



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter December 2024



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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WATER QUALITY

Winter Salt Monitoring is starting in Sligo & Long Branch

FOSC volunteers are getting ready to launch the fourth year of our **Winter Salt Monitoring program** in Sligo Creek and Long Branch. Our testing will continue through March using salt test kits provided by our partner, the Isaac Walton League.

Building on last year's findings, volunteers will again monitor the creeks for salt (chloride) weekly and during winter storm events at about 28 sites.

Because the data show that salt levels in the creeks rose quickly after roads were salted for the two major storms last winter, and reached very high levels, we are adding new test sites near the roadways that cross the creeks to better capture conditions close to these major sources of salt. We are looking for testers in these areas:

- University Blvd and Sligo;
- Forest Glen Rd and Sligo;
- Mid-Long Branch;
- Possibly along Takoma Branch; and
- Lower Sligo at Riggs Rd.

Please email wq@fosc.org if you are interested in joining the team. We're getting underway this week and next.

At the conclusion of the salting season, FOSC wrote to the MD State Dept. of Transportation (DOT) and MoCo DOT to push for greater employee and contractor training, tighter guidelines and procedures, and better calibration of spreader apparatus. Both acknowledged the need to deploy salt more effectively. We wrote to MoCo Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) as well, describing our testing results and need for greater protections for the Sligo watershed. We await the revised County Salt Management Plan scheduled to be released at the end of December.

We are continuing to press County and State agencies to do better this year, and will discuss our incoming data with them as the winter progresses.

What can you do? Become a Salt Reporter

Excessive winter storm treatment (in the form of salt piles or very dense application of salt) has made a major contribution to the high salt levels in Sligo Creek and Long Branch. Yet using excessive salt does not improve the effectiveness of the treatment. **We ask that you and your neighbors keep an eye out for excessive salt on roads, in parking lots, on sidewalks, steps and any other impervious surface and report them with photos, if possible.**

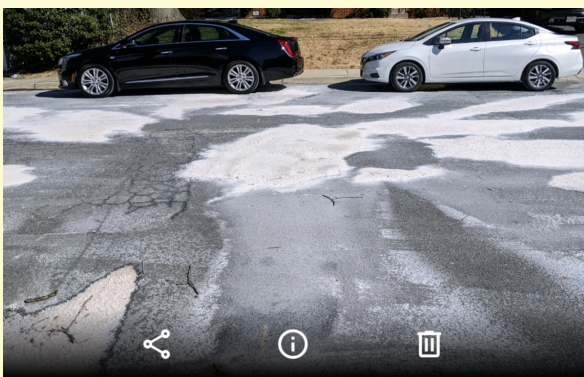
How to Report Excessive Salt on Roadways, Parking Lots & Other Impervious Surfaces

- **For Montgomery County roads (unnumbered roadways)**, including roads and parking lots in Sligo Creek Park, please report excessive salting preferably on the County's salt-related website at <https://www3.montgomerycountymd.gov/311/Services.aspx?SolutionId=-1> or call 311. A written request is always better but sometimes all you can manage is a phone call.

Your report should include as precise a location as possible, such as the nearest address, cross street, whether it's on the side or middle of the road, etc. Photos can be attached to the report. **In the web form comments, clearly state that you want salt removed, not added.** Request that they get back to you about the actions the County took to clean up.

- **For PG County**, call either 311 (if you're calling from PG County) or the PG Report Snow Conditions line at 301-883-4748. Tell them you want salt removed and provide a precise location and details as above.
- **For State-maintained (numbered) routes**, report through the **State Highway Administration (SHA) service webform** (https://mdotsha.my.salesforce-sites.com/customer-care/request_for_service) or call SHA at 301-513-7300. If you use the webform, select Topic "Weather-Related" and Subtopic "Snow/Plowing/Salt". In the comments section, clearly state you are requesting that excessive salt be removed. Request that the SHA get back to you with a follow up report.
- **For all excessive salt spotted, please also email FOSC at salt@fosc.org** with the location, date spotted, date reported, any photos, and where you reported it. Many educational, residential, and other sites are not covered by the salt reporting systems we mention above. We will try to get excessive salt removed if you report it to us, wherever it is, and will urge more effective salting practices.

