

# RIVERWATCH

The Official Newsletter of POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

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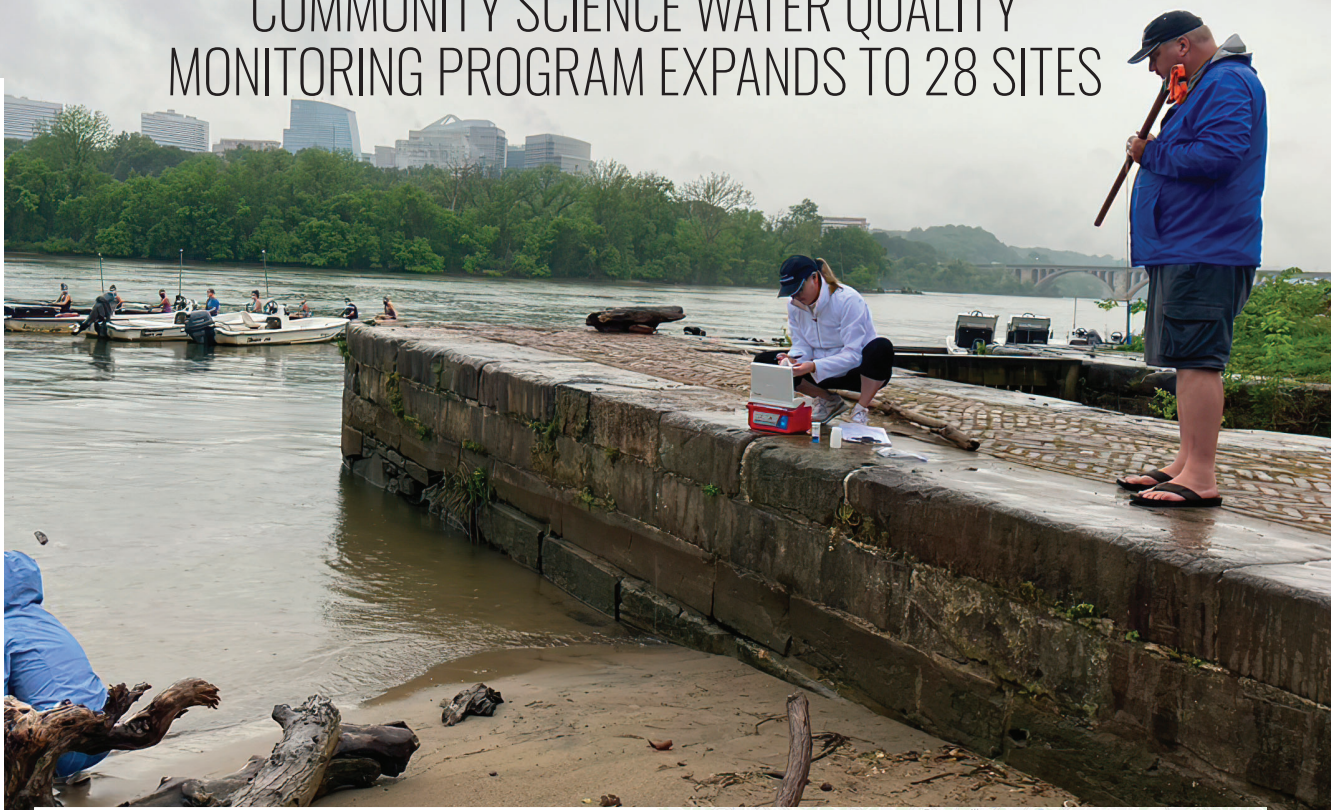
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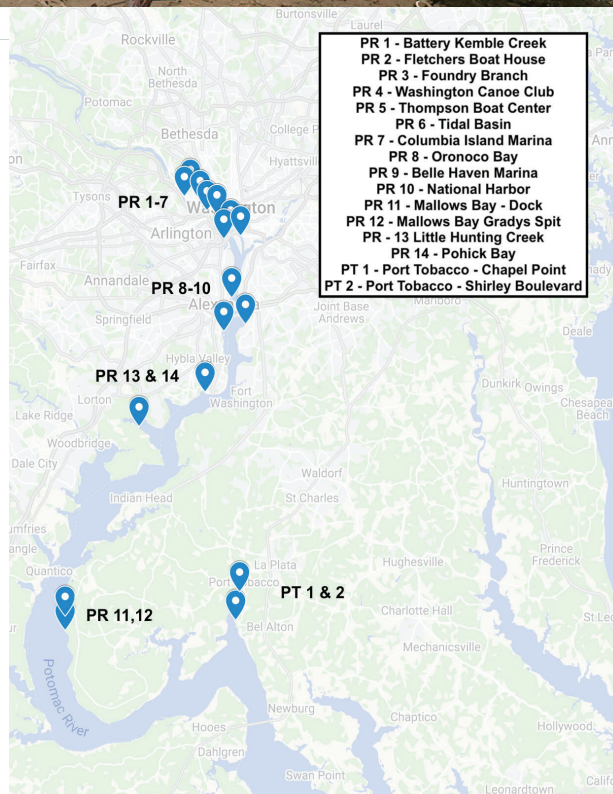
## COMMUNITY SCIENCE WATER QUALITY MONITORING PROGRAM EXPANDS TO 28 SITES



