



Friends of Lake Accotink Park Newsletter

February 2024

Mission: Protect, restore, preserve, and educate all concerning the natural, historical, and cultural resources of Lake Accotink Park



NOTES FROM THE FLAP BOARD

By Mary Keeser, FLAP President

As we welcome in 2024, we would be remiss not to thank all who have positively impacted our accomplishments and the success of our missions during 2023. We missed our annual 2023 operational fundraising goal for 2024 by \$1,764.86. Please donate what you can in person at our monthly clean-ups on the second Sunday of the month from 9 a.m.-12 p.m.; by mailing your tax-deductible donation to Friends of Lake Accotink Park: P.O. Box 1203 Springfield, VA 22151; or by using the donation button at the end of this newsletter.

Critical to our overall success: our volunteer board, committee directors, and members who give selflessly of their talents, skills, and dedication to lead and work with their chosen committees. Thank you! Also critical to our success is our partnership with FCPA, Lake Accotink Park, and our community of dedicated volunteers and donors. Special thanks to Lake Accotink Park manager Dan Grulke for going beyond and by caring for the community, Lake Accotink Park, and his staff. Dan's selflessness is demonstrated daily by his unwavering stewardship, guidance, and patience—enabling our partnership to focus on Lake Accotink Park, its care and inhabitants, the community, and our overall missions.

Hope to see you at our quarterly General Membership meetings—all are invited. We are a certified 501c3 Non-Profit 100% volunteer organization, with 100% of all funding going to FLAP Lake Accotink Park missions, activities, projects, and programs. Our mission: "Protect, restore, preserve, and educate all concerning the natural, historical, and cultural resources of Lake Accotink Park." We accomplish this through educating the community on the harmful impacts of trash and pollutants, along with the many positive impacts of clean waterways, land, and pollinator gardens. We plan, organize, provide supplies and outreach, coordinate, fund, manage, and execute, with our partners: monthly and special clean-ups (gloves, bags, grabbers, vests, etc.); dog waste stations (care and refill of 11 along the trail); Margaret Kinder Education and Pollinator Garden care and educational classes; Fairfax County-wide high school trash challenges (a Young FLAPer program); community Lake Accotink Park day; national and watershed activities; pictures with Santa; high school events; various organizational speaking; FCPA working groups (Lake Accotink Task Force); support activities; and much more.

We do need your help to continue keeping our Lake Accotink Park healthy—for our

waterways, wildlife, land, and ecosystem. We are privileged to meet and work with our community volunteer members, who selflessly give of their time and talents to improve the park and the overall quality of life for its users. Many of our volunteers have found themselves recruiting classmates, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and even strangers to help Lake Accotink Park through our missions, projects, programs, and activities.

You can keep track of all our activities, projects, and events through our social media and updated website at flapaccotink.org—see the events tab. To volunteer, send your contact information to contact@flapaccotink.org.

Thank you for being an active member of FLAP; please encourage your neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family to get involved as well. Together we can make a positive impact for our environment, our community, and our Lake Accotink Park. See you on the trail.

2024 MEETINGS & EVENTS

General Membership Meeting

WHEN: March 27 and Nov. 206:30 p.m.

WHERE: Community of Christ: 5610 Inverchapel Rd. Springfield, VA 22151

WHEN: May 22 and Aug. 28
6:30 p.m.

WHERE: Lake Accotink, in the large pavilion

FLAP 1040 5k Walk Run

WHEN: April 13, 9 a.m. Packet Pick-Up; 10:40 Race Start

WHERE: Lake Accotink Park: 7500 Accotink Park Rd. Springfield, VA 22150

Save the date! More information to follow.

Earth Day FCPA

WHEN: April 20, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

WHERE: Sully Historic Site: 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly

Save the date! (Rain or Shine.) More info to come.

Young FLAPer Fairfax County-Wide High School Trash Challenge

WHEN: April 28 and Sept. 29 12–2 p.m.