In the US, approximately 20 million tons of salt is applied to roads, parking lots, driveways, etc. each year. It gets washed "away" – into rivers and streams, polluting our soil, groundwater, and drinking water.



*An over-salted intersection, a common problem. This one in mid-Sligo, one short block from Sligo Creek.
(photographer unknown)*



*Excessive salting in the Sligo Park Hills neighborhood last winter.
(Photo by Kit Gage)*

Being Salt Wise at Home - for the Creeks, the Critters, & the Bay

What you do matters! MoCo DEP advises the following on their **DEP winter salt tips** webpage:



Shovel early & often: Remove snow and clear pavement before snow turns to ice.

Consider Green Alternatives: There are many organic, salt-free and pet-safe de-icers on the market today. Products containing calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) are more eco-friendly. [Editor's note: labeling such as "pet friendly" or "no salt" is not regulated for these products, so be sure to read the ingredient list. If it has chloride in it, it has salt.] Remember to use these products sparingly, and don't expect them to replace the need for shoveling. In addition, scattering sand on icy surfaces can provide temporary traction and reduce the danger of slipping.

Go easy!: Sprinkle de-icers sparingly and evenly. Read the directions carefully and apply the least amount necessary. More is not better. When applied properly, it won't take much to get the desired results. **Leave space between the grains.** Using a lawn spreader can help spread deicer evenly and prevent clumping.



One 12 oz. mug of salt melts a 20 foot driveway.

Know when to treat: De-icers and salt are not meant to replace the work of shoveling. They are meant to loosen ice so it can be shoveled away.

Check the temperature and weather conditions: Let the sun be your friend! It can do the work for you. If temperatures are expected to rise, de-icers or salt may not be needed.



*Oversalting at an apartment complex in VA.
(Photos courtesy of the Izaak Walton League)*



FOSC

FOSC Roundtable Requests



Members of the FOSC Roundtable at the annual meeting (Ellen Maidman-Tanner photo)

The FOSC Roundtable gathered on a sunny November Saturday for the annual meeting to review this year's accomplishments and to brainstorm ideas and activities for next year.

You've heard about many successes in past newsletters such as the Green Meadows Park kiosk, the Sweep the Creek and the monthly Litter Hotspot cleanups, the bluebird initiative, expanded Weed Warrior invasive plant pulls, history and nature walks and talks, water quality initiatives, and the growing outreach efforts.

One topic of conversation was the wish to reimagine Sweep the Creek to include actions beyond litter pickup.

Please let us know what you think would be an interesting addition to the Sweep the Creek semi-annual events. Email info@fosc.org.

This is also the season we plan FOSC walks and talks for next year. Help us brainstorm activities for the coming year that YOU want to participate in!

- Is there something more you'd like to learn about Sligo Creek?
- Problems in the creeks or parklands you want to help address?

- Have you heard an interesting talk you think would appeal to other FOSC members?

Email your ideas to info@fosc.org and we will explore them. We welcome fresh ideas and suggestions!

SLIGO STEWARDSHIP

Why Not English Ivy?

Protect the beautiful trees that give our yards, neighborhoods, and parks character and shade

FOSC has just updated the English Ivy postcard that describes a simple 3-step process for removing ivy from your trees and yard. Some readers may remember the original from 24 years ago by then-FOSC president Sally Gagne and others. It shows the importance of removing English ivy from your yard. Look for it in the kiosks along Sligo and Long Branch in the new year.

English ivy is a non-native invasive plant, or "NNI", and a major scourge in the Sligo watershed and elsewhere in MoCo and the region. It lacks predators, which gives it free reign to blanket the ground and trees, eliminating food sources and habitat for wildlife.



Learn more about English ivy on the [Resources on Invasives page of the FOSC website](#).

On the ground, English ivy smothers native flowers, ferns, and tree seedlings that are the future of the woods. It is associated with reduced biodiversity. It harbors mosquitoes by holding moisture and accelerating rot.

On trees, its heavy vines add significant weight and can bring down branches and mature trees in strong wind. It competes with the tree for light, nutrients and water. It forms berries when it grows vertically, spreading its seeds. It will kill the tree.

Get rid of your ivy! You'll save your trees, foster a healthy yard, and promote native plants

and the animals that rely on them.

