



# Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter February 2018



*Ellen X. Silverberg photo*

## Contents

Tour the Sligo Gorge Mar. 3  
Volunteer Needed for Program Hospitality  
Grant for Stormwater Control  
Love on a Lek for Valentine's Day  
Need to Reach Us?

## Tour the Sligo Gorge March 3

Explore the natural and human history of the Sligo Gorge with Bruce Sidwell, past-president and founding board member of Friends of Sligo Creek, on Saturday, March 3, from 1 to 2:30.

Meet at the picnic area across from the intersection of Sligo Creek Parkway and Kennebec Avenue (just north of Takoma

Park). The walk will use the paved, accessible hiker-biker trail.

The stretch of the creek from there to the Pepco powerline cuts through much steeper hillsides than further upstream, with a narrower floodplain, plants adapted to drier slopes (such as chestnut oak and mountain laurel), and massive exposed rocks formed between 320 and 220 million years ago.

Bruce will point out any early-flowering plants, which may include our native American elm, spicebush, and maples, as well as naturalized wildflowers such as the common chickweed, small-flowered bittercress, corn speedwell, and purple dead-



*The Sligo Gorge, looking downstream from the Carroll Ave. bridge, cuts through steep hillsides.*



*Parallel fracturing in 350 million-year-old rock is visible in the Sligo Gorge.*

nettle.

In addition to covering natural features, the outing will visit a stone bridge dating to 1931 (soon to be replaced), outfall pipes for the old Brashear's Run tributary (where water-quality studies are ongoing), and the site of Rachel Carson's home in the mid-1940s.

He'll also point out the ridge where once stood the short-lived Glen Sligo Hotel. Its owners dredged the then-defunct mill pond to create a toy ocean for boating, with islands named Cuba and Puerto Rico. Both were soon washed away in a flash

flood.

In 1901, the hotel was sold and became the Wildwood pool room and gambling parlor, with telegraph wires allowing bettors to wager on horse races all along the East Coast. A year-long battle ensued between the town sheriff and the owners, complete with



multiple raids, wires cut and replaced, dueling court battles, and a riot fought partly in the "dense forest of pines." Our website has the colorful Washington Post [coverage](#).

During his long service on the FOSC board, Bruce helped save the golf course from over-development, convert the Pepco powerline to a meadow habitat, label all of the shrubs and trees in Spring Park, coauthor our [database](#) of 120 flowering plants in the powerline, and write a trail guide to the entire length of Sligo Creek (available on our website [here](#)). Bruce was a career scientist with the Environmental Protection Agency and also a dedicated Boy Scout leader when his kids were younger.



*The Glen Sligo Hotel became a pool room and betting parlor before closing in 1903.  
(Historic Takoma photo)*

The outing will go forward in a light rain but will be cancelled in case of foul weather. For more information, contact [naturalhistory@fosc.org](mailto:naturalhistory@fosc.org).

## Seeking Volunteer to Help with Program Meetings

Hospitality is an important part of all our indoor programs -- talks by local experts, advocates, and government officials on a wide range of topics regarding the ecological health of our watershed.

We are in search of a new volunteer to take over the role of "schlepper," who brings refreshments, supplies, signage, and projector to public talks as well as our annual "roundtable" meeting. Board member Wes Darden is moving on from this role so he can focus on the imminent new addition to his family.

The schlepper's role is to facilitate these events by purchasing snacks, beverages, and serving supplies; setting up chairs and tables; bringing the projector; and storing these items in a few boxes at home. The FOSC budget provides for the cost of these items.

If you are interested in helping FOSC programs be successful, please contact our president, Corinne Stephens, at [president@fosc.org](mailto:president@fosc.org).



*Crowd at FOSC talk by author Linda Lear on her biography of Rachel Carson (Julius Kassovic photo)*

## Grant Will Address Stormwater in Three Oaks Neighborhood

The Chesapeake Bay Trust has awarded Friends of Sligo Creek and the Three Oaks Association (3OA) a \$22,650 grant to address stormwater management in the community, located between Piney Branch Road and Maple Avenue.