WHERE: Lake Accotink Park

Clean-Up Competition for FCPS High School Teams; See the events tab on flapaccotink.org.

Lake Accotink Park Community Appreciation Day

Lake Accotink Park was officially dedicated Aug. 25, 1962.

WHEN: Aug. 24, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

WHERE: Lake Accotink Park: 7500 Accotink Park Road, Springfield VA

Pictures With Santa

WHEN: Dec. 14, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

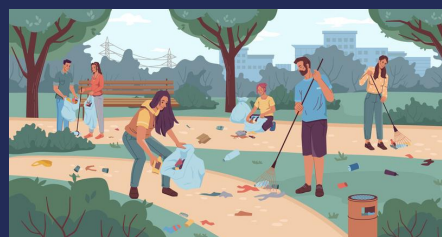
- 10 a.m.–12 p.m. Volunteers decorate
- 12 p.m. Santa arrives

WHERE: Large Pavilion adjacent to Lake Accotink Park Marina



Caring For & Exploring the Pollinator Garden

WHEN: 2nd Sunday of every



Monthly FLAP Lake Accotink Park Clean Up

month

TIME: 10:30 a.m.

WHERE: Lake Accotink Park
Margaret Kinder Pollinator
Garden—Adjacent to the Marina

Our experts will guide you through the pollinators and pollinator plants, and starting and maintaining your own pollinator garden. Work alongside the experts as they care for the plants, water, and clean up. We'll provide the tools and gloves, or you can bring your own.

Sign Up

WHEN: 2nd Sunday of every month

TIME: 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

WHERE: Sign in at Lake Accotink Marina

Pick up debris carelessly dumped, check and refill bags in dog waste stations, trim vines, and more. We'll provide gloves, FLAP information, clean-up bags, tools, maps, and more. You will also be loaned a FLAP safety vest. Volunteer 4 times and receive your very own safety vest to personalize!

Sign Up



Heartfelt Farewell to Charles Smith

By Mary Keeser, FLAP President

On behalf of Friends of Lake Accotink Park, our board of directors, our thousands of dedicated volunteers, members, and supporters, we would like to extend our most sincere thanks to Charles Smith for his many years of dedicated service as the branch chief of the Department of Public Works & Environmental Services. We must admit, we were taken aback at hearing the news of his retirement on January 12, 2024. All these many years, FLAP has had the honor to work with him and has depended upon his professionalism, transparent honesty (no matter the circumstances), and open communications. He will be missed. Before he departed, we had the opportunity to ask Charles a few questions:

Q: Can you tell us about your background?

A: After college, I served on active duty with the U.S. Army from 1988 to 1992. Upon leaving the military, I worked for the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority for five years doing a wide range of duties with three different positions, including environmental education, natural resource management, overseeing implementation and restoration of major utility projects on parkland, planning and policy development, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and served on the team that conducted assessment and recovery following the Reston oil spill of 1993. In short, as a young person transitioning from the military to a new career, I got a great opportunity to learn and meet many people.

I finished my master's degree in 1997 and came to work that summer for the Fairfax County Park Authority. My first position was as a historian, site manager for Walney Visitor Center, and assistant manager for Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. In 2004, I became the senior naturalist and ecologist overseeing natural resource management of the 23,000-acre park system. I became manager of the Natural Resource Branch in 2011. In 2014, I moved to the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, Stormwater Planning Division. I became a branch chief in 2015, where I have served since.

Q: Looking back, was your career with Fairfax County what you had planned?

A: My career was not what I anticipated, but I have been very fortunate. When I left the military, I knew I wanted to be in the “environmental” field, but really had no idea what that meant. In the last 32 years between the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority and Fairfax County, I had the great fortune to learn many things, work with a lot of great people, and take on challenging projects and programs that are important to local people and benefit our environment. Throughout that time I also volunteered with the Virginia Native Plant Society, Prince William Conservation Alliance, the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, Virginia Master Naturalists, and other groups doing field assessments, education, and environmental policy development.

