

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

FALL 2025



FODM 2025 Member Meetings

October 22, 7 p.m., Zoom, Beavers

Calendar of Events

October

- 11 and 25, 10 a.m., Invasive Plant Control
- 18, 9 a.m., Trash Cleanup, Haul Road Trail
- 18, Raptor Rapture, 1 to 3 p.m., Fort Hunt Park, Pavilion A
- 20, 1 p.m., Fall Colors Walk, Haul Road Trail
- 21, 9 a.m., Natural History Walk with NPS
- 22, Member Program, 7 p.m., Zoom, Beaver Business

November

- 8 and 22, 10 a.m., Invasive Plant Control

December

- 6 and 20, 10 a.m., Invasive Plant Control

Visit www.FODM.org for details and updates.

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Beaver Business, Co-Existing with Castor Canadensis, October 22, 7 p.m., Zoom

Please join FODMers on Zoom on October 22, 7 p.m., for Alison Zak's presentation on beavers (*Castor canadensis*), "nature's engineers."

Ms. Zak will provide a brief history of human interactions with beavers over time, an overview of beaver ecology and behavior and explore the benefits that beavers and the wetlands they create provide to our watersheds, landscapes and communities. She will also review effective and non-lethal methods for managing beaver-caused challenges like tree damage and flooding.

Zak is the founder and executive director of the Fairfax-based Human-Beaver Coexistence Fund. She has studied human-wildlife conflict and worked as an environmental educator. This program's cosponsors are the Friends of



Photo by Mike Digout

Huntley Meadows Park, the Friends of Mason Neck State Park and Nature Forward.

Register at www.fodm.org.

Preserving Safety and Beauty Along the Parkway

BY LT. ANNA ROSE, COMMANDER, U.S. PARK POLICE, DISTRICT 2, GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY STATION

As the new Commander of the U.S. Park Police's District 2 Station, I have the privilege of leading the team responsible for patrolling and protecting the southern section of the George Washington Memorial Parkway -- a place that blends history, natural beauty and daily recreation for thousands of visitors.

Over the past several months, our officers have been hard at work addressing long-standing concerns in the Dyke Marsh area. One of our major priorities has been removing abandoned and derelict boats that have collected in and around the marsh. These vessels pose a real danger, not only as eyesores but also as environmental hazards. Clearing them has been no small task, but it is one that reflects our commitment to restoring and maintaining the natural integrity of this treasured landscape.

We have also worked closely with marina staff in the area to coordinate operations and ensure a smoother, safer experience for visitors, whether they are launching a kayak, fishing or simply enjoying the view. Collaboration like this helps us deliver a more seamless and welcoming environment for everyone who visits Dyke Marsh.

At the same time, we have increased our enforcement presence along the Parkway itself, particularly in response to speeding violations. This stretch of road sees heavy use from commuters, cyclists, runners and families visiting nearby parks, Mount Vernon and trails. Speeding here does not just break the law. It puts lives at risk. That is why we have stepped up patrols and are actively working to reduce dangerous driving behaviors. Public safety is and always will be at the core of what we do.

We also encourage members of the public to be our partners in promoting safety. If you see suspicious activity, unsafe driving or other violations along the Parkway or in the Dyke Marsh area, please do not hesitate to contact our dispatch operations center

at 202-610-7500. Timely reporting helps us respond quickly and effectively to keep the community safe.

We are also part of ongoing conversations with the National Park Service and regional partners about long-term road safety improvements along the southern end of the Parkway. As those discussions continue, I can assure the community that safety remains our shared priority.

None of this work happens in a vacuum. It takes strong partnerships to keep the Parkway safe and enjoyable, and we are fortunate to have one with the Friends of Dyke Marsh. Your commitment to environmental protection and community education has been an asset to our efforts. We are grateful for your ongoing collaboration and shared dedication to this unique ecosystem.

As we move forward, I want all who visit the Parkway and Dyke Marsh to know that the U.S. Park Police are here -- not only to enforce the law, but to support and protect the spaces we all cherish. Together, with our partners and the public, we are working every day to make the Parkway a safe, beautiful place for all to enjoy.

