



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter

January/February 2025



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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FOSC Volunteers Do It Again

THANK YOU FOSC VOLUNTEERS!

Despite the many challenges the creek and park face, an amazing range of plants and wildlife are able to live and even thrive because of the volunteer efforts of FOSC members. Thank you for all your support and for making 2024 so productive and successful.

Your involvement and leadership in the many efforts FOSC took on throughout the watershed really adds up, as you'll see in the Sweep The Creek and Litter Hotspot Cleanups, and Weed Warrior metrics below. Volunteers are busy creating, translating, and posting our kiosk posters in English and Spanish, hosting activities at school and community events, and monitoring bluebird boxes. There are many, many volunteers that make FOSC the talented, diverse, vibrant group we are today.

We are very proud of all our volunteers. Your work is a remarkable achievement for a small group in a small watershed!

-Elaine Lamirande, FOSC President

Sweep The Creek & Litter Hotspot Cleanups



FOSC was again the leading watershed group in 2024 for litter cleanups in Montgomery County parks because of you, our volunteers!

You have earned this distinction for the second year in a row by bagging, grabbing, and hauling more than 13,600 lbs. of plastic bottles, aluminum and steel cans, glass bottles, and other litter, including 1,632 lbs. of furniture, bikes, mattresses, fencing, lawn chairs, lumber -

you name it. FOSC Stream Stewards are a key part of this effort, running the semi-annual Sweep the Creek event, as well as others throughout the year. *(See the Upcoming Events section below.)*

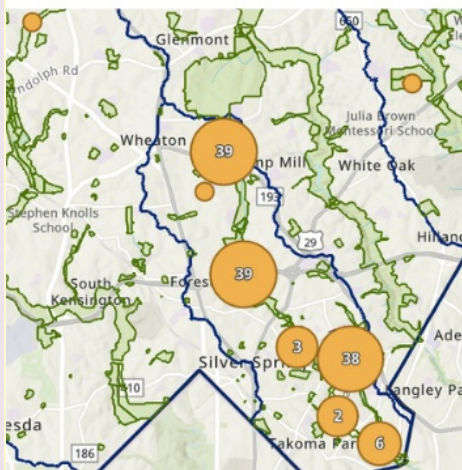
FOSC Weed Warriors pitched in as well, bagging 1,793 lbs. of trash at weed pulling events. And we know that many unsung parkgoers routinely plog on their walks.

The Parks Dept. joined in the recognition of the Litter leadership, Ed Murtagh, FOSC Vice President and Sweep the Creek coordinator, and Nick Clements, Litter Hotspot coordinator:

"Ed Murtagh is truly a keystone volunteer and leader in Montgomery Parks. Ed, thank you for your dedication and assistance. We're also grateful for the remarkable support from Nick Clements, the FOSC Sligo Stewards, and the Weed Warriors!"

Thank you for your tireless work for the creeks and parkland, Ed and Nick, and our Stewards and Weed Warriors! You do an outstanding job!

2024 Impact on Trash - The Friends of Sligo Creek MONTGOMERY PARKS



1,793 pounds of trash removed by
FOSC Weed Warriors at 35 WW events!

Total Weight
🗑️ **13,630 lbs**

Trash Bags

🗑️ **395**

Tires

🚗 **9**

Recycle Bags

♻️ **77**

Oversized Items

⚠️ **1,632 lbs**



Thank you **FOSC Sligo**
Stewards, Weed
Warriors and **volunteers**
for your incredible
stewardship and support!

Total Volunteers

🏠 **802**



Cleanup Events

🌳 **130**

Parks

🌳 **27**

Total Volunteer Hours

🧑 **1,690**

Volunteer Service Value

📈 **\$59,133**

FOSC removed **13,480 pounds** (57%) of the total trash from the Sligo Creek watershed (23,705 pounds). Trash levels have decreased from 2023 (roughly -2,000 pounds). FOSC is once again the **#1 watershed group!**

To calculate Total Weight we assume an average weight of 25 lbs per trash bag and 22 lbs per tire.
To calculate volunteer service value we used the 2024 MD volunteer time value of \$34.99/hr

