



Friends of Sligo Creek

Newsletter
November 2025



Photo by Xavier Courouble

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WATER QUALITY

Too Salty! Sligo Salt Monitoring Starting Soon

It's almost winter and the fifth year of the **FOSC Winter Salt Monitoring program** is about to get underway.

Our volunteer salt testing teams' careful work in the last few years has uncovered major salt pollution in Sligo and all its tributaries.



Greta P. at her test site on Sligo near Maple Ave. last January

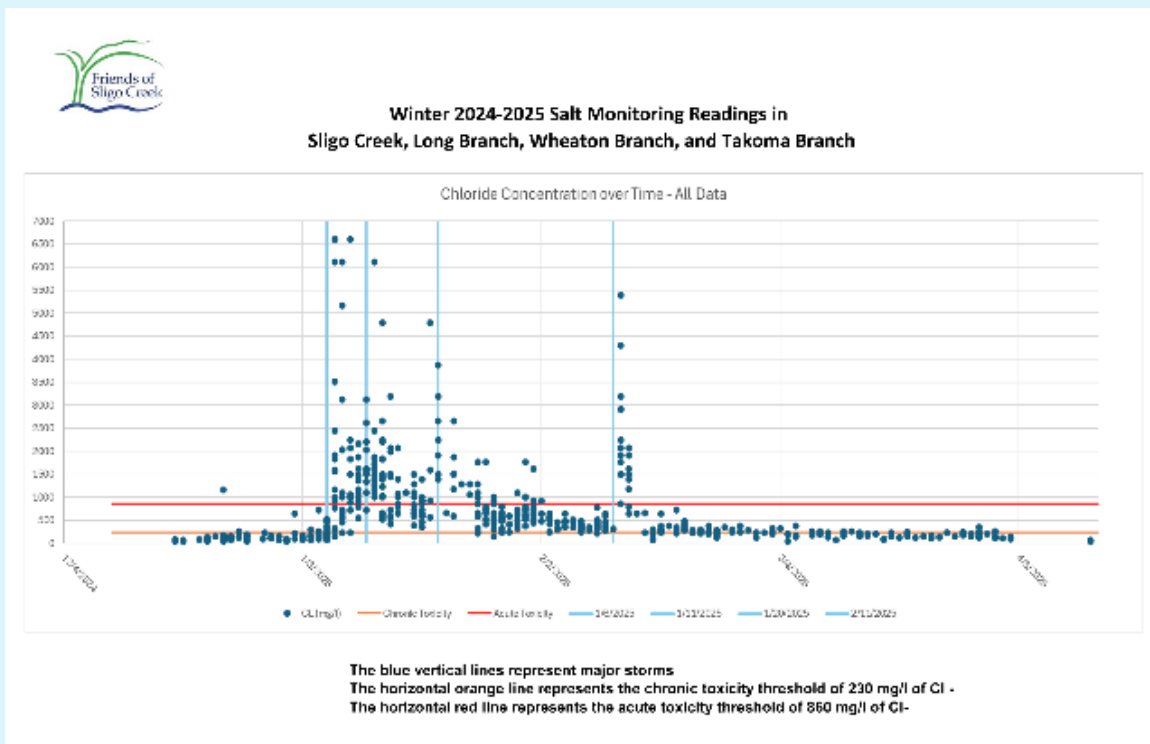
What can you do about salt?

1. Be a Winter Salt Tester - join the FOSC Salt Testing Team!

Get out in the parks along the creeks in winter. Experience their serene beauty, and be a part of the team documenting the salt challenge they face.

- **Testing is slated to begin** in mid-December and end in mid-March.
- **FOSC tests in two teams:** a weekly test team, or an event-based team whose members test only during/after storms. The team you choose is up to you! Some testers choose both.
- **Testers attend a training** in early December, in a single hands-on session, or in a zoom session. Dates will be set shortly.
- **We will discuss possible test sites** with you.
- **Contact us at wq@fosc.org** if you are interested in volunteering or learning more.

