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Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter

April 2025



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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NATURAL HISTORY

American Eels

In Sligo Creek, a common, yet seldom seen creature silently swims – the American eel. The American eel, or *Anguilla rostrata*, is an extraordinary species with a life cycle that spans thousands of miles. From the ocean to Sligo Creek and back, these eels begin their journey in a remarkable way.

Born in the Sargasso Sea, far off the coast of the Atlantic, young eels (known as glass eels as they approach the continental shelf, and elvers as they gain pigmentation nearer the shoreline), drift across the ocean in the currents to the



Juvenile American eels, known as "glass eels" because of their transparency. (Heather Perry photo)

freshwater rivers and estuaries of the eastern U.S. seaboard. This migration can take up to a year.

Once in freshwater, American eels mature, living up to 20 years. They're elusive, often hiding in the mud, submerged tree roots, or under rocks during the day. Their long, snake-like bodies and silvery coloration help them blend into river and creek bottoms. Using their strong sense of smell, they hunt for insect larvae when young, and worms, small fish, and crustaceans when mature.



*MoCo Parks staff catch eels during a fish survey in Sligo Creek near the Carroll Ave. bridge in Aug 2021.
(M. Wilpers photo)*



These eels play an important role in the Sligo Creek ecosystem, acting as both predator and prey. They feed at night, feasting on crustaceans, small fish, insects, and macroinvertebrates, while also serving as a food source for larger predators, like eagles, herons, osprey, and cormorants. Certain fish-eating mammals, such as raccoons and otters, enjoy a meal of eels too.

Despite their resilience, the American eel is in decline due to habitat loss, water pollution, and overfishing. Considered endangered, conservation and stream restoration efforts are critical to preserving this unique species.

The American eel continues to glide through the waters of our region—its life cycle a testament to the complexities of the natural world. Friends of Sligo Creek provides opportunities to protect this incredible creature and ensure its future in our waters. Visit [our website](#) to learn how you can help protect the ecology of our watershed through litter cleanups, reporting pollution, removing invasive plants, testing water quality, advocacy, and community outreach.

American eel larvae hatch in the abundant seaweed of the Sargasso Sea, and are carried by currents to the east coast of North America. Much later in life, the mature eels migrate back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

In a similar but reverse migration, after hatching along the southeast US coastline, juvenile green sea and loggerhead turtles use Gulf Stream currents to reach the Sargasso Sea, where seaweed provides cover from predators until they mature.

LITTER

The Creeks: Swept Clean



Cleanup crew #1

FOSC Partners with Potomac Conservancy

FOSC Steward Jesse Johnson and Potomac Conservancy Coordinator Feben Abebe led 18 volunteers in two groups tracking down litter in Sligo Creek near East/West Highway. It was a productive morning, yielding 32 bags of litter, some sofa cushions, an old wheelbarrow, and assorted other items.

Thank you Jesse, Feben, and volunteers! That's a lot less plastic, metal, rubber, etc. left to decompose and pollute the creek.

Next Cleanup: This Saturday at Green Meadows Park in lower Sligo Creek

Green Meadows Park runs along Sligo Creek below the "fall line", the geological transition from Piedmont to Coastal Plain. The soils here support cottonwood trees along the creek, unique in Sligo. Join us for a fun and meaningful experience that supports our plants and critters.



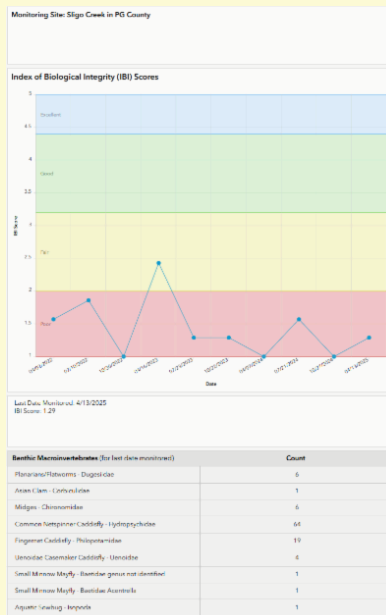
Cleanup crew #2

NATURAL HISTORY/WATER QUALITY

Macroinvertebrates

Monitoring for macroinvertebrates in lower Sligo Creek on April 13 yielded a relatively small number of specimens and low diversity of species. Whether the weather delayed their emergence, or high salt levels last winter or other pollutants affected them, is unknown.