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or our Facebook page.

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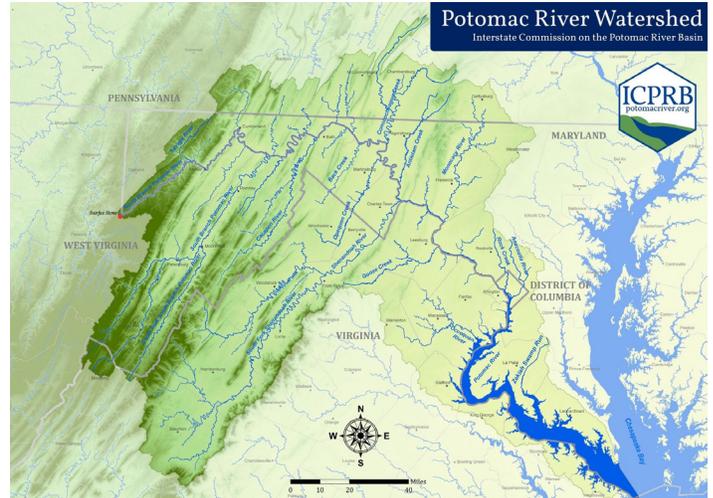
A River Divided: Who Owns the Potomac River?

BY MICHAEL NARDOLILLI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INTERSTATE COMMISSION ON THE POTOMAC RIVER BASIN

Why are the state boundary lines along the Potomac River so irregular? Why doesn't the line run neatly down the middle of the river, as it does in many other states? The fascinating story behind the Potomac's peculiar borders involves colonial land grants, centuries-old legal disputes and evolving interpretations of land and water rights.

Ownership of the Potomac River was entangled in three conflicting colonial land grants that reflected the newly-arrived people's lack of knowledge about the watershed. In the early 1600s, England's Virginia Company received land grants for Virginia, Maryland and parts of Pennsylvania from King James I. Second, in 1632, King James granted land to Lord Baltimore, in what is now Maryland, extending from the state's current northern border, south to the Potomac River's southern bank, and west to the river's "first fountain" or its source. This is the basis of Maryland's claim to the entire Potomac. Finally, Virginia's Northern Neck — the area between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers from the Chesapeake Bay to the headwaters — was granted to Lord Fairfax.

The first step was to identify the "first fountain" of the Potomac among the many tributaries in its headwaters. Is the source of the Potomac River what we now know as North Branch Potomac (then known as the Cohaugoruton River)? Perhaps the South Branch? Or is it either the north fork or south fork of the Shenandoah River? In 1736, Virginia sent a scouting party up the mainstem of the Potomac River to find the source. The surveyors chose the northernmost branch of the river, what we call the North Branch Potomac River today. Choosing the northern route up the Potomac also just happened to maximize the size of Virginia. The surveyors designated the Fairfax Stone in today's West Virginia as the river's source — and Maryland's western bound-



Map of the Potomac River watershed (Credit: ICPRB)

ary which is along the river just north of Fairfax Stone — setting the stage for centuries of boundary arguments.

In 1776, Virginia's first Constitution ceded the river to Maryland, but reserved Virginia's right to "free navigation and use of the river." Maryland disputed Virginia's claim, and the two states slapped tariffs on each other's products that crossed the Potomac. In 1785, George Washington invited conferees from both states to his home, Mount Vernon. There, the joint commission drafted the Compact of 1785, which was then confirmed by both state legislatures, thus codifying by compact the right to toll-free travel along the Potomac.

Through many court cases, arbitrations, legislation and laws, the southern bank of the river became recognized as the boundary. State legislatures approved the Black-Jenkins Award of 1877, which declared the line would run from one headland to the next, not along the shore indentations. Land along the tidal Potomac would be set by the courts. Finally, in 1945, Congress approved a bill and President Truman signed into law the boundary line between Washington, D.C. and Virginia. The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River is an interstate compact commission established by Congress in 1940 to protect and enhance the waters and related resources of the Potomac River basin through science, regional cooperation and education. Represented by appointed commissioners, the ICPRB includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the federal government.