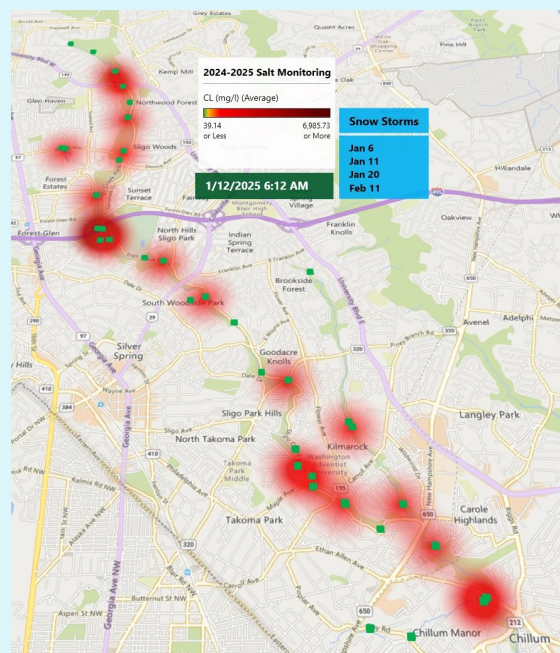
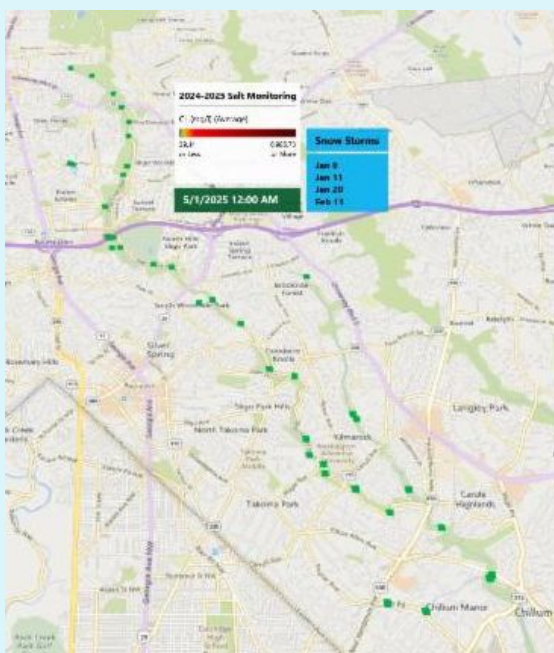
Winter 2024-2025 Salt Monitoring Readings



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

Above: During and after major storms (the vertical blue lines) last winter, salt levels in Sligo and its 3 tributaries reached up to 6500 mg/l Cl⁻ or 7 times the acute toxicity threshold of 860 mg/l Cl⁻ (the horizontal red line) for aquatic life.

Below: Test sites last winter at the start of the season (left) and at one of the peak salting days (right). Sites without any blur around them weren't tested on that day.



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

What else can you do about salt?

2. Be Salt Wise at Home

Salting by homeowners and their landscapers, as well as residential management companies, also contributes to high salt levels, damaging the landscaping, trees, soil, and our creeks.



Use best practices (see below) and insist that your landscaper follow best practices too. Apartment building managers may be interested to know that over-salting does not make walkways or parking lots safer, in addition to saving money. MD Dept of the Environment [created this brochure for businesses](#).

-**Shovel early and often.** Salt is not meant to replace shoveling or sweeping with a stiff broom.

-**Salt sparingly.** There should be at least 3" between granules.

-**Sweep up remaining salt.** Sweep up the salt and save it for reuse.

3. Be a Salt Pile Reporter

Keep an eye out for excessive salt on roads, in public parking lots, and on sidewalks, and report them to the [County's 311 system](#), with photos if possible. We'd also appreciate receiving an email with photos to this special email saltreporting@fosc.org so we can track their resolution.

See more ways to report excessive salt on the [How to Report Excessive Salt on Roadways](#) page of the [FOSC website](#).

You can also help by sharing the [How to Report Excessive Salt on Roadways](#) link on your neighborhood listserv. Thanks!

NATURAL HISTORY

When a Tree Talks in the Forest...

FOSC recently hosted a webinar on plant communication led by Elizabeth (Liz) Van Volkenburgh, Professor Emerita of Biology at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA. Liz is a founding member and President of the [Society for Plant Neurobiology/Plant Signaling and Behavior](#).

Professor Van Volkenburgh began by defining communication: the sharing of information by speaking, writing, motion, or using other signals. As we learned from Liz, there are many other signals at work in the world of plants.

The familiar, the unfamiliar but not surprising, and “wow, really?”

The familiar cases include pollination, in which plants emit volatile compounds to attract bees, flies, butterflies and other critters to help spread pollen from plant to plant and thereby ensure propagation. Other examples are the use of color, body shape, and other qualities of appearance to communicate with other organisms in a way that promotes pollination, dispersal, or defense.

Less familiar to many of us are examples of allelopathy, in which plants release soluble compounds that are toxic to other plants or predators. This form of communication essentially says “back off, I’m growing here, and don’t taste good anyway.” Looking again at the use of volatile compounds, some plants send signals internally and even to others of their species when leaves are eaten by predators. The reason? The leaves under attack are telling the rest of the plant, or nearby plants, to get their chemical defenses up and running.