Q: I'm sure there were many unforgettable moments or projects—is there one that sticks out?

A: The first big project was the Reston oil spill of 1993. The fuel oil flowed down Sugarland Run to the Potomac River, where it was mostly captured and recovered in Algonkian Regional Park. I learned about the emergency response, remediation, impact assessments, pipeline operations, damage assessment, and many other things over the four years working on that project as well as meeting many people who were experts in their fields. Establishing the urban prescribed-burn program for the Fairfax County Park Authority encapsulated many things that go into assessing, restoring, and managing our natural resources. Reintroducing fire as a management tool in an urban area required years of team building and education backed up by applied science. In recent years, the Lake Accotink Dredging project has been both challenging and rewarding. On the one hand, building a team to implement a large project and overseeing that process is a great challenge. On the other, working with the stakeholders to try to understand their needs and then trying to match those with the logistics and feasibility of the project requires humility. Lastly, the Long Branch Central Watershed Management Area project in Braddock District is the culmination of years of advocacy and the effort to work with a community to manage our stormwater and implement stream restoration that works with the environment while applying the best science and meeting regulatory goals.

Q: If you were to give young Charles advice on his first day on the job today, what would it be?

A: Stay open to opportunities. Listen and learn from others. Do the hard things that support larger goals. Be collaborative and supportive of others. If you work hard, learn your job, and do the mundane things that need to get done, you can gain the

latitude to innovate and push best practices for better outcomes. And when you fail as part of a collaborative effort, you can all learn from mistakes, improve, and move forward.

The new Lake Accotink project manager is Aaron George, project coordinator and branch chief, Watershed Projects Implementation Central Branch. You can reach him at aaron.george2@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Annual Bird Count at Lake Accotink

By Su Jewell, FLAP member and Springfield Area CBC Coordinator



Our resident bald eagle guards its nest at Lake Accotink on the day of the bird count.
(Photo by Susan Jewell)



Hooded mergansers are a common sight on the lake in winter. (Photo by Peter Nguyen)

Lake Accotink Park is part of the longest running bird survey in the world. Although the first National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts were held around Christmas in 1900 in a few locations, most locations in the United States started in years following, as interest in birding spread. Counts are now held around the world. Although I haven't confirmed what year the survey started at Lake Accotink Park, it has been held for at least 23 years.

The count is primarily a citizen-science effort that reveals long-term trends in bird populations. One trend it started revealing decades ago was the northward winter range expansion of certain southern birds, such as cardinals, robins, and purple finches. This is a symptom of the gradual warming of the winters. Another trend it has revealed is population crashes of certain species—also due to climate change—as well as habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and other reasons.

Each year, National Audubon sets the earliest and latest dates of the count nationwide as December 14 and January 5. The count in the Springfield (VA) area in

2023 was held on December 30 with 15 people in five prearranged areas who saw or heard 56 species. The immediate area around Lake Accotink included 524 birds of 45 species—including one adult bald eagle perched above the nest and a raven that flew over the lake.

The teams were out mostly walking with binoculars, searching for birds for much of the day. The weather was quite nice for the end of December—in the 40s and mostly sunny. Other teams covered other parts of the northern Virginia, DC, and Maryland area. The results of these counts get sent each year to regional coordinators, then to state coordinators along with counts around the states, and then to national coordinators. Thus, we learn the trend of bird populations from year-to-year in a highly coordinated fashion from thousands of volunteers—a tremendous feat overall.

PARK UPDATES



Lake Accotink Park News and Updates

By Dan Grulke, Manager of Lake Accotink Park

Now that the holidays are over, it is time to start thinking about spring and summer camp programs located at Lake Accotink Park and Crestwood Elementary School (supervised by Lake Accotink Park staff). A full listing of spring and summer camps is available on the [FCPA website](#).

