

Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter May 2016



Ellen X. Silverberg photo

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Tour Sligo's Grandest Trees May 21

Ready for another bicycle tour of the Champion Trees in our Sligo Creek watershed? A half dozen new champions have been found here in just the past year.

The next tour takes place on Saturday, May 21, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. Meet at the parking lot of Montgomery Parks Headquarters at 9500 Brunett Avenue, on the east side of the Parkway just below Dallas Avenue and the Golf Course.

Our leader is Joe Howard, founder of the Montgomery County Champion Trees program. He'll take us to see old friends and to view some of new champions, including a coast redwood, a bur oak, a yellow buckeye, and maybe some umbrella magnolias and a smoke tree (aka smokethorn).

View the latest list of champion trees in Montgomery County, and many of their locations, at this website of the [Forestry Board](#). All state champion trees in the county are also marked.

The full ride is about six miles with 18 stops. If you have any questions, call leader Joe Howard at (301) 585-8818 or email him at [email address](#).

If you're late to the tour and want to catch up, call Pat Ratkowski, who can tell you where the group is: 301-653-5343. About halfway through the tour, Joe expects the group to be looking at the champion silverbell along the 9000 block of Fairview Road.

Our rain date is June 4th, meeting at the same time and place.



This willow oak in our watershed is the county champion. (Wilpers photo)

Two Clean Water Events: WWD Training May 22 and Bike Tour June 12

Learn how to identify and report water pollution in Sligo on May 22 or join a bike tour of entire creek on June 12 focused on water quality themes.

Pollution ID and Reporting

Have you ever noticed an oily film or a strange color in Sligo's waters while enjoying the Park -- and you wanted to report it to the authorities? Learn how at the third Water WatchDogs training on Sunday, May 22, in the Kemp Mill area near the headwaters of Sligo. The workshop runs from 8:30 to 11:15 am. This session focuses on the upper-most portion of the creek, but the lessons can be applied anywhere.

To register, email Anne Vorce at avorce@aol.com. She'll send you the location of the workshop. Please mention any water pollution issues you have noticed in and around Sligo Creek, especially in the area of our focus (University Boulevard to Channing Road). That way, the workshop leaders can prepare to address them at the training.



Lori Lilly leads the first Water WatchDog training in Sligo last fall. (Samiy photo).

The workshop will begin with instructions on identifying pollution led by Lori Lilly, an independent environmental consultant who has done extensive pollution investigation work in our watershed.

Her presentation will be followed by an introduction to the Water WatchDogs reporting system by its founders, Anne Vorce and Kathleen Samiy. They will describe recent success stories in which citizens have stopped pollution by using this system. The group will then take a field visit to Sligo Creek to apply some of the lessons learned.

This workshop is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, through the Water Quality Protection Charge Program of Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection. The grant enables the Water WatchDog program to expand its reach through educational programs for the Sligo community and for Friends of Sligo Creek to hold "Bike Ride for Clean Water" on June 12 (see below). For more information, contact Anne Vorce at avorce@aol.com.

Bike Ride for Clean Water

Take an inspiring bike ride along Sligo Creek to the Anacostia River and learn about special places along the way on Sunday, June 12.

The ride starts at 8:30 am at the Channing Drive entrance to Sligo Creek Park (just above Kemp Mill). Bikers will traverse several trails along the Anacostia Trail Tributary System, arriving at Bladensburg Waterfront Park, on the Anacostia, at 10:30.

Riders will then watch a presentation on factors that affect water quality in the creek, after which they can take a one-hour pontoon boat ride on the Anacostia. At noon, bikers will depart the Boat House to arrive back in Kemp Mill at 1:30.

To register (spaces are very limited), send an email to avorce@aol.com. Registrants will receive a route map and guide, further event details, and priority sign-up for the pantoon boat ride. In case of rain, the event will be moved to Sunday, June 19.