Finally, the “wow” examples truly are amazing. Research has found plant roots that emit signals during times of drought. Those signals are received by the plants, which then close their stomata to conserve water. Some plants have shown the ability to recognize their “kin” vs. “non-kin” and act in a way that reduces or increases competition accordingly.

In addition to the ability to sense volatile or soluble compounds, plants may have the ability to see their surroundings. A South American vine, *Boquila trifoliata*, has demonstrated the ability to mimic the leaf shape of plants nearby, the purpose being to resist predation.



Boquila trifoliata, an evergreen vine from the temperate forests of Chile and Argentina, mimic the leaves - increase or decrease in size, get darker or lighter, broader or narrower - depending on its host or nearby plant. (Photo: L. Landrum. Image from Arizona State University Vascular Plant Herbarium; text from Far Reaches Farm)

If plants can see, can they also hear? Recent research has found that plants may be able to sense the sound of moving water, buzzing bees, or plants in distress and then act in a way that increases access to those resources.

Are plants thinking about sending or receiving signals or deciding to act in a certain way? Those are questions still being pursued and debated. While the findings of recent research are not yet conclusive about these matters, they provide evidence of remarkable abilities of plants that will encourage further investigation.

The [recording of the Plant Communications presentation and Q&A](#) is posted on our [FOSC YouTube Channel](#). And, to further explore this topic, the [Plant Neurobiology Society’s website](#) has links to scientific articles about many of the exciting findings that Liz discussed.

Montgomery County has a big decision to make: How to handle our trash?

In the coming months, Montgomery County must decide what to do with our trash.

Should we keep using the Dickerson Resource Recovery Facility (RRF)—our trash incinerator—or send our trash via long haul waste shipments to landfills in Virginia or Pennsylvania?

To help inform this discussion, FOSC sent the County Council and County Executive a report prepared by two Advocacy Committee members outlining **what we currently know and what we still need to learn**. The report doesn't recommend one solution over another. Instead, it highlights the information gaps that must be filled before the county can make a responsible decision. ([Read the report here.](#))

What We Still Don't Know

There are several major “known unknowns,” including:

- **Long-term costs** of keeping the incinerator running
- Costs of switching to a **more environmentally responsible way to handle ash**, such as an ash-only landfill (called an ash monofill)
- **The cost of shutting down and cleaning up the incinerator, which could be very expensive—especially if the county chooses the landfill option**

What the County's Own Studies Say

Montgomery County's Solid Waste Plan (2025–2034) notes that numerous health-risk assessments found “**no measurable influences on ambient air concentrations attributable to RRF emissions.**” These studies—conducted from 1994 to 2015—looked at levels of trace metals and dioxins/furans in the air, water, fish, sediments, and even in local residents.

But There's Still a Big Issue: Ash

Even though the incinerator's air emissions have been extensively studied, the ash **does contain toxic metals**. Currently:

- Montgomery County's ash is sent to a **mixed-waste landfill** near Richmond, in a majority-minority community.
- Nearby jurisdictions (Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax) send their ash to a **dedicated ash monofill** near Lorton.

Concerns About Landfilling

Choosing landfilling instead of the incinerator brings its own environmental and equity concerns:

- **Methane emissions** — Landfills generate methane, a potent greenhouse gas that the UN's climate change research body, the IPCC, says should be a top priority to reduce.
- **Toxic leachate** — One Virginia landfill produces **400,000 gallons of highly contaminated leachate per week**, a liquid that must be treated and managed.
- **Equity issues** — Landfilled waste would likely be shipped from up-county to communities that are economically and socially marginalized.
- **Benzene and vinyl chloride** — Landfill gas can contain harmful chemicals, including benzene and vinyl chloride, which are known to cause cancer, as well as other volatile compounds that can help create smog.
- **Greenhouse gases** — The report suggests that overall emissions from landfilling our trash could be **much higher** than emissions from the incinerator, which produces CO₂ but not methane.

Why This Matters

Montgomery County needs **informed, community-wide conversations** before the Council makes a final decision. This report is intended to spark those discussions and highlight what information is still missing.

FOSC also urges the County Council to **hold a public hearing**, so residents can ask questions, share concerns, and help shape the county's path forward.

Note:

If you'd like to learn more, read recent commentary published in the [Maryland Matters](#) and [Virginia Mercury](#) digital news outlets.