Camps at Lake Accotink Park include Lakeside Nature Explorer Camp, for kids 6-10 years old, and Accotink Adventure Camp, for those aged 9-13. Both camps are based outside, and each provides age-appropriate outdoor and nature-themed activities every day. Camps start on June 17 and the last day is August 16. There will also be a week of Lakeside Nature Explorers during spring break—March 25–29.

Lake Accotink Park Master Plan

The plan is on hold; more information to follow.

Visit [fairfaxcounty.gov](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov) for updates and information on the Lake Accotink Park Master Plan.

Lake Accotink Park Staffing

We start hiring camp and marina staff in late March/early April. Apply at the Lake Accotink visitor center or email Lake Accotink park manager Dan Grulke at Dan.Grulke@fairfaxcounty.gov or Erin Gray, operations manager, at Erin.Gray@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Lake Accotink Dredging Project Update

Questions? Contact Aaron George, the project coordinator and branch chief, Watershed Projects Implementation Central Branch, and new Lake Accotink project manager: aaron.george2@fairfaxcounty.gov.

[Get more updates and info.](#)



Please Remember: Pick Up After Your Dog!

By Martin Shepherd (Shep), Deputy Director, Dog Waste Station Committee

Pet waste is a subject everyone likes to avoid. FLAP is here to help you avoid the problems (and a possible \$250 fine) for not picking up after your dog. Since the summer of 2021, FLAP has dispensed 64,000 dog waste bags from the 11 dog waste stations along the Lake Accotink loop trail—double that number since the start of the program! It is only through donations that we are able to keep those stations filled.

Pet waste is not a sight anyone wants to see on the trails of Lake Accotink. And if you smell it before you see it, someone has likely left something on the trail for you to step in. I know you and none of our neighbors want to be in that predicament. The Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District reminds us that, even worse, it poses a health risk to pets and people using the trails. It is also a health hazard to Accotink Creek and Lake Accotink. Pet waste left on park trails, lawns, sidewalks, and streets is immediately flushed into the nearest waterway when it rains. Even if you can't see the water near you, the pet waste goes into a storm drain and travels untreated to the creek and the lake.

Like human waste, animal waste contains harmful bacteria and viruses and may have parasites, making the receiving water unfit for drinking and recreation. In addition, pet waste contains nutrients that will accelerate the growth of nuisance algae. When that alga dies off, it consumes oxygen from the water and causes dead zones where fish and amphibians cannot survive. Your life, your pet's life, and your environment's health are all intertwined. Help FLAP provide the means to remove pet waste from our Lake Accotink Park and watershed.



Seniors Corner

Meet the senior dogs that frequent Lake Accotink Park

Ula

Ula is a senior dog who lives near the Ravenel Lane entrance to the Lake Accotink trails. She looks forward to her walks along the lake trails, highlighted by sniffs with other dogs, excitement over squirrels, and the occasional enthusiastic goose encounter. Her favorite part is the love she gets from families who pass by and eagerly seek a pet of her fluffiness. She loves the lake and is grateful to have it as part of her routine!

Submit your senior puppy story, along with a photo, to publisher@flapaccotink.org.

YOUNG FLAPpers

Save the Dates: FCPS High School Trash-Off

Save the dates for the Friends of Lake Accotink Park's Trash-Off: A High School Showdown! All local high schools are invited to participate to accept the challenge of collecting the most trash at Lake Accotink park (helping Lake Accotink, Lake Accotink Park, the Chesapeake Watershed, and its wildlife) for the chance at winning a catered pizza party at their school. All FCPS high schools are listed on the Eventbrite registration page. Your school team captain can register your entire team. For additional information, contact Isabella Napoli at youngflappers@flapaccotink.org.

- April 28, 12-2 p.m.
- Sept. 29, 12-2 p.m.



LAKE ACCOTINK WILDLIFE CORNER

Winter Wildlife



*By Katherine Edwards, Fairfax County Wildlife Management Specialist,
FCPD Animal Services Division*

Winter—with its colder temperatures and scarce food supplies—is a tough time for wildlife throughout the United States. The winter cold might have you worried about wildlife, wondering where they go or how they find food in harsh conditions. It's easy for humans to bundle up with coats, scarves, and gloves or to seek shelter in the warmth indoors, but how do wild animals survive the winter months?