Our community science water quality monitoring program is fast becoming a model for the Waterkeeper movement. We've expanded to Montgomery County, thanks to a grant from Chesapeake Bay Trust. Downriver, we are sampling at Port Tobacco and Malloes Bay, a National Marine Sanctuary. In total, we now visit 28 locations every week from May through October, test for fecal contamination and other pollutants, and post the results on SwimGuide within 48 hours.

We could not continue to grow this program without the assistance of some really dedicated volunteers – this year, 70 supporters, new and returning, became part of the team. Thanks to them, and special thanks to Lisa Wu, our Volunteer of the Year, and to Carl Scheider, last year's Volunteer of the Year – without them, we would be nowhere!

Through continued sampling, testing, and reporting, we are able to share information with the public about where and when it is safe to recreate and, equally important, with regulators and decision makers to make the Potomac swimmable again!





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# A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



## OUTDOORS AND HARD AT WORK PROTECTING YOUR RIGHT TO CLEAN WATER

Greetings,

As your president, I welcome the chance to report to you on what's happening, and I'm delighted to share a number of ways in which PRKN has become an even better, stronger defender of your right to clean water – while also protecting our staff, board, members, and volunteers from exposure to Covid.

How have we done it? By taking our operations, our Gala, and our member meetings all outdoors, which is where PRKN staff and members like to be anyway – outdoors in nature; out, in, around, and on the river.

So, we have taken full advantage of the beautiful watersheds in which we work and have even expanded our operations into them with more water quality monitoring sites, more stream cleanups, more people out on the river for River-Palooza paddle trips and a RioPalooza festival of fun, and, of course, more patrolling, investigation of pollution incidents, and enforcement of the federal Clean Water Act and state clean water laws. We even created a new Rapid Response team to expand our ability to investigate pollution incidents that you report to us.

Many of you joined us for our premier outdoor event of the season, the Party on the Pier at the Wharf, which was a magical evening with music, dancing, and a lovely sunset. And we held three

outdoor meetings this fall for our members – in Falls Church, VA; in Bluemont, VA; and in Smithsburg, MD. I know you enjoyed the chance to hear from and talk with your Riverkeepers in person.

Like everyone else, we are hoping that Covid will soon be behind us, but we aren't waiting for that to happen to step up our work to protect the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. We are on it, every day, with your help and with an ever-growing number of members, supporters, and volunteers. Read on to learn more about the work our three amazing Riverkeepers are doing.

Sincerely,

Nancy Stoner, President



Nancy Stoner



Nancy in her favorite place – on the river! Photo credit Brent Walls

Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a proud member of both EarthShare Mid-Atlantic and Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Employees can choose to designate a portion of their paycheck to Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Our EarthShare and our CFC number are the same – #87828.



# SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER<sup>®</sup>



*From the North Fork where the advisory was posted this summer. Photo credit Alan Lehman*

## HARMFUL ALGAE OUTBREAKS – DEVASTATING!



*Unrestricted cattle access is a big part of the problem  
Photo credit Alan Lehman*



*Summer 2021 Algal Outbreak on the North Fork  
Photo credit Alan Lehman*



*Improperly stored poultry litter – a continuing problem  
Photo credit Alan Lehman*

This was a tough summer for water quality in the Shenandoah. Low water flow, sustained increased water temperatures, large climate-change driven storms, and excessive nutrient pollution coming into the river from uncontrolled cattle and poultry operations created the perfect conditions for heavy algal growth. And grow it did!