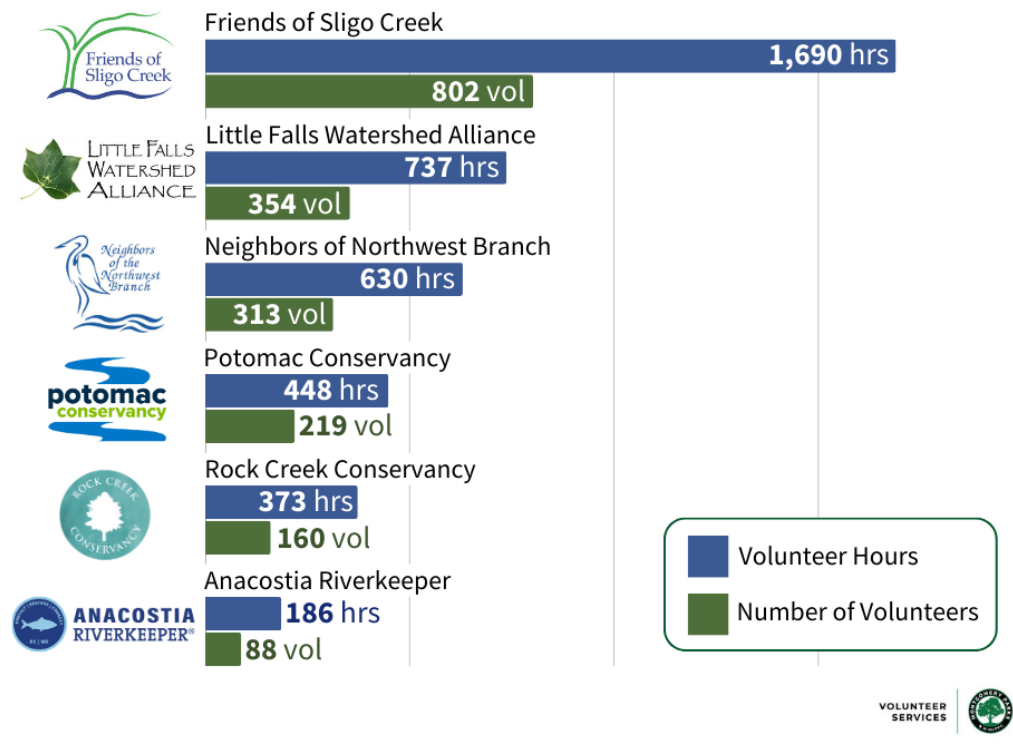
VOLUNTEER
SERVICES



FOSC also topped MoCo watershed groups in Volunteer Engagement in MoCo Parks. More than 800 of you gave your time and energy to reduce pollution in Sligo, Long Branch, and Wheaton Branch, and ultimately the Anacostia River. That's 1,690 hours!

Volunteer Engagement by Watershed Organizations 2024

MONTGOMERY PARKS



FOSC Weed Warriors

Thank you to all the Weed Warriors (WWs) who were out there in 2024 helping us protect the ecological health of the watershed.

See the metrics below showing what WWs accomplished and why they are #1 in MoCo!