Winter is a good time to look at your trees and cut any English ivy vines on them. In spring, pulling ivy from around the tree trunks in your yard will go a long way toward improving your trees' health.

Many of us have English ivy in our yards -- a cheap evergreen ground cover. Unfortunately, as a non-native invasive plant, it readily spreads into neighbors' yards and local parks, including Sligo Creek and Long Branch. On the ground, it crowds out native flowers, ferns, and tree seedlings that

are the future of the woods. It harbors mosquitoes. On trees, its heavy vines can bring down branches, slow the flow of sap, and kill the tree. Get rid of your ivy! You'll save your trees, foster a healthy yard, and promote native plants in Sligo Creek and Long Branch.



Ivy forms berries when it grows vertically, spreading seeds. Its leaves become more rounded too.

HOW TO REMOVE ENGLISH IVY



1. Using clippers, cut all shoots at the tree base. Don't pull the ivy off as that can pull the bark off too. Instead, let it die and fall off on its own.



2. Sever large vines with a hand saw and create at least a two inch gap between the top and bottom. Be very careful not to cut the tree bark.



3. Make a 2 foot "life saver ring" around the base of the tree. Pull ivy roots where possible to discourage it from regrowing. Check the tree and the area around it periodically and pull new ivy growth.



Resources on Invasives
For more on English ivy and alternatives, use this FOSC QR code.

Printed with funds from the Takoma Foundation



The 3 step technique for removing ivy is not difficult to follow. Once cut, leave ivy on the tree. **Do not pull it off** because you risk pulling bark off the tree. The cut ivy will gradually turn brown, blend in with the color of the tree bark, and fall off. One must check the tree and area around it periodically; cut any new ivy shoots growing onto the tree, and pull any new ivy growth on the ground. To avoid re-rooting and re-sprouting, all material must be carefully removed and disposed of through the County's yard trim pickup or placed off the ground to dry out completely.



Ivy forms berries when it grows vertically, spreading seeds. Its leaves become more rounded too - it can appear to be a different plant, but it is



Rootlets looking for another hold on the tree.

not.

Alternatives to English Ivy

Evergreen, Shade-Tolerant Native Ground Covers

Pachysandra procumbens – Allegheny Spurge

Dryopteris intermedia – Evergreen Wood Fern

Polystichum acrostichoides – Christmas Fern

Carex plantaginea - plantainleaf sedge, or seersucker sedge

Carex woodii - Wood's sedge

Carex rosea - Rosy or Golden star sedge

Chrysogonum virginianum – Green and Gold or Golden Star

Native Perennial Vines

Parthenocissus quinquefolia – Virginia Creeper – a native climber in the grape family that is especially pretty in the fall when the leaves become red to purple.

Lonicera sempervirens – Coral honeysuckle, trumpet honeysuckle, or scarlet honeysuckle - Attracts butterflies, bumblebees, moths, hummingbirds and even songbirds who eat the berries.

Wisteria frutescens – American wisteria – a woody, deciduous, climbing vine with fragrant purple booms on hanging racemes.

The **Maryland Native Plant Society** maintains **a list of area native plant nurseries**. On their site, scroll down past the map to see the actual listings. Choose a plant based on its cultural requirements - soil type, moisture and light requirements.

LITTER / WEED WARRIORS

Stewardship



Porcelain Berry Vine Art by Pat Wellington



Weed Warrior Pat Wellington transforms porcelainberry vines.



Our Long Branch Park is one of the projects featured in this Weed Warrior video by videographer Carly Silverman from George Washington University. See other Weed Warrior videos on the FOSC Youtube channel.

Thanks to Weed Warriors for being out there all year round improving our parklands.



Weed Warriors out on a cold Dec. morning at Dennis Ave. The weed wrenches make quick work of removing roots of invasive shrubs.

FOSC Weed Warriors are again on track to be #1 in the county for Weed Warrior hours, with 3,200+ hours so far pulling and cutting non-native invasive vines and shrubs in the Sligo watershed.



That's a lot of recyclables for one work morning! Ed Murtagh, FOSC Vice President and Sweep Coordinator (at right), and Nick Clements, Litter Hotspot Coordinator, make a big difference to the creeks by organizing cleanup events and encouraging volunteers to come out. Thank you!