For the first time ever, Virginia health authorities issued a Harmful Algal Bloom advisory, which essentially warned people to avoid contact with the river. First, a stretch of a few miles and ultimately growing to more than 50 miles of river.

We are relieved that the advisories have now been lifted; however, the significance of the event cannot be overstated. We know that these algal outbreaks are likely to recur because of climate change's worsening of severe storms and nutrient pollution from poor agricultural practices. Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, and Alan Lehman, Project Manager, have been at the forefront of addressing these problems.

The agricultural practices chiefly creating the nutrient pollution are cattle standing and defecating in the river and runoff from uncovered and excessive poultry litter piles along the banks of the rivers. Mark worked long and hard in Richmond with regulators and lawmakers to enact legislation setting a deadline of 2025 to voluntarily keep cattle out of our rivers and to ensure that farmers are using the best practices to avoid manure runoff into the Shenandoah. Alan, who spends an incredible amount of time patrolling on the river, has filed dozens of complaints this year with the state to compel action to address these pollution sources and to urge state agencies to warn the public of the dangers of coming into contact – or allowing their pets or livestock to come into contact – with the cyanobacteria in the harmful algal outbreaks. Without Alan's detective work, the public may have remained unaware of the dangers of toxic algae in the water.

While harmful algal outbreaks are likely over for 2021, our work is far from finished. Outbreaks of harmful and nuisance algae will continue to plague the Shenandoah until nutrient pollution is brought under control, and state agencies commit to monitoring our rivers, warning the public, and enforcing new standards to protect public health and the environment from further degradation.

Join our fight to protect, restore and respect the Shenandoah. Visit our Respect the Shenandoah Campaign website to learn more and get involved. If you're a Virginian, contact your state legislator and remind them that the Shenandoah River belongs to everyone and urgently needs their help. Wherever you live in our watershed, remember that the fate of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers are inextricably linked. We need to protect them all to realize our vision of drinkable, swimmable, and fishable rivers.



# POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER<sup>®</sup>

## RAPID RESPONSE TEAM – HITTING THE GROUND (AND THE WATER) FIRST



*Hot Spot – Photo credit Morgan Bench*



*Preparing a sample to preserve integrity –  
Photo credit Morgan Bench*



*Serena Moncion, Outreach Coordinator,  
collecting a sample – Photo credit Morgan Bench.*



*The team at work –  
Photo credit Morgan Bench*

With increases in climate change, weather events are more unpredictable and more damaging. Raw sewage overflows, one of the most harmful pollution sources, occur more frequently, with ruinous results.

Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, Morgan Bench, Volunteer Coordinator, and a great group of action-oriented PRKN members, including Sabine Malik, Gib Hartley and Carl Scheider, have organized a Rapid Response Team to act quickly and effectively to identify pollution incidents, document them, investigate their causes, and report the results to appropriate authorities for action.

Here's how it works: Dean gets a tip, usually from a supporter, about pollution that they see or smell. For example, in September, there was a report of a broken sewer pipe near Pimmit Run in McLean. The team jumped into action and did sample collection at two sites at Little Pimmit Run Stream Valley Park. The results showed

E.coli contamination far beyond safety – not safe for swimming or wading and not even safe for dogs to be in the water. A week later, the team tested again at the same sites and learned that while the water quality had improved, it was still contaminated. All this information Dean gave to regulatory authorities for further action.

PRKN is particularly well equipped for this work because of the Tier III laboratory aboard our research vessel, the *Sea Dog*; the results from this state-of-the-art facility are so reliable that authorities use them as if they themselves had prepared them. PRKN creates a record for immediate action – installation of a boom to contain a spill, clean up, and longer term remediation if a problem is persistent.

Dean's Rapid Response Team has become active throughout the Lower Potomac watershed – Loudoun County, VA; Washington, DC; Montgomery County, MD – and with our ever increasing cadre of volunteers, look for more!



# UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER®

## DRONES – INNOVATION IN FIGHTING POLLUTERS



*Drone image of gob pile Brent located during an investigation – Photo credit Brent Walls*

Brent Walls is leading the way in the Waterkeeper movement in the use of drones to find, investigate, and document pollution and its sources. Brent is a real stickler for details. He takes our drone program very seriously and assures that he, and those he mentors, follow all Federal Aviation Authority, state, and local rules about drone operation. In fact, he has instituted a formal drone surveillance program with standard operating procedures over and above FAA rules when conducting pollution investigations.

