

RIVERWATCH

The Official Newsletter of POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

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A Busy Summer and Autumn!



At Potomac Riverkeeper Network, staff has been busy and productive since our last RiverWatch newsletter! The underlying theme of this entire year has been the commemoration and celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the passage of the Clean Water Act, our most powerful tool to hold polluters accountable.

And while we had many events devoted to highlighting that milestone, we always kept our eye on the ball – protecting and defending our watersheds, heightening awareness of PRKN's mission, increasing access to our waterways, especially for members of underserved communities, and getting the job done through investigation, advocacy, and enforcement.

In the Upper Potomac, we have started a water quality monitoring program and have continued intense focus on the troubling and persistent issue of PFAS – toxic “forever chemicals” – whose impact we are only beginning to understand and address.

In the Shenandoah Valley, RioPalooza continues to be our trademark event for the Latino community and our partnership with it. And the long

term health of the river achieved a significant advance as a result of the adoption of meaningful water quality standards for the measurement of nuisance algae using Chlorophyll A; we also continued enforcement through filing of both algae and livestock fecal matter complaints.

In the Lower Potomac, our water quality monitoring program continued to expand the number of sites tested and our team continued its advocacy to get DC to lift the unnecessary DC swim ban and instead to focus on notifying the public of when and where it is safe to swim..

And how about our annual Gala? The most successful ever, thanks to the support of so many of you!



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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Nancy Stoner



Women's Paddle at Four Mile Run



Fun at our Good-bye Summer Blowout

A FABULOUS SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF RIVER PROTECTION

Throughout the summer and fall this year, we have celebrated and commemorated the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Clean Water Act on October 18, 2022. We have used this special time to recognize the importance of this legislation, how we use it to hold polluters accountable, and the impact it has made.

I have had the wonderful pleasure of attending many events – some hosted by Potomac Riverkeeper Network, some by others – and I have been blessed by making scores of new friends and beginning new relationships, all to help achieve PRKN's mission of protecting and defending our watersheds and making our waterways cleaner and more accessible to everyone who uses and enjoys them.

I've watched as our fabulous and dedicated staff did all that was asked of them and more to share their enthusiasm and skill. The result? Clean ups, water quality monitoring (now expanded into the Upper Potomac), our Gala, RiverPalooza and RioPalooza events and others have been extraordinarily well attended and successful.

For example, establishing meaningful water quality standards in the Shenandoah and testing for metals from coal mining operations in the Upper Potomac (read more about them in pages 4 and 5) represent real achievements in the furtherance of our mission to protect and defend our watersheds.

And I've also been incredibly gratified to observe how you, our stalwart supporters, have stood up each and every time we have asked – with your time and your treasure. Without you, we would not be able to accomplish what we have. Thanks to you, we make our presence felt – sometimes painfully, to polluters, and sometimes happily, to anglers or paddlers or open water swimmers enjoying our rivers.

Thank you for all we do together to protect the rivers we love!

Sincerely,

Nancy Stoner, President

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER[®]

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER TAKES ON SINGLE USE PLASTICS



Dean and PRKN volunteers on our research vessel



This is what we face!

Single use plastics are a chief source of pollution across the globe, nationally, and locally. Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, and his team are taking on the challenge!

He has created several paths to find both long and short term solutions, all of them part of his Trash Free Potomac campaign. On the ground, he and hundreds (968 to be exact!) of volunteers continue clean ups throughout the watershed. At last count, they have collected an estimated 13,000 pounds of trash; that includes at least 9,000 single use plastic bottles! That makes an immediate and positive impact (and another reason to thank our great volunteers!)

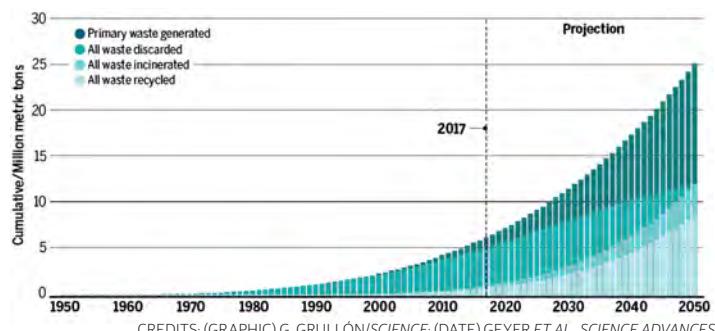
At the same time, he, Serena Moncion, our Outreach Coordinator, and Morgan Bench, Volunteer Coordinator, are undertaking a pilot project to identify which beverage manufacturers are most represented in the single use trash problem. Our colleagues at Sierra Club DC have begun a similar project. By identifying sources, we treat those manufacturers as other polluters and hold them accountable.