Wildlife have evolved many adaptations to cope with the winter conditions.

Migration: Wildlife often migrate to more hospitable habitats before winter weather arrives. Many bird species migrate south to environments with more favorable conditions—sometimes travelling up to thousands of miles! We have many winter bird residents that migrate from northern habitats, some of which you might see in your backyard. You may observe dark-eyed juncos, white-throated sparrows, or purple finches at your feeder. However, not all birds migrate—and the wintertime becomes a great season to bird watch with the lack of foliage on trees. You might observe year-round resident birds of prey, such as red-shouldered hawks and red-tailed hawks, perched on trees stalking their prey. Other hawk species, such as northern harriers, migrate south to our area and take up residence during the

winter.

Fattening Up: Food becomes more scarce and harder to get as winter wears on. To prepare for winter, many wildlife species—including deer, squirrels, chipmunks, and bears—spend the fall building up their fat reserves by feasting on high-calorie, fatty foods such as acorns, hickory nuts, and other forms of mast. Throughout autumn, bears forage for most of the day and can eat up to 20,000 calories daily in preparation for winter denning. Other species will store food in caches that they can access at later times. For example, beavers will cut trees and stockpile branches in an underwater “pantry” anchored by mud that they can keep safe under iced-over waterbodies to last them through the winter. Foxes opportunistically hunt their prey during the winter. They eat small mammals, such as mice, squirrels, and rabbits, and may deposit food in holes beneath snow and leave urine markings to help them relocate their surplus stash.

Pelage/Coat Changes: As winter approaches, many mammals trade in their summer hair coat for a thick, dense winter coat to trap body heat and provide insulation. Deer grow a soft, dense undercoat of woolly fur, topped with longer, dark guard hairs. Coyotes, foxes, and raccoons also bulk up their coat for winter and often appear much larger this time of year. Instead of hiding out in a den, red foxes will often just curl up right out in the open with their bushy tail wrapped around their body for warmth. You may also hear them vocalizing more during winter (known as the vixen’s scream) as foxes (and coyotes) enter their breeding seasons.

Some wildlife species’ coats or feathers can repel water and provide insulation from cold weather. Aquatic furbearers—such as otters, beavers, minks, and muskrats—have a double layer of fur on which they often rub body oils, waterproofing the coat. Birds also rub oil on their feathers for waterproofing protection and fluff the feathers to trap warm air.

While many animals can cope with the harsh cold, some are less well-adapted to winter weather. Unlike many other mammals, opossums don’t have furry tails or ears which makes them especially vulnerable to the winter cold and more susceptible to frostbite. Following harsh winters, you may see opossums with evidence of injury on their extremities from exposure.

Seeking Shelter: Many wildlife species build dens or burrows or roost in cavities to avoid the harsh winter weather. Birds will seek out a variety of unconventional shelters—both natural and human-made—to stay warm on bitterly cold nights. Gray squirrels build nests in trees out of leaves, small branches, and moss for insulation. Flying squirrels nest communally in small tree cavities, huddling together in a tight mass for warmth, but also sometimes take up residence in attics. Raccoons seek out hollow trees or underground burrows to use as dens. They may also opportunistically use abandoned human structures as dens. Bats either migrate south to warmer climates or hibernate during the harsh winter months. Hibernating bats seek out environments with stable temperature and humidity levels, such as caves, mines, and rock crevices for their winter hibernacula. Some species may utilize manmade structures such as attics, barns, or bridges. Reptiles and amphibians also seek shelter from the cold winter elements in various ways such as burrowing below the frost line, digging themselves into mud at the bottom of a pond or stream, taking cover in cracks and crevices in logs or rocks, or hiding under leaf litter.

