

# 2024

## ANNUAL REPORT



KEEPING OUR WATER CLEAN —  
FOR DRINKING, FOR PLAYING, FOR LIFE





Our mission is to protect the right to clean water for all communities and all those who live in and rely upon the Potomac and Shenandoah watersheds by stopping pollution, making drinking water safe, protecting healthy river habitats, and enhancing use and enjoyment for all.

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*Unless otherwise noted, all photo credit goes to Alan Lehman Shenandoah Riverkeeper Program Manager*



*Betsy with cheerful river enthusiasts!*

## A YEAR OF TRANSITION, RESOLVE, AND IMPACT

2024 was a year of change—for the Potomac Riverkeeper Network and for me personally. When I stepped into the role of President, I did so with a deep sense of responsibility, humility, and fierce commitment to the mission that brought me here in the first place: protecting the public's right to clean water. After a few months in the role, I am more committed than ever.

This past year, we advanced our campaigns to tackle PFAS contamination, expanded our water patrol and drone programs to uncover illegal pollution, defended public access to rivers under threat, and began implementing major legal victories that will deliver cleaner water for years to come. We did all this while remaining a lean organization. That kind of impact per dollar, per person—it's extraordinary.

When Nancy Stoner transitioned out of her leadership role, she left behind big shoes to fill. I was honored when the Board asked me to lead PRKN into its next chapter, and I took on that challenge with a full heart—and a full understanding of just how high the bar had been set. But I've never believed in doing this work alone. The impact we had in 2024 is a testament to our extraordinary staff, our volunteers, our Riverkeepers, and our unwavering community of supporters—you.

In a time of regulatory uncertainty and environmental rollbacks, our role is more important than ever. We're not just advocates; we are investigators, watchdogs, litigators, scientists, and storytellers. And we're needed now more than ever to protect the places and people who rely on clean water.

As you read this report, I hope you see yourself in our wins—because none of this would be possible without your support. Thank you for standing with us. Let's keep fighting together.



*Betsy in her happy place*



## WE ARE A POWERHOUSE IN PROGRAMS AND LITIGATION!

### SWAN POINT – CHARLES COUNTY, MD

Swan Point in Charles County, Maryland, is a lovely waterfront community with many water recreation opportunities, including Cuckold Creek, a placid and scenic tributary of the Potomac.

Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, analyzed the Maryland Department of the Environment's proposed pollution discharge permit for the Swan Point Wastewater Treatment Plant. With the assistance of Swan Point community members – including Nancy Schertler, who is a star Water Quality Monitoring volunteer in Charles County, and Will Tierney, we informed MDE of deficiencies in its draft permit. These included the failure to set limits on nutrient pollution designed to restore the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay and to require disclosure, monitoring, and reporting of toxic PFAS discharges, among other issues.

### POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER NETWORK VS. EPA AND PFAS

We joined farmers in Texas and Maine and a Texas county in a lawsuit against the EPA over its failure to regulate PFAS, a group of toxic chemicals – known as “forever chemicals” – because they do not degrade, present in sewage sludge widely used as fertilizer on farm fields and home gardens.

The Clean Water Act requires EPA to identify and regulate toxic pollutants in sewage sludge, but EPA has failed to act. This mandate – unfulfilled by EPA – arises when scientific evidence shows that the pollutants may harm human health or the environment. These chemicals continue to be spread as fertilizer on farms, pastures, home gardens, and yards, contaminating our rivers and the nation's food and water supply. This litigation we hope will make sewage sludge safe, as the Clean Water Act requires.



*Here's why clean water at Swan Point is so important*

### EMMITSBURG – FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

Founded in 1785, little Emmitsburg, Maryland has a remarkable history. However, it is forward thinking: in 2015, it constructed a solar-powered wastewater treatment plant.

But MDE's proposed 2024 permit renewal for the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), PRKN discovered, had some backward-looking deficiencies.

So when we began our careful analysis of the proposed permit, we discovered that it failed to require the WWTP to disclose, nor to address, PFAS contamination. PRKN recommended revisions to the permit to incorporate monitoring and other enforceable conditions to ascertain and control PFAS pollution discharges; we also urged the identification of upstream PFAS producers and implementation of best management practices to reduce downstream pollution.

*Monocacy looking upriver to Emmitsburg*





## PROTECTING THE POTOMAC — PROGRESS IN ALEXANDRIA IN 2024

THESE MUSSELS ARE THE FUTURE

### MUSSEL SEEDING IN ALEXANDRIA

As part of an historic agreement to settle our lawsuit challenging decades of coal tar residue pollution from a long closed industrial facility, Alexandria agreed to stop the pollution and clean up the site; it also agreed to fund a program to seed mussels at the Bay.