Macroinvertebrate species are a clue to water quality; some are pollution tolerant, others are very sensitive and cannot live in degraded streams. Results from this monitoring date earned a rating of Poor on the Index of Biological Integrity (IBI) compared with a healthy stream.



Click on the graph to see a larger version. (Courtesy of Nature Forward, Water Quality Monitoring Program Map.)

This site in lower Sligo, south of NH Ave. near Drexel St, earned an Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) score of 1.29, a poor rating, based on a lack of diversity in and low number of the macroinvertebrates found.



Getting water from the stream.



Specimens found in the water samples.



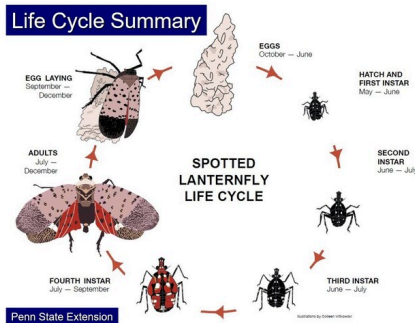
Identifying the species. A cellphone flashlight helped visibility.

The next monitoring date at this site will be in mid-late July. We'll include the date in the Upcoming Events section of the July newsletter. All are welcome.

NATURAL HISTORY

Spotted Lanternflies Are Back

Spotted Lanternflies - we've seen them on wild grape vines in the parks, plants in our gardens of very different kinds, from rose bushes to milkweed to hardwood and fruit trees. They're even making lists of garden myths - one such being that feeding on milkweed plants kills them. False!



Click the graphic to see a larger version.
(Source: Penn State Extension)



Nymphs emerging from an egg mass on a tree limb. Note the tiny holes in the eggs where they have emerged, and the unhatched egg mass at the bottom of the photo. If you see unhatched egg masses, carefully scrape them off.
(Greg Setliff, Kutztown University photo)

Spotted lanternflies (SLF) are an invasive planthopper which use a piercing-sucking mouthpart to feed on stems, leaves, and bark. Their waste, a sugary honeydew, is host to sooty mold. Because they congregate when feeding, sooty mold can quickly build up on leaves (and patio furniture, cars, and anything else found below), reducing the host's ability to photosynthesize, potentially killing it. SLF is not known to feed directly on fruit.

The Associated Press reported in mid May that specially trained dogs are being used successfully to sniff out SLF egg masses on trees in northern Ohio. [Read about it here in an expanded article in The Guardian newspaper.](#)

SLF Host Plant List

Massachusetts Dept of Ag. Resources, May 2025 (* denotes preferred species)

- Birch (*Betula* spp.)*
- Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*)*
- Grapes (*Vitis* spp.)*
- Highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*)
- Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)
- Lilac (*Syringa* spp.)
- Maple (*Acer* spp.)*
- Mulberry (*Morus* spp.)
- Poplar (*Populus* spp.)
- Rose (*Rosa* spp.)*
- Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)*
- Sycamore (*Platanus* spp.)
- Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)*
- Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
- Willow (*Salix* spp.)*

ADVOCACY/WATER QUALITY

Sligo Creek, a Water Main Crisis, and Rachel Carson

By Dr. Vivian Thomson, retired Professor of Environmental Policy at the University of Virginia, and producer of the podcast [Meaning of Green](#), with expert input by Dr. Paul Chrostowski, Anne Vorce, and the other members of FOOSC's Advocacy Committee.

Rivers and streams are much more than merely water flowing to the sea. They are webs of life whose inhabitants depend on each other. Their beds, banks, forests, and aquifers are interconnected.