FOSC is hosting a Zoom Q & A session on **Thursday, December 18 from noon-1:00pm** with the authors of the report. **Registrants should [read the report](#) prior to the meeting. [Register for the Zoom Q & A here.](#)** Please send your questions ahead of time to advocacy@fosc.org so the panel can organize the discussion.

FOSC

FOSC Board Openings



Join the Leadership Team of Friends of Sligo Creek

Hello FOSC members,

FOSC is seeking passionate, committed volunteers to join our Board of Directors — including a new Board President — to help guide FOSC as we protect, restore, and celebrate the Sligo Creek watershed. Board members and officers serve 3-year terms, and some current Board members will be rotating off the board in the coming months. We are looking for new members to keep FOSC active as a relevant community partner for the environment.

For over two decades, FOSC has brought together neighbors, naturalists, and advocates to clean up our creek, protect wildlife, and foster environmental stewardship through education, advocacy, and hands-on activities. As a board member, you'll help shape the future of this vibrant organization and ensure that Sligo Creek continues to thrive for generations to come.

We're looking for:

- **Board Members** with enthusiasm and energy for community engagement, environmental issues, communications, fundraising, event planning, or organizational leadership.
- **A Board President** who can provide vision, coordinate with our dedicated volunteers, and represent FOSC in partnerships with local governments, nonprofits, and the public.

Why join?

- Make a real impact on local conservation efforts
- Collaborate with an experienced and supportive team
- Develop leadership skills and deepen community connections

If you're ready to join other creek champions on the board, we'd love to hear from you!

Interested? Email info@fosc.org to start the conversation.

Together, we can keep Sligo Creek healthy and beautiful — for people, wildlife, and the future.

Please be sure to view the entire newsletter including the Recent Nature Sightings!

Click on "View entire message" or similar text at the bottom of your browser.

FOSC ROUNDTABLE

Have an idea for a talk, walk or project?

The FOSC Roundtable will be meeting shortly. This group of current and past FOSC leaders and stewards considers ideas for walks, talks and projects for the upcoming year.

- Have an idea for a talk or walk? Heard an interesting speaker you think FOSC should host?
- See problems in the creeks or parklands you think FOSC could help with?
- Have an idea for a project you want FOSC to consider?



[Let us know here](#) or email info@fosc.org.

We'll talk about it and let you know!

(Photo: Tree swallow eggs by S. DeFord)

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.

Weed Warriors at Godwin Dr. and Sligo Creek Parkway

Fri, Nov 21 from 9:00am - 11:00am

We will be back at Sligo Creek Park by the Godwin Dr. park entrance (just upstream of Forest Glen Road). There is parking along Tenbrook Dr. Many trees there need to be freed from invasive vines.

Please wear long shirt/long pants and closed toe shoes. Wear protection against ticks and bring a water bottle.

Litter Hotspot Clean Up at Green Meadows Park

Sat, Nov 22 from 9:00am - 11:00am

6310 Sligo Parkway, Hyattsville, MD 20782

Help to keep our waterways free of trash by cleaning up the banks along the Sligo Creek at Green Meadows. We will supply the bags, gloves and trash grabbers. Be sure to dress appropriately and bring a water bottle too.

Our partner, Potomac Conservancy, is handling the registration. To participate, [register here.](#)

Weed Warriors at Bullis Local Park

Sun, Nov 23 from 9:00am - 11:00am

Help remove invasive vines and plants. **If you are interested in participating, please register here:** <https://montgomeryparks.org/events/weed-warrior-bullis-local-park/>

Please wear long shirt/long pants and closed toe shoes, wear protection against ticks and bring a water bottle.

How Should MoCo Manage Its Trash - continue to incinerate it or ship it to a landfill out of state?

Thurs, Dec 18 from noon-1:00pm via Zoom

Pre-register for the Zoom Q & A.

Registrants will receive the Zoom link 1 week before the event

A discussion about the key issues involved in the upcoming decision, based on a recent report shared with the FOSC Board by two Advocacy Committee members. The report doesn't recommend one option over another. Instead, it highlights where more information is needed so the County Council can make a well-informed choice. Its goal is to help officials and the public understand the financial, environmental, health, and equity impacts of sending trash to a landfill compared to continuing to operate the incinerator.