In 2024, the City implemented this aspect of the agreement – its \$300,000 investment enabled representatives from Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources to begin the first mussel seeding near Oronoco Park in Alexandria.

The importance of reintroduction of mussels cannot be overstated: the little things really do incredible work to clean up pollution and sediment – a single mussel can filter 10 gallons of water a day!



*Getting ready to get mussels in the river*

### SEWAGE CONTROL

Vigorous work by AlexRenew Enterprises, the city's wastewater treatment authority and by Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, worked its magic in 2024 – the long needed combined sewer overflow storage tunnel in Alexandria officially opened for business.

A purpose-built tunnel boring machine, nicknamed "Hazel," dug 11,377-feet of 12-foot-diameter concrete-lined tunnel within the past few weeks.

Dean was instrumental in getting the Virginia General Assembly to require the reduction of raw sewage overflows into the Potomac River by more than 96%, one of the most protective plans in the nation. From high school rowing teams, to kayakers, to anglers — everyone who uses the Potomac River downstream of Alexandria will be a beneficiary of this project.



*Dean is always on the spot >*





## PROTECTING THE MIGHTY SHENANDOAH



HAWKSBILL GREENWAY

### SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER MARK FRONDORF WORKS TO SAVE LURAY'S HAWKSBILL CREEK

Hawksbill Creek, in Luray, Virginia, is home to a heavily used walking path – the Greenway – roughly three miles long. It features several locations used by locals as their swimming holes for recreation. In 2024, Friends of the Shenandoah River began testing for bacteria. The first test yielded very high results for contamination. Regrettably, these results were repeated nearly universally throughout 2024.

Mark's investigation identified several cattle herds upriver with direct access to the Hawksbill Creek. The presence of cattle in the streams caused the usual problems: unsafe bacteria counts, bank erosion, excess sediment, and nutrients which contaminated the waters all the way through Hawksbill Creek. Mark and other community leaders approached authorities in the town of Luray asking for their assistance in controlling the cattle access. Unfortunately,

their reply was that because it was not within the town limits, they could do nothing. Folks then approached the Board of Page County, in which Luray is located, and shared with them the availability of state funding for stream exclusionary fencing and alternate watering sources, a program which Mark had helped get the State of Virginia to launch. Unfortunately and inexplicably, however, those representatives told him they would do nothing about it.

So Mark and Alan Lehman, Shenandoah Project Manager, made it their mission to solve the problem for the good of the Creek and its users. Late last fall they began by filing Agricultural Stewardship Act complaints against four of the offending farmers. Their hope is that those complaints will result in the farmers beginning to use the state-provided funding. He and Alan have identified another 10 farms further upriver – Hawksbill Creek goes all the way to Skyline Drive – and they will continue to file complaints, press state regulators, and be on the ground and water ambassadors for clean water. Mark is now putting into action the legislation he helped create.

### SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER PROTECTS TROUT STOCKING STREAM

Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, was alerted last year by Tom Benzing, James Madison University professor emeritus, to a potential erosion and sediment (E&S) control issue concerning Coyner Spring Run, which serves as the trout stocking location for Waynesboro's Trout in the Classroom project. Runoff from a construction project, in heavy rain, threatened the Run. Both Tom and Mark worried that the E&S control was inadequate to prevent sediment-filled runoff from flowing into Coyner Spring Run.

Mark – on a Sunday! – contacted the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) employee in charge of oversight of the project about the danger and need for immediate action. And VDOT got in touch with the contractor that day, who remediated the situation with additional sediment control Monday morning.



Rapid response pays off for Coyner Spring Run — photo credit Tom Benzing



# PROTECTING THE UPPER POTOMAC



## UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER EXPANDS WATER QUALITY MONITORING

In 2024, Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, expanded water quality monitoring in his extensive watershed, which includes the headwaters of the Potomac River – the drinking water source for six million of us. He originally began in Washington County and now tests in 10 sites there. He has expanded into Frederick County with four sites, three of which are in the City of Frederick on the Monocacy River. A handy side note about the Frederick sites: they are all close to Hood College, where the testing of the samples is undertaken.

His expansion also included a collaboration with Town Run Watershed Group of Shepherdstown WV to source-track bacteria impacting the town's secondary drinking water source in order to resolve the problem. This effort is a good example of how his bacteria monitoring program takes on occasional side projects to help communities by identifying pollution sources.

The sampling and testing is every Wednesday from May through September and the results are posted on SwimGuide every Friday so users can know where and when contact with the water is safe.

Brent's water quality monitoring program would not be possible without significant volunteer support. He currently has around two dozen volunteers but can use more. And more volunteers would mean adding even more testing sites.

Those who join him tell him that involvement is great: it's not too much time out of their day but they know they are doing something meaningful. The data they help collect enables their communities to be safer and to enjoy our waters more.

