels have one of the most complex reproductive systems in nature. Males release sperm which the water's current carries to a downstream female who draws it in through her siphon. A fertilized egg develops within her gills into the microscopic larval stage called a

glochidium. Once mature, the glochidia enter the water column and attach to the gills, fins or scales of freshwater fish, their host, so the fish serves as a host or "taxi" for the mussel's eggs. Still microscopic, the juvenile mussel drops off the fish and continues to develop on the stream bottom.

We will learn more at our February 23 program. See page 1.



Various mussels from the Potomac River

WELCOMING THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT FROM PAGE 2

strategies across the Service. Her leadership capabilities were further showcased during her tenure as Acting Superintendent at Colonial National Historical Park and as Chief of Administration and Acting Deputy Superintendent for the National Mall and Memorial Parks. Additionally, Jen served as Acting Deputy Regional Director for the NPS Pacific West Region, where she played a pivotal role in regional management and strategic planning.

Prior to her current role as GWMP Superintendent, Jen was the Program Administrator for the Park Facility Management Division. In this capacity, she led the implementation of national policies and programs related to employee housing, asset management, transportation, sustainability and accessibility. Her comprehensive experience and strategic vision make her an invaluable asset to the GWMP team.

"As our new Superintendent, Jen is committed to fostering a supportive and collaborative environment within GWMP," in my view. "She embodies the values of compassion, empathy, integrity, honesty, responsibility and accountability. Jen advocates for open and respectful communication, encouraging the sharing of diverse perspectives to achieve our collective goals. Her leadership style is both inclusive and forward-thinking, aiming to empower each team member's expertise and initiative."

Jen's vision for GWMP includes building a shared understanding of GWMP's goals and priorities, exploring innovative funding and execution strategies

and continuing to develop the park's recognition, training and health and wellness programs. Her approach ensures that the park team not only meets current challenges but also thrives and excels in delivering exceptional experiences to all who visit and work within our parks.

She also understands the importance of partnerships and looks forward to working with the GWMP's many partner organizations. "I am deeply honored to serve as the superintendent of George Washington Memorial Parkway, which embodies rich history and a vital connection to the community," Madello said. "My family's ties to this area and the park's individual sites extend back three generations, making this role even more meaningful to me. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the GWMP team and dedicated partners to preserve these important places and share the complex, vibrant stories that define this extraordinary landscape."

The park is confident that Jen's extensive experience and unwavering dedication will significantly enhance GWMP's mission and drive our continued success. Her leadership will undoubtedly enrich the experiences of everyone involved with Dyke Marsh and the broader GWMP community. Congratulations, Jen!

Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction. — E.O. Wilson

More Forthcoming Events

March 11, 7 p.m., Zoom, FODM is cosponsoring a talk by Joanie Millward, Virginia Osprey Foundation, on a study finding that fewer osprey young are surviving in Mobjack Bay because of insufficient food. Register at <https://www.nvbirdalliance.org/nvba-events/osprey-chesapeake-watershed-240311>

March 22, Trash Cleanup, 10 a.m.

May 14, 7 p.m., Member Meeting, Zoom, Over the Seawall, the Delusion of Controlling Nature, Stephen Robert Miller. Visit www.fodm.org.

October 22, 7 p.m., Member Meeting, Zoom, Beaver ecology, behavior and human interactions, by Alison Zak, the Human-Beaver Coexistence Fund. Visit www.fodm.org.

If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos. — E.O. Wilson

Welcome New FODM Members

FODM welcomes our **new members**: Karen Baragona, Maribeth Bersani, Kay Bushman, Michael Dorrian, Jessica Kasza, Ana Maria Kleymeyer, Gordon Michalson, Maureen Rayman, Ann Schumacher, Sharon Shutler, Reed Van Beveren and Ed Vaughan. We welcome our **new life members** Zander Gambill and Carol Lindsey and **conversions to life membership** Cynthia Nickerson and Janet Rupp.

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

FODM holds bird walks on Sunday mornings, all seasons. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Walks are led by experienced birders and all are welcome to join us.

U.S. Park Police, Emergency Number:
202-610-7500

FODM Membership -- Dues and Contributions

Support the Friends of Dyke Marsh by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Benefits include the newsletter, The Marsh Wren; membership meetings with knowledgeable speakers; bird and nature walks and notification of activities in and around the marsh. Most importantly, your membership lends your voice in support of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, its protection and full restoration. Use the QR code below or visit www.fodm.org/membership.html to go to our membership page. Then click on the "Join" or "Donate" button to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card or from your bank account securely through PayPal. For help, email info@fodm.org. If you prefer, you can send a check, payable to FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307. The annual dues are \$20 per household, \$250.00 for life membership for an individual. You will receive a notice by mail or by email when your renewal is due. A financial statement is available upon written request from the Virginia Office of

Charitable and
Regulatory Programs.
Thank you for
supporting FODM.

Use this QR code
to visit our
membership page.



DUES AMOUNT..... \$ _____
ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION..... \$ _____

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE ____ ZIP _____
TELEPHONE NUMBER _____
EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Please address any questions or comments about *The Marsh Wren* to Glenda Booth and about membership to Bob Veltkamp. You may contact them by mail at FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307 -7183, by telephone or by email (see page 2).

The Marsh Wren

The Friends of Dyke Marsh
P.O. Box 7183
Alexandria, VA 22307-7183

Bald Eagle Official

While the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has been America's national bird for some time, it had not been officially designated until December 24, 2024, when then-President Joe Biden signed a bill into law officially making the bald eagle our national bird. "The U.S. recognizes the rose as its national flower, the oak as its national tree and the bison as its national mammal. But nowhere does it legally establish a national bird," wrote Rachel Triesman for National Public Radio. So now that revered avian that appears on our national seal, on coins, stamps, military uniforms and more is legally the nation's official bird.

Photo by James Stone