Boundary marker (Credit: ICPRB)



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

We greatly appreciate our volunteers who, for example, lead walks, staff tables, work on invasive plants, clean up trash and conduct surveys. A special “hats off” to Larry Cartwright who has led the Breeding Bird Survey for over 30 years. “Without volunteers, we’d be a nation without a soul,” said former First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

Volunteer Hours Add Up

The dollar value for each volunteer hour contributed nationwide is \$34.79, reports Scott Hill, GWM Parkway Volunteer Coordinator. He emailed, “For June and July 2025, FODM contributed 479 hours so the total amount FODM contributed is \$16,664. FODM averages about 200 hours a month which puts your contribution at about \$7,000 to \$8,000 a month or between \$80,000 and \$90,000 a year.”

Generous Funders for Our Projects

We have a new wayside on the boardwalk explaining the Dyke Marsh restoration and stabilization project. We thank the Virginia Lakes and Watersheds Association for helping fund the sign and NPS for working with us to make it happen. We hope it helps explain that the breakwater and sills were built to stabilize the marsh and encourage sediment accretion.



Thanks to a generous donation from the Virginia Lakes and Watersheds Association, FODM and NPS created and installed a new sign on the boardwalk. Photo by Glenda Booth

We are grateful to the Dominion Charitable Foundation for an \$8,000 grant to control some invasive plants. With NPS, we hired Invasive Plant Control to treat several species. To complete the job, we are likely to need more funds

so we welcome donations. Invasive plants can outcompete more ecologically-valuable native plants and degrade habitat.

New Website and Boxes

We send a big thank you to Board member Bob Veltkamp who managed the upgrade of our website to update the look, improve usability, better present information, offer better access from a cellphone or tablet and streamline membership renewals and donations.

Thanks too to Bernie Krell for installing three new boxes for our materials on the Haul Road Trail bulletin board.

Fall Bird Migration

Bird migration is well underway. The fall bird migration is actually a post-breeding migration,” wrote Paul Kerlinger in *How Birds Migrate*. For some birds, migration starts in mid-summer and for some, it extends into December. “From the birds’ perspective, migration involves a long time and many places,” Kerlinger observed. To learn how many birds crossed our area last night, visit <http://birdcast.info>.

Ominous Signs

And now for some disturbing news. A July report by the secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands reported that since 1970 more than one-fifth of the world’s wetlands have been lost. Some are no longer viable and some have completely disappeared. One quarter of the remaining wetlands are in “ecological distress.” Human activity is the major contributing factor, including filling wetlands, pollution, invasive species and climate disruptions.

Keeping up with Department of Interior (DOI) and NPS headquarters’ actions is challenging. We joined other friends’ groups and urged Congress to support our national parks.

Here’s an excerpt from the letter, initiated by the National Parks Conservation Association: “For more than a century, our national parks have remained America’s favorite places, important pieces of our natural and cultural heritage designated for future generations to explore and enjoy. Unfortunately, NPS has lost 24 percent of its permanent staff since January, reducing the agency’s ability to care for our nation’s most iconic places. Visitor centers are reducing hours, trails and facilities are falling into disrepair, and education programs are being cancelled. Our parks’ natural and cultural heritage are already significantly at risk and the visiting experience and local economies that rely on visitors could be impacted.” Learn more at <https://www.npca.org/articles/10046-senate-committee-moves-bill-to-protect-national-park-staffing-and-funding>. For more on advocates’ efforts, visit www.npca.org and <https://protectnps.org/>.

The 2024 Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve Breeding Bird Survey Results

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT, COMPILER, Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey

Friends of Dyke Marsh volunteers conducted the 2024 Breeding Bird Survey between May 25 and July 7, but I entered any data collected outside of this period that confirmed breeding activity into the database. This permits us to filter out most migrants that do not breed here. I also added information provided by reliable outside sources to supplement data reported by the survey teams.



