



Friends of Lake Accotink Park Newsletter

January 2022



**Wishing you good times, good cheer,
and a memorable new year!**

The Friends of Lake Accotink Park want to thank you for your support and generosity this past year. We hope to see you again soon in the new year!

Happy New Year Friends of Lake Accotink Park,

After last year's quiet holiday season, I hope you enjoyed valuable time alongside friends and family these past weeks. The pandemic has been difficult, yet you, the Friends of Lake Accotink Park (FLAP), remained unwavering in your ardent vision to improve our community. I'm grateful for your work to make sure

Braddock District remains a great place to live and raise a family. From hosting dozens of socially distanced trash clean-ups, officially welcoming the Margaret Kinder Pollinator Garden (see photo), and hosting a tribute event for well-loved community leader Dick Sargent, FLAP has kept families and friends connected throughout the pandemic.



Here in Braddock, we are fortunate to have a county-wide flagship environmental gem called Lake Accotink. One of the challenges of having an abundant green space is making sure it stays clean. Week in and week out, FLAP mobilizes volunteers from all neighborhoods and all ages to provide environmental aid—through various

projects—to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA). These community-focused projects gave FLAP members, volunteers, and hundreds of residents much-needed refuge and community bonding during stressful times. It also ensured the community at large could enjoy the beauty our local natural oasis offers.

I was ecstatic, yet unsurprised, when the 2021 Best of Braddock Awards Selection Committee chose FLAP as the winner of the Neighborhood Beautification, Enhancement, or Community-Building Effort category this year. Clearly, the committee chose FLAP from a list of many great nominees because of its extraordinary milestones. Along with local success, it was remarkable to see your efforts garner national attention as a recipient of Starbucks' Foundation Neighborhood Grant program—a competitive grant competition where less than 20% of nominees were selected this year. These tangible achievements reaffirm the work FLAP carries out is a beacon of light—both locally, and even nationally!

As the Braddock District Supervisor, I look forward to continuing the area's environmental work alongside FCPA, advocacy groups, residents, and you, FLAP! As we move into a new year, I eagerly await the new endeavors, projects, and community organizing FLAP will embark on. You can count on my support!

If you would like to stay up-to-date on local community news, county resources, and important information, sign up for my newsletter by emailing Braddock@Fairfaxcounty.gov with "Subscribe" in the subject line. You can also follow me on Facebook @SupervisorJamesWalkinshaw, Twitter @JRWalkinshaw, and Instagram @SupervisorJamesWalkinshaw.

Yours in service,
Supervisor James Walkinshaw



Jai Cole Named as New Park Authority Executive Director

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors affirmed the selection of Jai Cole as Executive Director of the Park Authority in September, voting to accept the recommendation of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board. Cole, a park professional with more than two decades of leadership experience with award-winning recreation and park agencies, will begin immediately, filling the vacancy created by the retirement of Park Authority Executive Director Kirk Kincannon earlier this year.

Cole comes to the Park Authority from the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery Parks (M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks) where she served as Chief of the Park Planning and Stewardship Division since 2018. Park Authority Board Chairman Bill Bouie remarked, "Along with the rest of the Park Authority board, I am very excited to welcome Jai Cole as our new Executive Director. Jai has the experience and vision to lead the Park Authority staff and residents of Fairfax County as we continue our mission to support the changing needs in parks. At the forefront of that mission will be how we fully engage and support the One Fairfax policy, one of our major decision drivers moving forward. We look forward to working with Jai to define and implement that strategy."

In her role as Chief of the Park Planning and Stewardship Division, Cole provided overall strategic direction for long-range planning, natural resource management, cultural resource stewardship and interpretation, trail planning and construction,

development review, and environmental project review for a 37,000 acre, nationally accredited, six-time Gold Medal winning park system. The M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks, has a \$127 million annual budget and a \$317 million, six-year Capital Improvement Program budget.

Cole previously served with M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks, as their Natural Resource Manager, and has held several other positions in that agency related to natural resource management and aquatic ecology beginning in 2005. Cole also worked as the Director of Adult Programs at Reston Community Center from 2003 until 2005.

Cole grew up in Fairfax County, residing in Reston for 25 years. She attended South Lakes High School where she played youth softball, basketball, and field hockey. She then went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in biology at the University of North Carolina Greensboro where she played Division I basketball. Cole resides in Silver Spring, MD, with her husband and two children.

The First Quarterly FLAP Trash Off: A High School Showdown!

By Yasmine Marrero, Young FLAPers Director

On October 17, FLAP hosted the first quarterly Trash Off: A High School Showdown! Three schools accepted the great challenge: Annandale, Edison, and Lewis High Schools. Combined, volunteers combed 497 acres to collect an incredible estimated 1,500 lbs. of trash in two hours.