Plastic grocery bags are another persistent source of pollution. When is the last time you saw one floating in the wind along the roadway? Probably yesterday. Dean applauds retailers such as Wegman's and Mom's Organic Market (one of our corporate sponsors) which have eliminated plastic bags altogether; he is also encouraged that Aldi's, another grocery store chain with a local presence, has pledged to discontinue the use of plastic bags by the end of 2023.

Locally – by which we mean in Maryland, DC, and Virginia – Dean is active in lobbying for legislation to drastically reduce the presence of single use plastics. He anticipates a considerable lobbying effort in Maryland during that state's legislative session which begins in January 2023 to encourage the adoption of plastic pollution control measures. In DC, his colleague Serena appeared publicly to comment on the District's Zero Waste Plan framework. And in Virginia,

although the Youngkin Administration unfortunately repealed the single-use plastic product ban at all state-owned and operated facilities, Dean and Serena are gathering information on which state colleges and universities have switched to recyclable alternatives voluntarily. The University of Virginia, for example, is making good on its commitment to stop the purchase of single-use products in order to meet zero-waste goals. We applaud UVa for doing so. Dean will work to advocate a return to the sensible and effective ban at all state facilities.

Nationally, Dean and his team did much to support the "Break Free From Plastic Pollution" bill which was pending in Congress. Notwithstanding a considerable effort, supported by Waterkeeper Alliance, and which included a "People's Briefing" attended by co-sponsors, the bill did not pass. But that does not mean he won't be pushing for it again! He also has his eye on the "Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act" which, if passed, would prohibit the discharge of the plastic pellets from which all single use plastics are manufactured into waterways. These pellets, made from petroleum products that contribute to climate change, enter the ecosystem and are ingested by wildlife – with the predictable dreadful impact.



UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER®

UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER INITIATES NEW ACID MINE DRAINAGE PROGRAM IN THE UPPER POTOMAC'S NORTH BRANCH



Testing in summer

Coal mining operations in the Upper Potomac region have long been and continue to be a source of acids and other pollutants in the river and its tributaries. Thus, Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, has implemented a water testing program to gather data about the extent of the problem and to develop a basis for further action.

The program, supported by Hood College Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies in Frederick, MD, and Fredericktowne Labs in Myersville, MD, began in March of this year and continued through November. Brent and his colleague, Catherine Gaudlip, a graduate student at Hood College funded by PRKN benefactor Dan Murrin, twice a month gathered samples from 10 locations in the Upper North Branch of the Potomac, including tributaries such as Sand Run, Buffalo Creek, and Upper Laurel Run. Fredericktowne Labs gave invaluable support by analyzing the samples for aluminum, manganese, and iron metals. Bradley Paradise at Fredericktowne Labs and his team provided this testing for free, a contribution worth approximately \$20,000.



Brent's testing program is the most comprehensive of its kind in the region, so it's guaranteed to create data more valuable and more reliable than any preceding similar program. He is collecting the largest data set focused on metals in small streams - typical sampling by state authorities is only two or three times. The presence of active and abandoned mining operations near the Upper North Branch make this analysis vital to the health of the waters.

Brent and Catherine are finding some troubling data: two streams have routinely shown unsafe levels of aluminum and iron. The data the program is developing will be shared with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE); the goal is to encourage MDE to list the affected waterways as "impaired" so that remedial action can be taken.

And Brent plans to continue the monitoring in 2023. His long term goal is to eventually work with West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection, MDE, and other stakeholders to develop a watershed based plan for the Upper North Branch Potomac.



Acid mine drainage sampling – even in winter

NEW CHLOROPHYLL A STANDARDS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

Last September, the Virginia State Water Control Board, by a unanimous vote, approved the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) recommendation to adopt new state water quality standards for chlorophyll-a to measure algae in the Shenandoah River basin. By monitoring chlorophyll-a levels and documenting the extent of nuisance algae blooms in the river, DEQ will finally have a regulatory tool to determine which sections of the river are unsuitable for recreation and what steps are needed to restore them. Sections of the river that exceed these standards for more than one year in a three-year period will be designated as impaired, triggering a formal process to reduce the pollution. Reducing nuisance algae is critical to the health of the river because the disgusting mats of the stuff block the sunlight that submerged aquatic vegetation needs to grow and because they deplete the water of oxygen that fish need to survive.