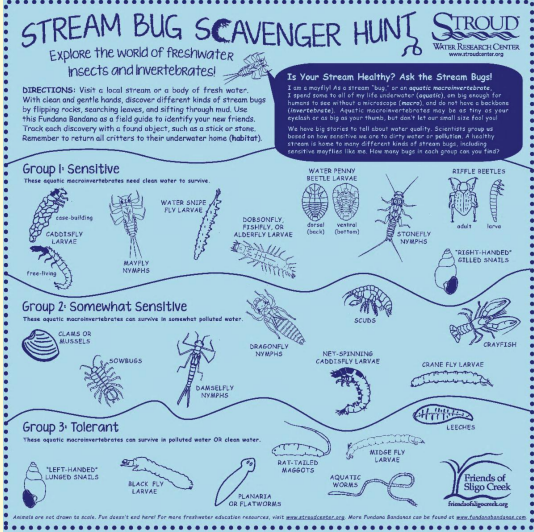
Registrants should read the report prior to the meeting. Please send your questions ahead of time to [**advocacy@fosc.org**](mailto:advocacy@fosc.org) so the panel can organize the discussion.

FOSC STORE/LISTSERV

T-Shirt, Ball Cap, or a Fundana?

**For the buggy person in your life...
a Stream Bug Scavenger Hunt
Fundana!**

**Para la persona que gusta insectos
en tu vida...
¡Una Fundana para la
búsqueda del tesoro de
insectos del arroyo!**



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.

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.

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



JOIN FO SC / JOIN THE FO SC LISTSERV

The next drawing for a t-shirt, cap or fundana - your choice- will happen on November 22 at the FO SC Roundtable. To enter the drawing:

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

FO SC GIVING

FO SC runs on donations! Your gift to FO SC keeps our many projects going. In this giving season, please support FO SC.

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.

Donate



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

FOSC is able to accept DAF gifts, gifts of securities, and planned gifts.
Our EIN is #52-2345099

Your gift is greatly appreciated - thank you!

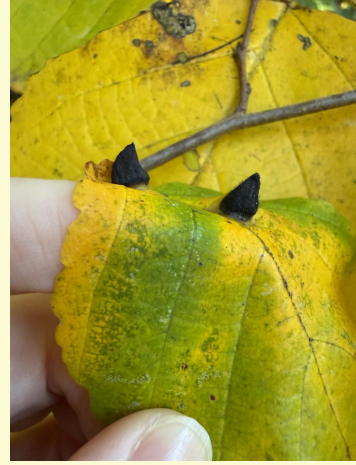
NATURAL HISTORY

Recent Nature Sightings



Hawks Keeping Watch

Left: Cooper's Hawk near Wayne and Cedar on Nov. 7 (maragay)
Right: Red-shouldered Hawk near Larch & Hayward on Nov. 10 (Jim Della)



A Few Fall Galls

Some insects lay eggs that cause plants to create protective and nutritious structures (galls) around them. These can be raided by other insects or birds who feed on the eggs or, later, on the developing larvae.

Left: Oak Gall Wasp near Dale Dr. Park on Oct. 31 (carrieseltzer)

Center: Acorn Plum Gall Wasp near Sligo & Mississippi on Nov. 5 (alie81)

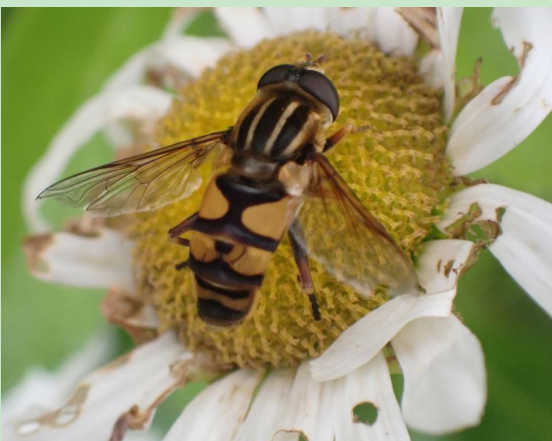
Right: Witch-hazel Gall Aphid near Dale Dr. Park on Oct. 31 (carrieseltzer)



Green Bottle Fly near Silver Spring and Fenton on Nov. 2



Margined Calligrapher Fly at the Kemp Mill stormwater ponds on Nov. 5



Narrow-headed Marsh Fly near Franklin & Worth on Nov. 5



Long-tailed Aphideater Fly near Silver Spring and Fenton on Nov. 2

Fall Fly Pollinators

In addition to the more familiar bees and butterflies (not to mention moths and beetles), many fly species also feed on nectar, spreading pollen from flower to flower as they do so. Our many late-blooming white asters provide both at this time of year. Some flies, like the bottom two here, have evolved to look like aggressive bees, wasps, or hornets, which helps protect them from predators. (All photos by Hugh Rand)

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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Friends of Sligo Creek | P.O. Box 11572 | Takoma Park, MD 20913 US

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