Because Sligo Creek flows through an urban area and is protected only by a thin strip of park, its web of life is constantly under attack from pollution, and other insults; the massive, years-long disruption to the stream from the Purple Line light rail construction is but one glaring example

Another insult to Sligo Creek occurred in May 2025, when a water main broke in a parking lot near Three Oaks Drive in Silver Spring. Aging infrastructure affects the stream's health. The break spewed untold amounts of chlorinated water and sediment into the creek. Perhaps some passersby thought "Wow, I hope they fix that gusher soon, because that's a huge waste of expensive drinking water:"

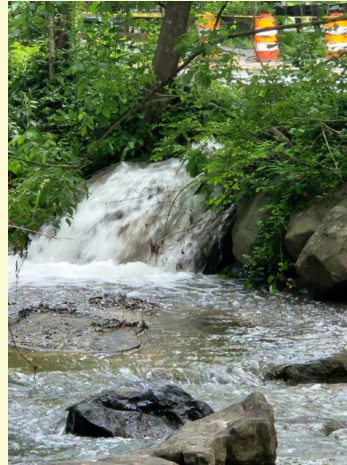
However, it's not just public coffers that took a hit: the Creek's flora and fauna suffered, too. Abrupt changes, like this massive influx of chlorinated water, shock streams. The resulting erosion exposed plant roots and destabilized the ground, thereby destroying bank habitat. Soil spilled into the stream for several days. Excessive sediment, depending on particle size, can clog fish gills and smother habitat.

Potable drinking water usually has low dissolved oxygen levels, and dissolved oxygen is vital for stream life. Chlorine and its byproducts can be especially toxic for organisms at or near the bottom of the food chain, like bacteria, algae, and invertebrates. A toxic brew of street-borne pollutants (such as motor oil, other vehicle fluids, and tire residue) likely flowed into the stream with the runoff. It looks as if asphalt and trash were pulled into the stream as well.

Immediately after the water main broke, Friends of Sligo Creek advocates alerted Montgomery Council President Kate Stewart, as well as the staff of our local water authority (WSSC) and Montgomery County Parks.

We were in constant contact until the break was halted. It took several days to accomplish that, in part because the main in question was huge—24 or more inches in diameter—and also because of complications caused by the Purple Line construction. While water main breaks pouring into Sligo Creek are not unusual (unfortunately), this one lasted longer and sent more water and debris into Sligo Creek than most.

Sligo Creek is a special place. We all appreciate its gifts to us: beauty, forest, shade, peacefulness, and the sights and sounds of wildlife. Walkers, runners, and bicyclists all enjoy the path along the stream. The path and the stream may also help improve mental health. Scientists have found that exposure to green spaces and waterways seems to reduce the incidence of dementia.



One of the waterfalls of chlorinated drinking water entering Sligo Creek just east of Three Oaks Drive. (R.Bowers photo)

A Water Main Crisis and Rachel Carson



View the video Dr. Thomson created of this big water main incident and its impact on Sligo Creek.

But it is incumbent on all of us to protect Sligo Creek's web of life. Friends of Sligo Creek is on the front line of those defenses. In so doing, we are carrying on the work of Silver Spring's most famous environmental advocate, Rachel Carson. In her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, which she wrote in Silver Spring, Ms. Carson wrote: "Water must be thought of in terms of the chains of life it supports... in an endless cyclic transfer of materials from life to life."



(Ellen Maidman-Tanner photo)

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.

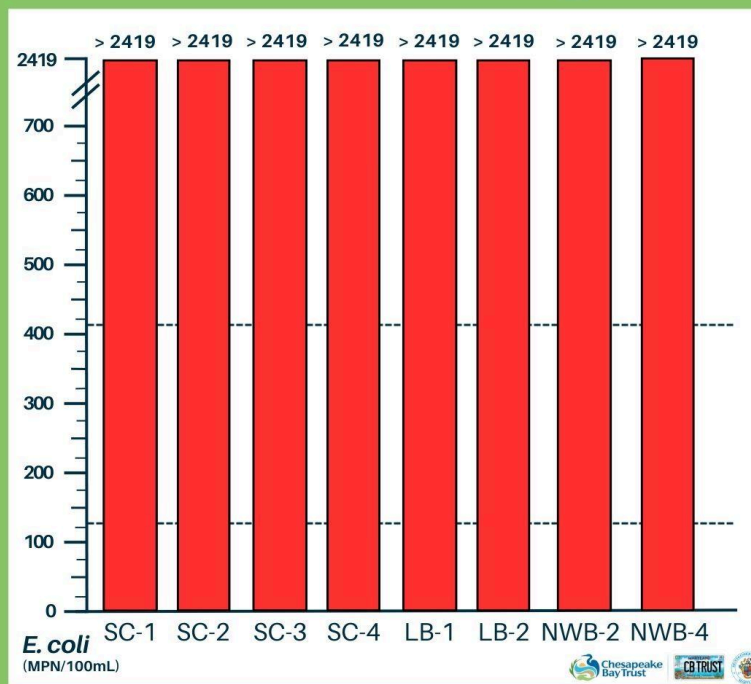
WATER QUALITY/STORMWATER

First Summer E. coli Test Results: That's a Lot of Red

The first summer E. coli testing results are in. They are not encouraging. Every site tested on May 14 in Sligo Creek, Long Branch and NW Branch registered above the maximum recordable reading.

