



# Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter November 2022



*Photo by Xavier Courouble*

## T-shirts to Wear with Pride

Join in our 20th year celebration by getting a beautiful new FOSC T-shirt for yourself, family, and friends!

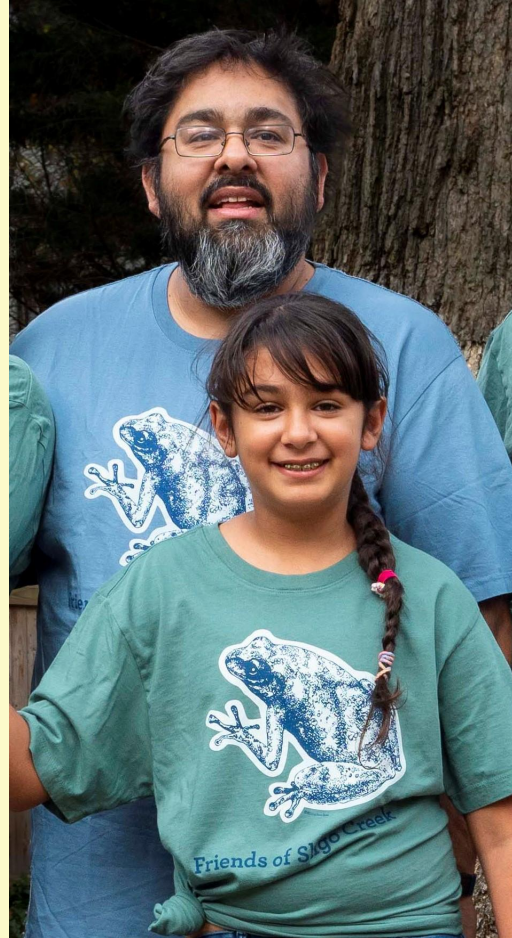
The tees are made of organic cotton and come in short sleeve (in pine green and slate blue) and long sleeve (in slate blue), in 5 sizes, small to XL.

Prices range from \$22 to \$27, and you can order the tees directly from the **FOSC store** or by going to the drop-down menu under "Support" in the upper-right of our **homepage**.

Each T-shirt purchased helps support

FOSC in its work on litter, non-native invasive plants, stormwater, water quality, natural history, and advocacy.

*Right: Sligo residents Zia and her father Raj show off their new FOSC T-shirts. (J. Kassovic photo)*



While at the store, look at the FOSC mugs and window clings that every member should have (along with their family and friends!). Our T-shirt design was done by longtime FOSC volunteer and graphic designer Marty Ittner.



The front of the tee features a Gray Treefrog (one of six frog species found in Sligo) using an illustration by Tina Thieme Brown, whose work appears in Melanie Choukas-Bradley's *Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees*.

The back of the T-shirt (left) shows the FOSC logo with our anniversary slogan, "Giving Nature a Chance Since 2002."

For more information or questions about the new FOSC T-shirts, contact [webmaster@fosc.org](mailto:webmaster@fosc.org).

*Above: Joe Howard, Sligo's long-time advocate for the Champion Trees program, displays his new FOSC T-shirt at our 20th anniversary celebration in September.  
Below: Christine Dunathan and Walter Mulbry at the T-shirt sales table during our 20th anniversary event (M. Wilpers photos)*



## Join the FOSC SaltWatch Team This Winter

Help address the issue of excessive winter road salt and the damage it causes by joining our FOSC SaltWatch team as it launches its second year.

Salt applied during snow and ice events to roadways, parking lots, and sidewalks eventually washes into our creeks. Salt can harm or kill fish and other sensitive aquatic organisms and streambank vegetation. It has also made our tap water saltier over the last few decades, which can affect human health. Salt also corrodes construction materials.

State and local agencies (notably MCDOT and MTA) have improved their salt application practices over the past few years, yet there is much more to be done in order to understand how salt affects different flora and fauna and where salt issues are greatest.

There are two ways to help:

- 1) you can volunteer to monitor salt levels in the creek. And,
- 2) you can report a pile of excess salt to [salt@fosc.org](mailto:salt@fosc.org).