Great-crested flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*). Photo by Mike Ready

The survey tract encompassed the Belle Haven Park picnic area, the Belle Haven Marina, the open marsh, including what we call the “Little and Big Guts,” the floodplain forest around the marsh, the Virginia shoreline to the channel of the Potomac River and the surrounding area from the stone bridge at the mouth of Hunting Creek near Porto Vecchio to south of Morningside Lane. Although the survey tract is larger than the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, I call the entire tract the Dyke Marsh survey tract.

The survey methodology uses behavioral criteria to determine the breeding status of all species found in the Dyke Marsh survey tract. We place species into one of four categories: confirmed breeder, probable breeder, possible breeder and present. Our teams reported 80 species in the survey tract in 2024. There were 47 species confirmed as breeders, six as probable breeders and 15 as possible breeders. Additionally, we listed twelve species as present, but they were a combination of colonial breeding waterbird species not using a rookery inside the survey tract, species in unsuitable breeding habitat and migrants still heading north. I should emphasize that we define a

confirmed breeder as a species that is attempting to breed in the survey tract. It does not suggest breeding success, meaning the production of fledged young.

Troubling Declines

The results of the survey show a decline in numbers, a reduction in breeding success and perhaps even a change in breeding strategy in some species in Dyke Marsh, most notably migrant songbirds. The data show the largest numerical declines have occurred in warbling vireos (*Vireo gilvus*), yellow warblers (*Setophaga petechia*), eastern kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) and even normally ubiquitous blue-gray gnatcatchers (*Poliotila caerulea*).



Warbling vireo (*Vireo gilvus*). Photo by Ed Eder

I use 2015 as a comparison since it was one of the last years that I reported that woodland breeding songbird species were maintaining sustainable populations. The decline was slow to develop but has accelerated in recent years.

In 2015, volunteers identified at least 20 warbling vireo territories distributed throughout the survey tract from the Belle Haven picnic area to Morningside Lane in the south marsh. During that survey, observers found

three nests and adults feeding fledged young or carrying food at multiple locations. In contrast, in 2024, volunteers reported no more than eight territories, five of those on the Haul Road peninsula past the dogleg turn. There was a single report of a bird carrying nesting material to confirm a breeding attempt, but nobody confirmed any fledged young.

In 2015, surveyors documented a dozen yellow warbler territories, with eight or nine concentrated near the boardwalk at the end of the Haul Road Trail. The 2024 observations yielded no more than two singing males, both near the boardwalk. You can imagine my surprise then when a reliable observer reported an adult male with a fledged youngster on July 10.

The recent drop in the common blue-gray gnatcatcher has been the biggest surprise. Counts normally exceeded double digits in 2015 and nests and fledged young were not difficult to find, especially along the Haul Road Trail. A walk down the trail in 2024 yielded no more than three individuals at best, maybe four if you could find a breeding pair. One person documented a nest near Dead Beaver Beach and another reported a pair with nesting material at the dogleg turn, but there is no evidence that either attempt proved successful.

Eastern kingbirds present an interesting story as numbers show an increasing decline. In 2015, the species was evenly distributed in the wildlife preserve along the Potomac shoreline from the Belle Haven picnic area to south of Morningside Lane where they nested primarily in sycamore trees. That year volunteers found a total of eight nests. Breeding pairs generally single-clutched (making one nesting attempt). The birds generally completed nest building by late May and we documented young in the nest by mid-June. Nestlings were fledging by July 4 and clutches contained two or three young. There seemed to be one exception. One pair began a late nesting attempt in late June with observers reporting fledged young by mid-August.



Two Eastern kingbird nestlings (Tyrannus tyrannus). Photo by Ed Eder

Eastern kingbirds now seem to be modifying their breeding strategy, partly by double-clutching (making back-to-back nesting attempts) and having fewer young. The 2024 survey yielded only four nests, and at least two of these nests were the product of a double-clutching breeding pair that volunteers found at the Haul Road boardwalk. I'm sure it was the same breeding pair that we observed at the boardwalk during the 2023 survey and they repeated the same performance in 2024 as they had done the previous year. The first nesting attempt of 2024 began in late May, and two youngsters fledged by June 30. While continuing to feed these fledged birds, the pair began constructing a second nest by July 18 just a few feet away from the first nest. This attempt also produced two nestlings that fledged August 23.