Upper Anacostia - Montgomery County

May 14th, 2025 - Single Sample *E. coli* Value



Site Key Sligo Creek SC-1 @Fleetwood Terr. SC-2 @Maple Ave SC-3 @Wayne Ave SC-4 @Dennis Ave	Long Branch LB-1 @Rolling Terr. LB-2 @Becca Lily Park Northwest Branch NWB-2 @Burnt Mills NWB-4 @Lamberton Dr
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The takeaways:

- Though it's just one test date, the results are well above the 410MPN/100mL threshold for limited contact with the water.
- The Sligo Creek, Long Branch and NW Branch waters are not safe for contact whether by human or pets.

Become a summer water quality tester!

- [View the 2025 training video:](#)
- [Self-certify online](#) by passing a short quiz;
- ARK will then follow up with you via email with the next steps.
- You can sign up for the dates that work for your schedule.
- You can sign up to test at a single site, or decide to mix it up and test at different sites.

2025 Maryland Community Water Quality Training



Organized by Anacostia Riverkeeper (ARK) with FOSC and other partners. Testing is done every other Wed. from mid May - mid Sept.

SLIGO CREEK AND LONG BRANCH

Always Wondered About...

- Wondering about a mammal, amphibian, reptile, fish, or bird?
- See problems in the creeks or parklands you think FOSC could help with?
- Heard an interesting talk you think FOSC could host?
- Have an idea you want FOSC to know about?



[Let us know here.](#) We'll figure out what we can do and let you know!

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.

Saturday, May 31 from 1:00pm - 3:00pm

Litter Cleanup at Green Meadows Park

6301 Sligo Parkway, Hyattsville

[Register here.](#)

We'll meet at the Parks building. Look for the **FOSC At Work** sign. Reducing litter benefits the wildlife and flora of the creek and parklands.

If you've never been in this southern section of Sligo Creek, this is a great chance to get to know it. The park is below the "fall line", the geological transition from the Piedmont to Coastal Plain. The soils here support cottonwood trees along the creek, unique in Sligo. Join your neighbors to improve and preserve the trees and water quality of Green Meadows and Sligo Creek!

We will provide the bags, gloves, trash grabbers, etc., but bring your own if you have them. Remember to bring water to drink. [Please register](#) so we can reach you if there is a change in date/time due to weather, etc.

Saturday, June 7 from 10:00am-12:00pm

Wheaton Branch stormwater ponds cleanup

Dennis Ave at Hemley St.

Meet us at the stormwater ponds for a cleanup at this important time for bird families. Our cleanups remove harmful plastic and metal, protecting birds from ingesting it, and making the water more hospitable for land based animals.

Please bring hat, sunscreen and water in a reusable container. We'll provide the gloves, bags and trash grabbers. Sign in when you get there. Student SSL hours available; bring your form with you.

Saturday, June 14 from 10:00am - 12:00pm

Exploring Sligo Creek with a Camera and a Pro

Meeting location (adjacent to Sligo Creek) provided after you register

[Register here.](#)

Led by longtime Sligo resident Julius Kassovic, a professional fine art photographer who has been intensively photographing Sligo Creek since 2005...20 years. Julius brings a wealth of experience and will concentrate on the "seeing" part of photography. The morning will start indoors and move outdoors to photograph what we see. Please bring questions - it will be an interactive event. See some of Julius' work at www.photojulius.com.

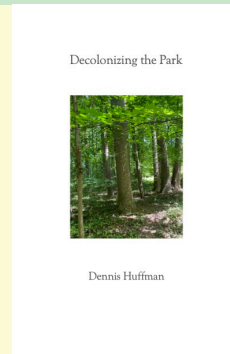
Registration is required. Limited to 15 people.