- Brent's wizardry with technology is the basis for his innovative use of drones to find and document pollution problems. He already has three success stories which demonstrate that drones are the way of the future.
- In Pennsylvania, Specialty Granules, a mining company, was fouling a trout stream and the photos captured irrefutable proof. The result: an agreement with the company to install a state-of-the-art filtration system.
- In western Maryland, Brent found "gob piles" – mountains of unusable coal whose leachate appears to be migrating through a tributary into the North Branch of the Potomac. In fact, he found this during a tour he gave to a French author investigating coal-fired power generation in the U.S. More work analyzing and documenting this is necessary, but check your River Currents for future developments.
- Brent used drone photography to document the "black liquor" flowing from the closed Verso paper mill in Luke, MD. "Black liquor" is a toxic byproduct of paper production. When the plant owners blocked access to the source, Brent took to the sky. And the State of Maryland got involved; we negotiated an agreement with the owners to stop the pollution, clean it up, and to pay us and Maryland fines and penalties.

What's more, Brent has completed a five module training program for Waterkeepers to learn how to use a drone for investigation and advocacy. Five Waterkeeper programs will be taking the drone training; after this pilot project, the drone training program will be open to other Waterkeepers across the US. And, finally, Brent will be offering drone training to an initial cadre of interested PRKN volunteers in the Spring of 2022 to build our "eyes in the sky" presence to investigate pollution complaints.



*Leachate from the gob pile fouls this pond and risks groundwater contamination – Photo credit Brent Walls*



*Brent and his drone at work! Photo credit Alan Lehman*



# US FOREST SERVICE – OUR VALUED PARTNER



*Snorkeling on the Shenandoah – Photo credit Alan Lehman*



Although we are a small organization, we “punch well above our weight.” And that is possible only because of the incredible array of partners who support us and our mission.

One of our key partners is the U.S. Forest Service. Throughout our watersheds, our Riverkeepers work closely with the staff at the USFS to improve water and riparian quality, while sharing insights and strategies.

In the Shenandoah Valley, USFS is singularly important in helping us implement our mission and achieve our goal of increasing outreach to underserved and underrepresented communities. RioPalooza is certainly the capstone of this relationship. With the Spanish-language capability of the USFS staff, combined with their true commitment to expanding access to everyone in the watershed, the event gets better and better every year. The accompanying photos tell the story of the joy of the participants. And read more about this year’s event in the sidebar.

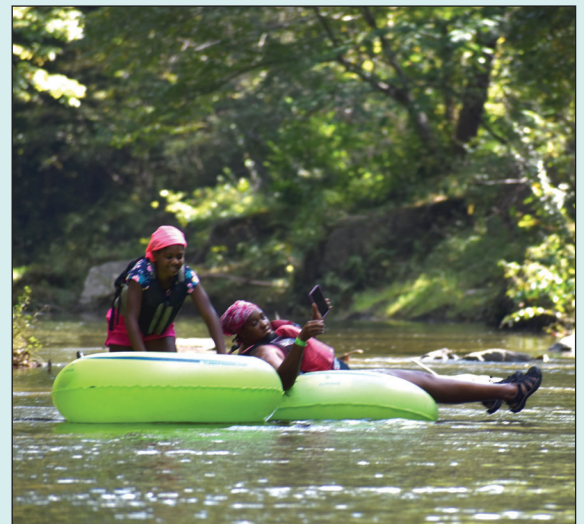
The Forest Service also stands with us for smaller events. The Shenandoah freshwater snorkeling activities are a good example. Most people have never even heard of freshwater snorkeling, much less have their own equipment for exploring the river under the surface. So an event like this enables them to enjoy the river in a unique and memorable way. Kim Winter of the Forest Service and National NatureWatch Leader, is a stalwart and always on hand for her help and guidance. She says “Having grown up enjoying rivers in the Ozarks, I support, both personally and professionally, the goals of PRKN. Seeing the surprised look on the faces of people, young and old, who see the amazing diversity of animals in the river at these jointly sponsored events really brings a smile to my face.”

## RIOPALOOZA PRKN’S BILINGUAL RIVER FESTIVAL

Smiles were a key feature of this year’s Shenandoah Riverkeeper’s RioPalooza – smiles by those tubing, fishing, and listening and dancing to Mister G’s music.