Eastern kingbird feeding recently fledged youngster at boardwalk on the day of fledging. Photo by Ed Eder

I believe a second breeding pair at the Belle Haven Marina used the same breeding strategy as the boardwalk pair. The marina pair completed a nest by June 6, but the nest apparently failed by the end of June. Observers found another active nest in the marina on July 13 and the breeding pair successfully fledged two youngsters from this nest by mid-August. Finally, a volunteer kayaking in the south marsh reported two fledged eastern kingbirds in mid-July, meaning that at least three kingbird breeding pairs successfully bred in Dyke Marsh in 2024.

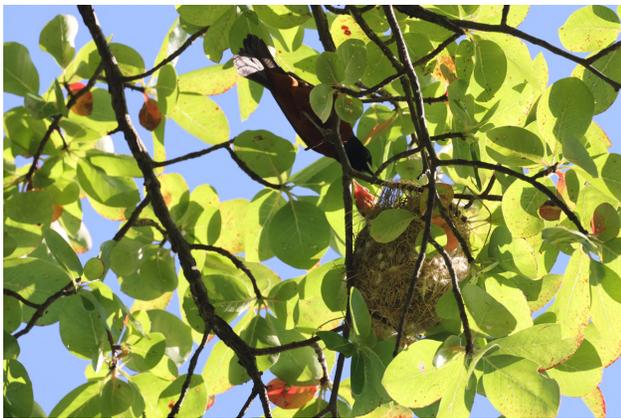
One final word on eastern kingbirds is in order. I noticed during the 2023 survey that adult kingbirds modified their choice of prey items to include large insects like carpenter bees rather than relying heavily on their traditional prey, odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), to feed themselves and their offspring. At the time, I speculated that a decline in odonates was responsible for the apparent change in breeding strategy, but I'm sure there are multiple reasons.

I was pleased with orchard oriole numbers (*Icterus spurius*) in 2024 with at least 12 territories and delighted that Baltimore orioles (*Icterus galbula*) appeared to be making a comeback with around eight territories in the survey tract by early June. However, these numbers did not



Orchard oriole pair (*Icterus spurius*) engaged in courtship. Photo by Ed Eder

translate into evidence of significant breeding success for either species. Observers found one Baltimore oriole nest with nestlings on Dyke Island and an orchard oriole nest containing nestlings at the Big Gut Bridge, both in mid-June. A later survey yielded a second orchard oriole nest at Dead Beaver Beach. That was it for the entire tract where oriole nests used to be easier to locate. To add insult to injury, in July we found an adult orchard oriole feeding a fledgling. The only problem was that the youngster was a brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).



Orchard oriole feeding nestlings. Photo by Ed Eder

I have practically written off Acadian flycatchers (*Empidonax vireescens*) and northern parulas (*Setophaga americana*) as breeders in Dyke Marsh. I used to enjoy finding a small Acadian flycatcher cup nest with material hanging down almost a foot from the bottom of the nest, but

that was some time ago. In 2024, there was one northern parula and two Acadian flycatchers along the Haul Road Trail and a third Acadian flycatcher near the Tulane Drive parking lot in the south marsh. However, all these birds went unrecorded after mid-June, perhaps because they departed when apparently, they were unable to find mates.

Some Good News

Not all news about our breeding songbirds is negative. Great-crested flycatchers (*Myiarchus crinitus*), prothonotary warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*) and indigo buntings (*Passerina cyanea*) are maintaining a robust population and are confirmed as breeders with fledged young every year. Although present in smaller numbers than the birds mentioned above, eastern wood-peewees (*Contopus virens*), red-eyed vireos (*Vireo olivaceus*) and common yellowthroats (*Geothlypis trichas*) are tallied yearly as summer occupants of the marsh and are often recorded as breeders, even if not every year.