Please be sure to view the entire newsletter including the Recent Nature Sightings by clicking on "View entire message" or similar text at the bottom of your browser.

Gas Leaf Blower Ban

In Montgomery County, gasoline-powered leaf blowers and leaf vacuums can no longer be sold, and their use is banned as of July 1, 2025. FOSC led the charge to help pass the bill.

FOSC Advocacy Committee members did extensive research on the harms associated with gasoline-powered leaf blowers and on the legal options available to state and local entities who want to restrict their use. We published commentaries in [Maryland Matters](#) and in the Baltimore Sun urging the County Council to move ahead with the ban.

Our research showed that the noise that gas leaf blower users suffer is earsplitting, reaching [95 to 105](#) decibels at the user's ears. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), you can sustain ear damage from a two-hour exposure to a leaf blower blasting at 90 decibels. At 50 feet away, noise levels can reach [75 decibels](#). The low-frequency component of the noise produced by gas leaf blowers penetrates windows and [carries much farther](#) than the noise generated by battery-powered blowers.



An electric leaf blower (DEP photo)

Hearing loss can be insidious, happening even before we know it. But noise pollution is not just annoying, disruptive, and bad for our ears. Continual exposure to noise pollution [can cause](#) high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, and depression. The [World Health Organization](#) adds to that list cognitive impairment in children.

The [air pollution that gas leaf blowers pump out](#) includes fine particulate matter, oxides of nitrogen, and the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Americans who live in traditionally marginalized neighborhoods may already be [disproportionately exposed](#) to the [long list of risks posed by air pollution](#). No one should have to experience additional, avoidable

health burdens on the job.

In adopting the leaf blower ban, the County joins with many other jurisdictions across the US to protect the health of some of its most vulnerable citizens - landscape workers - who often cannot choose the equipment they must use, and in protecting the environment.

OUTREACH

FOSC Outreach is Gearing Up

We haven't had an active FOSC Outreach committee since before the pandemic, but we're now organizing one.

The goal of the committee is to expand the number of people who know about FOSC and our work, and invite them to become involved. Sharing with people about FOSC and the creeks, and connecting them with FOSC projects or bringing their ideas to life, will expand our impact. We would especially like to engage people in neighborhoods where we haven't been active.

Whether you would like to speak about FOSC to neighborhood groups and PTAs, or staff a table at events, or simply participate in the new Outreach listserv and/or committee meetings, we would be delighted to have you as part of the team. Let us know of your interest at outreach@fosc.org. We'll arrange a kick-off meeting in the new year.



*At the Takoma Park Earth Day 2024
Celebration (City of Takoma Park photo)*

With your help we can really expand FOSC's presence and make a difference in the creeks and parkland.

With thanks,

Sergio Obadia, Outreach Committee chair

Mimi Abdu, Outreach Committee member

Give a gift to Sligo Creek and Long Branch

Support Friends of Sligo Creek and help the creeks thrive in 2025!

Your support is key to our success.

Sweep the Creek and Litter Hotspot clean-ups
Weed Warrior invasive plants removal
Salt, E. coli, and other testing to understand threats to water quality
Advocacy work to protect the creeks
Water WatchDogs pollution reporting
Natural history posters in the kiosks
Outreach to neighbors in English, Spanish and Amharic
Walks, talks and other initiatives

Help the creeks thrive in 2025 by making a year-end gift to FOSC!

[Donate here](#)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Upcoming Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Watch the **[FOSC Home page](#)** and the **[FOSC Calendar of Events page](#)** for more upcoming FOSC programs and volunteer events.



Planting at a Sacred Grounds project site (Photo courtesy of Kit Gage)

Wednesday, January 15 at 7:30pm-- Sacred Grounds Project of the National Wildlife Federation with FOOSC and other partners

Talk at Historic Takoma, 7328 Carroll Ave, Takoma Park 20912

Doors open for conversation at 7:00pm, program starts at 7:30pm.

FOOSC and the Takoma Horticultural Club will jointly host a talk about the Sacred Grounds project, a national project of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) with FOOSC and other local partners.

Many congregations in Maryland have already participated in the project, siting native plant pollinator gardens on their properties, obtaining free native plants, and learning more about their importance for the environment.

Learn about the project and how your congregation might participate from Naomi Edelson of NWF, and Kit Gage of FOOSC and Takoma Horticultural Club. Kit serves as the native plant lead for this area's Sacred Grounds projects.