Sligo Weed Warriors #1



Sunday Workgroup

in Montgomery
County, MD
2024



Monday Workgroup



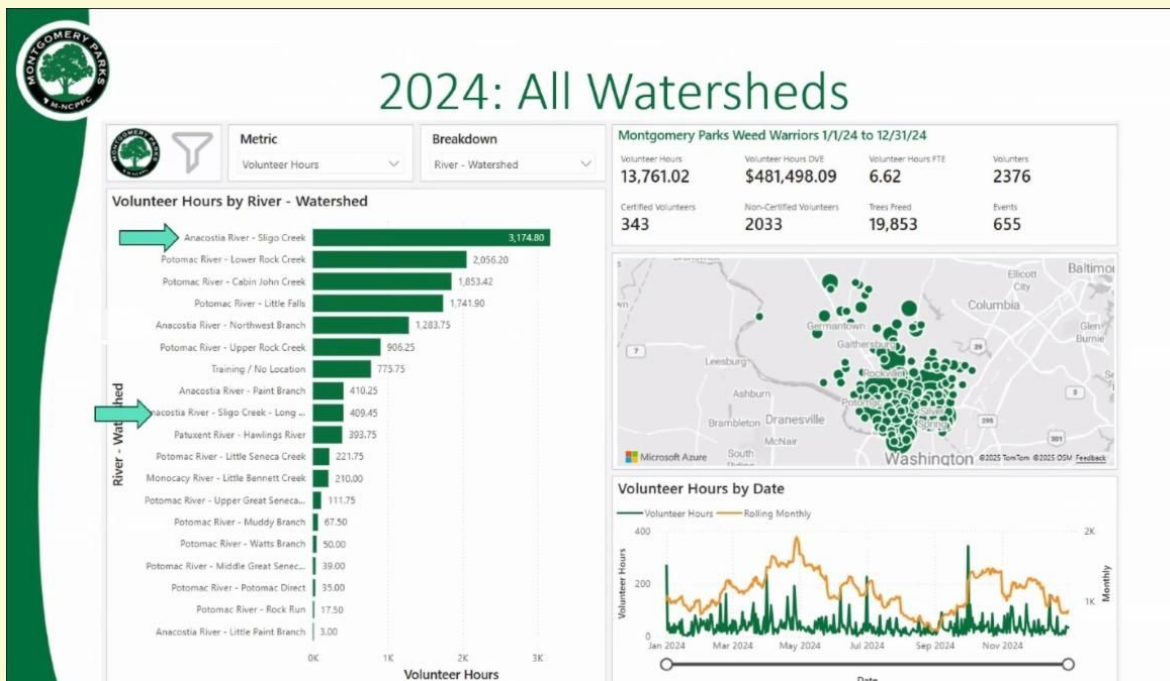
Wednesday Workgroup



Friday Workgroup



Saturday Workgroup

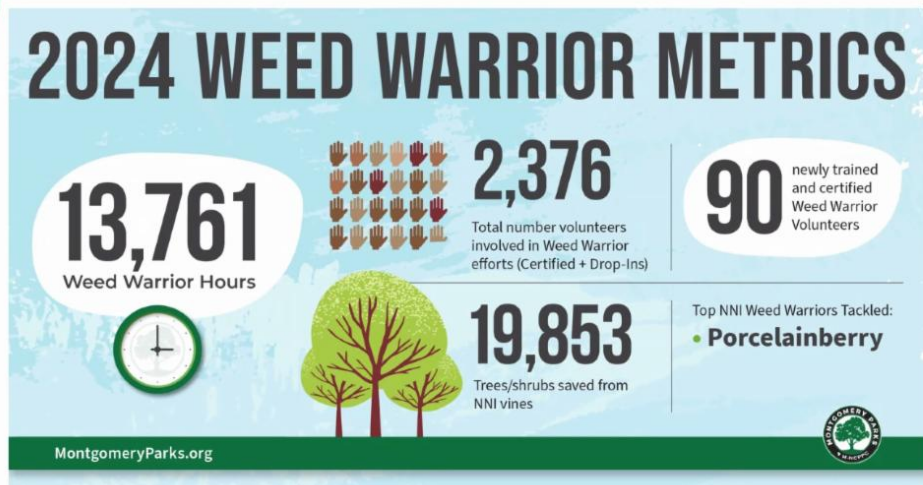


Note: Click on the graphics to see a larger version.



2024 Weed Warrior Reported Volunteer Service Metrics

WW Workday
Events = 655



*Montgomery County metrics, above, and
Sligo Watershed metrics, below.*

	FOSC Weed Warriors	% of Total County-wide
Watershed with the most WW hours:	Sligo	
WW with the most individual hours:	Edward Gertler with 794 hours	Way to go, Ed!
Weed Warrior hours:	3,608	26% of total WW hours!
Trees/shrubs saved from NNI vines:	4,514	23% of the total trees saved!
Full Time Employee Equivalents:	> 1.5 FTEs and \$125,412 DVE**	25% of the County total
# Certified WWs who entered data & are 'active':	100	29% of the 343 active WWs in MoCo
# Drop-In Volunteers* at WW Workdays:	350	17% of the County total
Total # volunteers in WW efforts (Cert. + Drop-Ins):	450	22% of the County total
Most popular NNI plant to remove:	Porcelainberry, followed by Bush Honeysuckle and English Ivy	
* (not certified WWs)	** (Monetary Volunteer Contribution)	

Note: Click on the table to see a larger version.

The Sligo watershed is just 11.07 square miles.

We are small but mighty!

STEWARDS AND WWS

MLK, Jr. Weekend of Service: Litter Cleanup & Weed Warrior events

2025 has started off on a great note.

At the request of MoCo Parks Natural Resources, we met with the Parks team and toured

East Wayne Park, the site of our future weed warrior collaboration near the headwaters of Long Branch.