Many people show intense interest in the breeding success of raptors in Dyke Marsh. The data show a mixed bag in 2024. The Haul Road Trail bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) pair produced three fledged young for the third consecutive year. The Tulane Drive nest collapsed after two young fledged in 2023 and the eagle breeding pair constructed a new nest that winter in a residential backyard on the west side of the parkway at Park Terrace Drive just south of Tulane Drive. The nest was successful during its first year with the breeding pair fledging at least one of two nestlings. We did not document young at the Morningside nest.

Some ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) struggled in 2024, with the Belle Haven Marina nest and one of the Porto Vecchio platform nests failing before young were produced. However, the second Porto Vecchio nest produced two fledged young, including one bird rescued from fishing line and plastic netting entanglement while still a nestling by a “rescue team” from the Porto Vecchio condominiums. Also, osprey nests on Bird and Angel Islands in the south marsh produced two fledglings.

I end the raptor report with owls. The barred owl (*Strix varia*) breeding pair were once again successful, fledging two youngsters that emerged from their cavity nest near the south end of the Belle Haven picnic area in late April. Many fans enjoyed observing the young owls and their parents through mid-June when the birds vanished. The 2024 great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) nesting attempt ended in failure as the adults abandoned the nest in March, perhaps because of human disturbance.

A kayaker in the Big Gut confirmed the least bittern (*Botaurus exilis*) as a breeder in 2024 with the presence of one fledged bird. Although this is fewer than the four

youngsters probably representing two family groups that this surveyor reported in 2023, the presence of adult birds in the upper Big Gut, Little Gut and Dyke Island show that the breeding area has experienced no further reduction since 2023. To top it all off, we confirmed the green heron (*Butorides virescens*) as a breeder in the marsh for the second straight year with the observation of a breeding pair accompanied by a single fledged youngster near the Haul Road bridge.

The Breeding Bird Survey could not be conducted without volunteers who collect the data. Thanks to all those who participated in or provided information to the 2024 survey.

In alphabetical order, they are:

- Eldon Boes
- Glenda Booth
- Ed Eder
- Sandy Farkas
- Bill Hoover
- Todd Kiraly
- Elizabeth Krone
- Laura McDonald
- Roger Miller
- David (Nick) Nichols
- Robert Smith
- Sherman Suter
- Margaret Wohler
- Alisa Wong
- Katherine Wychulis

Definition of Categories:

Confirmed Breeder: Any species for which there is at minimum evidence of a nest. A species need not successfully fledge young to be placed in the confirmed category.

Probable Breeder: Any species engaged in pre-nesting activity, such as a male on territory, courtship behavior or even the presence of a pair, but for which there is no evidence of a nest. Since birds can and do sing and display to females during migration, this category cannot be used until the safe dates are reached.

Possible Breeder: Any species, male or female, observed in suitable habitat, but giving no hard evidence of breeding. Unless actively breeding, all birds in suitable habitat before the start of the safe date are placed in this category.

Present: Any species observed that is not in suitable habitat or out of its breeding range. It also applies to colonial water birds in the survey tract not associated with a rookery.

Definition of Safe Dates: We use safe dates as a means of deciding if a bird can be considered a breeder or a migrant. Safe dates are simply defined as a period beginning when all members of a given species have ceased to migrate in the spring and ending when they begin to migrate in the fall. Unless a bird is engaged in behavior that confirms breeding, it will be placed no higher than in the possible breeder category if it is observed outside the safe dates assigned to that species.

The 2024 Breeding Bird Survey Results

Confirmed – 47 species: Canada goose, mallard, mourning dove, least bittern, green heron, osprey, bald eagle, great horned owl, barred owl, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, northern flicker, great-crested flycatcher, eastern kingbird, eastern wood-pewee, warbling vireo, blue jay, fish crow, tree swallow, northern rough-winged swallow, barn swallow, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, white-breasted nuthatch, blue-gray gnatcatcher, gray catbird, brown thrasher, Northern mockingbird, European starling, American robin, house sparrow, house finch, American goldfinch, song sparrow, orchard oriole, Baltimore oriole, red-winged blackbird, brown-headed cowbird, common grackle, black-and-white warbler, prothonotary warbler, common yellow throat, yellow warbler, Northern cardinal, indigo bunting.