The grant covers the costs of an engineering study, community outreach programs on stormwater management, and the installation of "dry wells" (see illustration below) and conservation landscaping. Together, these improvements will collect water runoff from roof tops, parking lots, roads, and sidewalks and help it seep gradually in to the soil.

The private parking lot of Three Oaks Association is one block above Sligo Creek, at the intersection of Sligo Creek Parkway and Three Oaks Drive.

Rain water, gutter water, and stormwater from neighborhoods uphill also currently flow across impervious asphalt down Three Oaks Drive and into storm drains that empty in to Sligo Creek.



*Stormwater carries damaging sediments from Three Oaks toward Sligo Creek.*

"Our goal," writes homeowner Marion Harrell, "is to reduce the



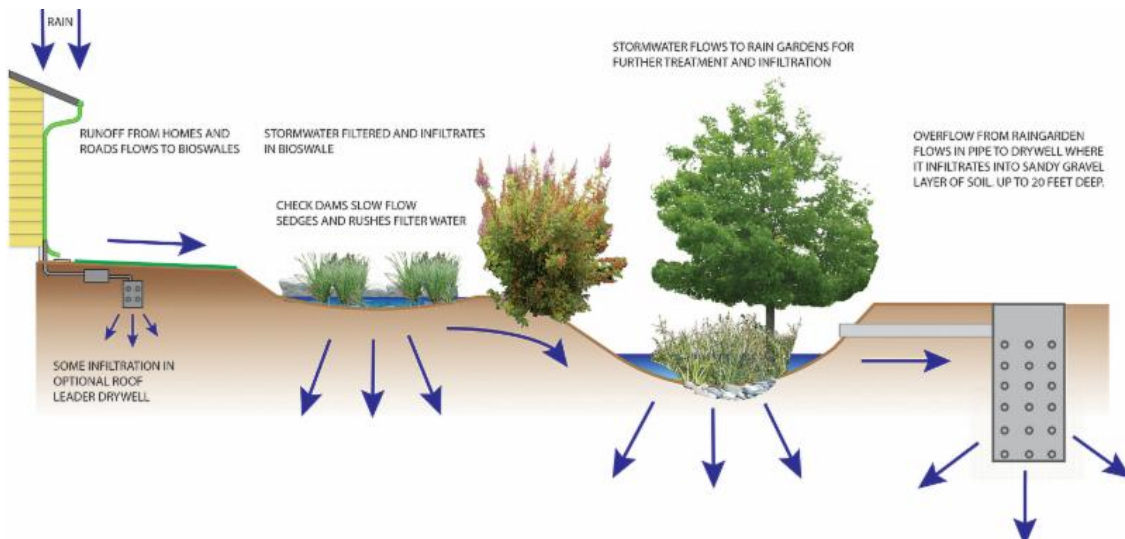
parking lot stormwater runoff dramatically by identifying areas for conservation landscaping, dry wells, and other remediation strategies. Public outreach and education will be part of the process."

Friends of Sligo Creek thanks and congratulates 3OA homeowners Carol Boquist, Marion Harrell, and Katherine Payne; 3OA Board vice president Valerie Berton; and other board members for this successful grant application. The board will also contribute about \$15,000 in crucial matching funds.

*Replacing this concrete swale with dry wells and conservation plantings will help stormwater soak in rather than run off. (Marion Harrell photos)*

Kit Gage, FOSC advocacy lead and longtime member of the Stormwater Committee, worked

closely with 3OA to prepare the grant, along with FOSC president Corinne Stephens. For more information about the project, contact [stormwater@fosc.org](mailto:stormwater@fosc.org).



*Unvegetated "dry wells" (far left and far right) can capture stormwater above or below bioswales and rain gardens. (quinaultindiannation.com photo)*

## Love on a "Lek" for the First



# Valentine's Day

Best known for his *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer also wrote the comic poem "A Parlement of Foules" in 1382. Its narrator describes a dream in which Empress Nature convenes an assembly of 34 bird species to judge three male eagles who vie for the hand of a female. Dr. Seuss-like in its clever rhymes, the poem is our earliest link of Valentine's Day with romance.