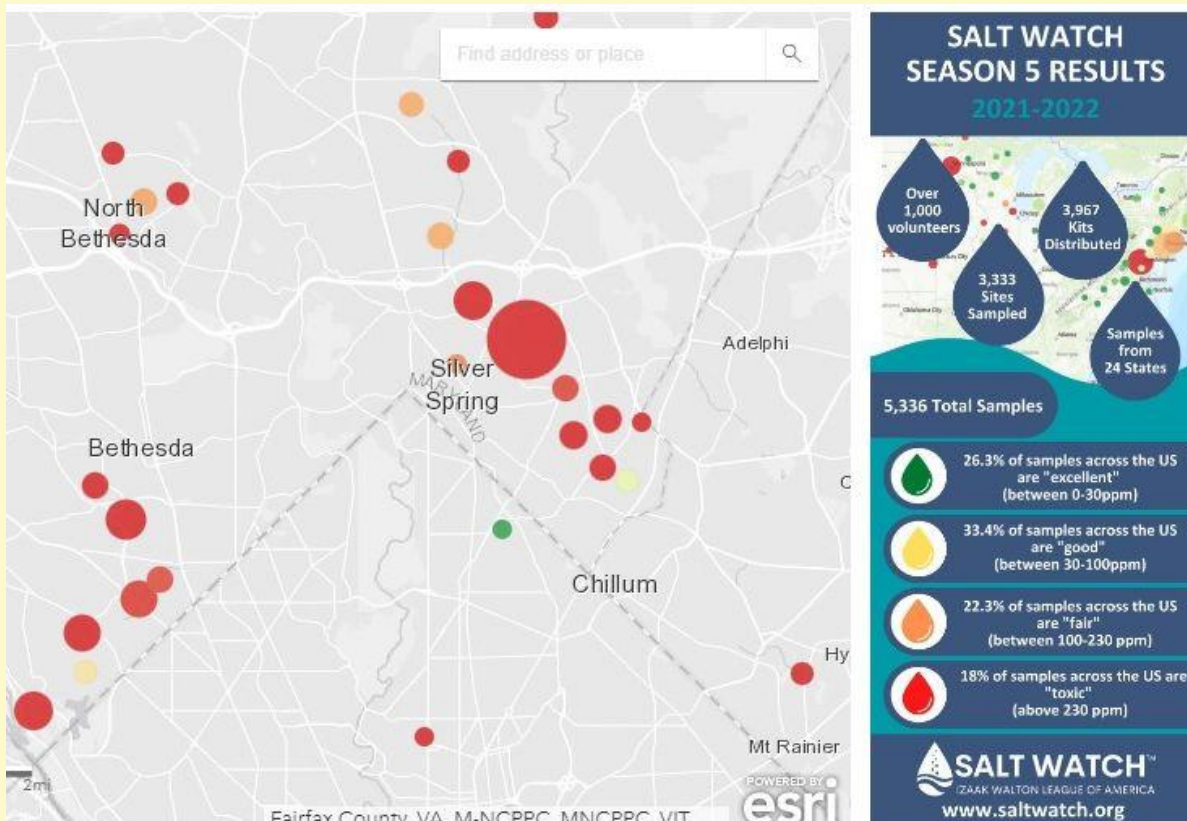
*Excess salt dumped last winter near Piney Branch and Mississippi Ave*

## **Monitor Salt Levels with the FOSC SaltWatch team**

To volunteer for the FOSC SaltWatch Monitoring team, monitoring salt levels before, during, and after snow and ice events, please let the FOSC Water Quality Committee know you're interested by emailing [waterquality@fosc.org](mailto:waterquality@fosc.org).

Last year, thanks to the dedication of the FOSC SaltWatch Monitoring Team, we learned how quickly parts of Sligo Creek can be affected by salt application. And now we also understand which roadways and other hard surfaces are salted and how they drain into Sligo Creek - including the Beltway.

The chart below shows the monitoring results in Sligo and other local creeks last winter. The large red dot over Sligo Creek indicates the salt levels were in the toxic range, with average readings over 230ppm (parts per million); at certain test sites we found spikes above 840ppm.



Courtesy of the [Izaak Walton League of America](http://www.izaa.org)

This winter, we hope to have enough volunteers to monitor for salt at key spots along the entire lengths of Sligo Creek, Long Branch, and Wheaton Branch.

Our water quality team will contact you about picking up a test kit from a nearby Water Quality Committee member and will work with you to select a monitoring site so that testing is spread out across the Sligo Watershed.

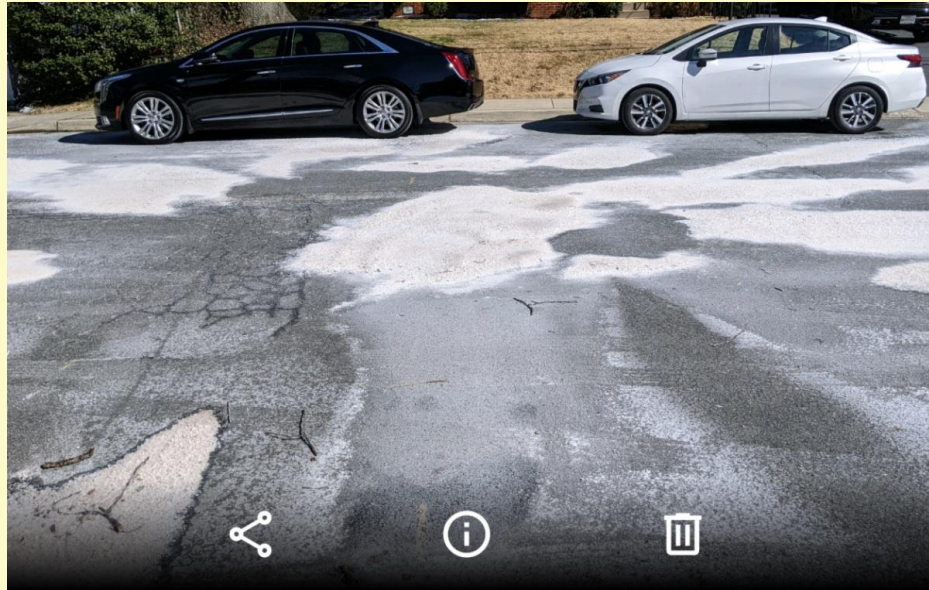
To learn more about our work and what's involved in monitoring, visit the [Salt Monitoring Initiatives](#) page on the website.