On MLK, Jr. Day of Service weekend, FOSC Weed Warriors turned out to continue the effort to remove NNI plants from Arliss Long Branch Park.

We held our first litter cleanup of the year the following day, at which FOSC volunteers removed **1,305 pounds of trash**.

Way to go everyone! One of the reasons for our Weed Warrior and litter cleanup success is our collaboration with Montgomery Parks Natural Resources staff.

- Ed Murtagh, FOSC Vice President



MoCo Parks and FOSC teams plan their collaboration on a site visit Jan. 14 at East Wayne Park.



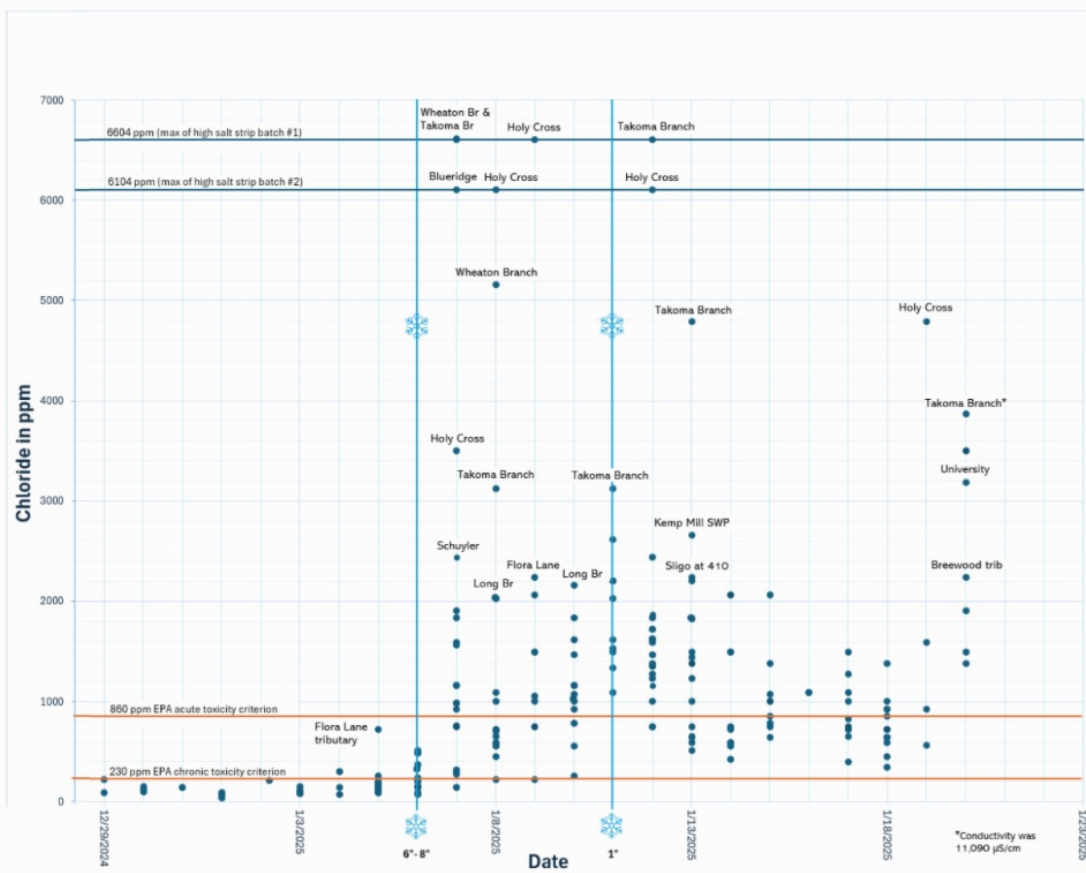
Eleven Weed Warriors came out to work at Arliss Park to kickoff the MLK, Jr. Day of Service weekend.

WATER QUALITY

FOSC Salt Monitors Find Shockingly High Levels of Salt in the Creeks

The 28 volunteers of FOSC's Salt Monitoring team are testing the level of salt in the water at 35 sites throughout Sligo Creek, Long Branch, Wheaton Branch, and Takoma Branch.

Over the last 6 weeks, the team has documented shockingly high levels of salt in many locations after the January snowstorms.



(Click on the graph to see a larger version.)

FOSC testers are finding very high salt levels throughout the watershed, in some cases beyond the capacity of even the high-range salt test strips.