FOSC STORE/LISTSERV

T-Shirt, Ball Cap, or a Fundana?

Coming soon to the FOSC Store...

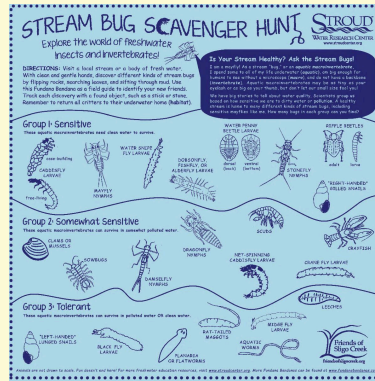
the Sligo poetry volume **Decolonizing the Park**, by Dennis Huffman, a FOSC Weed Warrior and Sligo resident.



For the buggy person in your life...

a Stream Bug Scavenger Hunt Fundana!

Accurate drawings of stream bugs that morph into flying creatures that feed fish, birds and others. Learn how we know stream health by who is living in the water. Fundanas are 100% cotton, last for years, and have many uses.



¡Y ahora en español!

Para la persona que gusta insectos en tu vida...

¡Una Fundana para la búsqueda del tesoro de insectos del arroyo!

Dibujos precisos de insectos de arroyo que se transforman en criaturas voladoras que alimentan a los peces, pájaros y otros. Descubra cómo sabemos la salud de los arroyos según quién vive en el agua. Las fundanas son 100 % algodón, duran años y tienen muchos usos.



Purchase your fundana, t-shirt, ball cap and mugs from the [FOSC store](#). You can have your order mailed to you or opt to pick it up locally. All sales support FOSC programs. Thank you.



JOIN FOSC / JOIN THE FOSC LISTSERV

The next drawing for a t-shirt, cap or fundana - your choice- will happen in summer 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.

[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!

NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings in Sligo



Morning-glory Plume Moth near Elson and 16th Place on May 16 (kristin-marie)

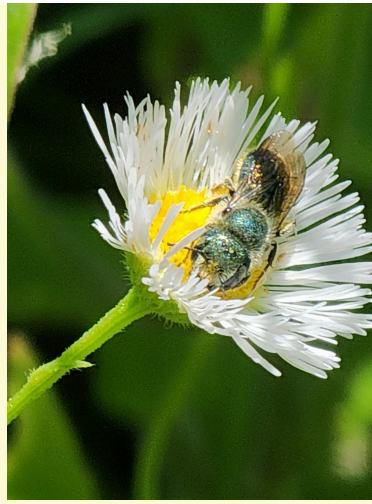


Above: Red Fox near Garland and Carroll on May 20 (jimdella)

Right: Cinnamon Fern in the powerline meadow on May 19 (casey harless)



Yellow-crowned Night Heron near Sligo-Dennis Ave. Local Park on May 15 (wilpersm)



Above: Margined Calligrapher
Right: Georgia Mason Bee
Both near Kimberly and Eugene on May
19 (matthewrine)



Desmia moth near Elson and 16th Place on May 18 (kristin-marie)



Ebony jewelwing damselfly male near Folk St on May 24 (Susan DeFord)



Eastern Bluebirds and a House Sparrow in conflict over a nest box at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on May 15 (Dan Treadwell)



Typical Sawfly in the powerline meadow on May 17 (mmmmbugs)



Fork-tailed Bush Katydid near Franklin and Caroline on May 20 (hughrand)



Catalpa tree blooming near Flower and Garland on May 20 (wilpersm)



Left: Northern Parula near Dallas and the Parkway on May 3 (brewster_mccloud)
Right: Common Yellowthroat near Hilltop and Mississippi on May 3 (bennygesserit)



Remains of a Red Swamp Crayfish, near Dennis and Sligo, on May 15.
It was probably eaten by one of our Yellow-crowned Night-Herons,
who depend heavily on crustaceans for their diet. (danielletheexplorer)

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

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 & Anne Vorce): waterquality@fosc.org

Outreach (Sergio Obadia): outreach@fosc.org

Treasurer (Tom Walton): treasurer@fosc.org

Webmaster (Christine Dunathan): webmaster@fosc.org

Newsletter Editors (C. Dunathan & M. Wilpers): editor@fosc.org



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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