The bike tour, titled "The First Community Bike Ride for Clean Water: The Sligo Headwaters to the Anacostia," is supported by a grant to Friends of Sligo Creek from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, through the Water Quality Protection Charge Program of Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection.

For more information, email avorce@aol.com.



Participants in the Sligo bike tour get a pontoon boat ride on the Anacostia. (AWS photo)

Sweepers Brave Rain to Pull Trash and Invasives



A very rainy Saturday morning didn't dampen the enthusiasm for our spring Sweep the Creek if the large turnout is any measure of enthusiasm!

We were happy to welcome 409 volunteers over the Sweep weekend, April 23-24, and they worked at 14 cleanup sites along Sligo Creek and its tributaries.

Volunteers collected 264 bags of trash, 91 bags of recycling, and 23 bags of invasive weeds. It is worth noting that the total of 14 sites we cleaned might be the record for the number of sections participating in one Sweep weekend.

Key in providing many of the volunteers were all the groups that turned out:

- Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park
- Cub Scout Packs 33, 275, 249
- CASA
- Community Bridges
- Brownie Troops 2772 and 6497
- Daisy Troop 2474
- Girl Scout Troop 4872
- Montgomery College
- Glenhaven Elementary School PTA
- Target



One young volunteer carries a haul of invasive garlic mustard in Takoma Woods.

While we hate to highlight any trash found in the creek as "special," noting the range of things found may continue to build awareness of the lingering litter issues that face our creek.

In one section, volunteers pulled out two mattresses (with several more there but unreachable) and six shopping carts. Other items that certainly do not belong in the creek included a lacrosse stick, highway sign, a five-gallon plastic home brewing bucket, a Goodyear tire, a skateboard, two 18-inch plastic pipes, a duffel bag filled with clothes and food containers, a car windshield, and a wheelbarrow.



Members of scout troop 275 head out into the park. (Kasovic photos)

Sweep the Creek is a collaborative effort made possible by many, including our Section Stewards, Tablers, Outreach Team, Kiosk Marketers, Photographer (this year we have a large number of exceptional photos), Webmaster, and our volunteer Sweepers. Thank you to everyone! A special thanks to Montgomery Parks, which provide gloves and empty bags, picks up the filled bags, helps advertise the event, and serves as our sponsoring organization for awarding student service-learning hours

I hope to see everyone at the fall Sweep the Creek on September 24 and 25!

Patton Stephens
Sweep the Creek Coordinator

New Meadow Gets 650 Native Seedlings

Thirty volunteers and Montgomery Parks staff planted more than 650 native wildflowers and grasses on April 26 in the new meadow habitat across from the golf course.

The seedlings, all provided by the county's Pope Farm Nursery, represent seventeen meadow species, from grasses such as little bluestem, broomsedge, and Indian grass to a host of butterfly-friendly asters such as coneflowers, and goldenrods.

To maintain the area as meadow, Parks will mow it only in late fall or winter. Over the last year, Parks removed extensive growth of porcelainberry and other non-native invasives and treated the area with targeted herbicides. A dense network of porcelainberry roots is now gone and much of the soil (especially closer to the creek) is rich and dark.

Among the volunteers from FOSC, Weed Warriors, and the Pope Farm Nursery were FOSC board members Kit Gage, Jim Anderson, and Ross Campbell; champion tree and trash activists Joe and Mary Howard; and several families with children. We benefited from a few schools being closed because of the primary elections.

The complete list of plantings included 80 seedlings of little bluestem; 50 Indian grass; 45 each of mist flower, wild bergemot, penstemon, mountain mint, and ironweed; 35 calico aster; 30 each of perfoliated boneset, wingstem, and early goldenrod; 20 each of black-eyed susan and grass-leaf goldenrod; 15 each of round-leaf boneset, lyre-leaf sage, and rough-leaved goldenrod; and at least 10 of velvet panic grass, gray goldenrod, cut-leaf coneflower, Joe Pye weed, and broomsedge.



Volunteers plant seedlings at the new Sligo meadow.