Slowing Down: Many wildlife species undergo periods of dormancy in the winter in which an animal becomes less physiologically active, growth stops, and metabolic processes slow down. Hibernation is a state of inactivity where wildlife undergo changes, such as lowered body temperature, decreased heart rate, slowed breathing,

and lower metabolic rate. That allows them to burn their body's fat reserves much more slowly than if they were awake and active. True hibernators, such as groundhogs, disappear when the weather gets bad and "sleep" until spring and better conditions arrive. Groundhogs generally retreat to underground burrows from October through February in Virginia. Other species, like skunks, raccoons, and bears, enter a lesser form of hibernation called torpor to conserve energy. They tend to slow down into a lighter "sleep" but not to the extent of true hibernators. Often, these animals will have reduced activity during periods of severe weather and emerge once the weather breaks to search for food. This can last from a period of a few days to several months, depending on the species and winter conditions.



Critter of the Quarter: Freshwater Crayfish

By Dave Gibson, FLAP Acting Treasurer and Board Member at Large

It's time the Critter column took a look at the middle of the lake's food chain. I picked the freshwater crayfish because it serves as prey to so many other critters. These include eagles, barred owls, foxes, and green herons.

As seafood, they are eaten all over the world. Like other edible crustaceans, only a small portion of the body of a crayfish is edible. In most prepared dishes, such as soups, bisques, and étouffées, only the tail portion is served. **WARNING: DO NOT EAT RAW.** They may contain parasites that can hospitalize the foolhardy.

Crayfish can be defined as any of numerous crustaceans (order Decapoda, phylum arthropoda) constituting the families Astacidae (Northern Hemisphere). More than 250 species occur in North America. Crayfish, common in streams and lakes, often conceal themselves under rocks or logs. Like other arthropods, crayfish are characterized by a joined head and thorax, or midsection, and a segmented body, which is sandy yellow, green, red, or dark brown in color. The head has a sharp snout, and the compound eyes are on movable stalks. The exoskeleton, or body covering, is thin but tough. The front pair of the five pairs of legs have large, powerful pincers (chelae). There are five pairs of smaller appendages on the abdomen, used mostly for swimming and circulating water for respiration. Most adult crayfish are about 7.5 cm (3 inches) long. Crayfish reach adult size in 3-4 months and its life span is 3-8 years long. Once they reach maturity, they seek out a mate and the crayfish life cycle begins all over again. The life cycle of a crayfish plays an important role in the food chain.

Crayfish mate in the autumn and lay eggs in the spring. The reddish eggs,

attached to the female's abdomen, hatch in five to eight weeks. The larvae remain on the mother for several weeks. Sexual maturity is achieved in a few months to several years, and the life span ranges from 1 to 20 years, depending on the species.

Crayfish can eat both plant and animal matter, which makes them omnivores. They feed mainly at night on fresh vegetation, along with living and non-living invertebrates, such as insects and snails. They also eat dead and decaying matter and will also feed on snails, aquatic insects, eggs, and sometimes small fish. They will eat dead fish and scrape algae and microbes from the substrate. Because crayfish will eat both living and dead plant and animal material, they help to reduce the amount of decaying matter, and thereby improve water quality.

Submit your articles with photos for consideration in our next FLAP quarterly newsletter to publisher@flapaccotink.org. Please send by the end of March.

Friends of Lake Accotink Park Board

Position	Name	Email
President	Mary Keeser	president@flapaccotink.org
Vice President	OPEN	vice.president@flapaccotink.org
Secretary	Jim Hickey	secretary@flapaccotink.org
Treasurer	Dave Gibson (Acting)	treasurer@flapaccotink.org
Member at Large	Dave Gibson	memberAL@flapaccotink.org

Visit flapaccotink.org to see a full list of committee members and see other positions that are open. We're accepting candidates for board positions, as well as various other committees and special projects. It is your Lake Accotink Park—help make a difference for about an hour a month! Send an email to contact@flapaccotink.org.



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