Shenandoah algae near Winchester's drinking water source

This important milestone is the result of tireless work by Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, and Alan Lehman, Shenandoah Agricultural Program Manager, to document and report the chronic and growing impact of algae blooms on the river over the past eight years, forcing state regulators to acknowledge the problem and look for solutions. While the new standards cover only some of the types of nuisance algae that foul the river, they are still a good start to giving us a regulatory and legal tool to address the chronic pollution arising from algal blooms.

In addition to his success in obtaining a new standard for nuisance algae, Mark's Respect the Shenandoah Campaign's list of achievements includes a successful effort to pass legislation in the Virginia General Assembly to require herds of cattle to be excluded from defecating in its rivers by 2025 unless water quality standards for nutrient pollution have been met. He and his colleague Alan Lehman are also implementing a toxic algae testing program. Toxic algae is actually cyanobacteria that grows on algae. It has very serious health impacts, including skin rashes, nausea and vomiting, liver damage, neurotoxicity, and other short and long-term health impacts. Mark's monitoring of cyanobacteria is critical because the Commonwealth has not yet funded a program to do so. Mark will work to gather the science and put it in front of the policymakers until they develop effective controls on the sources of this toxic pollution.



Creating the next generation of river enthusiasts at RioPalooza

RIOPALOOZA 2022 – A GREAT RIVER FESTIVAL!

What's more fun than spending a beautiful summer afternoon on Passage Creek in the Shenandoah watershed? Spending it with a few hundred friends and neighbors from the Hispanic community and some enthusiastic partners to make it happen!

Over 500 friends and neighbors enjoyed this year's RioPalooza! The weather was spectacular and the months of planning by Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, and his partners, USDA Forest Service, National Park Trust, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Hispanic Access Foundation, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Manassas Latino Festival, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Conservation Conexions, Buffalo Soldiers, and a diverse collaboration of regional conservation and law enforcement organizations, made it a huge success.

As always, there was something for everyone – young and old – great food, fantastic music provided by Mister G, snorkeling, tubing, fishing, and information about the fish and wildlife that live in the river and what we all need to do together to protect their habitat.

RioPalooza is the premier bilingual environmental event in the Valley, and we are proud to have established it. An important goal for all of us throughout the Potomac and Shenandoah watersheds is recognizing the value and importance of ensuring everyone has an opportunity to enjoy our rivers. We work hard to revive our waterways so that they are fishable, swimmable, and enable both people and wildlife to thrive.



Lazy tubing on the Shenandoah during RioPalooza

FRIENDS OF OXON RUN PARK— ENERGETIC AND ENGAGED PARTNERS!



Friends of Oxon Run Park at the Earth Day Clean Up



Heavy lifting at the Earth Day Clean Up



A hard day's work!

We at Potomac Riverkeeper Network are small, but fierce. How do we accomplish what we do? Sure, passion and dedication are important – but so is the ever-expanding group of partners who share our vision. Partners like Friends of Oxon Park!

Oxon Run Park, in Southeast DC, is a stunning hidden treasure quietly nestled in the heart of Ward 8. The span of Oxon Run Park is from Southern Avenue and Mississippi Avenue, S.E. to Oxon Cove. The largest park in the DC Department of Parks and Recreation inventory, its luscious green 3-mile, 128 acres are adorned with towering majestic trees that include the “Legacy Cherry Blossom Trees” and Magnolia Bogs.

Friends of Oxon Run Park seek to create an urban oasis that re-ignites the spirit of DC's residents as they re-imagine a new future. Their goal is to enhance the community's mental and physical well-being through trails, tree plantings, amphitheater performances, exercise and outdoor learning.

And the health and cleanliness of Oxon Run and its riparian surroundings are where our partnership with this fabulous group convenes. Our relationship with this terrific group is particularly special to us – our common goal is to protect and defend Oxon Run (which flows directly into the Potomac River) from pollution and to achieve greater access for community residents who have historically been underserved.