And, of course, Brent could use more sponsors to fund this program. Corporate sponsors of individual sites can have their logos on SwimGuide at each sponsored location and reach tens of thousands of visitors.

## UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER FINDS ALARMING CORRELATION BETWEEN FIRE STATIONS AND SCHOOLS IN FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

The case for greater vigilance and regulation of PFAS becomes more compelling every day. Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Brent Walls was among the first to recognize the problem. And so he began initial investigation back in 2020 by sampling fish from Antietam Creek and the results confirmed his fears as well his belief that more investigation and action was required.

Brent knew that PFAS is found in significant levels in firefighting foam – he learned this in some of his original research. Then his creative inquisitiveness led him to do more investigation: he decided to test the principle by sampling drinking water from some Frederick County, Maryland public schools which were located near fire stations.

His worst fears were confirmed. This map he created shows seven schools whose drinking water had unacceptable levels of PFAS – and as he predicted, all of them were located near fire stations.

Brent shared this information widely, including local media outlets, as part of his effort to inform the public about the dangers and prevalence of PFAS. What's more he and Betsy Nicholas, our President, put themselves at the forefront of legislative efforts in Maryland and Virginia to deal with the problem. And in 2024, PRKN joined a lawsuit against EPA to force the agency to regulate PFAS chemicals in biosolids, which is the sewage sludge often applied to cropland.

Thanks to Brent, working to resolve PFAS in our water and our food chain has become one of our chief priorities.

## YOUR SUPPORT MAKES IT ALL HAPPEN

We gratefully acknowledge the generous contributions of our members, who now number in the thousands, and our private, corporate and public supporters. Without your financial and in-kind contributions, we would not be able to carry out our important work to protect the Potomac, the Shenandoah, and the many tributaries that make up the watershed more than 6 million people and countless creatures call home.

As federal regulations that once protected our rivers are rolled back, our work is more important than ever. We hope you will continue to help us fight for clean water – our new PRKN president Betsy Nicholas says it is “not just an environmental issue; it is an economic necessity.”

### 2024 INCOME

Total \$3,272,524

- Individual Giving \$1,899,110
- Foundations/Organizations \$691,177
- Events \$380,994
- Other Income \$301,243

### 2024 EXPENSES

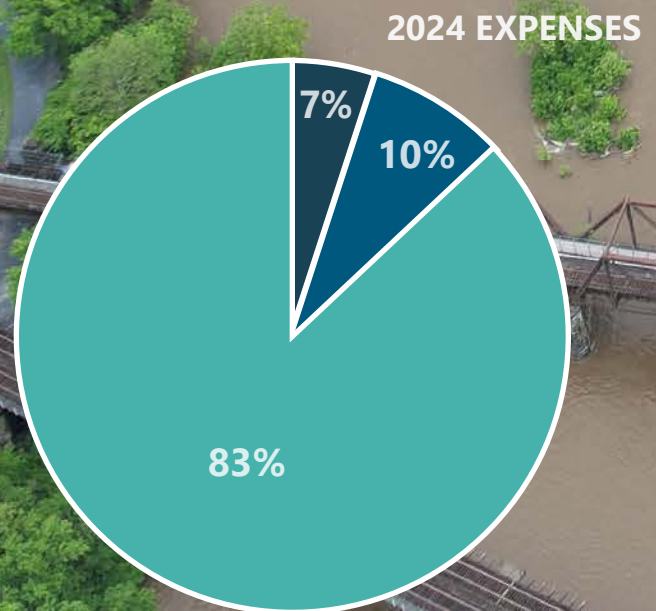
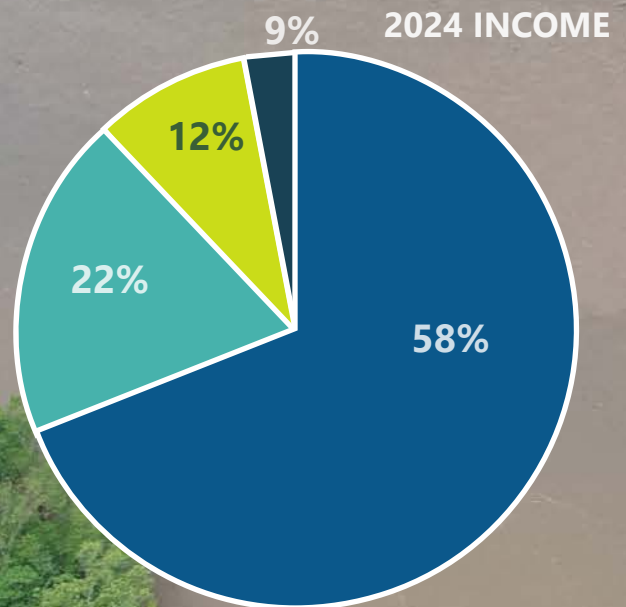
Total \$3,065,418