Removing these harmful pollutants from the land and waterways not only improves the environment's health but the wildlife's health as well. We will hold these challenges on a quarterly basis, highlighting the school that recovers the most trash from the lake at each event. The first-place winner at the first Trash Off was the John R. Lewis High School team. A big thank you to all our volunteers and congratulations to the winners of the showdown!

Volunteers representing Lewis High School won a pizza party for their team. When asked about the competition, winning team captain Edward Carino said "Overall, my peers and I enjoyed the experience and would love to come back for more! Thanks again, FLAP!"

Join us for the next Trash Off on January 16, 2022, 12–2 p.m.! If your high school is interested in taking on the challenge, email youngflappers@flapaccotink.org. We'd love to have even more teams compete for our next High School Showdown.



You're Invited!



Caring For & Exploring the Pollinator Garden

WHEN: 2nd Sunday of every 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



Monthly FLAP Lake Accotink Park Clean 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

Annual Bird Count Returns to Lake Accotink

By Su Jewell, Springfield Area CBC Coordinator

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 on Christmas Day 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 21 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, and other reasons.

Each year, National Audubon sets the dates of the count as December 14 to January 5. The count in the Springfield area this year will be held on January 2, no matter the weather, with five pre-arranged teams. If you see people with binoculars walking around Lake Accotink Park and other Springfield areas on that day, you may want to thank these volunteers for helping to contribute to the knowledge of bird populations.



This photo was taken five years ago at the Lake Accotink dam. Is it a giant Komodo Dragon on top of the dam, or just logs? Hmmm....

The Accotink Alligator

By Jim Hickey, FLAP Secretary

Back in the last century there was an alligator in Lake Accotink—really!

Well, it was actually a caiman, which is a smaller member of the American Alligator family. But in the spring of 1999 a three-foot-long caiman was spotted in the lake by numerous visitors to the park. As word got around, several people set out to capture it, including my teenage son and I. We took our canoe out with some lunch meat and some nets. To no avail, though.

But a couple who live near the lake saw the caiman sunning himself near the shore. They threw a fishing net over the beast and took him back to their townhouse, putting him in a baby pool, still in the net. Animal Control was notified and a warden soon came to take charge. The gator attempted a last-minute getaway, but was foiled by the experienced warden.

The fugitive never revealed how he happened to be in a Fairfax County Park. It was theorized he had been someone's pet that had grown too large for a home. Experts say that survival during the winter months would have been very difficult.

Fortunately a new home was found for the caiman. He moved to the Shenandoah Valley, to reside at the Luray Reptile Center and Dinosaur Park. There the Lake Accotink caiman can entertain visitors in a safe and warm habitat.

So watch carefully while at the park—you never know what you'll see! Maybe Bigfoot will make an appearance next.

NEWSWORTHY

Save the Date: **Lake Accotink Park 60th Anniversary Celebration**

Lake Accotink Park was established in 1962, almost 60 years ago. On

The Benches Are Back!

Remember when you needed a little rest while you were walking on the trail and you sat down on a bench? Did you notice

Dog Waste Clean Up

The park has recently expanded the number of doggie waste stations where you can pick up plastic bags and drop off

August 27, 2022, we plan to have a 60th anniversary celebration! Reps from FCPA, Lee District, Braddock District, and FLAP will be in attendance.

Many things have changed over that time, and many things—like our enjoyment of the park—have stayed the same.

A certified historian is now sifting through thousands of documents related to the park. We also are forming a committee to plan the celebration next summer. We hope this will be a glorious event for our wonderful Lake Accotink Park. Send an email to contact@flapaccotink.org if you would like to help with the 60th anniversary celebration.

that the benches were missing for awhile?

Well, after some repair and updates, now the benches are back! The trail now has numerous benches around the lake for your enjoyment of the view and opportunity to catch your breath. Thanks to Lake Accotink park manager Dan Grulke and his team for installing the new benches. One more great reason to come and relax at Lake Accotink!

the filled bags at 10 locations around the lake. And patrons of the park have certainly been using them! More than 140,000 bags have been dispersed since the beginning of the pandemic. Park employees say removing the dog waste has made a real impact on the soil quality.

Have you ever wanted to report an issue or problem to the park staff but didn't know how to describe the location? Well now the doggie waste stations have stickers with numbers on them, so you can clearly pinpoint the stretch of trail you are talking about. You also might want to report when a station is out of bags and needs a refill.

The trail is checked by staff once per week, but they rely on your careful eyes (and maybe noses) to report what might have happened in the meantime.

Friends of Lake Accotink Park Board

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

We're accepting candidates for board positions! It is your Lake Accotink Park—help make a difference for about an hour a month. Send an email to Contact@flapaccotink.org.



Donate to FLAP

Text FLAP to 22828 to receive monthly updates.

Friends of Lake Accotink Park | FLAP P.O. Box 1203, Springfield, VA 22151

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