The standard test strips measure up to 640-720 parts per million (ppm) chloride, which is between the two horizontal orange lines on the graph. The lower orange line represents the EPA criterion of 230 ppm chloride for chronic toxicity and the higher the 860 ppm criterion for acute toxicity. The high range strips can measure up to 6100-6400 ppm chloride, shown by the horizontal blue lines at the top of the graph, or seven times the 860 ppm acute toxicity criterion.

We are extremely concerned about the acute and chronic effects of these excessive chloride levels on the macroinvertebrates, salamanders, various fish species, and other creatures in the creeks. An integral part of healthy streams, they are threatened by the salt levels we are documenting. Mortality events are not uncommon under these circumstances, according to the literature. In fact, we had a 200+ salamander and fish kill from road salt several years ago in one of our highest quality tributaries. We also note the longer run rise in baseline salinity in the watershed, the impact of salt on groundwater, and on drinking water.

Signs of degradation from previous excessive salt treatment may already be evident; benthic macroinvertebrate surveys in Sligo Creek and Long Branch have revealed poor biological health for at least 18 years with no sign of improvement. While other factors may well be involved, excessive salt most certainly has played a big role.

Recently FOSC wrote to County and State agencies and WSSC to share our findings, request better execution of the salt management protocols they have adopted, and to press for greater accountability. The letters are available on the [Letters and Testimony page](#) under the [Advocacy tab](#) of the [FOSC website](#).



All salt, not snow. Dense clumps of salt on the street and sidewalks do not increase public safety more than a much less dense, even distribution of salt. Wheaton Branch is at the bottom of the hill, where snow melt sent the salt directly into the water.

In previous years we used only standard range test strips generously provided by the Izaak Walton League of America through the Salt Watch program. Last season FOSC expanded our testing by purchasing high range test strips when we found sustained salt levels beyond the capacity of the standard range strips to measure. The high range strips show that the creeks contend with a much greater level of salt, up to or even exceeding 7 times the acute toxicity criterion, than we suspected.

FOSC purchases these expensive high range salt test strips (\$85 for 40 strips) to capture the true level of salt pollution in the Sligo Creek watershed. If you'd like to support this effort, please consider [making a donation here](#) or using donate button in the FOSC Giving section at the end of this newsletter. Thank you!

FOSC volunteer salt monitor Slater Knowles finds beauty in Sligo Creek - and dangerous levels of salt

The ride down East-West Highway is grim: breathing exhaust and tasting salt; soiled mounds of plowed snow peppered with trash. But, down by the banks of our freshwater creeks, magic awaits.

I arrive at the confluence of Sligo and Takoma

Branch on this cold winter's afternoon. Across a field of white, I follow my footprints left in the snow the previous day. Preoccupied with my phone, I am startled by a large, ungainly shape rising from below the edge of the streambank. A great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), disturbed in its winter vigil, ascends above me and sails out of sight.



This magical moment is much needed. Over the past four days, I have measured progressively higher levels of chloride in the water, levels that indicate toxicity, ecosystem damage, and acute death for aquatics. Yesterday's reading at Takoma Branch was the highest ever recorded by the FOSC Salt Monitoring team, and was over seven times the level of salt that EPA defines as the criterion for acute toxicity in aquatic life.



I clamber down the steep bank, then frog leap from rock to rock to get to the center of the stream where I take a sample. The water is frigid; the yellow sun low behind bare, black trees. Sample in hand, I take an impromptu hike through the small woods bordering Takoma Branch.

At an old pedestrian bridge an open concrete gutter runs from the end of Red Top Road into the creek. A large plastic bag halfway down the drain catches my attention. It's an empty 50-pound bag of salt.

Today's readings will show a slight downturn from yesterday's peak level here at Takoma Branch, where cardinals flit about searching for food, deer eye me warily from icy thickets, and the waters continue to flow.

By Slater Knowles
FOSC Salt Monitoring Team



Slater regularly measures the level of chloride at two locations: Sligo Creek downstream of East-West Highway and Takoma Branch just before it enters Sligo.

On January 7th, the chloride level in

Takoma Branch measured 6,604 ppm chloride, the maximum level the test can detect, and over seven times the level of salt that EPA defines as the acute toxicity criterion* for aquatic life. Other sites in Sligo reached this level as well.

*A level of salt with potential for significant mortality of invertebrates.