- Programs \$2,540,994
- Fundraising \$319,791
- Admin/General \$204,633



Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) – PRKN #87828  
EarthShare – PRKN #87828

## Financial Highlights



**90%** of the budget goes directly toward our programmatic work

**\$650,000**  
Of in-kind pro bono legal services



# Outreach & Engagement – Working to Build a Stronger PRKN

**POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER NETWORK IS ONLY AS ROBUST AS ITS FOUNDATION, AND ITS FOUNDATION IS ITS SUPPORTERS, DRAWN TO US BY THEIR COMMITMENT TO OUR MISSION.**

Our development team works grueling hours to assure that our message reaches far and wide and that anyone newly acquainted with us receives the same welcome as long-time members and supporters.

To engage current members of PRKN and make new friends, the Development Team, along with Evan Quinter, Water Quality and Volunteer Coordinator, organizes many events during the year, working to appeal to the broadest audience possible.

In the Spring, Virginia's Osprey Festival in Colonial Beach gives us a chance to meet new people who perhaps began looking only for some outdoor fun after a cold winter, but end up learning how important clean rivers are to the region's osprey population and, by extension, to all of us. The event gives us a chance to promote our water quality monitoring, which is now happening around Colonial Beach and at other sites in the Lower Potomac, thanks to engaged volunteers!



*Never telling what you will find at our events!*

We take advantage of our special expertise by promoting our 50 Million Mussels restoration project among the schoolchildren in Prince George's County and elsewhere. Our aim is to connect communities to the water and instill our values into the next generation of Riverkeepers and supporters.



*Fun and friends at the Gala – photo credit Capitol Hill Photography*

And our Gala is one of the premier events in the area that allows us to celebrate the river in high style with the community and give thanks to leading PRKN volunteers and supporters. At this premier event that is usually held in early autumn, a fabulous reception and dinner are followed by a night of dancing and fun.

**YOU CAN HELP OUR HARDWORKING DEVELOPMENT TEAM – SHARE THIS ANNUAL REPORT WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES. SHOW THEM WHAT WE DO, WHY IT IS IMPORTANT, AND HOW MUCH FUN IT CAN BE!**



*These volunteers really do the job!*



# Special Thanks to All of Our 2024 Supporters!

The Board of Directors, your Potomac, Shenandoah and Upper Potomac Riverkeepers, and Staff dedicate this space to recognizing our supporters who have given generously in 2024 to support our work, from the watershed headwaters at Fairfax Stone in West Virginia, through the Shenandoah Valley, into Pennsylvania and down the Potomac to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay. *NOTE: Every effort has been made to properly acknowledge donors. Please contact Carlie Smith at [Carlie@prknetwork.org](mailto:Carlie@prknetwork.org) if a listing is in error.*

\* denotes 2024 Board Member  
+ denotes automatic recurring donor

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We greatly appreciate every gift to help protect and celebrate clean, drinkable, swimmable, and fishable water. Please see our digital Annual Report for a complete listing of additional 2024 supporters.

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 Van Ness Feldman

## 2024 VOLUNTEERS EXTRAORDINAIRE

Our heartfelt gratitude for the 655+ volunteers who helped with water quality monitoring and trash cleanups this year!

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*Did you know many companies offer to match employee charitable giving? You might be able to double or triple the impact of your gift.*

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 In Memory of Kenneth Berg  
 Barbara Miller  
 Leilani Poland  
 In Memory of Brent Blackwelder  
 Laura Blackwelder  
 Cary Fuller  
 Diane Hartley  
 Kathleen Marcou  
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 In Memory of Kris Unger  
 Ian Urquhart

*I, and a huge part of my family, live near the Potomac and the Shenandoah. Family members were baptized in the Shenandoah. We pass over one of them on at least a weekly basis, and during the summer, I love taking my wife and daughter to the banks. I want to do what I can to ensure all families can enjoy the rivers. For a long time, I have wanted to get involved in local environmental work.*

— Warren Dean





POTOMAC  
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The paper used for this newsletter is a mixture of materials from FSC-certified forests, recycled materials, and/or FSC-controlled wood.

# Help Us Make Our 25th Anniversary The Most Powerful Year Ever!

Did you like what we did in 2024? In 2025, as we celebrate our 25th anniversary of protecting and defending our precious rivers, tributaries, and watersheds, we want to redouble our efforts.

You can help us! Whether stopping nutrient pollution in the Shenandoah Valley, doing vital bacterial and DNA research in the Upper Potomac, or facing down the challenge of coal ash pollution in the Lower Potomac, your dollars make all the difference.

None of what we do would be possible without your support. And it's easy – make a recurring monthly donation to support PRKN. Thank you!



SCAN ME