Saturday, January 18 from 10:00am -12:00pm

Litter Hotspot Cleanup at Long Branch Community Center

8700 Piney Branch Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20901

The first litter hotspot cleanup of 2025 on this weekend of service in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Meet in front of the Community Center.

Monday, January 20 from 1:00pm -3:00pm

MLK, Jr. Day Litter Cleanup at Sligo Creek Parkway

at Sligo Creek and Piney Branch at the Dale Drive Tennis Court parking lot

Meet at the tennis courts just upstream of Piney Branch.

(Lat/Long: 38.99600372723872, -77.00768618428033)

Please dress for the occasion, and bring gloves and trash grabbers if you have them.

Sunday, January 26 from 1:00pm -3:00pm

**Litter hotspot cleanup at Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds
at Dennis Ave. and Hemley Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20902**

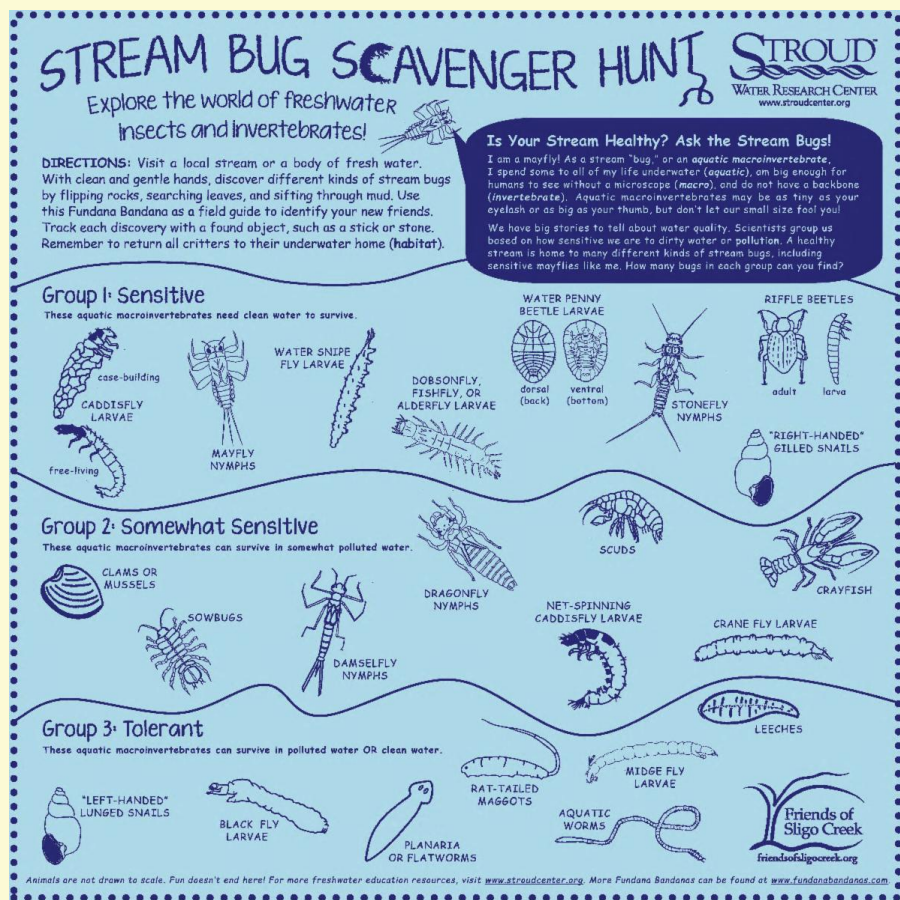
Join us at the Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds. Please bring work gloves if you have them.
We'll provide the trash! And trash bags and recycling bags, of course.

FOSC STORE/LISTSERV

T-Shirt, Ball Cap, or a Fundana?

For the buggy person in your life...

a Stream Bug Scavenger Hunt Fundana!



Accurate drawings! Bugs that morph into flying creatures! Learn how we know stream health by who is living in the water. Fundanas are 100% cotton, last for

years, and have many uses.

Order your fundana from the [FOSC store](#), along with ballcaps, t-shirts and mugs. You can have your order mailed to you or opt to pick it up locally. All sales support FOSC programs. Thank you.

