



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter March 2021



Photo by Ellen X. Silverberg

March 25 Panel on "Improving Outreach and Inclusion"

On Thursday, March 25, three leaders in the Black and Latino environmental movement will discuss how Friends of Sligo Creek can improve its outreach to more diverse communities living within the watershed.

The event takes place at 7:30 pm as a Zoom meeting. To join the discussion, use this link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85924504035>.

FOSC's board of directors recognizes that we need to reach out thoughtfully and more effectively to be inclusive in outreach, programming, and leadership. Advocacy Director Kit Gage will moderate the discussion to explore how we can better reach out to people in all the communities in our watershed. Our speakers will discuss their recommendations on how FOSC might address these issues. We'll leave some time at the end for attendees to engage in conversation with our panelists.

Our panel features three committed experts with substantial experience: Dennis Chestnut, retired founding director of Groundwork Anacostia River DC;

Ruby Stemmler, executive director of EcoLatinos; and Raymond Coates, staff member of Ward 8 Woods.



Dennis Chestnut

Dennis Chestnut's work leading Groundwork Anacostia River DC featured his bandalong litter traps that removed tons of trash and debris from the Anacostia River and became one of Groundwork's signature programs. He is now a board member of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and a Senior Fellow of the Chesapeake Region Environmental Leadership Program.



Ruby Stemmler

From her over 15 years of experience in government relations, public engagement, and inclusive outreach, Ruby Stemmler founded EcoLatinos to connect and empower Latino communities in the pursuit of social and environmental justice through engagement, education, and activism across the Chesapeake Bay region. Read more about Ruby on the web page of EcoLatinos.



Raymond Coates

At Ward 8 Woods, Raymond Coates works to rejuvenate and enhance the beauty, ecological health, and public enjoyment of 500+ acres of forest. The organization engages local residents as paid staff and as volunteers to restore the woodland ecology, build trails, and promote healthy and sustainable living. Read more about Raymond in this article in the Washington Post.

For more information about this event, contact advocacy@fosc.org.

Neighbors Improving the Powerline Meadow

Recent events in the powerline meadow, downstream from New Hampshire Avenue, reflect a newly energized group of neighbors in Carole Highlands and Hillwood Manor who call themselves the Partners of Kestrel Meadow.

They've named the meadow after this charismatic falcon because the right-of-way there has hosted these birds

since 2013, taking advantage of the shrubby grassland-meadow habitat they prefer and which is increasingly rare in Maryland. The Kestrel's numbers are in decline statewide, as are Field Sparrows, which are also found in the meadow.

On March 11, a team from Prince George's Parks installed a Kestrel nest box and two boxes for Northern Flickers in county parkland adjoining the Pepco property. The boxes were



Above (left to right) are neighbor and birder John Stith, Christopher Garrett (PG Parks), Tina Schneider, Amanda Duprey-Hicks (PG Parks), and Sophia Barbieri (PG Parks).

the brainstorm of resident Tina Schneider, who worked with PG Parks to arrange the installation. The boxes were assembled in Tina's backyard with help from local carpenter David Shrock and several neighbors.

For the installation, thanks go to PG Parks Assistant Division Chief Kyle Lowe for providing materials, tools, vehicles, and staff, including Senior Park Ranger Christopher Garrett, with help from Parks staffers Amanda Duprey-Hicks, Sophia Barbieri, Michelle Adams, and Devin Mills.



On March 5 and 6, a dozen neighbors from Carole Highlands and (above) spent many hours moving trash and debris from the edge of a church parking lot adjoining the meadow, where it was threatening a sensitive wetland within the meadow. They were joined by staff from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) in this substantial effort.

The group, organized by neighbors Kristin Zimmer and Tina Schneider, was joined by Robinne Gray of the Anacostia Watershed Society; Pamela Boozer-Strother, member of County Board of Education; and Victor Ramirez, candidate for PG County Council. They welcomed a visit by Wanika Fisher, MD State Delegate, who has spent considerable time consulting with the neighborhood group on strategies to address litter issues.

A hearty thanks go to Aubin Maynard and Phong Trieu at COG for arranging for trash pickup by the PG County Department of the Environment and for their hard work during the cleanup, along with three of their colleagues from COG.



Photos: Top and bottom by M. Wilpers; cleanup by Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

In February, a Pepco contractor hand-cut the meadow's encroaching expanse of invasive Callery pear, whose saplings numbered in the thousands.

This labor-intensive approach, generously provided for a second time by Pepco (the first was in 2016), avoids the need for frequent mowing to keep the pear trees under control. In the photo above, taken afterwards, only a few scattered saplings remain in an otherwise uninterrupted expanse of broomsedge stalks, a favorite source of nutritious seeds for wintering birds.

Road Salt Blamed for Mass Fish and Salamander Kill

More than 200 fish and salamanders were found dead in the Flora Lane tributary on February 25, apparently the result of road-salt pollution from the Capital Beltway, which abuts the little stream.