**Report Excess Salt Piles** on Sligo's roads, driveways, and parking lots. Email a description with the location, date, and a photo to [salt@fosc.org](mailto:salt@fosc.org). We will notify the appropriate government agency to get it removed. Visit the [Salt](#)

**Monitoring Initiatives** page and email [salt@fosc.org](mailto:salt@fosc.org) if you want more information or have questions.

Hopefully, through the work of the Sligo Creek community, we can make a difference in how, when, and where salt is applied by helping to document the levels of salt being applied and to "give nature a chance."

*Below: Excessive salt dumped on Dallas Avenue last winter*



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## FOSC's Ed Murtagh Honored by Conservation Montgomery

In early November, Conservation Montgomery gave its 2022 Joe Howard Environmental Award to long-time FOSC member and current FOSC Board VP **Ed Murtagh** at its annual meeting at the Writer's Center in Bethesda.

Ed has been very active in Sligo for 20 years, at first focusing on stormwater, and litter initiatives and more recently taking on coordinating Sweep the Creek and Weed Warrior events, expanding the FOSC stewards program, and creating videos and social media posts for FOSC. Congratulations, Ed! Thank you for all you do for FOSC and the larger community.



Above (from left): Ginny Barnes (Vice Chair, Conservation Montgomery), Joe Howard, Mike Riley (Director, Montgomery Parks), Ed Murtagh, Caren Madsen (Chair, Conservation Montgomery), and Mark Elrich (Montgomery County Executive)

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***Please support FOSC in this season of giving***

***FOSC is funded by donations. Our programs depend on your support.***

***You can give via the Donate button below - it's simple and secure -  
or send a check to the address at the very bottom of this email.***

***Thank you!***

**Donate**



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## Secrets of Sligo's Squirrels

You'll often see our Eastern Gray Squirrels scampering straight down a tree trunk, easily pausing between runs.

This neat trick is possible only because their hind feet are attached to swiveling ankle joints that can rotate backwards.

*(Photo from Sligo by Katja Schulz on iNaturalist)*





If you see squirrels chasing each other in winter, it's probably a male running after a female who's ready to mate. Males detect scents given off by females for five days leading up to the eight hours when they can become pregnant. Young squirrels sometimes chase each other while pretending to mate. The adults also mate in June. *(Photo by Derek Bridges via flickr)*

When a squirrel picks up an acorn from a white oak, the squirrel eats it immediately because, if buried, the acorn quickly sprouts, ruining its nutritional value. If the acorn's from a red oak, the squirrel buries it because these acorns won't germinate until spring, so they remain a good food source for months.



The red oak group in Sligo includes Northern Red Oak, Southern Red Oak, Black Oak, Pin Oak, Scarlet Oak, and Willow Oak. The white oaks include White Oak, Chestnut Oak, and Post Oak. *(Photo by Andy Wilson from Maryland Biodiversity Project, [marylandbiodiversity.com](http://marylandbiodiversity.com).)*

A squirrel can store acorns, walnuts, and hickory nuts in as many as 100 shallow holes for future eating. They find about 85 percent of them when needed and can smell an acorn through a foot of snow. To prevent other animals from raiding these pantries, squirrels dig many fake, empty holes, frustrating birds, raccoons, and foxes who go looking for them.



*(Photo from Sligo by Katja Schulz on iNaturalist)*



It's not unusual to see Eastern Gray Squirrels that are all black. These natural variants occur much more often near cities than in rural areas, probably because the black color makes them stand out against the gray pavement on roads, so they're less likely to be hit by cars. Much rarer are white squirrels, which are either color morphs (with black eyes) or albinos (with pink eyes). Three have been reported in separate locations in Sligo since 2020. *(Above left photo by Dany Poet, from [marylandbiodiversity.com](http://marylandbiodiversity.com); right photo from Sligo by Stephen Davies on iNaturalist)*

Squirrels have eyes on the sides of their heads, giving them nearly 360-degree vision, which helps them notice predators. Below, a female Cooper's Hawk has cleverly approached its target from the rear, the squirrel's blind spot. It worked, as the second photo shows. *(Photos by Andy Wilson from Maryland Biodiversity Project)*





*Text by M. Wilpers. Use the iNaturalist app or website to follow wildlife sightings in the project titled "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed." For more info, email [naturalhistory@fosc.org](mailto:naturalhistory@fosc.org).*

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## Need to Reach Us?

Interim President (Kit Gage): [president@fosc.org](mailto:president@fosc.org)

Invasive Plants/RIP (Walter Mulbry): [invasives@fosc.org](mailto:invasives@fosc.org)

Litter (Tanya DeKona): [litter@fosc.org](mailto:litter@fosc.org)

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

Natural History (Michael Wilpers): [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)

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

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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.*

**Join FOSC**