Courtship assemblies actually occur in the wild, most famously among the grouse of the American West. Males gather annually on the same patch of arid plains and try to attract females by spreading their tail feathers, puffing up their chests with colorful jiggling air sacks, and strutting around to defend a small temporary territory. Females wander casually among them, seemingly oblivious but making their selection. The Heath Hen, a lekking grouse, was widespread in Maryland into the 19th century, last reported in the Accokeek area in 1860.



Detail from John Haldane, *Froggy Went a Courtin* (2017 via [fineartamerica.com](http://fineartamerica.com))



*The Heath Hen, a lekking grouse, was last reported in the Washington area in 1860. (L. A. Fuentes, Bowdoin College Library)*

The Swedish word "lek" (play) was first applied to the assemblies of Scandinavian grouse in the 1860s. Darwin wrote at length about the role of female choice in the evolution of elaborate displays in males of many animals, including the Greater Prairie-Chicken, a grouse widespread in Maryland into the 19th century (as the subspecies Heath Hen). By the mid-1990s, biologists had found lek mating in nearly 200 species of insects, fish, amphibians, birds, and mammals.



*Gray Treefrogs call loudly from their leks in Sligo's trees. (New Hampshire Fish and Game photo)*

The key qualities of leks are that the assemblies be used only for mating, the females choose their mates, and they obtain nothing but fertilization of their eggs from the males (no nest, territory, parental care, or pair bond). In Chaucer's poem, Empress Nature must sternly remind the bird jury that the female has the final say, and she chooses to remain single another year.



*Female Black Swallowtail (top) has chosen her mate from the lekking ground on a hilltop. (Frank Model photo via Flickr.com)*

In Sligo, lekking is used by our numerous Gray Treefrogs, so rarely seen but oft-heard from their leks in trees, where males compete for females through their very loud calls. Black Swallowtail butterflies (uncommon but present here) establish their leks on hilltops, where females fly over and choose mates by the prominence of their locations. Dance flies make their leks in the air, gathering in little swarms above small landmarks.

Here is a modern English [translation](#) of the Chaucer poem; the bird parliament begins about half-way through. The wikipedia article on [lek mating](#) is very useful. Here are videos of Greater Sage-Grouse leks from [PBS Nature](#) and the [Cornell](#) Lab of Ornithology and a [silent film](#) from the 1920s showing

some of the last Heath Hens. See this cool [video](#) of dance fly mating swarms, which shows males bringing nuptial gifts to attract mates. The most comprehensive study of lek mating seems to be Jacob Hoglund and Rauno Alatalo, *Leks* (Princeton 1995).

-- Michael Wilpers, Natural History Committee, Friends of Sligo Creek,  
email [naturalhistory@fosc.org](mailto:naturalhistory@fosc.org).

## Need to Reach Us?

President (Corinne Stephens): [president@fosc.org](mailto:president@fosc.org)

Invasive Plants (Jim Anderson): [invasives@fosc.org](mailto:invasives@fosc.org)

Litter (Patton Stephens): [litter@fosc.org](mailto:litter@fosc.org)

Advocacy (Kit Gage): [advocacy@fosc.org](mailto:advocacy@fosc.org)

Natural History (Bruce Sidwell): [naturalhistory@fosc.org](mailto:naturalhistory@fosc.org)

Stormwater (Elaine Lamirande): [stormwater@fosc.org](mailto:stormwater@fosc.org)

Water Quality (Pat Ratkowski): [waterquality@fosc.org](mailto:waterquality@fosc.org)

Outreach (Sarah Jane Marcus): [outreach@fosc.org](mailto:outreach@fosc.org)

Treasurer (Dee Clarkin; Asst treasurer Sherrell Goggin): [treasurer@fosc.org](mailto:treasurer@fosc.org)

Webmaster (Sherrell Goggin): [webmaster@fosc.org](mailto:webmaster@fosc.org)

Newsletter Editor (Michael Wilpers): [editor@fosc.org](mailto:editor@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.*