Slater Knowles, a volunteer on FOSC's Salt Monitoring team and a longtime FONTT member, wrote this article for [FONTT](#) (Friends of Native Trees in Takoma) at the end of January, reproduced here with permission.

What can you do about excess salt? Become a Salt Reporter!



At the Dennis Avenue Health Center January 2025. The Stormwater ponds and Wheaton Branch are just down the hill to the left.

Excessive winter storm treatment in the form of salt piles or dense application of salt is contributing to the high salt levels throughout the watershed. **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, and other impervious surfaces and let the County know about it. You can ask the County to remove it by **calling 311** or **[going to MoCo 311 online](#)** which gives you the option to include photos. In Prince George's County, call 311 or the Report Snow Conditions line at 301-883-4748. The full guide to reporting excessive salt is on the **[How to Report Excessive Salt on Roadways](#)** on the **[FOSC website](#)**.

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

Salt cannot be removed from water by WSSC. What you do matters!



Text and graphics courtesy of Montgomery County Dept. of Environmental Protection



ADVOCACY

Trying to Save a Little Forest

We recently lost our effort at the Montgomery Circuit court to save a 1.25 acre forest on the development site at the northeast corner of Georgia Ave. at Forest Glen.

Our neighbors near 9801 Georgia Ave. drew FOSC's attention to the planned development across Georgia Ave. from the Forest Glen Metro stop.

We support development near transit, but we don't support destruction of a forest to create that development. Currently a vine covered forest, it contains trees providing decent canopy cover. One of our chief concerns was that the proposed development was inconsistent with the site plan and sector/master plan, which urges preservation of the forest.

Last March we testified against the proposal, along with dozens of others, at the Planning Board hearing. The Board, however, immediately approved the development plan. We obtained pro bono legal support and appealed the decision to the Circuit Court. The court heard arguments in November. This Jan. 23, the judge gave her decision, denying all our arguments.

We are considering whether to appeal the case to the Appeals Court of Maryland. They would hear the arguments de novo, that is, allowing us to challenge all the judge's decisions with the same and perhaps additional information.



The remnant forest of 1.25 acres. Plagued with English ivy and other non-native invasive vines, it nevertheless provides tree canopy and with additional planting would be a higher quality forest reducing heat and noise.

ADVOCACY

Montg. County Council passes Bill 24-24 “Bring Your Own Bag”

On Feb. 11, County Council unanimously passed the bill, which would prohibit use of single use plastic bags by retailers, with some exemptions. Those exemption would substitute paper bags for plastic. Further, it would impose a charge of \$.10 each to be split equally between the retailer, to cover their costs, and the county, to support water quality projects. SNAP recipients would be exempted from the charge for paper.

The bill will take effect January 1, 2026 to allow retailers time to transition.

FOSC testified in favor of the bill. A win for the creeks and parks.

OUTREACH

What Do You Wonder About Sligo?



Eastern painted turtles in the Forest Glen wetland March 2024
(Dan Treadwell photo)

2025 Walks, Talks, and Interests – What do you wonder about the creeks and wildlife surrounding them? What do you want to do with FOSC this year?

Hello FOSC members! We're filling out the 2025 calendar. We need your input to plan activities you are interested in! Do you want to learn more about the eels or salamanders that live in the creek? Do you wonder why there's always trash at the Wheaton stormwater ponds? Interested in knowing more about native plants that can add to local biodiversity? Tell us at info@fosc.org and we'll try to arrange a walk or talk to satisfy your curiosity.

Or maybe you see a need in the watershed that should be addressed – let us know about it. FOSC added another new kiosk in Prince George's County last year and translated our brochure into Amharic because someone like you saw a need and spoke up. Did you get a FOSC creek critters fundana as a holiday present? That started as a member idea too.

We're looking to expand Sweep the Creek beyond trash pickups. Let us know what else you'd like to do in/for Sligo Creek.

We rely on members like you to be our eyes and ears in the community. Let us know at info@fosc.org. If you don't ask, we won't know you're interested! Many thanks.

- Elaine Lamirande, FOSC President

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Upcoming Events

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

Two Presidents Day Litter Cleanups in Lower Sligo

1) Saturday, February 15 from 9:00am to 11:00am Sligo Creek at East/West Highway

Join Friends of Sligo Creek stewards and the Potomac Conservancy for a trash cleanup at this beautiful part of Sligo Creek. Please be sure to [register here](#) so that you can receive any updates as we approach the cleanup date. Thank you! Lots of street parking available nearby on the E/W Highway frontage road and 17th Place.