The next drawing for a t-shirt, cap or fundana - your choice- will happen in early 2025. We're working on a date. To enter the drawing:

- If you are already a FOSC member, join the [main FOSC listserv](#) to be automatically entered in the drawing.
- If you are not yet a FOSC member and are reading this newsletter from your neighbor's copy, please join FOSC [at this link](#)! You will also be entered in the drawing.

FOSC GIVING

**Donating to FOSC keeps our many projects going.
You can give anytime and in any way that suits you!**

**Make a gift, set up a monthly gift, make a birthday gift,
a gift in honor of someone, or a gift in memoriam.**

**Just use this link: [Donate here](#) or use the Donate button below.
It's simple and secure.**



**If you prefer to write a check, please send it to:
FOSC, P.O. Box 11572, Takoma Park, MD 20913**

**For those of you who are required to take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD),
you might consider making a gift to FOSC with part of it.**

**If you are at least 59½ years old, you can take a distribution from your IRA and then
make a gift from it without penalty.**

**No matter your age, you can designate FOSC as the beneficiary of a portion of your
IRA and it will pass to FOSC after your lifetime.**

Consult a tax advisor for these and other tax-advantaged ways to give to FOSC.

Your gift is greatly appreciated - thank you!

NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



Red-shouldered Hawk near the the Parkway at
Park Valley Rd on Nov. 15 (philipncohen)



Both were caught with a sweep net (and released) in the powerline on Nov. 25 (Adrienne van dem Beemt)



Above: White Oak



Top right: Maple-leaf Viburnum



Right: Northern Red Oak

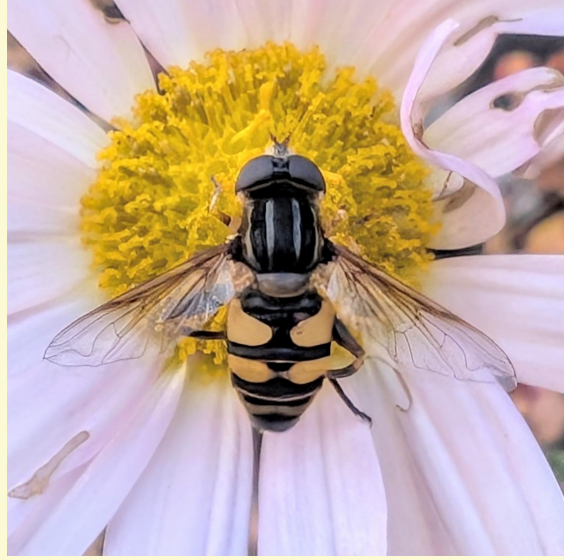
Along the Parkway near Park Valley Rd. on
Nov. 15. (M. Wilpers)



Above: Hooded Mergansers at the
Wheaton Branch ponds on Nov. 18 (rekursiv)

Below: Cooper's Hawk on Long Branch near
Houston on Nov. 24 (philipncohen)





Left: Marsh fly (genus *Dictya*) in the powerline on Nov. 25.

Right: Narrow-headed Marsh Fly near Elm and Poplar on Nov. 26

(Adrienne van den Beemt)



Spectacular Rustgill near Jesup Blair Park on Nov. 19 (ychhean)



Panicled Aster flowering in 42-degree cold near the Parkway and New Hampshire on Dec. 3 (M. Wilpers)



Left: Shelf fungus (*Seccherinum nitidum*) near the Parkway at Mississippi (owens19)

Above: Gray Hairstreak near Elson and 16th Place on Nov. 12 (kristin-marie)



Peregrine Falcon on the WTOP satellite dish on Dec. 14 (Dan Treadwell)



Golden-crowned Kinglet near the Parkway at Houston on Dec. 8 (philipncohen)



Red-shouldered Hawks at the Forest Glen
wetlands on Dec. 14 (Dan Treadwell)

Photo selection and captions by Michael Wilpers (questions or comments, naturalhistory@fosc.org). All photos taken from the iNaturalist project, "Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed" ([Fauna and Flora of the Sligo Creek Watershed · iNaturalist](#)). Photo credits reflect those provided in the iNaturalist system.

Need to Reach Us?

President (Elaine Lamirande): president@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.



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