RioPalooza is a collaborative effort with our partners US Forest Service, Hispanic Access Foundation, and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. This is THE event in the Valley for Spanish-speaking river enthusiasts to enjoy a day in, on, and near the River to learn about the work we do and how they can take advantage of what the River has to offer.

For us, the focus on the young people creates especially enduring memories – they are the next generation of river protectors, and we are proud to engage them. We are also particularly grateful to their parents, who bring their whole families to this event, recognizing the importance of the work we do and their children’s involvement in it.



*A hot summer day, but what a great place to refresh at  
RioPalooza – Photo credit Brent Walls*



*A relaxing day at RioPalooza  
Photo credit Kasey Dutrow*

# END OF YEAR GIVING

During the holiday season, all of us think about generous giving. Whether it's helping a neighbor, fighting for an issue we care about, or spreading some of our good fortune to those in need, every act of generosity counts and everyone has something to give. So share your good fortune with others – for example, give the gift of membership in Potomac Riverkeeper Network. And please, think also about a direct gift to PRKN – here are some ideas about how your dollars will go to extremely good use.

## \$100 WATER QUALITY MONITORING KITS

Each \$100 water quality monitoring kit is used by our volunteer community scientists during the summer recreational season to report bacteria levels to the public (that's you) on our Swim Guide App. These kits provide weekly results, which we post on Swim Guide, about when it's safe to get in the water.

## \$250 RIVER CLEAN UP

PRKN hosts several shoreline cleanups each year and each one requires materials for volunteers including bags, grabbers, hand sanitizer, coffee (for those early mornings) and sometimes disposal fees.

Or you can help put 50 freshwater mussels back in the river with a donation of \$250! Mussels work just as hard as oysters at filtering and cleaning water.

## \$500 SUPPORT ON-WATER PATROLS

Riverkeepers need to maintain boats to conduct regular on-water patrols and investigate pollution reports and spills. If you are a water enthusiast, you know how important upkeep is to maintain a safe vessel. \$500 also buys fuel for an entire year or winterizing maintenance.

## \$1000 PUT EYES ON THE RIVER WITH PRKN DRONE FLEET

Drones provide a different view and new perspective to investigate difficult-to-access pollution sources and hold polluters accountable. Your \$1000 can go towards accessory items like infrared and thermal imaging cameras, insurance, and FAA registration.

## \$2500 PLASTIC, CHEMICALS, AND BACTERIA, OH MY!

Each site we monitor for water quality annually costs \$2500 for supplies. Our water quality monitoring program is a key to making the Potomac swimmable again and we are hoping to add five more sites next year. Or, if you prefer, a donation in this category can fund collecting and analyzing fish tissue samples for the presence of over 15 dangerous legacy chemicals in the Upper Potomac. This investigative work will help us track down the sources of these chemicals, protect public health, and advocate for safe fish consumption advisories.

100% OF DONATIONS  
IN ANY AMOUNT GO DIRECTLY TO  
CLEAN WATER!

# PARTY ON THE PIER!

Party on the Pier was the theme of our Gala in 2021 and the name says it all!

Thanks to all who attended in person and virtually. Together you raised over \$285,000 to defend and protect the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers! The night was spectacular and the venue, The Wharf's Dockmaster Building and Pier, was perfect. A chance to meet new friends and talk to Riverkeepers? Check. Good food and great auction items? Check. Dancing? Check again.

Next year, on October 8, 2022, we will look to have an even bigger event as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act – the legal tool we need and use to bring polluters to account and to clean up the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. Put it on your calendar!



Board member Ann Codrington with a PRKN supporter – Photo credit T.oVisions



Supporters enjoying the Gala! Photo credit T.oVisions



The smiles tell the story! Photo credit T.oVisions





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# *Save the Date for Gala 2022!*

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act

Throughout 2022, we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Clean Water Act. This vital legislation is the basis for so much of the litigation we undertake to stop polluters – without it, our incredible river victories would be next to impossible.

So celebrate with us all year long but especially on October 8, 2022 when we host this fantastic event! We just wrapped up a terrific night of fun and fundraising at “Party on the Pier 2021” and we are already working on plans to make the event bigger and better than ever.



**1972-2022**  
***The Next 50 Years***

**DON'T MISS NEXT YEAR'S – INK IT ON YOUR CALENDAR NOW!**