Our FOSC water quality chair, Pat Ratkowski, was in the process of



leading a team doing water testing in Sligo that evening when they noticed a couple dozen dead fish in the tributary. Exploring further up the stream, they noticed many more casualties among fish and salamanders. Their bodies showed no signs of scavenging by other animals, suggesting that the die-off had happened recently.

Pat took the photo, above, showing two fish and a salamander. He alerted the county's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and three of their staff arrived at the scene the next morning. They counted 170 dead

northern two-lined salamanders and 36 dead fish (26 blacknose dace, seven tessellated darters, two creek chub, and one white sucker).

The DEP team of Steve Martin, Mark Rockman, and Alex Torrella found them all along the tributary, from its confluence with Sligo Creek upstream to a concrete structure that creates a small waterfall.

They did not find any dead fish or salamanders in the mainstem of Sligo.

Pat detected no noticable pollution in the water emerging from a large outfall at the end of Columbia Boulevard. At two other outfalls downstream, they found elevated levels of conductivity, a sign of excess salt. The first outfall drains mostly from the Beltway, with smaller amounts coming from the neighborhood, while the third pipe drains exclusively from the Beltway.



At right: Flora Lane tributary runs west to east (bottom to top) through a woodland and alongside the Beltway, at left.

Since the only anomaly in these outfalls was high conductivity, they concluded that the fish and salamander kill was likely caused by a large influx of road salt from I-495 during a snow melt the previous two days. A similar event in Gaithersburg was covered by WAMU-FM radio. There, dramatically elevated levels of chloride strongly suggested that salt was the cause. Read the full story or listen to the broadcast [here](#).

FOSC YouTube Channel Features Dozens of Sligo Videos

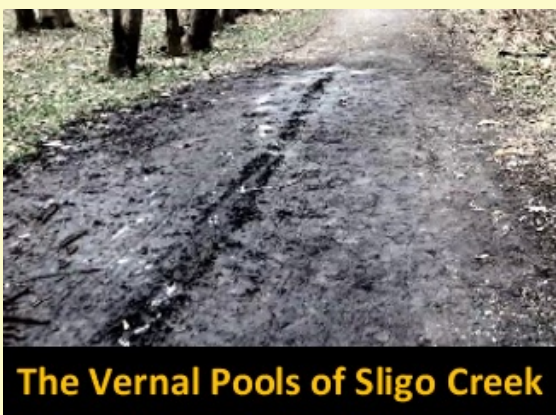
You can now watch more than 30 short videos about the Sligo Creek watershed, thanks to the hard work and vision of Ed Murtagh.

These videos are all available on the [FOSC YouTube channel](#). You can also reach YouTube from the upper-right corner or the bottom of our website home page. Once in, click on "videos."



Here, Ed reflects on his motivations, satisfactions, and future plans for this great video series:

"I started making videos and building the YouTube channel with the idea that FOSC would benefit from using this medium. We had been using blog posts and photos, but with videos, we can do so much more, like adding sounds and music to create mood and interest in the topic. People have told me that the videos are inspiring and that they share them with their friends, neighbors and family. That is a great motivator.



"When I make these videos, I usually learn something. I just did one about vernal pools. I learned all about the Wood Frog's ability to freeze most of its body, to stop its heart, and to go into a sort of suspended animation in the winter. In the spring, it thaws out and essentially comes back to life. I want to share all these interesting aspects of nature and Sligo Creek that I am learning along the way.

"I also like taking complicated topics and explaining them in everyday language rather than jargon. I enjoy using simple analogies to explain complex topics. For example, I used a bathtub analogy to explain how stormwater ponds work.

"Sligo Creek also has a lot of interesting human history and lessons to be learned. When people learn about it, they have better insight as to why

Sligo Creek is special. Otherwise, people walk right past stone structures and unique natural phenomena, having no idea about the intriguing story behind them. I would like to help change that.



"With COVID restrictions, I have done most of the videos by myself, but as the situation changes, I hope to involve more people in these videos.

"I look forward to exploring local Takoma Park green spaces. I'm interested in showing how people use their yards to provide habitat and protect Sligo Creek. And there is so much more Sligo natural history that I have yet to video document. Finally, I am hoping there are others in the community that are interested in using video as a way to share the beauty and history of Sligo Creek."

If you'd like to get involved in making these videos, contact Ed at stewards@fosc.org.

Upcoming Events

March 23: Weed Warriors Meetup

7:30 pm. Email weedwarriors@fosc.org for the Zoom link.

March 25: Improving Outreach & Inclusion - How Do We Do It Better? 7:30 pm. The Zoom link is in the article above.

April 17-May 2: It's back! Sweep the Creek

Litter pick-up for individuals and small groups. See details on the [Sweep the Creek](#) page of the FOSC website.

April 21: Merikay Smith on Less Lawn, More Life with Native Plants 7:30 pm. The Zoom link will be in next month's newsletter and on the website closer to the event date.

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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.

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