Probable – 6 species: Acadian flycatcher, willow flycatcher, red-eyed vireo, Eastern bluebird, American redstart, northern parula .

Possible – 15 species: wood duck, American black duck, yellow-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, killdeer, spotted sandpiper, red-shouldered hawk, belted kingfisher, pileated woodpecker, eastern phoebe, American crow, purple martin, northern house wren, cedar waxwing, cerulean warbler.

Present – 12 species: rock pigeon, least sandpiper, semi-palmated sandpiper, ring-billed gull, Caspian tern, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, black vulture, turkey vulture, magnolia warbler, Wilson's warbler.

What Is a Pest?

BY AARON ANDERSON, XERCES SOCIETY FOR INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION

Humans often define plants, animals and even micro-organisms that have a negative effect on us as “pests.” Maybe they can eat crops, vector disease or damage our homes, but when we step back and look at these living organisms, we often find that they, too, have roles.

A pest is context dependent. In some settings, a “pest” species may be beneficial, such as an ant in a natural area aerating soil and moving seeds, as opposed to where ants are swarming your kitchen counter. The need to respond to a “pest” is also dependent on its population. More specifically, population levels might be so low as to not be harmful or at levels kept in check by natural enemies.



*The large milkweed bug, *Oncopeltus fasciatus*, is a common insect found on milkweed plants and identified by its vibrant orange and black colors. These insects are not a major threat to milkweed plants. Photo by Glenda Booth*

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.”

– Dr. Edward O. Wilson

Welcome New FODM Members

FODM welcomes our new members: Kathleen Bartoloni, Christopher Bunting, Joseph Kitrosser and Paula Craig, Eric Danielsen, Tom Dickey, Andree Dumermuth, Phillip Fraas, Steven Garron, David Hopkins, Preston Huey, Matthew Ko, Alison Mack, Dianne Modell, Steve Percy, Jori Raymond, Casey Ricardo, Scott Roddy, Claudia Stevenson, Scott Taylor, Susan Tomiak and Constance Whiteside. **We welcome our new life members,** Sara Farabow, Tatiana Lipsey, Ralph Luken and Linda Schierow and **conversions to life membership,** Marianne Ginsburg, Patricia McCarthy and Nancy Rybicki.

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**

Planting Black Willows

BY JIM GEARING, FODM Board Member

In 2024, in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), FODM initiated a project to help stabilize the marsh, planting black willow (*Salix nigra*) trees in the marsh. In 2010 and 2013, the U.S. Geological Survey concluded that Dyke Marsh was in a net erosional state and without action, would be completely gone by 2035. (See <https://www.fodm.org/restoration/restoring-the-marsh.html>). With our support, NPS is implementing a stabilization plan.

Another factor that is likely destabilizing the marsh is that most pumpkin ash trees (*Fraxinus profunda*) in the marsh, the most prevalent tree species in the intertidal area, are at risk because of the invasive emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*). Trees and their root systems help stabilize marsh sediments.



Volunteers planted black willow stakes, which were sprouting. Photo by Glenda Booth

In April 2024, volunteers planted 150 black willow stakes near the Haul Road Trail and did not put cages around them, assuming that beavers would not want to eat them until they were more mature. Unfortunately, this planting had a mortality rate of over 90 percent, because, apparently, beavers pulled the stakes out of the ground to eat the bark.

On March 24, 2025, ten FODM volunteers turned out on a good, wet day for the second planting. We put wire cages over the stakes and over the re-remaining live 2024 stakes and secured all cages in the ground. We tagged the 2024 plant cages with small red cable ties and the 2025 cages with white cable ties, so we can identify the two plantings.

We started conducting periodic surveys of the black



Volunteers installed cages around the black willow stakes to protect them from beavers. Photo by Glenda Booth

willow stakes' viability in May 2024 and we conducted two more surveys on May 5 and June 20, 2025. We counted both cages and live stakes. We counted cages to verify that what we set in March was or was not still there.