So earlier this year, Brenda Richardson (one of our new board members and vice chair of Friends of Oxon Run Park) approached us about doing a clean up at the Park, we jumped at the chance. The efforts of her and her colleagues brought scores of enthusiastic people, including a significant cohort of cadets from the DC Police Academy – this crowd was ready to get their feet wet and their hands dirty!

We are eager to continue this important and beneficial relationship in the years ahead. Thanks, Friends at Oxon Run Park!

PHOTOS COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

WORLD RIVERS DAY AND PEER TO PEER FUNDRAISING – TWO SIDES OF A DEVELOPMENT COIN



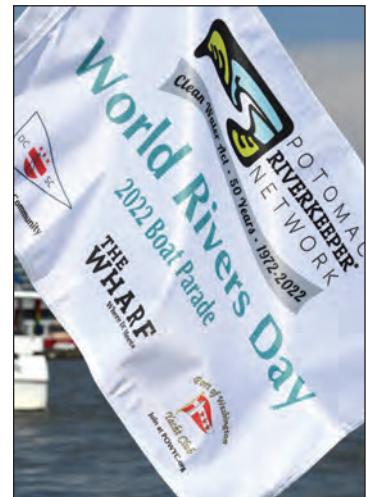
PHOTO CREDIT: ALAN LEHMAN

Our Development Team has two goals: putting more people in touch with our waterways and encouraging donations to make that happen. We'd like to report on a couple features that demonstrate how it all works: the World Rivers Day boat parade last September and our yearlong "Peer to Peer" fundraising campaign.

Millions of people in more than 100 countries participate in World Rivers Day on the fourth Sunday of every September. Together, we celebrate the world's waterways to increase public awareness and encourage the improved stewardship of rivers around the world.

We at Potomac Riverkeeper Network have always participated and this year, we went a step further: our inaugural Boat Parade from Alexandria to the DC Wharf. Our boating community showed up and had a blast sailing up Potomac River while appreciating just how important the river is to all of us. We enjoyed a pretty day on the water followed by a beer provided by our partner, Pacifico Beer at the Wharf.

Thanks to everyone in our community who started fundraising campaigns, and made donations to the Clean Water Act 50th Anniversary, it was a huge success. You raised over \$28,000 for clean water! Our top individual fundraisers, David Hunke and Pat Munoz, knocked it out of the park, and our top team fundraiser, the Potomac River Swimmers - Andie Nelson and Brian Jaskot- completed a 20.5 mile unassisted swim in the Potomac River to show their dedication for clean water.



PARTY ON THE PIER – A CELEBRATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT

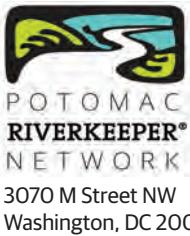
What do you get when you have about 300 enthusiasts, a terrific band, a beautiful night, and the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act? One of the best Galas ever!

Spirits were pretty high at the festivities on Saturday, October 8, at the Dockmaster Pier – DC Wharf. Participants had been teased by the fabulous auction offerings – a private band performance by Board Chair Randy Benn's Soulfire, a day with raptors thanks to Virginia's Raptor Hill, several days at the eco-friendly resort, Playa Catico in Costa Rica, donated by Board Member Shelley Slade and her husband Mark Betts and a one of a kind dolphin sightseeing tour in partnership with the Potomac-Chesapeake Dolphin Project. As our biggest fundraising event of the year, high attendance and eager auction bidding are important. Everyone really came through for us – as a result, our original goal of \$360,000 was blown out of the water. Together we raised over \$435,700, and \$117,432 of that in just two hours.

Thanks to our terrific sponsors, Host Committee, and Board, and you for making it happen!

Save the Date for next year – Oct. 7, 2023!

GALA PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANTHONY BOLOGNESE // CAPITOL HILL PHOTO



*Generosity is an important feature
of this time of year...*

Scan QR Code to
Make Your Gift



This is when we all have perhaps a little more enthusiasm to help those who are in need.

At PRKN, we are lean – really lean. 87% of every dollar raised goes straight to what we do – protecting and defending our precious watersheds.

As this year closes, and we reflect on our incredible successes, made possible by your generous support, may we count on a gift to ensure next year is even better? Scan the QR code to get there. Thank you.

POTOMACRIVERKEEPERNETWORK.ORG/GIVE