Rochelle Bartolomei (Pope Farm Nursery, left) and Parks ecologist Carole Bergmann (second from right) with two volunteers during the meadow planting (Wilpers photos)

Sligo Middle School Wins National Green Award

Sligo Middle School has been named one of 47 schools nationwide as a "Green Ribbon School" by the U.S. Department of Education. The award was announced on Earth Day, April 22, by Education Secretary John King.

The White House Council on Environmental Quality praised the schools and school districts for "their leadership in reducing environmental impact and utility costs, promoting better health for students and staff, and offering effective sustainability education." The award recognizes schools that save energy, reduce costs, feature environmentally sustainable learning spaces, protect health, foster wellness, and offer environmental education to boost academic achievement and community engagement.

Starting three years ago, Sligo Middle School's Energy and Recycling Team began collecting recyclable materials weekly, placing them in the correct receptacles, visiting classrooms to turn off lights and computers, and reforming the recycling practices of staff and students.

The school secured partners to offer more outdoor environmental education for students, including the Tower Companies, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, and the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) GreenKids Program. The school's partnership with ANS includes Enviroscape lessons, water quality testing, litter collection, and a composting experiment.

During the second year of the initiative, all eighth grade students conducted water-quality testing of Sligo Creek, and students built an outdoor classroom with gardens. Sixth grade teachers took training through the Trout in the Classroom program and brought this project-based learning approach to all students. In May 2015, these efforts culminated in Sligo's certification as a Maryland Green School.

Currently, sixth graders investigate ecological and sustainability concepts in project-based units on habitats, going green, and alternative energy and participate in three days of outdoor environmental education at a residential site, where they tackle the impact of humans on the environment. Seventh graders study hydroponics and its use in modern agriculture and are introduced to biological evolution, adaptation, and natural selection. In grade eight, students look at the interdependence of the living and nonliving elements in the environment.

Sligo was awarded a STEAM grant in 2014 that provided opportunities for students to collaborate in a team approach environmental issues through outdoor adventure, artistic creation, scientific exploration, and multimedia communications. In the culmination of a yearlong effort by 30 students, Sligo hosted the "S"TEAM Sligo Community Day Festival, which brought together staff, students, and the community to learn more about the environment surrounding the school.

Sligo's outdoor classroom now includes a pond, vegetable gardens, a butterfly garden, and a RainScapes (stormwater retention) garden. Students learn about nutrition, biology, horticulture, pollinators, herbivores, and the predators who feed on them. Students also enjoy food from the garden, including kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, and cabbage. The school hosts a salad party where students bring various salads to school to share and teach about the nutritional value of each.

Congratulations to Sligo Middle School on winning this national honor!

(Adapted from U.S. Department of Education announcements)

Share Your Sligo Nature Sightings!



Bob Cantor reported this Canada Goose on its nest at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds.

Springtime is prime time to observe nature in Sligo and to share what you notice with others through the "Sightings" feature of our website.

Let other nature and Sligo lovers know what you see (or hear) by making an easy report. "Sightings" is one of the tabs along the left side of our home page (fosc.org) or you can go directly to [Sightings](#).

We know that students in at least one local elementary school check our Sightings page to see what's been noticed lately. It's likely that those who can't get out much do the same.

So far, this season has produced sightings of three notable mammals: a Groundhog ("just ambling along in broad daylight"), a Red Fox, and sign of Beaver activity,

Among the birds, keen-eyed neighbors have reported a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bald Eagle, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, nesting Canada Geese, Scarlet Tanagers, Wood Duck, Northern Parula, and Black-and white Warbler. Interesting plants in flower are also on the list, including Bloodroot, Blue Toadflax, Star Chickweed, and Azure Bluets.

Photos make a great addition to the sightings. They can be sent to the webmaster@fosc.org.



Find us on Facebook!



Friends of Sligo Creek is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to protecting, improving, and appreciating the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed.

Need to Reach Us?

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