Results

Of 50 stakes planted, we found 49 cages with stakes from the 2025 planting in the May 5 survey. Since we failed to count the stakes before planting, we are not sure how many we planted, but we estimate that there are 49 or 50 cages in the planting area. They can be hard to find because of the dense vegetation.

Our June 20, 2025 survey found that seven percent of the original 2024 stakes are alive. The mortality rate was large soon after the planting and did not abate. Mortality was primarily due to beavers pulling out the black willow stakes to eat the bark, in our view.

The June 20 survey found that at least 58 percent of the 2025 plantings are alive. The cages appear to be the obvious difference in the mortality rate.

We will continue to monitor the plantings several times a year and welcome volunteer help. In two or three years, we assume the black willows will be mature enough to withstand the beavers. We will then remove the cages and let nature take its course.



Volunteers secured the cages in the ground. Photo by Glenda Booth

We learned several lessons, including the need to protect black willow stakes from beavers.

Plastic Pollution Is Persistent

Plastic bottles are commonly collected during trash cleanups along the river.

A July study in Scientific Reports found that for three major beverage companies -- Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Nestlé -- roughly 60 million metric tons (MMT) ends up as pollution on land and roughly 20 MMT polluted waterways.

And though each company committed to reduce plastic waste, only eight to eleven percent of their plastic products were recycled, with up to 58 percent becoming pollution. Without changes, these three companies could produce nearly 340 additional MMT of plastic (equivalent to roughly 374 million U.S. tons) by 2050, which would burden countries with an estimated \$100 billion in clean up costs

Single-use plastic production has nearly doubled over the last ten years. The study concluded, “. . . a disproportionate amount of plastic pollution could be avoided if industry took responsibility at end-of-life . . . Results of the present analysis suggest that a course change by a few important players could help to make real progress toward the protection of global human populations, wildlife, and threatened natural resources.”

In May, Department of Interior Secretary Doug Burgum signed an order rescinding the Biden administration’s 2022 order to phase out the purchase, sale and distribution of single-use plastics in national parks and other public lands by 2032.

A spokesperson from the 5 Gyres Institute told Forbes magazine that single-use plastic is “pervasive across federal lands,” that plastic is almost 80 percent of waste recorded in 2024 in national parks. The Department of Interior gave this response to our inqui-



Plastic bottles and fast food debris are common trash cleanup targets in Dyke Marsh. Photo by Glenda Booth

ry: “The Secretary’s Order 3430 speaks for itself.” The Secretary’s direction through this order is in alignment with the President Trump’s Executive Order 14208, titled ‘Ending Procurement and Forced Use of Paper Straws.’” The order directs departments and agencies “to repeal or revise any policies that limit the availability of plastic products without a compelling scientific or statutory basis. It further emphasizes the importance of agency discretion, operational flexibility, and product performance in procurement and public service delivery.”

In response to the Secretary’s claim of lack of scientific basis, Paulita Bennett Marting with the 5 Gyres Institute said that single-use plastic is “pervasive across federal lands,” that plastic makes up nearly 80 percent of pollution in national parks. She added, “Plastics continue to break up into harmful micro and nano-plastics that threaten not only these protected ecosystems and wildlife, but also human health.”

Congratulations Dixie and Carolyn

Congratulations to Dixie Sommers who received the James Eike Award from the Virginia Society for Ornithology (VSO). Dixie was Vice President of FODM for many years and organized our bird walks. For the VSO, Dixie was a Board member, newsletter editor, treasurer and fund raising chair for the second Virginia breeding bird atlas which will be out October 31.

On August 14, the Fairfax County Park Authority announced that FODM Board member Carolyn

Gamble was chosen as a recipient of the Fairfax County Elly Doyle Park Service award: “Gamble retired as Huntley Meadows Park Site Manager after 30 years and has volunteered for more than a decade supporting the park and Historic Huntley. She created a major exhibit for their anniversaries and co-led efforts to increase park funding, strengthening community connection and advocacy.



The Friends of Dyke Marsh
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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
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membership page.



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DUES AMOUNT..... \$ _____
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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).