-Nick Clements

2) Saturday, February 15 from 9:00am -11:00am Sligo Creek at Green Meadows Park 6310 Sligo Parkway at Roanoke St.

Join Friends of Sligo Creek stewards and the Potomac Conservancy for a trash cleanup at Green Meadows Park. Show this part of the creek some love! Be sure to [register here](#) so that you can receive any updates as we approach the cleanup date. Thank you! Nearby parking is available on Roanoke St.

-Nick Clements

Sunday, February 16, 9:00am Morning walk in Kestrel Meadow 7100 16th Place, Hyattsville, MD

Meet us where 16th Place dead ends at the meadow.

Join us for a morning walk in Kestrel Meadow, where the early birds are getting the worms and the plants are preparing their spring frenzy. We walk the path that leads to Sligo Creek, making a loop around the meadow when possible. Thank you in advance for your help!

Bring binoculars if you have some. There can be some muddy spots this time of year, and it's always good to wear long pants and socks to deter ticks and protect against poison ivy. Rain or shine.

-Kristin Zimmer, FOSC Board Member and Section 1 Steward

Sunday, February 16th, 1:00pm - 3:00pm Litter Cleanup event in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (rescheduled from January)

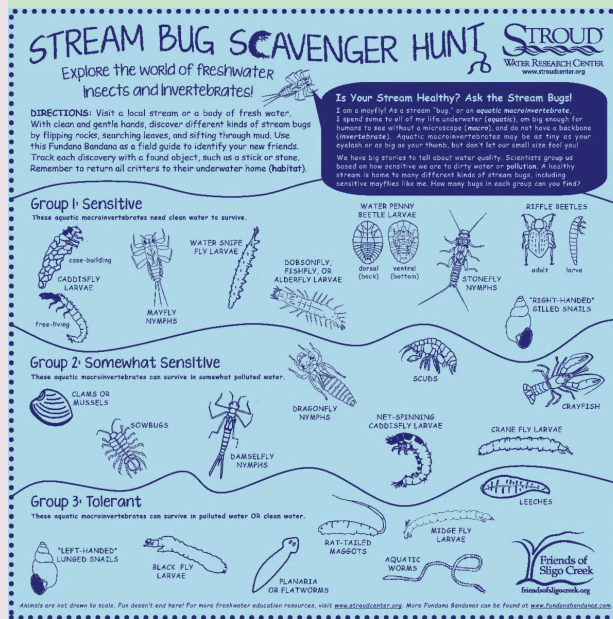
Meet at the Sligo Creek Parkway tennis courts adjacent to Piney Branch Rd.

We'll remove litter and help the parkland and creek welcome spring in FOSC Section 4 between Wayne Ave and Piney Branch Rd. ([See the map](#)). The [Calendar page on the FOSC website](#) has details on kids under 14 years old, and student SSL hours. All are welcome.

-Chris Richardson, FOSC Section 4 Steward

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 or T-shirt 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.

JOIN FOSSC / JOIN THE FOSSC LISTSERV

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.
-

FROM THE TRAIL

Alligators?

From Julius Kassovic in Section 3 comes this report from a walk along Sligo in January:

"I was out photographing early this morning when I saw this notice near the bridge by the playground at Kennebec. It was purportedly printed by the "Maryland Department of Herpetological Resources."

I knew 2025 was going to be challenging, but..."

Similar signs had appeared in Wheaton, Gaithersburg, and elsewhere in MD. A humorous hoax turned into a social media frenzy, TV news coverage, and a \$50 civil penalty for the perpetrator, publisher of [The Montgonion](#), a local satirical news site. The [Patch](#) published an article on Feb. 2 that tells the full story.

Humor aside, placing signs in Parks is illegal and risks a fine.



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

Your gift is greatly appreciated - thank you!

Need to Reach Us?

President (Elaine Lamirande): president@fosc.org

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

Litter/Sweep the Creek (Ed Murtagh): litter@fosc.org

Advocacy (Kit Gage): advocacy@fosc.org

Natural History (Michael Wilpers): naturalhistory@fosc.org

Stormwater (Elaine Lamirande): stormwater@fosc.org

Water Quality (Dean Tousley): waterquality@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](#)



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